

A Short History of our club.

The Beginning

In the early 1950's, Australia was a vastly different place. Its population of a little over 12 million was almost exclusively of British descent. It had just emerged from almost six years of World War II during which hundreds of thousands of its men and women enlisted voluntarily for service in the armed forces. By 1949 Australia was emerging from wartime shortages and rationing.

Oil exploration had not started. Mining was a very unsophisticated affair and the pick and shovel were the order of the day. Jet aircraft had not invaded the skies. High rise building was confined to St Patrick's spire on Eastern Hill. We only just had our first Australian car. We had no freeways but the roads were not choked as few people had cars. Having children was normal; marrying beforehand was usual.

Rotary had expanded from its beginnings in Chicago with clubs being formed in Canada, Ireland and England. Early in the second decade of the century we had a new organisation calling itself Rotary International. Two distinguished Canadians were appointed by RI in 1921 to undertake the task of establishing Rotary in Australia. Almost by accident, Melbourne was the site of that first club when Sydney passed up a prior opportunity.

It is interesting to note that it took 16 years for Rotary to expand from Chicago to Melbourne (some 14,000km), it took another 32 years for it to expand a further 7km to Hawthorn. Between its formation in 1921 and the start of WWII, the Melbourne club ceded territory for only 3 other clubs to be formed, Essendon, Dandenong and Footscray. There was a strongly held view at that time that one strong club would be able to accomplish more than a proliferation of smaller ones.

After the War, more progressive thinking was apparent in the Melbourne club which led to the post war establishment of Williamstown, Frankston, Northcote, Melbourne South and Brunswick. In the early months of 1953, Mr Horace Bedggood was appointed as the District Governor's Special Representative to set up a Rotary Club of Hawthorn.

Horace put together a team of other Rotarians to assist him and then set about the task of identifying community leaders in the Hawthorn area who might be potential club members. Each person so identified was interviewed personally by Horace and a member of the team until he was satisfied that he had enough members to meet the charter requirements.

The first organisational meeting of the group was held at Camberwell Town Hall on 16 July, 1953 resulting in a decision to apply for a charter. Less than six weeks later, on August 24, the charter was granted and the club had started a life of its own.

Our First Decade

The twenty five charter members had as their first president Ron Fowler who was the managing director of the local business, Fowlers Vacola. This was a wise choice as Ron was quick to use his enthusiasm and energy to weld a disparate group of new Rotarians into a community-minded entity.

The second year, 1954-55, saw local newsagent, Jack Cathie appointed secretary alongside president John Goss. Shoe retailer Alan Patterson followed John as president whilst, remarkably, also serving in the same year as Mayor of the City of Hawthorn.

By 1956-57 a need for an additional Rotary club in the area was perceived and Hawthorn agreed to cede part of its territory, namely the City of Camberwell, so that a new Rotary club of Camberwell could be formed. As with Hawthorn's own beginning, a District Governor's Special representative was needed to initiate the process. Past President Alan Patterson was entrusted with this task and carried it through to success, with the new club ultimately being chartered on 8 February 1957.

A move to set up a Hawthorn Community Chest came from the club in 1956-57. The Chest was seen as a means whereby this community organisation could raise money and distribute it each year to deserving local charities thus obviating the need for each individual charity to make its own collection. This successful mechanism lives on in the early 21st century.

An important initiative taken by the club, with the support of Rotary Club of Melbourne, was to arrange for a portrait of Australia's first RI president, Sir Angus Mitchell, to be painted by Sir William Dargie, himself a local resident. The portrait hangs to this day in the dining hall of International House in Parkville.

In 1959 Hawthorn had the task of hosting the District Conference and asked vice-president Boyard Taft to be in charge which he did most successfully.

A curiosity of that time occurred when a club member changed occupations. Under the rules of the day, the member had to resign from the club and apply to rejoin with a new classification. These days rules are not quite so strict.

The last years of this first decade saw the club's community service committee focus on upgrading the facilities of the weightlifting section of the Hawthorn Citizens' Youth Club, a prominent local provider of activities for young people. Many fundraisings later and with the aid of members' donated services, the project was brought to a happy ending.

Our Second Decade

The early years of the decade saw Geoff Stevens, Jack Cathie and Reg Harris as club presidents and the decision to cede further territory to a soon-to-be-established Rotary Club of Kew.

The birth of the new club was not without incident however. PP Jack Cathie was appointed as the Governor's Special Representative and worked on the project for several months before becoming ill and requiring hospitalisation. Geoff Stevens took over from Jack, with Frank Gill, the District Extension chairman, assisting him.

Progress was slow in identifying the necessary 25 members until Bib Stillwell offered to host an evening for the 12 already interested. Bib's enthusiasm and drive was transmitted to his guests with the result that the numbers were soon in excess of the 25 needed and the new club was ready to go.

The middle years were notable for Geoff Stevens' nomination to be District Governor in 1970-71, Neale Burgess being the first 'second generation' president after father-in-law, Gordon Woodard and Bib Stillwell's presidency coinciding with Geoff's year in office and the 1971 Sydney RI Convention.

