

R.P.P.Circuitt - Eulogy

Introduction

It was over a year ago Dick Circuitt asked me if I would deliver this eulogy.

As there are many here who have known Dick for a lot longer and a lot better than I, I could only assume at the time that he asked me not just because of the good friendship we had formed over the last 10 years or so since I met him, but really because we had explored together a particularly important part of his life.

That part was his lifelong involvement and love of the Merino sheep. Now Dick Circuitt was many things:- a proud and devoted family man; a community contributor; an outstanding stockman - whether it be with horses, cattle or sheep; a well read man with an enquiring mind, interested in his nation's affairs. He was other things too.

But if you wrapped that all up in one word, then you would say he was a true Australian bushman: knowledgeable; skillful; capable of the long-term view; a dry, call it droll, sense of humour; tough as nails when need be, but compassionate too.

And it was through my talks with him about the Merino sheep - that great love of his, and where he played no mean role during one of the great periods of Merino and Australian history - it was through these talks that I got to know more about this remarkable man.

We have come here today first and foremost to share our friendship and grief with Dick's family: with Jean, Christina, Sandy, Ted and their respective families.

But we have come also, I believe, to celebrate and remember the life and times of a remarkable man.

If Dick could hear me now, he would say, in that pleasant but gruff manner of his, something like: "Huh - don't you worry about that old man. We don't want any of that sentimental stuff." For he would not want this to be a sad occasion, but a time when we celebrate his life.

As one of his sons said recently: "Dad would hate to have anyone moping about his death. You see, he lived life to the full - right to the chocker. Because he was an 'up-and-at-em man"

And that is so true. He lived an extraordinary and full life. He was a real individual - as the Australian bush has a habit of producing, and I would like to share just a little about him with you.

Richard Patrick Perry Circuitt - known widely through the Australian bush as Dick Circuitt, was born on 30th. June 1903. Over 89 years ago.

He was born at Queanbeyan, near Canberra, the elder son of George and Ethel Circuitt. The Circuitts were pastoralists. Dick's father, George, had come out from England to Australia as a young man, with his brother, in the 1880s.

Dick's grandfather was a parson in England - known as the 'Boxing Parson' - a man who had started the Sea Rescue Service of Brixham on the Cornish coast.

No one quite knew where the Patrick, Dick's second name, came from - though it was suggested to me the other day that it's probable Irish origins would explain the dash of the larrikin that was in his make-up. And I might add, some of his descendants, both male and female.

Dick's father was in partnership with the Campbells of Duntroon - one of Australia's famous pastoralist families, and who owned virtually all of the extensive valleys that Canberra occupies today - as well as other holdings. It was in this area that Dick grew up as a child - playing in the Murrumbidgee, and immersed in all the adventurous activities that small boys get up to when brought up in the bush.

I remember him telling me about him riding as a small boy from Cuppacumbalong station to Duntroon, through tall rich paddocks of high grass with rolling fat steers, and past the log fences that held the draught horses. Duntroon had the Campbell dairy, and Dick Circuitt's job was to collect the cream and other vitals. But given a lively horse, and young Circuitt's strong will, I place a fair bet that by the time he got home the cream would be closer to the consistency of butter than milk.

I think it is important to consider the fact that Dick Circuitt would have been brought up by parents of true Victorian vintage, and also in a society where the role of the Church and Christian principles played a far more important role than it does today.

You cannot escape such early influences. To these I am sure were due the high principles to which Dick Circuitt adhered, and which he practiced for his entire life: Honesty; integrity; standing by your spouse; family; mates. Where in business, signatures were not considered necessary, just a firm hand-shake and level gaze. And also His impeccable manners.

I don't think I ever saw Dick Circuitt without a tie on: whether it be classing sheep; casting a fly on some trout stream; or at 4.a.m. when he was pottering about his house.

Ted informs me that the other day a friend saw him out for a walk without a tie and stood dumbfounded. But at his age, such tardiness was more than excusable.

It has been my privilege over the last few years to get to know a number of Dick Circuit's contemporaries: men like Tom Culley, and others, and of course people like Jean Circuit. You look back on the era they grew up in - of strict discipline and high Christian and moral principles - and then I certainly ask myself whether our generation will produce such a crop of strong, unique individuals, of high principles, and with manners and dignity as was exemplified by R.P.Circuit.

