

**Good afternoon.**

**I am thrilled to be here in Launceston today, particularly because the Pope is in Sydney.**

**I think Tourism Tasmania missed out on a real opportunity to market this as a quiet destination well away from the chaos of a major metropolis in lockdown and temporarily transformed into a police state.**

**We are here on serious business, to look at the future of tourism in this state and how we might kick it along without Papal intervention. My brief is to look at a couple of specific areas – Arts and Culture and Heritage.**

**I worked for almost thirty years in the advertising and communication industries. After a false start as a journalist with the Sydney**

**Morning Herald, a job that because it involved night work, played havoc with my late teenage social life, and a year at Sydney University where, conversely, the attractions of undergraduate social life wrecked my chances of a degree, I crossed over to the dark side and signed on as a copywriter in the advertising department of a large retail store in Sydney. This provided me with a somewhat more appealing wage than the two pounds twelve and sixpence I was paid as a cadet (for 'cadet' read 'slave') with the Herald and a civilised working hours of nine to five.**

**It also began a long process of instruction in how to appeal to consumers and lure them into parting with their money. It also provided me with a salutary insight into what constitutes effective communication. One wrote an ad that ran in a Sunday newspaper and on Monday morning one could take a lift down to the floor where the featured merchandise was on display**

**and see just how many customers your words and pictures had attracted.**

**The prevailing theories of communication at that time were devised by a chap called Rosser Reeves, an American advertising executive and early pioneer of television advertising. Reeves was committed to making ads that were simple, direct, and often annoying. A typical Reeves ad was one for a headache tablet called Anacin. Most viewers found the advertisement grating, so much so that they developed a headache and then went out and bought some Anacin and, understandably, sales of the product tripled.**

**Some of his ideas seem pretty wacky now. He hated any form of artistry or creativity and believed, as did Herman Goering and more recently, George W Bush, that if you repeat a slogan often enough, people will believe you.**

**But some of Reeves' ideas still make sense.**

**With any product, he posited, you must establish what he dubbed the USP or Unique Selling Proposition.**

**When I subsequently went to work in London, I found myself in an agency that adhered rigidly to Reeves' theories. Much market research was undertaken to identify what owners of pets most wanted from their animals and that was eternal life. Thus was born a dog food called PAL with an acronymic slogan Prolongs Active Life.**

**When you think about it, that could apply equally to a pet or a partner and it is surprising that it hasn't been appropriated by manufacturers of either baby or invalid food.**

**The agency also contrived a somewhat similar slogan for a brand of birdseed called Trill. That little gem of copywriting was TRILL – makes budgies bounce with health.**

**Both slogans were in fact promises. Nowadays regulators would demand scientific evidence of**

**such longevity claims.**

**Advertising has become much more sophisticated now but the idea of the Unique Selling Proposition is still a sound one.**

**Now I know that unique means one of a kind but you can have a number of unique features in different categories and I think Tasmania has three.**

**The first, of course, is our environment. There are areas of Tasmania of transcendent ugliness but these are far, far outnumbered by places of heart-stopping beauty. This is a fact universally recognized but, whereas New Zealand's reputation for beauty is untainted, ours is compromised by the logging of old growth forest. So if we are speaking of the future of tourism to this glorious island we need somehow to address the negative perceptions**

**that in part neutralize the positive ones.**

**And in passing, may I also mention that I don't think Rosser Reeves would have thought it a sound idea to nick New Zealand's 'pure' campaign and bolt it on to a local product.**

**Another unique feature of Tasmania is its vibrant cultural life. There are many artists working on this island and they and their work deserve to be better known and more widely celebrated. Kevin Perkins, Mark Bishop and Toby Muir-Wilson at Stanley and a dozen others design and make furniture that is both handsome and uniquely Tasmanian in terms of spirit and material. The artist Patrick Hall is probably better known in Chicago where he exhibits annually than in Tasmania where he works. Richard Wastall and Phillip Wolfhagen uniquely capture the beauty of the Tasmanian landscape but more of their work is hanging in corporate collections on the mainland than here**

**where they live and work.**

**Creativity is an open-ended concept. In 1992, when I was involved in an initiative of the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating's vision for a Creative Nation, we wrestled with the definition of creativity and came to the conclusion that it could include everything from wood whittling to cooking, any endeavor that involved ideas, inspiration and effort.**

**It is something of a given that Tasmanian produce is superior to pretty much anything produced on the mainland. Add the word 'Tasmanian' to any product from a block of butter to a round of cheese to a jar of honey to a half a dozen oysters and the consumer instantly associates it with quality. And that associative implication of something fine and worthwhile is invaluable and needs to be extended as widely as possible. Tasmania is not just a place. It's a brand, and a quality brand at that, although not**

always conveyed as such. I suggest that it's worth considering the AOC system, *Appellation d'origine contrôlée*. This method of protecting a brand originated in the 15th century, when Roquefort was regulated by a parliamentary decree and the French have brought it to perfection as a guarantee of quality.