Geoff had a large territory to cover as DG, with far flung places such as Finley in southern NSW and the Goulburn Valley to visit, in addition to a metropolitan area extending from

Lilydale to Mordialloc. Geoff's private pilot's licence and the availability of light aircraft made his task as DG a little easier.

Our relations with the Swinburne complex of schools have always been close. The secondary college, the TAFE college and the university all benefitted as has the club. Into the 1970's this closeness was exemplified when member Bill Brown was appointed as chairman of council with members Tom Tylee, Bern Hames and Roy Longworth all holding head-of-school positions.

Our Third Decade

The club started its third decade with Bill Brown as president. Bill had many attributes apart from his Swinburne connection; ground breaking civil engineer, one of the earliest recipients of the new Order of Australia decorations, councillor and later Mayor of the City of Hawthorn and, in after work life, arbitrator. Bill's leadership of the club was exemplary, especially in the Vocational Service area.

John Head was Bill's successor and he, too, served as Mayor of Hawthorn. It was during John's term in office that moves were initiated to set up a Rotary Club of Glenferrie, Jack Cathie again being the Governor's Special Representative. Not much later the club was involved with a major International Service project as Paul Bruce and Boyard Taft organised the dispatch of some sophisticated X-ray equipment to India.

We had the pleasure in 1977-78 of our club member, Ray Chambers, serving as District Governor. Ray had joined Hawthorn from his original club, Prahran, where had served as club president. That year's District Conference was held in Melbourne with Boyard Taft and other members taking leading roles in its organisation.

By the late seventies there was a steady stream of new migrants coming to Melbourne from Vietnam after the end of the war in that country. The club saw fit to purchase a house in Survey Street in Richmond to accommodate a number of the new arrivals. Strong financial support from club members enabled the \$40,000 purchase to be fully owned in a short time. After the need for such short term housing had passed the club was able to sell it for \$100,000, the proceeds providing the basis for a perpetual trust fund which, to this day, enables donations to be made to a range of charities each year.

Our 1982-83 president, Ron Carr, was a skilled acoustical practitioner with a keen interest in encouraging enterprise and initiative in young people. This interest is still perpetuated today with the presentation of the annual Ron Carr Award for enterprise to a young person who has set up a local business successfully and has displayed initiative in so doing.

During the whole of this decade, Youth Exchange maintained a high profile within the club. Almost every year saw both an incoming and an outgoing exchange student. This emphasis on the Youth Exchange program has been maintained right through to the present day and remains a constant feature of the club's activities.

Our Fourth Decade

A thirty years anniversary dinner with second generation president, Rodney Taft, in the chair started off the 1983-84 year. Presentations of Paul Harris Fellowships to longtime members, Alan Patterson and Boyard Taft, were a highlight of the occasion.

Rodney's successor, Robert Patterson, another second generation president, introduced a new concept of having a cover page on the weekly club bulletin and selling advertising to members as a means of subsidising the cost of the additional pages.

Possibly Rotary International's most ambitious project ever, Polio Plus to wipe out poliomyelitis in all countries of the world, commenced in Viennese-born Henry Kingsley's year with the launch of a USD120m appeal.

Possibly our club's most ambitious International Service project yet, the Hawthorn Kitchen at Phuket in Thailand, was initiated in 1986 by future president David Rush who was the incumbent International Service director. While visiting Thailand, David had learnt that there were school children who were too embarrassed to go to school because their parents could not afford to supply lunches or suitable clothing.

David envisaged a self help program to assist with this need. A cashew nut plantation was established with funding from Hawthorn and Phuket Rotary clubs. The children harvested the nuts, sold them and used the proceeds to purchase chickens and hot vegetables. Simple kitchen facilities were also provided at the schools as part of the scheme. The children's health improved, they could attend school regularly and literacy rates at school were improved. The beauty of the scheme was that it encouraged self help and was not just a handout of money.

In later years financial contributions from the two Rotary clubs and The Rotary Foundation enabled the scheme to be expanded to include the shipment to Thailand of high protein biscuits. Monitoring by the Phuket Rotarians afterwards revealed a marked improvement in the health of the children. The success of the project was evidenced by the Thai government's award in 1987-88 of the year's best Disadvantaged Children's project.

A successful public appeal in 1986 for funds to support the Polio Plus campaign raised over \$40,000.

David Rosback's 1989-1990 presidency was highlighted by a personal visit which he and wife Judi made to see the Phuket project in action. An original, and successful, fundraising idea was the compilation of a book of Australian art which was done with help from member, John Loutit. Profits from the project were made available to the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.

Early 90's president John Carre Riddell was a quiet, but hard, worker for Rotary especially through his efforts as the honorary doctor at Camp Quality, a Rotary undertaking for children suffering from terminal illnesses. John's successes included the establishment, in conjunction with Rotary Club of Glenferrie, of the John Head Memorial Trust to alleviate poverty and distress in Hawthorn and assistance to the Low Vision Clinic to help blind people appreciate stage shows in the same way as sighted people.

The last years of this decade were notable for the Paint Your Heart Out campaign to paint the homes of needy locals and for Patrick Colbourne's project to provide training for students and executives from former eastern Bloc countries in the ways of democracy.