Schooling

Dick Circuit was educated at Tudor House near Moss Vale - a unique preparatory school that has continued to explore and develop boy's individuality and potential. He was one of only 13 pupils, and then went from Tudor House to the King's School at Parramatta.

Conditions at boarding schools 80 years ago were not what could be called palatial. And I would imagine that the conditions and environment that Circuit major. experienced when he went to Tudor and Kings were considerably tougher than those we experienced 50 years later. The result, though, was the steeling of character and the teaching of self reliance.

My father was only a few years behind Dick Circuit at Kings, and I have some inkling of what the times were like. I am sure that, like most boys, Dick Circuit also would have had some early swimming lessons whilst suspended upside down with his head in a toilet bowl; he would have heard, whilst bending over touching his toes, felt the onrushing drum of feet as a monitor or master advanced at increasing speed to swing a black-soled sandshoe or whippy cane on his exposed buttocks.

But things were a little different then for young boys at school. Common occupations in a still bushy suburb in Parramatta were birds-nesting - or egg collecting.; I would say that young Circuit had a shangheye or catapult in his back pocket for the sparrows and starlings; Spinning tops, knuckle-bones and marbles were prevalent; and during the first world war in particular, collecting cigarette cards was a favourite occupation. But around these cards elaborate games also evolved.

A group of small boys would stand some distance from a wall, and with a peculiar crack of the wrist - a skill that is lost to today's youth - a cigarette card could be sent a great distance. The person whose card landed closest to the wall would then keep all the other cards, and so on.

I have my father's cigarette card collection still at home. It says much about the times that Dick Circuit grew up in. There is

a collection of British Empire cards - depicting scenes from around the then British empire; English county cricket players; and of course during the war, there were a range of collections. There is a whole series of the landing of Gallipoli.

There is also a series called: "Britain's Defenders": with photos of such leaders as Haig; Allenby, French, Jellicoe and others - one Winston Churchill, the Rt. Honourable, and of course Field Marshall Kitchener. - and photos of the English King inspecting troops in France.

In an age of no Television, little access to radio, or organised mass media, and with a meagre diet of Boy's own and the odd comic, objects like these cigarette cards reinforced powerful messages, attitudes and mores of the day - of the bond to the British Empire and the English King and royal family; of the courage of Australian troops at Gallipoli, and places like Beer Sheba and later Pozieres and the Somme. All these things, in the days before Ponsford, O'Reilly, Bradman, Dally Messenger and Phar Lap, were powerful images that impressed attitudes, loyalties and codes of behaviour on impressionable boy's minds. To show stoicism; courage; to be chivalrous; to ride and suffer but never complain; to be as tough as nails; - all these things were important. For life had more of an heroic meaning to it then - far more than today.

I am sure that many of Dick Circuit's gritty and resilient attributes were moulded in these times.

After School

During his school days Dick's father bought country, first out west, at Uabba between Hilston and Lake Cargellico - in partnership again with the Campbells and Thring, and then in 1917 up on the Monaro, where he spent some happy times. They held country up behind Adaminaby - the Gulf. A well-known mountain hut bears the Circuit name. They also held an old and well-known Monaro station, Dangelong from 1919 for 35 years - both properties being a drought-move. When Dick came back to the Monaro and stayed for a while at home a few years ago, I was astounded by the extraordinary accuracy of his memory: for places, dates, and names. He was a keen trout fisherman of course, and had spent many happy days over the years casting a fly on some of the beautiful Monaro lakes and streams.

You know, I have sometimes wondered at just what went on on some of those rivers. Because flyfishing can be the most frustrating, finnick sport - where everything usually goes wrong at the wrong time, with your fly catching in a bush just when a large trout is ready for the taking. Dick Circuit's patience sometimes ran on a short fuse, and I suspect the odd profanity was uttered. He was a good angler though, because he was a good bushman.

But it was obvious that young Circuit had had a taste of the

bigger, flatter country, big paddocks and big flocks, and in June 1920 he took a major step in his life when he left home to begin Jackarooing for one of Australia's greatest Merino breeders: Neilson Mills at Uardry.

