

AUSTRALIAN PHILBEYS GATHER IN KERANG, VICTORIA -2017

Australian descendants of George Frederick Philbey (1832-1913) gathered in Kerang on 31 March to 2 April for another of our periodic reunions.

Kerang (pop. 3,800) in the Gannawarra Shire is a prosperous regional centre and transport hub on the banks of the Loddon River, some 280 kilometres northwest of Melbourne. In an irrigation district, the local economy is based on animal husbandry, cereal growing and horticulture.

William George Philbey (1862-1922), the fourth child and second son of George Frederick Philbey, brought his family across from South Australia in 1894 to settle in Kerang. While some of his descendants still live within the district, others are now scattered across Victoria and beyond.

Kerang's strategic location made it a logical choice for a reunion venue. The town is a relatively accessible venue for family members from across the country. Kerang was a serendipitous choice, having all the necessary accommodation and facilities, good support from local community organisations, and a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

Our reunion began on the evening of Friday 31 March with an informal dinner in the function room of the "Exchange Hotel". Around forty clan members were present. In a convivial atmosphere over the bistro's renown curries, kinsfolk who had not seen each other for years caught up, and were able to meet others for the first time.

Proceedings began in the function room of the Kerang Motel, fortuitously on "April Fools' Day" -- so gremlins struck the public address system, slightly delaying the opening. Kellie Burmeister, a fourth generation descendant of William George Philbey, representing our hosts and the Kerang community, set the ball rolling.

In her introduction, Kellie welcomed the sixty family members present. She noted that many had come enormous distances to attend -- Darryl and Glennis Philbey from Cecil Plains in Queensland had travelled the farthest, but several others had travelled several hundred kilometres to be present.

Kellie presented a prize to the eldest Philbey present (Mrs Norma Siegert *nee* Philbey, 97 years, from Mount Gambier in South Australia) and to the youngest (Ms Frances Galea, 25 years, from Melbourne). As well as Norma Siegert, a goodly number of venerable family elders were present.

Kellie then gave a brief outline of the history of the Philbey family in Victoria, a number of whom were present, including George William Philbey, one of the surviving third generation and the patriarch of the Victorian branch.

Garth Hunt, speaking on behalf of interstate attendees, followed with a short address listing family members who had passed away since the last Australian Philbey reunion (Cecil Plains, Queensland, 2015); Mrs Rosalie Philbey (beloved wife of George William Philbey), Mrs Maureen Tappin, Ms Meegan Harrison-Philbey and Mr Graham Philbey). He expressed condolences on behalf of the family and asked that they be remembered. Garth paid tribute to the late Graham Philbey for his 2000 book, *Descendants of John Philbey*. This publication had served as a catalyst in drawing together the widely scattered branches of the family and providing a beacon for our reunions.

Garth also urged people to follow Philbey activities on the "Philbey Network Australia" Facebook page. He announced that a number of Australian Philbeys were planning to attend

the 50th Filby Association Reunion next year (All Saints Church, Filby Village, Norfolk UK, 11-12 August 2018) and encouraged others to join the group

The programme allowed ample opportunity for the various branches of the family to meet each other and to “network”. In the informal and convivial setting, people were able to rediscover old connections and to forge new ones. We were again reminded that over the 160 years of its settlement in Australia, Philbeys are as diverse and accomplished a clan as any, but all remain proud of their common heritage.

Mr Ollie Jane, a respected local historian briefed the gathering on the origins and development of Kerang and the surrounding district. Later, Ollie and museum volunteers escorted us on a tour of the Kerang Museum. Its keynote exhibits included carefully restored farming, pumping and haulage machinery, underlining the agricultural character of the district and its debt to the early pioneers, including William George Philbey and his descendants.

The first day was capped by a BBQ dinner at the Kerang Motel. The Charm Mystic Park Branch of the Lion Club amply catered for the function, with Dian Burmeister (*nee* Philbey) and Shirley Robinson providing good country dessert delicacies. We were entertained by the husband and wife Country and Western duo, Neville and Kathy Hird. The combo had the otherwise staid and sober Philbey clan “rocking” until late, with sprightly eighty-plus year olds showing younger “dudes” how to kick up their heels.

Sunday 2 April began with a Lent service at the Saint John’s Anglican Church. A respectable number of Philbeys packed the pews. The Reverend Simon Robinson gave a feisty contemporary sermon on the theme of Lazarus. He kindly acknowledged our presence, gave us his blessing, wishing us a successful reunion and safe journey home.

Later that morning, we gathered at the Kerang Cemetery. Ms Julie Smith, a celebrant and local historian, guided us on a brief tour of the cemetery, including the graves of departed Philbey family members. We then gathered at the grave of William George Philbey, buried together with three members of his family. Julie presided over a short ceremony to unveil a plaque marking the grave. Kellie, on behalf of the descendants, paid homage to William George Philbey and underscored how significant the ceremony was for the Victorian branch, then removed the veil. Three generations of William George Philbey’s descendants witnessed the ceremony.

The final event was a farewell lunch at the motel. All present agreed that the reunion had been memorable and a great success. Some voices were heard asking when and where the next Australian Philbey reunion would be held.

Organising a reunion on this scale is a major operation requiring the contribution of many hands. We need to give special thanks to Kellie and her mother Dian for organising the reunion, and for ensuring that it ran smoothly. Dian, Shirley Robinson, Cindy Boyd, Joyce Boyd and Linda Slater also slaved over a hot stove to ensure that the clan were well victualled during morning and afternoon tea breaks. We also thank Lisa Webster and Cindy for providing valuable back-up support.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Jean Hutchings for notices and registration, to Marilyn Philbey for managing our finances, and to Jeanette Ireland for help with the logistics. To those others who played a role in ensuring the success of this event, we express our thanks.

Should we have another reunion? Well, Cecil Plains, Kadina and Kerang have all done their bit. It would be good to keep up the momentum. Perhaps one or more willing and enterprising volunteers from another part of the country might step forward in the not too distant future.

Kerang Reunion 2017

