

COWPER200

≈ 1809-2009 ≈

THE COWPER FAMILY IN AUSTRALIA



Press Release

July - Aug 2009

AUSTRALIA CELEBRATES BICENTENARY OF WILLIAM COWPER – THE ‘INDISPENSIBLE PARSON’

When retired English banker Keith Cowper wondered what to do with the old chest in his attic, he could hardly have imagined that on the other side of the world the descendents of its original owner were well advanced in planning a bicentennial celebration, seeking their own historical reference points to trace their ancestor’s life in Australia.

William Cowper, the gentle parson born in Whittington Lancashire, who was invited by the Rev Samuel Marsden to serve as the colony’s assistant colonial chaplain, arrived in Sydney with his new second wife Ann and his four young children on 18th August 1809 aboard the brig *Indispensible*, and spent the next 49 years devoting himself to the people of Sydney in every sense, his death marked by a state funeral service on 9th July 1858 with an estimated crowd of 25,000 people lining the streets.

St Paul’s College Sydney University, St. Philip’s Church, Sydney Grammar School, Wivenhoe Historic House, Moore Theological College, the Benevolent Society and the state’s first railway are some of the legacies that William and his family were instrumental in providing to Australia. Many of these historic locations will serve as the centrepiece of a week of celebrations planned from 16th to 23rd August 2009 to commemorate William’s life in Sydney.

Her Excellency, the Governor of NSW, **Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO**, the **Anglican Archbishop of Sydney**, the **Dean of Newcastle Cathedral** and the **Honourable Richard Torbay MP, Speaker of the New South Wales Parliament** will be amongst the dignitaries to officiate at commemoration ceremonies.

These include a service at St Philip’s Church and Speaker’s reception at Parliament House, both on 18th August, a book launch at the Mitchell Library on 17th August and a family reunion on 23rd August at **Wivenhoe**, the historic family home at Camden, where hundreds of descendents will gather to celebrate William’s life.

While much is written about the dynasties of his contemporaries Lachlan Macquarie and John Macarthur, less is known about William's family, which included son **Sir Charles Cowper**, five times Premier of New South Wales and renowned as a strong emancipist, champion of social causes including the end of convict transportation and the person who introduced the state's first railway.

Son **Henry Cowper** was the first person to graduate as a Medical Practitioner in Australia and **William Macquarie Cowper** the first Australian-born minister of religion, taking over his father's St Philip's parish and becoming the first Dean of St Andrews Cathedral, Sydney.

Daughter **Mary Stephena** married Surgeon George Brooks and with their children became a pioneering family of the Hunter Valley with strong links to Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle, (where father William had preached the first sermon in 1818), while sons **Thomas** and **Sedgwick** distinguished themselves in their respective careers as a schoolteacher and the NSW representative at the London Exhibitions of 1861 and 1862, having been one of the first graduates of the University of Sydney.

After William's death, it is believed that daughter **Elizabeth** returned to England to marry, taking with her much of the memorabilia which documented his life and eventually passing it to her granddaughter Elizabeth Eugenie Cowper Field who gave it to Keith Cowper for safe keeping, where it lay in his attic until recently, unbeknownst to his Antipodean descendents.

Fortuitously, last year a late night internet search from the other side of the world connected Keith to John Cowper and Warren Kenny in Sydney, themselves descendents, who had already made considerable progress with other family members to chart the painstaking process of rebuilding William's life 200 years on to share with future generations.

The treasure trove contained in the chest served to complete many of the open-ended family stories which had circulated through the respective family branches over the years.

Now hundreds of descendents are set to benefit from their discoveries, which included commissioning respected historian Dr Peter Bolt, who travelled to the UK and whilst there recorded the chest's contents as part of his research for a biography on William Cowper, to be launched during COWPER200 week.

A selection of these records and memorabilia, some of which sat on mantelpieces of descendent families for many years, will be available for viewing through a public display at Parliament House in August during the celebrations. The family of William Cowper continues to honour his memory by celebrating the 200th anniversary of his arrival in this country and invites the public to share this occasion with them.

Event and booking information: info@cowper200.com.au

Website: www.cowper200.com.au For further information, story angles or historic images:-

John Cowper

Chairman, COWPER200

Tel: 02 9949 5280

Mob: 0419 683426

Email: cowper200@onaustralia.com.au

Jane Corbett-Jones

PR Consultant

Mob: 0417 772783

Email: janecj@unwired.com.au