

Eulogy for Rex Basil Fuge OAM. -21.01.1935 – 06.09.2014

Authored and read by Bill Steele at Rex's funeral service on Tuesday 16th September 2014 at St Paul's Anglican Church Chiltern.

Chiltern has indeed lost someone special and unique, with the passing of our dear friend Rex.

Where do you begin when you try to encapsulate and to honor and celebrate the life and times of Rex Basil Fuge.

He was first of all a husband, father, grandfather, a farmer, a conservationist, an historian, a leader, definitely a determined achiever, and much much more!

When piecing together as many details as I could for my presentation of this eulogy to him to-day, a couple of lines jumped out at me that were included in a recent bereavement notice placed in the Border Mail by the Indigo Shire, Management, staff, and councilors – and they are “He (Rex) always put himself forward for the interests of his town and was a proud guardian of its history. We knew Rex as a friend, a colleague and an honorable man”

I believe everyone gathered here today would definitely agree with those sentiments.

There is no doubt that most of you in this congregation were during past decades, touched by Rex's kindness or help in some way.

His record of service in public life in this district is unbelievable, the list is far too long to go through here, but it includes a lengthy career as a Chiltern Shire Councilor including two terms as Mayor.

President of Chiltern Tourism under two councils for at least thirty years, and his membership of numerous other organizations and committees where he thought he could help or achieve something, and of course there has always been his beloved Chiltern Athenaeum which was the centre piece of his interest and that he led so well for the last thirty five years as our president.

The Chiltern Athenaeum was Rex's passion, wife Mary once joked when they moved from their farm “Vine View” at Cornishtown some six or seven years ago to move into Chiltern, that Rex would be in heaven now living only a few doors from the Athenaeum, and that he would be able to make a cup of coffee at home – walk out the front door, walk down the street, open up the Athenaeum and sit down and drink his coffee while it was still hot!

Rex didn't like modern technology too much, but he learnt to work his way around it by delegating someone else to write his emails or find something on the net for him. He of course also realized how much the internet could promote

the Athenaeum and he would embrace any new ideas or new technology that we would present to him.

The success of the Chiltern Athenaeum as you see it to-day stands as testament to Rex Fuge's tenacious approach to the way it has been operated and structured by him, and the way he personally ran it on a day to day basis.

An example of this is, that as a member if you were rostered to be in attendance on a certain day at a certain time, you would never not attend without keeping Rex fully informed, and he would always have a chuckle and say I'll create another spot for you very soon to make up for your lost day, and then with another laugh he would say "don't worry I'll get you." None of us ever minded because it was for Rex and the Athenaeum!

Athenaeum meetings were most often very well attended because Rex would always ring you to make sure you were going to turn up. The last meeting on Tuesday the 12th of August was almost standing room only and ironically it was to be Rex's last. As always it was run to perfection with a mountain of business to be discussed.

Rex had scaled down just some of his activities during the last five or six years leading up to his un-timely death. His main priority was of course as always the Athenaeum, he was also a member of the Indigo Shire Heritage Advisory Board and he still kept his ever watchful eye over anything that related to Chiltern that needed protection, preservation, or improvement.

Rex was ever humble about anything he might have achieved in life, never seeking adulation or notoriety for any achievements he may have obtained or service that he may have rendered. And so it was when Rex Fuge received his "Order Of Australia" on Thursday the 1st of September 2005 at Government House in Melbourne for his contribution to the Chiltern community.

Rex was so proud as Governor John Landy pinned his OAM medal onto his lapel. The OAM's accompanying citation reads -
"For service to the community of Chiltern through a range of heritage and tourist organizations, and to local government"

Rex appreciated all of the accolades he received during the days and months after the event but never boasted about it, - such was the man.

Rex almost never signed his name with OAM attached as he was entitled to do, but again such was the man. However he was so proud of the honor.

Rex had his OAM medal set mounted into a presentation case as you can see placed near his casket here today

Sadly for the man who was affectionately dubbed by the local media as "Mr Chiltern" his life came to an abrupt end, with his sudden and un-timely passing

on Saturday morning the 6th of September, as he prepared to leave for his day on duty at his beloved Athenaeum.

