

Chapter 12

Poets Laureate

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Verse Selections

When the Club was first formed, it was John Etkins who took the mantle of "Poet Laureate" and John produced ballads, cautionary tales, doggerel, limericks and just poems. Greg Ross also took on the mantle and had his greatest impact when as Sergeant in 1988-89 he chose each week to introduce President David Cheney in verse. As Sergeant, Greg ensured that Bill Kneale was fined weekly and Bill had some satisfaction when he responded that Christmas with a poem of his own. Others too including David Goldsmith, David Cheney and Bill Oakley have contributed and so we record just a few samples of their combined efforts (in no particular order).

A Tribute to our Ladies (John Etkins)

It did not take long for our early members to recognise the importance of the part to be played by the "ladies" in the life of our Rotary Club. The following verses were published in the 4th Edition of the Bulletin of 22nd May 1980.

The first formal night for our ladies-
That's the wives of the North Balwyn Club-
Was a swinging affair at Argenti's,
Socialising and noshing great grub.

Some of our gals were found checking
Whether we passed their Four Way Test.
Is he rich? Is he handsome? And sober?
If he's mine, is he properly dressed?

Some chat had a domestic nature
Of the fun to be had on Mondays,
Hanging out laundry on rotary hoists
And then rotary ironing our undies.

I only heard one wife bemoaning
She couldn't make time for sewing
On household chores, as her Rotary man
Kept her too busy rotary mowing!

Hats off to our wonderful women!
Sing nothing but praises about 'em!
Honestly, fellows, let's ask ourselves now
Where the heck would we all be, without 'em?

The First Changeover Night (John Etkins)

What a fantastic fellowship fling
We had at our Changeover thing!
Designed not to be boring
(Didn't want fellows snoring!)
We planned it to go with a swing.

And it did! People warmed at the start,
Every single soul there played a part;
After Fred 'Graced' the scene
Our King toasted The Queen,
Then a welcome from Stan, from his heart.

A short Sergeant's segment was planned
But that session got right out of hand!
Rob joined Bernie and Paul
And they sure had a ball
Whilst we suffered, and so did the band!

And when Geoff introduced his new Board
Quietly droll, in a manner that floored,
He has us in fits
As we sat in the pits,
How we ached as we laughed and guffawed!

Distinguished guests, most with their fillies,
Duncan, Jack, Phil, and Ted Gillies,
Said they'd non been to one
Where they'd had so much fun –
Some apparently gave them the willies!

The climax, I'd finally mention;
Heartfelt thanks to Past Pres. Our intention,
By sheer accident got
To a very warm spot
From his past, with our 'Bone of Contention'!

Rofuntary (John Etkins)

Our Editor has slipped his lid
But then at heart he's just a kid
And at the top, as you can see,
He's stuck 'fun' into 'Rotary'!

Rotarians know, without a doubt,
That fun is what it's all about.
We pull our weight, and get things done
Ungrudgingly, if we have fun.

Ian, craftily, last Thursday night
Listed the tasks in manner light
Each given some small chore on Sunday
A share of ensuring a vital fun day.

Came 'Raft Day', and it must be said
Some forfeited an hour in bed,
But with mum, kids and a chop or two,
All hastened to the rendezvous.

The rest, of course by now is history,
And for those not there, shall remain a mystery –
(Impossible to tell you anyway
As this gets written up on Saturday!)

But it proved, yet again, that we're not so daft
To spend a day paddling a raft,
Safely, responsibly, making each trip
In true Rofuntary fellowship.

A darned good P.R. exercise –
Helped DG Ray, exposed Tresize,
Gave Rotaract and Rotary
And us, some good publicity.

So thanks to those who planned and toiled
To get the Raft Race so well oiled;
To Roger, and to his Company
All putting the fun into Rotary.

What a fine body of men! (John Etkins)

For Roger Benallack, the banker,
And Pauline, hard work doesn't rancour.
With home, office and shop,
Rotary too, they don't stop;
Free time the sole item they hanker!

As our Club Secretary, Ron Carnell
Is a worker without parallel.
He exchanged aviation
For near full time Rotation –
As Betty knows only too well!

It is untrue that David and Jan
Have concocted a foul fiendish plan,
That will have us all shiver
When we go to Rich River,
By booking us tents, them a van!

Peter Cleary – a Charter recruit –
Is a valuer whom we salute.
For he works like the clappers
Keeping Pat, and two strappers,
Plus their pair of Mercedes, to boot!

