Official opening of Old Perth Boys School

Wednesday 2nd March 2016

Old Perth Boys’ School, 3.30pm arrival. (4-6pm event)

National Trust of Australia (WA) President Max Kay AM CitWA

I’d like to acknowledge the traditional Whadjuk Noongar custodians of the land on which we meet and also Acknowledge their Elders past and present.

And Further Acknowledge The dignitaries here today

The Hon Malcolm McCusker, AC QC Former Governor of WA and representing the McCusker Foundation,

The Hon Peter Collier, Minister for Education,

The Rt Hon Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi,

Deborah Terry AO, Vice Chancellor of Curtin University

The Hon Michael Murray AM QC Chair of the National Trust Australia (WA)

The Hon John Cowdell AM, Vice President of the National Trust of Australia (WA),

Mr Julian Donaldson CEO National Trust (WA)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Old Perth Boys’ School has always been part of something bigger...
A place of ambition, a cauldron of ideas, a centre of lifelong learning.
And in many ways we celebrate this today!

Standing here, in Curtin University’s new city premises, this beautiful space, our gaze is drawn up to something higher

It’s referred to as a ceiling on the rake
Even before the school was completed in 1854, this place was important to the community, through it’s Noongar name Byerbrup –the high location above the water – and referring to the ridge between Gargatup and Mattagarup (Kings Park and Heirisson Island).

When Colonial Secretary William Ayshford Sanderson created his original design for a school in the early 1850s he delivered the foundations of extraordinary values which we continue to recognise and enjoy today more than 160 years later.

Education is far reaching and those little boys (from the 1850s and 60s) who attended school, recalled dozens of Noongar people cooking and eating fish, the same little boys who went crabbing, swimming and hunting with the local Noongar kids in what would become Perth’s CBD.

Their names are familiar Leeder, Trigg, Armstrong, Watson, Kennedy, James, Wittenoom --- and as a matter of interest, tiny used slate pencils held in little fists, pen nibs, lost buttons, marbles all have been recovered from under these floorboards.

But, there was hardship too! William Glanville – a student and a boy from the poor house, drowned in the pond on this very site he was just 8 years old.

There are many “Firsts” associated with this place. The Swan River Colony’s first mill, built by first civil engineer Henry Reveley, the first purpose built government school in Perth. Frederick Bell, - a former student of Perth Boys’ School became the very first Western Australian recognised with a Victoria Cross for his bravery.

Prosperous times underwritten by gold would see the school outgrow the building by 1896 and while the boys moved over the railway line to a new school the government geologists moved in to undertake extensive survey work.

Perth Technical School commenced on site in 1900 and so too an extraordinary period which saw the arts flourish, led by inspirational people such as artist James WR Linton, who held the top position in the Department of Art. Then there was women like Loui Benham who was appointed Instructor in Art
Needlework at the Perth Technical School in 1904. Both were central to a dialogue of creativity and exhibition, enjoyed between Perth and Europe.

Dr Dorothy Erickson who we are pleased to say, is with us today, we thank you for your generous input to our understanding about this time and the talented people involved.

Perth Boys’ School was renamed Perth Technical College in 1928 and went on to become part of something bigger again.

National reconstruction though technical education saw opportunities and new skills for returned servicemen and war widows. As a young Architect in training, Geoffrey Summerhayes recollected in 1946: and I quote

“That first year had twenty – odd students of whom only five, had not been to the war and even less were straight from school as I was.”

And we also acknowledge Geoffery’s daughter Andrina who joins us today.

The Western Australian Institute of Technology grew out of Perth Technical College in the 1960s as the Bentley campus emerged. And even into the 1970s WAIT and PTC were still sorting out the borrowers and books belonging to the Terrace Library – where we now stand.

The keys to Old Perth Boys’ School were handed to the National Trust of Australia (WA) in 1977 by the then Premier the late Charles Court, who said

“He hoped this building like others already in the care of the Trust, would be adequately cared for and made available for the use and the benefit of the public.”

Almost 40 years later this is now achieved with outstanding results, through superb compatible reuse and our partnership with Curtin University.

At this point, I must acknowledge the former National Trust CEO Mr Tom Perrigo for his long standing vision and initiative... including securing the funding of 1 million dollars in 2011/2012, for the conservation to the exterior of this building in and most recently exploring the opportunity with Curtin which has led to the university further embracing its own foundations,
of course, I refer to this prominent position on St Georges Tce and the exceptional values inherent in this place...being, education, innovation and a place which brings people together.

The National Trust’s mission is to conserve and interpret WA’s heritage and deepen the connection between the community and places like Old Perth Boy’s School. We do this by working with valued partners like Curtin University.

The architects, designers and interpreters have transformed this space for the needs of 2016.

It’s beautiful, bold and invites everyone who visits to appreciate the evocative sense of place Old Perth Boys’ School has to offer.

On behalf of the Trust I thank you Curtin University for your foresight
And partnership and wish you the very best of good fortune.