

Lady Denman

Naming of the Vera Hatton Gallery

I am here today to do the honours in naming a gallery here at the Lady Denman. The honours in this case are for Vera Hatton, who I am sure you all know.

I am also doing this in memory of Gavin Hughes, my partner of 39 years who passed away six weeks ago.

Vera had taken on the task of putting together the museum exhibition to fill a new building and approached Gavin to do the design. Apart from being collaborators in the opening of the Lady Denman in 1988, Gavin and Vera developed a very deep and life-long friendship. Along the way both Gavin and I became a part of the family.

In the initial discussions about today's proceedings it was thought that Gavin would be the right person to do this role, but because he was not a public speaker and in fact would run a mile before giving a formal talk. Robin, Gavin and I decided that I would take on the "front of house" role and Gavin would supply some background colour and movement, the highs and lows in getting the Museum open. Unfortunately circumstances intervened before we had that discussion, so if I get some of the facts wrong then bear with me.The good thing though, is that Vera might be relieved that some of the colour and movement is going to be omitted.

But I suppose the story sort of starts in 1980 when Vera became concerned that the history of the local area was vanishing and she recruited six other community members with similar concerns. They met every Tuesday to research, collect photographs, trace and interview descendants and learn how to accession artefacts, photographs and negatives. Over time the group grew and then in 1987 faced the challenge of having a new , and empty, museum building to fill.

The work involved in setting up one exhibition is huge and complex, let alone taking on Aboriginal history, European exploration and settlement, ship building, lighthouses and ship wrecks to name a few. However the challenge was taken up and with only the bones of research to hand, and even less money, they headed towards an opening in 1988. In Vera's words from a paper presented to a national conference in 1999, "We had a small collection of ship building tools, knew nothing about museums and had no idea where to start. But we did it!"

Vera was the driving force behind getting this Museum up and running, this is not to say that a large number of other people did not put in a huge amount of time, effort, resources and sheer hard work. Those effort should also be acknowledged and celebrated. Warren Halloran, Pat Fogarty, Doris Jones, Marie Smith, Enid Gale, Judy Mason, Terry Christensen and Gavin of course, are just a few of those involved in the funding and building, researching the history, developing exhibition themes and converting the vast amount of data into museum exhibitions.

Vera's involvement with the museum was of course important to the decision to name the gallery today but her involvement went beyond the local community she also brought the Lady Denman into the Australian museum community. First on a local level through the South Coast chapter of the Museum s Association, then on a state wide basis and involvement with the NSW Ministry of Arts

and finally on a national basis through Museums Australia and the Maritime Museum Network as well as through the national recognition received with awards the complex has won.

Like ripples on a pond the reputation of the Lady Denman has also spread internationally. I can vouch for this as Vice- President of the World Federation of Friends of Museums and their 3 million membership.

Since that 3 December 1988 opening the museum and its collections and exhibitions has grown considerably, including the building now housing the Denman , the foyer and shop and this exhibition space, all designed by Gavin. The exhibitions have grown and changed, as they should. The museum is now totally embedded into the community and as new people have become involved and added their enthusiasm, as nearly thirty years have passed since that first concern about a vanishing history in the last couple of years Vera's involvement has become less intense but still enthusiastic.

While Vera's contribution to the Community has been recognised with a number of awards, including the Healthy Cities Illawarra Award in 1997, the Shoalhaven International Women's Day Award in 2000 and the Shoalhaven Arts Board Award in 2005, I think it is more than appropriate that Vera's contribution to the people of Huskisson and Jervis Bay, to the Lady Denman Museum and the Australian community at large, is recognised by naming this Gallery the Vera Hatton Gallery.