In his biography, David Doyle,
Told us how, using epee or foil,
For his country he'd fenced;
Then with sword-play dispensed,
Tennis now his relaxer from toil.

Keith Glover, of ABC fame,
Received mail by the tonne, and acclaim;
For his works legendary
Now he's our Honorary –
With a PHF too, to his name!

Don Haycraft, our butcher supreme,
Supplies cuts of which gourmets day-dream;
His mouth-watering Scotch fillets
He prepares with such skill, it's
Sure there's more at steak than t'would seem!

Challenge Hibbert, and he'll have a go,
As we found out ab initio!
When our Charter Pres. Stan
Says he will, then he can,
And he does – just ask Bev, who should know!

In the Stock Exchange Ralph grows no moss,
Having risen from 'chalkie' to boss!
Do the pressures of shares –
Sorting bulls out from bears –
Need a hide like a rhinoceros?

At wallpapering there is none finer,
So he tells us, than our own Ron Liner!
But the art, we recall,
Is preparing the wall,
Then the effort of hanging quite minor!

For the Lucases, Ian and Jean,
Involvement comes to them as routine;
And lets not undersell
Policewoman Narelle
On patrol, in the Rotaract scene!

A challenge to me is MUNTWYLER,
Who makes blinds, by the metre or miler;
But Marcel is no sloucho –
He's the double of Groucho –
Always here, hard at work, and a smiler!

We were challenged to get up and go
For the truth about Geoff Perdriau!
Quiet, calm, unassuming,
And so willingly resuming
Recording our cash ebb and flow.

Renovator of buildings, B.Smith,
Loves a laugh, and likes talking the pith;
Yearly to the Strathbogies
Invites young and old fogies –
Bernie's nurses up there are a myth!

From South Africa came Gerry Spencer,
Migrating before things grew tenser;
And we thank Audrey, bless her,
For being aunt to Vanessa,
Which enabled us bias to censor!

David Willshire, our barrister bold,
Is the scourge of our courts, we are told,
All he seeks is the truth,
This Rotarian sleuth –
Or else loopholes to get them paroled!

In his autobiography, Tom
Told of shortage of rice at Geelong;
But he weathered that shock,
Later building The Wok,
Where ricewise he just couldn't go wong

Advance Australia, Where? (John Etkins)

At the D9800 conference in Albury in 1981, there was a call for Rotarians to take a leading role in turning the tide against apathy amongst our population, and to launch a resurgence in old-fashioned NATIONAL PRIDE. Hence the following John Etkins contribution

No worries!" Have you noticed, pray,
When e're those words are said,
The speaker promptly drifts away,
Then troubles loom ahead?

"She'll be right!" And how a shudder strays,
For we know it won't be long
Before he, who tritely mouthed the phrase,
Will prove that she'll be wrong?

It's apathy and selfishness,
Bitter men, with such effrontery
That stirring make a devilish mess
Of this, our lucky country.

As a locust plague, or mould that grew,
Spread, and consumed the crop, it
Is sad but it's true, that we and you
Don't know quite where to start, to stop it!

Rotarians, as leaders, can defuse
This sloth and turn the tide
If we fellows constantly enthuse
About our National Pride.

And act, and show we really care;
Work on it, hard and long;
Clean up the rubbish everywhere;
And sing our National Song.

Produce! Contribute! Stop our land
From sliding ever down!
With pride help Aussies understand
Freedom, Justice, The Crown.

Fly our flag high for all to see
In unpolluted air!
Ensure that in our lifetime, we
"Advance Australia Fair!"

And the last of these John Etkins' verses

I must ask T.A.A. Captain Ron
If he learned to fly at college,
And how many flying hours it took
Acquiring his Carnell knowledge!

The Repentant Sergeant (Bill Kneale)

Bill Kneale's Reprise (inspired by H.Lawson)

Now many schemes to stir old Bill
Had racked young Ross' brains
For Gregory had the stubborn blood
Of Scotland in his veins.

It was indeed a deadly feud
Not class nor creed nor race
But yet there was no rhyme
Nor reason in this case.

Now was the time for Greg to claim
Reward and praise should he prevail
Now was the time to win him fame
Oh but what if he should fail.

He struggled well to play his part
For in this art he took a pride
But ah, there beat a warm man's heart
Beneath this young smart alec's hide.

He failed – and only he could tell
Why shame and misery forced his hand
To give to Bill a double pass
To join Cervantes in Windmill land.

Upon receipt old Bill just smiled
And all ill will gave way
Two strong hands in friendship joined
And it was Christmas Day.