Let's now have a brief look at Rex's life.

He was born on the 21st of January 1935, to Basil Adolphus Hoyle Fuge and wife Ethel at Dr Harkin's private hospital at Conness Street Chiltern.

Rex lived at the family property "Vine View" at Cornishtown for over seventy years and moved to 65 Conness Street right next door to where he was born. The irony is that his life ended there approximately seventy nine and a half years later only about one hundred metres from where he came into the world. !

Rex had a wonderful sense of humor. After his 65th birthday I would often ask him what age will you be on your next birthday – his reply! two weeks younger than Elvis ! Rex and Elvis Presley shared the same birth year and month and it was up to you to work out how old he was, or what age he would be on his next birthday.

Let's go back again to the early years.

Rex is now about four and a half years old, class numbers at the Cornishtown State School No 802 are low and the school could close. Rex is bought in to sit in the class and make their current numbers look a little better for the arrival of the district inspector, it must have helped because the school remained opened until the latter part of the 1950's.

Rex became a full time student there in 1939 through to 1946.

It may surprise many of you that Rex in those early years was a very shy timid and reserved little boy who badly lacked confidence.

However Rex told me some years ago that, all that changed with encouragement of headmaster Alan Cleaves who had started a Junior Young Farmers debating group at the school and encouraged and helped Rex to be involved in it, and for him to learn public speaking and debating, so Rex took his advice got involved and something snapped in the young student and he completely changed of course for the better.

Later in 1960 as a member of the Cornishtown senior young farmers debating team, Rex, Jim Grace, and Claire Shelley won first place in the "George Howey debating competition."

Rex's entrepreneurial flair had already begun to show very early as a teenager when he would catch and skin rabbits, leave the hides at a special spot on the Chiltern Valley Road for the skin merchant with a jar for the cash, it certainly worked, Rex purchased his first wrist watch and later his first car out of the proceeds of the many rabbit skins that he was able to sell.

After leaving the Cornishtown State School in 1946 he attended the Wangaratta Technical school in 1947 until he was 15 and then began his full time farming career at his home at "Vine View" in 1951.

Rex's father Bass was running sheep at "Vine View" at the time but Rex had decided he needed to create his own income and concluded that the best way was to go into milking cows, a milking shed was constructed and Rex eventually progressed over the years to milking sixty cows twice a day up until 1972.

Rex had made another big decision in the early 1950's as a 16 year old, to go into debt to purchase his grandfathers farm "Morning View" a 240 acre property on the Hume Highway south of Chiltern which after purchasing, he then rented that property out.

In 1954 Rex had decided he wanted to do his National Service in the Australian army, however because of a previous serious injury to his back and shoulder he had to have five medicals before they would eventually sign him up, his persistence had paid off, he did his three month stint at Puckapunyal and then two weeks service per year for the next 3 years.

Rex Fuge's life was about to change when he meets Mary Brown at a dance in Corowa in 1957.

Rex and Mary marry later at St Mary's Catholic Church Corowa on the 26th of August 1961.

Rex's parent's had moved from "Vine View" to "Morning View" just prior to Rex's marriage and remained there until 1974, they then moved to 65 Conness street to a home that Rex and Mary had built for them to see out their years.

By the mid 1960's Rex had purchased "Vine View" then consisting of a little over 600 acres, he and wife Mary had doubled Vine View's size to nearly 1200 acres by the mid 70's when they purchased any adjoining property's that came up for sale in those later years.

During the early to mid-sixty's two children had arrived, a daughter Leonie in 1962 and a son Warren in 1966.

During 1973 Rex Fuge is appointed as secretary of the "Back To Cornishtown" State School centenary celebrations committee.

Rex became involved in piecing together a centenary booklet for the event and writing to former students inviting them to attend - it was this project he told me once that first triggered his interest in family history and history generally. In the early 1980's Rex joined the Chiltern Athenaeum as research officer and later became its President, and as they say the rest is history!

Years later during 1989 Rex researched and wrote a detailed book about the Fuge family titled "From Tavistock to Rutherglen" and gathered together 250 Fuge decedent's at St Stephen's Church in Rutherglen for its release.