But let's move to culture in the sense of cultural tourism. Now the primary vehicle for cultural tourism is the festival. I have directed nine of these, twelve if you count the three New Year's Eve celebrations I devised for Sydney.

Festivals to commemorate great writers or musicians or simply celebrate a season or a place are not a new idea. There were festivals of all sorts, the Dionysian revels in ancient Greece and the marathon circuses of ancient Rome with the Christians obligingly providing free amateur talent and the organisers proceeded untroubled by Actors' Equity.

**But the modern arts festival seems to have originated in the second half of the eighteenth century when in 1769 the town of Stratford-on-Avon staged one to mark the bicentenary of Shakespeare's birth.**

**Festivals proliferated throughout the following century and produced some really eccentric one-offs such as the Tonic Solfa Festival of 1874 in the Crystal Palace in which three thousand schoolchildren took part.**

**Indeed, scale was the hallmark of the nineteenth century festival, particularly in the United States where a bandmaster called Patrick J. Gilmore, styled as 'the high priest of the colossal', brought the cult of bigness to its first climax with the Great National Peace Jubilee held in Boston in 1869. Described at the time as the 'grandest musical festival ever known in the**

**history of the world', it required a chorus of ten thousand and an orchestra of a thousand.**

**Events on this scale are unthinkable today and one must rely on methods other than mass to attracting visitors, although spectacle still works. The visit of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo to Sydney two years ago involved twelve hundred performers and attracted one hundred and fifty thousand people for four performances.**

**The world's biggest and most lucrative festivals, those in Bayreuth in northern Bavaria and Salzburg in Austria, were inaugurated to honour Wagner and Mozart respectively, although Mozart never lived to see how he and his image would be triumphantly marketed two centuries after his death.**

**Other festivals are dedicated to a particular form of performance, the Cheltenham Festival**

**to contemporary British composers, the Tamworth Festival to our homegrown country music performers.**

**But most festivals exist for no better reason than at some point in time someone thought it would be a good idea to have one and that it would help stimulate tourism. For all the high-flown talk of art, the reality is that the festival is a commercial enterprise.**

**Alas, Mozart wasn't born here and Wagner didn't retire here, so Tasmania doesn't have that sort of excuse. And this state's citizens didn't rise as one and march on the parliament building in Hobart chanting, "What do we want? A Festival, When do we want it? NOW".**

**Those late eighteenth century festivals were tightly focussed. They only had to honour Shakespeare or Handel whereas the modern festival director is often required to place**

**offerings on the altars of music both popular and classical, theatre, dance, the visual arts, outdoor performance, jazz, film, fashion, gastronomy and gardening. In addition he or she must make the streets festive and generally raise the artistic temperature to near-fever level for a month or so, or in Tasmania's case, ten days.**

**I must confess to being underwhelmed by Ten Days on the Island, both conceptually and in practice. It offers too little and it's spread too thin but more critically, it does not fulfil the primary function of any festival and that is to attract outsiders.**

**And it has a name that sounds more like a sentence than a celebration. Rosser Reeves wouldn't approve. All of the aforementioned Festivals have in their names the place where the action takes place. Salzburg, Melbourne, Edinburgh, Brisbane, Bayreuth, even Townsville**

**for God's sakes. So it strikes me as absurdly perverse that someone should have elected to be so unspecific about location. Ten Days on the Island. What Island? Sardinia? The Isle of Skye? No I'm afraid it was a misguided choice of name and should be ditched. Besides, in programming terms it's something of a corset. Every act has to come from an island somewhere or other, big deal, which rules out Europe, North and South America, Russia, the Indian subcontinent, just about most of the globe.**

**Another mistake was to make it biennial. What little interest can be cranked up by the program is dissipated in the seven hundred and twenty days between each event. Nor was anything except its oddball programming concept particular to Tasmania.**

