

UNVEILING OF A PLAQUE AT THE NEW TELEPHONE EXCHANGE,
BATHURST, N.S.W.

27TH MARCH, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. Chairman, Your Worship the Mayor, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Luchetti and all those other people who were referred to just now by the Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen, Girls and Boys :

Now that is fairly comprehensive. I think I would like to begin by telling you that my wife regrets her absence just as much as you do, but we managed - and she's a woman of strong mind - to force her into hospital about eight or nine days ago, and to keep her there. It's been a very remarkable achievement, and I trust she will be there for another few days and that she will come out completely recovered. She wanted to come, partly because she likes to come with me - strange as it may seem - (Laughter) partly because she likes visiting places of this historic interest and importance and partly - and this I say with infinite regret because I should dearly love to defeat him politically - partly because she has a soft spot for Tony Luchetti. (Laughter)

Now this event is of double interest because it occurs in this city. I, myself, was at school in a place called Ballarat in the State of Victoria, an old gold mining city which, when gold had gone, became a prosperous community because it was set in the middle of a magnificently fertile district. Now you didn't actually have gold mining here but I think that the historical records would show that when the gold came in from outlying places, the citizenry of Bathurst and perhaps the tavern-keepers in particular managed to let a little of the gold rub off on their fingers so that you have an old association with gold mining back in the fifties, and you, in turn, when all that had gone, or most of it had gone, found yourself a growing prosperous community because you had a lovely district, a lovely and fertile district set about you. So I feel there is something a little in common between an old Ballaratian and you ladies and gentlemen of Bathurst.

It's a very interesting thing that this city has not just been content to rest on its laurels, hasn't been content just to say, "Well, we are the third oldest city in the whole Commonwealth of Australia. We were established in the year of Waterloo. We are, ourselves, an historic monument as a town." You haven't been content to do that because the growth is proceeding apace. I'm indebted to the Post Office for an interesting figure - I didn't come here to quote statistics, I can assure you - but in the year in which that very great Australian and memorable Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley, became Prime Minister - 1945 - there were 826 subscribers on the Bathurst Exchange. Now that seems only the other day. It's a tribute to the strength of Ben Chifley's personality, the genuineness of his friendship that one remembers him always as if it were the day before yesterday, and it was 1945. Today there are 2,635 subscribers. That means over three times as many in that relatively short span of time. Now that argues - it is one of the index figures, so to speak, that Bathurst continues to grow and that as it grows it will increasingly add to its historic significance a very real economic and civic significance as one of the great provincial cities in our country. And on all these grounds one is

1815.

delighted to be here.

I noticed in one of the documents that you have been producing for this great event that the first postal deliveries were made here in 1828 and that the postal services at that time were somewhat interrupted by bushrangers led by the redoubtable Ben Hall who, unlike Ned Kelly, had not yet become a popular hero. (Laughter) But bushrangers were troublesome, and you remember that a great number of people at that time, or some of them, in order to avoid or avert their depredations, used to cut banknotes in half and send half by post and half by other means so that they wouldn't be worth anything until the two halves had been put together. Well, the bushrangers went out of business shortly after more modern communications were established, and indeed, I think that Gus Kelly would agree with me that most of them have now retreated to the fastnesses of Sydney and Melbourne. (Laughter)

There is one other thing I would like to say about the significance of Bathurst because I really do believe that this is a most significant place. This is a commonplace to a lot of you but it may not have been recalled by some. Five of the great explorers in Australia made Bathurst their point of departure on their great historic excursions into the inland of Australia and down towards the south - Evans, Oxley, Cunningham, Mitchell and Sturt.

It is worthwhile recalling their names because these were great and courageous men, literally going out into the unknown and it does some honour to the Federal Parliament that there should be a constituency today, an electorate of Evans, one of Oxley, one of Cunningham, one of Mitchell and one of Sturt. They have been commemorated in perpetuity in the Federal Parliament, the National Parliament of this country, and their association with this city is worth recalling because people like that represented the first real break-through into the hinterland in Australia just as Wentworth and Blaxland who came over the mountains and came to here were the first people to break through what seemed to be the impassable barriers which confined the old original Sydney settlement.

Well, we know perfectly well that but for the work of these people, but for their courage, but for their determination, this land might not have been opened up for many, many years and Australia would have remained a relatively poor country, a rather precarious colony perched on the coast. All that has changed. It is now a rich and well-balanced country, growing steadily in strength and in significance. And poised as you are here at the very beginning point of this tremendous drive into the inland of Australia, you must continue to be proud of your heritage and perhaps, if I may say so, equally determined as we all must be, to be pioneers ourselves in the day in which we live, not to be afraid to take a chance, not to be afraid to go out on to something new because this is what our forefathers and your forefathers did in their time and in this place.

Just one other thing I would like to say about Bathurst because again in that respect that reminds me of Ballarat. It is a city which has been endowed by those who went before with a sense of beauty. I think that the City Square here is one of the most beautiful squares in Australia

and I hope that it will always be kept so, just as I recall with pride and pleasure the work done by the pioneers of Ballarat in gardens and in statuary, and in particular, every time I have come through Bathurst, sometimes on reputable missions, sometimes on political exercises (Laughter), I have paused long enough to look with admiration at that lovely tower designed by that great architect and artist, John Moore. That is, I think, one of the lovely buildings in Australia because it has everything - it has proportion, it has colour, the right kind of colour, it has setting and it exhibits the pride of a proud community.

Now I haven't seen the design of the building that will go up here. I hope it won't be too hideous. (Laughter) All I know already is that it will be reasonably costly and that will give great pleasure to Tony Luchetti who wanted something costly not something trifling, but whatever it turns out to be, it will be a matter of immense advantage to this community, and it is a very interesting thing and gives me great pleasure to be able to recall some time that it was erected, begun, initiated in this 150th year of his historic place.

Now I think I will now relieve you from the burden of listening to me by taking you into my confidence on one point. I have never been too clear this morning as to what I do, whether I unveil a foundation stone that is already laid or whether I lay a foundation stone and tap it and say, "I declare this well and truly laid." I usually take precautions on this matter by finding out in advance what I have to do and then do it, in case I forget to do it at the end of the speech. (Laughter) So whatever it is, I now have great pleasure in doing it.