Welcome to our New President (Gregory Ross)

It's 1988 and our new Sergeant, Greg Ross, commenced each evening with a welcome poem. This one was his first to our new President David Cheney

There was movement 'round North Balwyn,
For the word has passed around
That a tearaway named Cheney was in town;
And had left the rank of truckie,
Though some said, "b.....lucky!"
But he knew the greasing process
And he wore the others down.

He'd seen the vision splendid
Of a Presidency extended,
And had made his run some eighteen months before
He'd wined and dined and laughed a lot
To guarantee he had best shot,
And finally – they called him from the floor.

And as while sitting here about
North Balwyn members gape
And President David reminds them all
That there's really no escape
I feel a strange compulsion to welcome him and run
But that would be sheer madness
Since the fun has just begun

The 1988 Olympics for President David (Gregory Ross)

The Olympic Games are here again,
With swimming, field and track,
Any many other skilful sports –
It's good to have them back.

By being slightly overweight,
And not in peak condition,
Our Pres. Would find the going tough
In Olympic competition.

Now President David, he's got soul (Seoul)
And a good career (Korea)
The question is, which sport he'd choose,
If he were there, not here.

The pole vault really lacks appeal,
And the high jump's not the go,
While the 3,000 metre steeplechase
Wouldn't give our Dave a show.

A water sport may be his choice,
Using backstroke style or breast,
And even the taxing butterfly
Would put to use his chest.

There's one event that he could try
And really show some fight –
Mind you, the Sumo boys are big
Dave may be slightly light.

I think we all should just be glad
To have him here with us,
So please, all welcome now the man himself,
And cheer, and make a fuss.

A Cautionary Tale (Gregory Ross)

President John Thwaites, he said to Ron Carnell and Betty,
“That Christmas pud’s gone to my head, I should’ve had spaghetti.
They filled it full of old port wine mixed with five star brandy;
It’s not that I don’t feel quite fine but it’s made me jolly randy.

Now Annette heard her John exclaim and thought it rather cruel,
That Christmas pud should get the blame for his feeling full of fuel.
And so she said, “My darling man whatever be the reason,
That recipe I’ll keep and use no matter what the season!”

A Song for Club Birthday 1999 (David Goldsmith)

(to the tune of “Rain Drops On Roses”)

Rain drops on noses and whiskies in mittens;
Bright coloured labels on wine bottles smitten;
North Balwyn’s birthday so give us your ear,
And join us reciting a wonderful year.

Grand Prix with Terry and Ian and Phil,
Vari-ety Club when we’re not feeling ill.
Golf days and fishing can break up the year,
All provide service and lots of good cheer.

Red Shield appe-al to keep Salvos happy;
Kew Golf Club menus are not always snappy;
Funds for Foundation to sanctify Paul;
RYLA and RYPEN keep youth on the ball.

Raffles at Xmas to occupy many;
Vo-cational visits, and words from John Rennie;
Tractors for Gulags, food parcels for kids;
Help Rotar-actors collect more for SIDS.

At painting your heart out Ron Liner's not sleeping;
Shine On awards our disabled are keeping;
Mal-aria fighting with P.D.G. John;
Working the air waves with Radio Ron.

Our youth are exchanging and Nino knows why;
Rotaract too always reach for the sky;
G.S.E. Tony is leading his teams;
Ken has ambassadors living their dreams.

Power-point displays with our President Bruce;
Help us believe that he's really no goose.
McBride on his bicycle with Magor too,
Findley Cornell is out coaching his crew.

Jane keeps us posted on members well being;
Gartlan's the John who has all of us fleeing.
Brian's Club Service and allocates seats;
North Balwyn celebrates wherever it meets.

If we have missed you then please do not fret,
Any more verses you could well regret.
District Assemblies and Conferences too
Keep our North Balwyn the best of the crew.

Change-over for Pres Peter Courtney (David Cheney)

Tonight is the last of this Rotary Year-
Welcome to this year's Change-over dinner.
And next week, thank God, a new sergeant you'll see-
Though the next one you'll find not much thinner.

But I'd like to say thankyou for bearing with me
For I'm told I've been sometimes loquacious.
For the fines I've collected, all the jibes you've deflected-
Making comments at times, quite audacious.

But I hope it's been fun and the nights entertaining
With President Peter in charge.
I am sure that we'll miss him once he has retired
For his presence has always loomed large.

In the past year I've used many words to describe
Peter, when introducing him here.
Words like hoary, and bold and a leader of men-
And our own little treasure so dear.