Apparently Dick saw rams being unloaded at Uabba at the age of 9, and he said then that he wanted to work at Uardry. Neilson Mills, when asked by Dick's father whether Dick could jackaroo at Uardry, is reputed to have replied that he would take the boy, but he had to leave school early as he, Neilson, didn't trust boarding schools.

Dick Circuitt spent 4 years with Neilson Mills, then left to work for the Austins - that other famous family of Merino breeders. He worked first for AW.Austin at Lake Midgeon and Canoon near Hay, where he looked after the stud sheep, and then went to another of the great Merino studs of the day - Eli Elwah, where again he worked with the stud sheep under Harry Austin until 1927.

In 1928 he returned again to work with Neilson Mills at Uardry, where he remained until 1933 - before striking out on his own. Neilson Mills had a profound effect on his life.

Not only were these vital years in his education and development, where as a Jackaroo on some of Australia's great stud-properties he learnt his trade as a pastoralist, stockman, horseman, bushman, sheep-classer and stud-breeder. But Dick Circuitt was uniquely placed in both time and geography, for he happened to be working in the midst of great stud-breeders and classers, and working at a time when the Merino stud industry was in one of its most important phases of development.

So young Circuitt was not just learning from the best - about stud sheep breeding and management, classing, and property management - but he was also meeting everyone who was anyone in the stud industry. With his enquiring mind, he was uniquely placed to ask, observe and learn - and this he did.

Dick Circuitt knew most, and befriended many, of the great names in Merino history from the early part of this century until the present. Neilson Mills became a close friend; he knew and later worked for Otway Falkiner and the Austins; GBS Falkiner of Haddon Rig, Art Collins, Sir Walter Merriman, and still later Tom Culley he all knew well. Early influential thinkers and breeders like Alec Morrison, the Wigans, and of course the famous sheep-classers of the day - WJ Macarthy, the Pennefathers and others. Indeed, Dick Circuitt would have spoken to people who had known the Peppins and their classers, the Shaws.

Significantly, with his colossal memory, he remembered them all, and of course the lessons they had to teach.

Dick Circuitt's memories of this time were vivid, and part of

living history. He recounted the foot-rot days in the 20s in the Riverina, where most big stations for 5 years battled this curse - a curse that Otway Falkiner said was worse than any drought. Young Circuitt worked long and hard with the horses, transporting wooden troughs to distant yards, where even 2 week old lambs would come in with their feet peeling.

Young Dick Circuitt saw wool being shipped onto barges and boats at uardry - 500 bales to a boat, 1000 to a barge, - for the long trip to Echuca, and then Melbourne by rail. The wool was shipped late winter when the river was high.

Young Circuitt fought the inevitable bushfires - and fighting with inadequate tools - wet bags, and no communications - and horse teams to plough the fire-breaks.

Dick spent a lot of time trucking the uardry rams - sometimes over 1000 in a draft to the big Queensland stations. He was at uardry when they bred the famous 0-1 - the ram on the shilling.

Young Circuitt had fond memories of the Sydney ram sales - a holiday period for the hard-working jackaroos - who travelled with the rams by train to Sydney - trucking rams to the sidings in heavy waggons, sleeping in the guard's van, and then despatching the rams in various teams to the big Sydney wools stores by horse drawn waggon from the station. And God help the manager then, because the jackaroos were let loose on Sydney like a bag of spilled rabbits.

I touch on these things, because it was an enormously important period in Dick Circuitt's life.

I could be accused of being biased, but I happen to believe that the role and contribution of the Australian Merino industry is still not fully appreciated. Because, more than any other industry, it has helped to build this nation. The key breeders and classers who helped to transform the sheep thereby were the architects of this nation's wealth - in similar fashion to the great industrialists of England or America.

Dick Circuitt not only knew and worked with these people, but he became a contributor in his own right. He not only assisted Neilson Mills, but looked after the stud sheep at the great Wanganella daughter stud of Eli Elwah. In 1934 he became the advisor and helped class another of the great peppin parent studs, Wanganella Estate for Otway Falkiner. Dick Circuitt played more than a passive or minor role in shaping the course of Australian merino genetics - he was indeed one of the real contributors in this most crucial phase of Merino history.