Among the many things that Rex achieved was his idea of turning the old unused Chiltern Fire station into what became the John McEwen Annexe, a centre for meetings, family history research and archival storage and much more. Rex achieved his goal after years of planning and chasing grants, the Annexe opened during April of 2000 and stands as a monument today to Rex's determination to make things happen.

It is said that behind every successful man there is a strong woman that supports him.

Rex's tireless work as a councilor in preserving and maintaining Chiltern's history, family history research, and everything else that he achieved in public life was only made possible by his wife Mary supporting him at every stage, and without her quietly working away in the back ground a lot of what he achieved may never have happened.

Both Rex and Mary loved Old Time Dancing and attended many dances and balls throughout their married lives, they had many friends at the Corowa group and at other places around North Eastern Victoria.

After selling Vine View in 2006 and moving into Chiltern they had a chance to take a number of overseas trips, including visits to China, Japan & Russia and a number of other destinations including two trips along parts of the Murray River. Rex and Mary's up-coming visit to Gallipol this very week was the one Rex was very excited about and was really looking forward to, but sadly it wasn't to be.

In Fact Rex and Mary would have been standing somewhere around that famous Anzac cove this coming Friday the 19th.

As this eulogy to my dear friend Rex Fuge comes to an end I would just like to pass on a few special words to him before he goes to his final resting place.

Rex – You were plucked from our midst so quickly that none of us had time to prepare for your departure and to say our goodbye's to you!

If there is any reasoning as to why such a wonderful man such as yourself should be taken from his family, friends and the Chiltern community I can't and don't understand why, and why it was now ! – The only positive I can draw out of this sad event, is that you were enjoying your life and doing the things that you loved when you left us so suddenly.

Rex, the only other conclusion I can draw is that God needed you, and wanted to use your special skills for a bigger and more important project up there.

But unfortunately the Athenaeum will never be quiet the same without your presence there.

When I would drop in for a visit to see you at the Athenaeum,

I will forever miss those words 'G'Day G'Day' as you spun around on that squeaky chair at your desk at the Athenaeum to bring me up to date with what was going on.

I will never forget the sound of your laughter down around the displays at the Athenaeum as you proudly talked about Chiltern's history and explained to your visitors what they were seeing.

Rex, you rang me on the afternoon of the day before you left us full of enthusiasm about a new page for our Athenaeum website that you wanted me to organize, little did I know that was the last conversation I would ever have with you!

I will always cherish the joy I saw that people experienced when you would often magically pluck out details of their family's back ground and history and present it to them with such clarity and detail, often straight from your brilliant memory.

Rex there are a couple of final things I need to let you know.

Don't worry about the latest outbreak of weeds and the bridge at Lake Anderson, someone from the Shire will fix it!

Also Rex, even though you weren't able to make it to Gallipoli to gather extra research for next year's Anzac centenary celebrations at the Athenaeum, Ian Charlton has it all covered and he will be fully supported by all of us and it will be presented to perfection just the way yourself and Ian had planned it!

Rex it's time to go. You were indeed an outstanding man and a person of great integrity and all of us gathered here to-day to celebrate your life, know that you were one of a kind, you will never be replaced, you will be forever missed, and we will never forget you.

Oh Rex – Just one final thing! When you departed from us so quickly on that Saturday morning a little over ten days ago, The Chiltern community lost your wonderful oversight and caring for all things Chiltern.

However, it would be my hope and I am sure the hope and aspirations of all your family, friends and colleagues gathered here to-day, that someone would have the foresight in the near future to erect a plaque, monument, or something with your name on it – stating what you did, what you achieved, and how you cared for this town and the Chiltern community, so that at least when all the friends who knew you have also departed this world, future generations who come to live and visit the township of Chiltern will always know who Rex Fuge was and what great achievements you attained for Chiltern and that you will be always remembered as a very special and important part of Chilterns history.!

Rex I am very proud to say that I knew you, and that you were my very close friend.

"Vale" Rex Basil Fuge OAM
May you rest in peace.