Good looking, well spoken, a man amongst men-
And our genuine small Aussie Bleeder.
Our Saint Peter, the sun that for us does shine bright-
He's our President and he's our leader.

And I've even announced him as handsome and young,
Bold and gay have been terms I have used.
But I realise now just how wrong I have been,
My position I feel I've abused.

For his talents have been somewhat modestly put
Before you, for the last year, each week.
He's been bigger than Ben Hur, fearless, upright and true,
Peter Courtney – it's of you I speak.

I have thoroughly loved working closely with you,
And been lucky to see you in action.
It's the genuine nature of you as a person
I've found is your greatest attraction.

But now it's my duty as MC tonight,
To invite you to come to the mike
And preside over this, your own change-over night
And to do just whatever you'd like.

Unsolicited Comment (Brian Hurnard)

David Cheney's a past master of verse
But you'll notice it's been getting worse.
His praises of Peter
Could not have been sweeter,
But I've heard better verse in my hearse!

Past-Presidents' Dinner Toasts (David Cheney)

Toasts to the first ten incumbents.

1980-81:

Stan Hibbert:

Stan was our first, our Charter pres,
Who set the path before us
To him we owe a debt of thanks.
"Well done!" I hear you chorus!

- 1981-82: Geoff Clark:
My very first changeover night
Was when I heard Geoff give
The longest speech I hope to hear
As long as I shall live.
- 1982-83: John Etkins:
Forget John's fiddling with his jocks,
Pocket billiards he conducted.
His greatest feat of all was when
Yours truly he inducted!
- 1983-84: Kevin Maunder:
He sent our first outward exchange,
Liz Roy to Tokyo winging.
But Kev will be remembered most
For leading us in singing.
- 1984-85: John Reddish:
John may be known as our Club's most
Eminent and senior member.
But it's for introducing Frank
Tisoni we'll remember.
- 1985-86: Paul Fitz:
Another of our leaders who
Have served our district well.
But when he rises to his feet
It's time to ring the bell.
- 1986-87: Geoff Steinicke:
Not one to stand on ceremony,
For reasons most profound
The long top table got the flick
When Geoff demanded round.
- 1987-88: John Robson:
"Attention please", became the cry,
When order was demanded.
With velvet gloves, he lead the Club,
Thought sometimes, heavy handed.

1988-89: David Cheney:
The Sex debate, those Japanese,
Incorporation gained.
Three trouble makers on my board
No wonder nerves were strained.

1989-90: Tom Wing Young:
The first Club president in the land-
Male chauvenist through and through.
To indoctrinate a female to-
Our Club, was "you know who".

Thanks for the Memory

And, as a suitable way to close this chapter, a ditty whose author is unknown, but which was sung to President Paul Fitz on the night he surrendered the presidency. It was sung by a choir consisting of Valda Anderson, Jan Cheney, Pat Cleary, Bev Hibbert, Carmel Hughes, Jean Lucas and Norma Wing Young, accompanied by David Cheney on piano.

(Spoken)

We have been together for six years now.
Rotary Club of North Balwyn.
Now let's reminisce with all our Presidents,
Stan, Geoff, John, Kevin, John
And President Paul.

(To the tune of "thanks for the Memory")

Thanks for the memory
Of our exchange students,
Our Rotaract Club, the Youth Debates, the Air Display,
The fellowship. It's great.
How lovely it was.

Thanks for the memory
Of barbeques, pool parties,
Your homes for fire-side chats,
We've all enjoyed the dinner with a welcome on the mats.
How lovely it was.

Many times we've wined and dined on club nights
And tripped around on our safari dinners.
Oh, well, this is the Rotary Spirit.
We did have fun and fellowship.

And thanks for the Charter
By Balwyn Rotary Club
And Founding Father Duncan –
Your guiding hand and sound advice have set us on our way,
We thank you so much.

Thanks for the memory
Of Paul as President,
Our speakers all so bright.
Let's not forget the ladies on their first Takeover Night-
How marvellous we were!

Thanks for the memory
Of long directors meetings,
Perhaps a glass of port.
The hectic days of fashion parade extravaganzas, sport.
How lovely it was.

Paul, you'll be remembered for your meetings
Which were nearly always running overtime
Oh. well, it was swell while it lasted;
We did have fun and made new friends.

And thanks for the memory
Of weekend at Rich River –
Sport and money spent,
First of all our Sergeant, now you'll be Past President.
Awfully glad we met you,
So good-bye and cheerio,
We thank-you so much!