On his own

Between 1934 and 1939 Dick Circuitt struck out on his own as a sheep-breeder and classer. Only those who have lived through the

Great Depression would appreciate how hard this must have been. It is known he approached old McClure in Hay to buy a car - pointing out his meagre wages wouldn't cover a new one @c 400 - so requesting a second hand car. McClure said he should get a new one and that Dick could pay him back when he could. For as long as the McClure store continued, Dick always supported them and never forgot that gesture.

He was based at Young, when he struck out on his own classing, living mainly with the Crighton's at Glainsnock. He classed widely, not just such important studs as Wanganella Estate, as well as contributing advice to Otway Falkiner and Neilson Mills, as well as at Mungadal, but also classed Malvern Hills at Tambo in Queensland; and at Charlie Russell's at Cunnamulla. - as well as many other properties in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

Through all these times, whilst battling to stand on his own feet, he had to survive the great depression and the wool crash. His innate qualities of toughness, resilience and resourcefulness, were further developed and honed in this period.

Marriage

And then, as it happens for many of us, a bombshell hit him, and his life was changed for ever - for the better of course in this case, for he met at the Sydney Show one Jean Stirton - a highly attractive, excellent horsewoman and cattlemaster from off the land - from Auburn Vale at Inverell.

To quote what I think were Bill O'Reilly's, or it may have been Sir Donald Bradman's words: he then began the best partnership of his life. They were married on 8th. January 193?? at St. *Stephen*
~~Andrew's Cathedral~~ in Sydney. Dick continued classing until the war years - based in Sydney for a few years. *Macquarie St.*

Their first child, Sandy was born before they moved up to Oregon at Warialda, where Dick Circuitt took over the management of the Stirton's property.

Then followed their two other children, Christina and Ted to complete the family. And as inevitably happens, the Circuitts found themselves raising young children during times when they themselves were working at their hardest and under pressure - through the difficult war years and then the mid 1940s drought and later as they sought to establish a foothold on their new home and country near Hay.

Dick Circuitt was too young for the first world war, and too old for the second. That did not stop him from enlisting, but an urgent telegram from his bank manager persuaded him that he would contribute more to his country by keeping the property going than helping to butcher sheep in a Maitland garrison. So he returned to take over the management of Oregon.

I would suspect, that raised in the era he was, and with a man of his high patriotism, sense of mateship and loyalty, that this unfortunate circumstance of age that left him out of both Wars, left its scars on him. This would have been sadly reinforced when his only brother, the younger Ted, died ~~on the Burma railway.~~
at Sandakan.

But life had to go on, and Dick Circuitt was never one to lay about. After Oregon was taken over for soldier settlement, the Circuitts purchased Ulonga station in 1949. It was a famous name in Australian pastoral history, sited on the Lachlan, somewhere within the triangle of Patterson's 'Hay, Hell and Booligal', and immortalised in the old song about shearing, and the bloke who had shorn for old Patterson of Ulonga..

The Circuitts railed and walked around 7000? sheep and up to 1000 cattle from the north to Ulonga to begin their new life there - country which the Circuitts still occupy - now divided as Ulonga and adjoining Walgeirs - and which they have cared for, and, building on the firm foundations of Dick's knowledge and skills in Merino and cattle breeding and management, have built a fine name for high class stock off both Ted and Sandy's properties.

It takes a particular type of person to make a success of this Western country - the 3 and 4 acre country. A short-term approach to management - of raping resources - is a sure recipe for disaster. Dick brought all his experience and knowledge of knocking about with great breeders and managers to bear, when he moved to Hay. In addition, with never enough resources or labour, and the occasional flood or bushfire to make life interesting, to survive out there one had to be a jack of all trades, expert horseman, good stockman - and above all to have a long-term vision for the country - to conserve the fodder, the herbage, the salt-bush if possible; to anticipate the dry times, and to make your key moves at the right time, whilst breeding animals that thrived and produced in that difficult environment. Dick Circuitt, and subsequently his sons, have proved these attributes remarkably.