Probably the most important event of the decade took place in Melbourne when it was asked, at relatively short notice, to be the host city for the 1993 RI Convention. The club marked this event with its funding of the immediate past president of the Rotary Club of Lublin in Poland to attend the convention. Many members of the club were included amongst the hundreds of Rotarians who home hosted visitors for a meal one evening.

Our Fifth Decade

President Ian Warren was the initiator and guiding hand behind our major project to turn an old disused quarry area in Rose Street, Hawthorn East into a pleasant, landscaped outdoor area for use by the entire community. Funding from Hawthorn was leveraged with funding from the newly formed Boroondara Council and the Commonwealth government to create a project with a total value in excess of \$1m. Twelve young, unemployed persons worked on the project and acquired skills in landscape work and general work ethics which they would not have had otherwise.

The year 1994-1995 was a stellar year for the club with PP David Rosback holding the office of District Governor and the club organising his very successful Darling Harbour (Sydney) District Conference.

Our member, Ian Pohl, was the facilitator of a major project to refurbish the Hawthorn Citizens Youth Club in Auburn Road. This community youth centre was largely the brainchild of former member, Sam Coffa, who had nurtured it for close to 40 years but in recent years it had fallen into a state of disrepair.

A matching grant through The Rotary Foundation was organised by president Anne Scott to teach skills in chicken rearing, tailoring and basic living to rural Zambians. The project succeeded with the help of members of the Rotary club of Lusaka Central and a non government organisation called Peoples Action Forum. One of the by-products of this endeavour was the establishment of a Rotary club in Mumbwa, the rural area where the project took place.

A 3-H grant from The Rotary Foundation is a rarity. Hawthorn was fortunate to be a party to such a grant in 1999 when PDG Jack Nankervis asked us to become involved in his plan to extend his expanding literacy project to include Kurdish women in a remote area of Turkey. The scale of this undertaking can be gleaned from the fact that The Rotary Foundation's grant was USD283,000 and the project will run over several years.

East Timor has been a focus of much Rotary activity since the events surrounding the departure of the occupying Indonesian forces in 1999. Hawthorn ran an excellent project in 2001 to collect, recondition and package into toolboxes unwanted hand tools for shipment to Timor. Over 100 large packages accompanied 610 toolboxes in a shipping container. These items were distributed widely throughout East Timor per medium of four non government agencies who worked with us to achieve our aim.

Another Matching Grant project was approved by The Rotary Foundation in the same year, this one to immunise 4000 children in the city of Mumbai, India against hepatitis B. Our partner in this venture, the Rotary Club of Bombay, acted as the administering agent in the program which got under way in July 2002.

Our recently inducted member, Peter Kennedy, became very interested in the work of RAWCS in Timor Leste, in particular their project to rebuild the orphanage run by the Carmelite order near Dili. Peter used his influence to source much in the way of building materials to assist with the rebuilding work. In addition, he participated in three RAWCS working parties including one where he undertook the role of team leader.

During 2003, our club organised two further Matching Grant projects for the benefit of rural villagers in Zambia. Our Zambian Rotary club partner was the Rotary Club of Lusaka Central which acted in conjunction with the non-government organisation, Peoples Action Forum.

The first of these projects entitled Water and Sanitation provided funds for the training of pump menders, training to villagers in basic hygiene and the construction of pit latrines. D9800 club, Kew on Yarra, also participated with us on this project.

The second entitled Vehicle and Goods provided funds for the local purchase of a vehicle to be used for the transportation of goods and people and the shipment of a container of badly needed school requisites, clothing, childrens' story books and toys, sports equipment etc. D9800 clubs, Balwyn, Carlton and Collingwood also contributed funds towards this grant.

In the second half of 2003 an exchange of Year 10 students was undertaken with the Rotary Club of Evandale in Tasmania. The selected 4 students from Hawthorn Secondary College and Campbell Town High School in Tasmania each visited the other's area for a week and enjoyed home hosting, visits to local cultural sites and the opportunity to speak at their host Rotary club.

During 2005 we organized a project to set up a Rotary Cricket Blood Bank in Gujranwala, Pakistan. Our partner club was RC of Gujranwala Civil Line. The total funds available for purchase of equipment there was just under USD 25,000. The land on which the Blood Bank was established was kindly donated by a local Rotarian.

Our most important project in the 2005-06 year was to try to raise \$200,000 for the Neuro-Sciences ward at the Royal Children's Hospital. Acceptance of this project as a D9800 project assisted fund-raising materially with the first cheque for \$60,000 being presented to the hospital's representative in June 2006.

Another first for us was our nomination of Methodist Ladies' College student, Anna Plewhe to attend the prestigious National Summer Science Forum in Canberra in January, 2006.

ROMAC is a Rotary affiliate which does much good work in bringing children under 15 from Pacific Rim countries to Australia for life-saving and/or dignity restoring operations which cannot be performed in the home country. Adison Tule from Vanuatu was hosted by our club during his successful visit for an operation to correct his encephalocele condition.