Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Oration – Chiltern, January 4 was a Great Event for Chiltern

The weekend of celebrations remembering the birthday of famous Australian author Henry Handel Richardson, held in Chiltern on January 3 and 4 was a truly wonderful occasion.

In excess of one hundred and forty people gathered under the marquee set up on the lawns at the Richardson family home 'Lake View' to hear the authors great-niece Angela Neustatter deliver the inaugural Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Oration on Sunday morning January 4. Angela, who is a journalist and author herself, had travelled from London for the Oration and she delighted her enthusiastic audience with her exploration of the parallel lives of HHR and her sister Lillian (Angela's grandmother) and the influence they have had on her own life. Of course along the way she provided many insights into her great-aunt and grandmother; such that could only come from someone within the family. Angela proved herself to be a most entertaining orator and this together with her wit, charm and effervescence ensured maximum attention from her audience.

During the picnic tea held at Lake View on the previous evening, Angela's brother, Patrick Neustatter, who had travelled from Virginia, USA to join the celebrations, spoke most entertainingly about HHR's father and his great-grandfather Dr. Walter Lindesay Richardson. Patrick maintains a long line of medical men in the Richardson family and again was able to reflect on the life of Walter Richardson from within the family. Over one hundred and twenty people enjoyed this experience, and the lovely garden at Lake View, that is a credit to all those who volunteer their time to maintain it, was an absolutely perfect setting for this memorable occasion.

Earlier in the day about ninety people had joined HHR Society of Australia President Rex Fuge on his guided walk around "the Chiltern that Doctor Richardson knew". The fact that such a large group ventured out into the blazing sun for the walk speaks volumes about their enthusiasm for the subject. At the conclusion of the walk a short ceremony was held at the Chiltern Athenaeum where Angela and Patrick Neustatter formally handed over a writing desk that had belonged to HHR. This means that Chiltern is now home to two writing desks once owned and used by HHR. The one at Lake View is believed to be her first desk, whilst the second desk now on display at the Chiltern Athenaeum was probably purchased when she felt the need for a slightly bigger desk to write at. It may indeed be the desk she used during the many years she spent writing her great trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. The Athenaeum Trust is extremely grateful to the Neustatter family for their generous donation.

During the weekend twenty new members joined the Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia taking total membership beyond one hundred and fifty. This is a fantastic result for the Society, which was formed just one year ago. People came to Chiltern from Perth, Queensland and various locations across NSW and Victoria for this year's event. Planning is already under way for a Society tour to Ballarat and Maldon later this year, and of course for next year's birthday celebrations and Oration in Chiltern.

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