But the Circuitts struck difficult years in establishing their foothold in Ulonga. the early '50s held a series of big floods, where they were isolated for 8 months. To survive required a high degree of self-sufficiency. The children clearly remembers such events as a pack-horse train from town led by Dick, with one load containing dozens of trees; another with a large turkey-gobbler riding on the pommel with Dick, its purple head bobbing beside Dick's sunburnt face and the children in stitches at the sight riding behind in single file. Another time, during a mouse plague, McClure's store received, as if it were an everyday occurrence, the order from Dick for a bag of cats. Unperturbed, this store that could supply everything from pins to anchors, obliged (though how many distraught cat-owners were left in Hay is not told), and the children remember the arrival of the bags of cats , carried by nervous pack horses through the floods

amidst the profanities of the horse leader. The cats were released by gleeful kids in the sheds and apparently scattered to the wind.

So, while the family continued to grow up and be educated, life went on and the Circuitts consolidated on Ulonga. Dick and Jean went on an overseas trip in 1952 - visiting South Africa, England, Ireland and Scotland. Whilst in the UK they visited a number of short-horn studs and purchased 15 stud cattle, including 2 bulls. One of the heifers that this experienced stockman had chosen, did not pass quarantine tests and had to be left in England. It was subsequently purchased for 1000 guineas; became champion cow in England for 2 years, and her calf, which should have been born on Ulonga, was sold for 5000 guineas.

Back at Ulonga, as the family developed, completed their education and went out on their own, Dick continued to breed his horses, cattle and beloved Merino sheep - remaining in stud-breeding, and occasionally showing with some success.

In his local community, Dick Circuitt was a contributor as well. He was a member of local government, serving the then shire of Waradgery from 1953 to 1962, and was Shire President in 1960. - an autocratic leader I am informed.

He was a long-serving member of both the Hay Jockey Club and the Hay Picnic Race Club. He was elected to the Waradgery Club in 1925. He was chairman of the local Grazier's Assocn. during the 1950s.

In later years he enjoyed the fruits of his long partnership with his faithful and gracious wife, Jean. He saw Christina develop a very successful career in nursing, and the boys go on the land with him. He was able to enjoy many years as a grandfather, as all three children in turn got married, and a new generation of Circuitts arrived - 7 grand-children, of whom he was inordinately proud.

The Man

So who was this bloke.?

We know he lived through interesting times; trained under many great men; and became a real contributor in his own right.

he lived through the era of Bradman, the recession, 2 world wars. He was around when Phar Lap thrilled the Australian public in the Melbourne Cup. And I mention the horse not to glorify gambling, but to emphasise the large role that the horse played in the psyche of the time, particularly for a bushman.

For Dick Circuitt's life spanned the period from the age of the horse and steam to the rocket and micro chip age. He began life when humans were limited in travel and communication to the speed

of the horse, and finished it witnessing the frenetic speed of the modern car, plane, computer and fax. And the slow and measured speed of his early days did have a lasting and positive affect on him - for he always had time for a chat, and to persue friendships; to value deliberation and live with a measured dignity. One wonders what todays frenetic pace will do to human relationships of the future.

It seemed to me that Dick Circuitt had a friend or acquaintance in every town in eastern Australia - and he knew the value and importance to a meaningful life of true and loyal friendship.

I have mentioned the significance of the horse in early bush life and how it was with Dick Circuitt all his life. Being a man of enormous energy, he rode most days of his life. From his diarys, and those who knew him, he would cover up to 60 or more miles a day on many occasions, mostly trotting.

Like his wife Jean, he was a fine horseman and cattleman, and an excellent judge of horseflesh - and of course cattle, particularly his favourite shorthorns, and of a merino sheep.

Dick Circuitt was a keen reader and kept abreast of current affairs. His enquiring mind and skillful bushman's observations skills were the mark of an acute intelligence. He loved sport, especially rugby and cricket.

Dick Circuitt was a real individual - and thank God for the strong individual. For these people are the movers and the shakers in life. Strong individuals, of course, make waves wherever they be, and no one would pretend that Dick did not have his moments like all of us. I would say that the Circuitts were a pretty normal family: they had their share of tiffs, differences of opinions, like we all do. They are also mature people, and differences were resolved; strong personalities accomodated, and life got on with.

As I say, he was a strong and unique individual - a real character. In his younger days, he knew Banjo Patterson - or old Barty as he called him. I have seen a photo of a youthful Dick Circuitt astride a horse, in some rough and ready gear - as a member of the Cooma Polo Club. It was this polo club that Banjo Patterson, as he told Dick Circuitt, had in mind when he wrote his poem 'The Geebung Polo Club'.

With his remarkable memory, Dick could clearly remember the rabbit plague early this century - of digging pit traps on Uabba, and herding rabbits into them - 28,000 they took off the place in one year.

He could clearly remember riding in a Cobb & Co coach - going from Uardry when a boy at Tudor House, where his father had been buying rams, to Hilston. - 8 hours to do 70 miles through the

night, and then by buggy for the rest of the day.

I remember a few years ago I was staying with Mr. and Mrs. Circuitt here in Hay. I was up early. Now anyone who has known Dick in the last 10 years and more would know that the nighttime for Dick was a bit of a nuisance - as if sleeping was a waste of time, for there was too much to do. So about 4 or 5 in the morning when I arose, Dick was rattling around, playing with his radio, feeding the dog etc. I went outside and watched Hayley's comet. On coming back in to inform Dick, he shrugged:

"Huh - seen that before!" And he had of course, only 70 years earlier. And far more impressive then too.

Patience. This was another attribute that at times was tested in one Dick Circuitt. As Ted told me, he was an "Up and at-em man", and patience often got in the road of this. There is a story during the early 1950s floods, when they were cut off by road at Ulonga for 8 months and more. Dick felt it was time to get some rum, and so rode out the 12 miles to the One Tree to pick up his bottle that he had ordered. Unbeknown to him, his erstwhile wife had organised a small treat for the children and had a bottle of cordial ordered as well. After a long ride through sticky mud Dick arrived, found his bottle all wrapped up, and duly rode home in great anticipation, with the bottle secure in his saddle-bag. But of course when he unwrapped the parcel the the liquid was the wrong colour, and there was hell to pay.

I have heard the comment made about Dick that he was a mixture of the positive and the negative. Very positive about others - about encouraging them. In all the voluminous notes I have of my talks with him, there is hardly a bad word about someone else. But about himself, despite his abilities, he could have severe self doubts. That was the positive and negative - that beneath that sometimes gruff, capable exterior, humility and self doubt could lurk. Despite this, he had the courage to always battle on. Tough and gritty are the descriptions I have from many who knew him.

But there was compassion too beneath this gritty exterior. There are a number of incidents, some we will never know, of his generosity in others' adversity - of 6 cows and a bull being quietly gifted here, and others there and so on.

Importantly, he was a Christian in his beliefs. The principles of his early upbringing were the rocks on which his ethics, morals and behaviour were based throughout his life.

And he had a sense of humour. Perhaps not the lightening dry wit of the repartee in the shearing shed, but sharp, dry - indeed droll - nevertheless.

On one occasion one of the helpers out at Walgeirs left a campfire alight, and the smoke got some action going. This bloke helping, from some suburb in Sydney, was boring along on his motorbike when he hit a huge roo, which smashed him up a badly.

After inspecting the damage and the enormous bruises, Dick quiteely observed: "Oh, these city fellas are soft arent they".

Conclusion

I would just like to conclude by observing that we can remember here today a remarkable man who was a real link with the past - a segment of Australian history. He was a true individual; loving, yet tough as nails; resilient, and wise in his world - and one, who, as his son said, did live life right to the chocker. His legacy can be judged by the man he was: his wide circle of friends; the way he handled adversity; his integrity.

It is measured in his significant contribution to the pastoral industry and his community, and to the Merino industry in particular - and this legacy is clearly attested by the sort of person he married, and their children and grand-children.

I count it as one of the great priveleges of my life to have befriended Dick Circuit, because I was certainly enriched by that friendship, despite the large gap in age between us, some 50 years.

And I know that I speak on behalf of everyone here, when I say: "Thank God for the life of Dick Circuit, and may he rest in peace."

Charley Massey 24/8/1992.

As L.V. Pauls Church. Hay. N.S.W.

Author of "The Australian Merino."