**I can honestly say that I know of no one except myself who ever bothered to come down from**

**the mainland for it so the whole purpose of its creation was lost.**

**The bulk of the funding for any festival anywhere in the world comes from governments, federal, state or local, and the expectation, a perfectly reasonable one, is that the investment will show some return. The Bayreuth, Edinburgh and Salzburg festival are heavily funded and only continue to be so because they attract visitors in considerable numbers and there is a quantifiable economic benefit to the city as a result. Bayreuth for instance has a total of fifty thousand tickets to sell and receives one million applications for them each year. Tourist activity related to the Bayreuth Festival alone generates an estimated seventy million Australian dollars annually. Ticket sales are additional. So is the merchandising of records and videos and related ephemera.**

**The various concurrent Edinburgh Festivals in August comprise two thousand events at two hundred and thirty eight venues, attract audiences of 1.3 million and generate two million pounds in revenue. All this cultural activity, these nine festivals, also helps maintain more than three thousand jobs in Scotland.**

**Tasmania neither could nor should aspire to events on that scale but it could have one of the most exciting small festivals in the world, unique in location, concept and focus. Instead it has a plodding worthy slew of acts that barely register as a blip on the national, let alone the international cultural radar.**

**The opportunity exists still to create a wonderful Hobart Festival. Apologies to all Launcestonians present, but Hobart is the capital. It's bigger and it has the edge over Launceston in that it has a greater number of**

**venues including the only remaining Georgian theatre in the country, which in itself is a unique selling proposition.**

**In my view the major Tasmanian arts festival should be an annual event. It should take place only in Hobart, it should be called the Hobart Festival, and it should be imaginatively programmed to lure visitors. I know of few people here or overseas who don't want to come to Tasmania. They just need an excuse. That excuse should be an intriguing and singular event, or even a series of events.**

**It's a no-brainer that event tourism represents the future. Just see how Victoria has managed to attract visitors in vast numbers especially in winter when Melbourne is not the most alluring of destinations – unkind souls might say it is never really alluring even in summer – but blockbuster art exhibitions exclusive to Melbourne, big Broadway musicals exclusive to**

**Melbourne and museum shows exclusive to Melbourne generate significant interstate visitation to Bleak City. Just as the current Picasso exhibition at Brisbane's new Contemporary Art Museum is also pulling huge crowds. Who'd ever have imagined Brisbane as a cultural destination?**

**Tasmania is ill served not only for festivals but also for events in general and needs to create them or enhance existing ones that are unique to this place, such as the Wooden Boat Festival.**

**The Taste of Tasmania is a great concept appallingly executed and deeply tacky. With a little effort and a lot of creativity it could rival to Melbourne's Food and Wine Festival but it needs investment and some kind of overarching creative direction. The site is currently a kind of carbohydrate gulch. The best food and wine idea in Tasmania was the Long Lunch at Stanley but that has fallen by the wayside,**

**So events, yes, definitely, but not events that are pale rinses of mainland ones but are particular to Tasmania.**

**And now we come to the bit I am really interested in. The built environment.**

**As a kid growing up in a working class household the mealtime mantra was Waste not, want not. And right now Tasmania has a unique resource that is being wasted, its astonishing and vast built heritage. With a relatively modest investment in infrastructure and some clever marketing, heritage could be a real winner. But it is tragically neglected.**

**Tasmania fair bristles with fascinating buildings that exist nowhere else in the country. It's a mistake to call them stately homes but they are a remarkable collection of historic houses,**

**churches, farms, cottages unequalled in the Southern hemisphere.**

**However no one has yet managed to turn them into a collective experience for the tourist.**

**Granted Port Arthur is one of the best interpreted and presented heritage sites in Australia, granted that the new proposals for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery are exciting, these are but two of dozens of potentially lucrative tourist magnets.**

**The worthy municipal folk who administer our regions, many of whom appear to have had a taste bypass, don't seem to get it. You have a mayor in Burnie who wants to tear down one of the few attractive buildings in that dismal burg to put up a shopping mall. We have something called the Midland Highway, aka the Highway from Hell, which local alderpersons have decided to market as the Heritage Highway but**

there is little indication of why other than it some dreary, ill-designed signs along the route. They imagine that everyone will instantly understand the history of coaching as if by osmosis.

But the fact is that there exists a series of small, individually characterized towns along said highway that could collectively – repeat collectively – offer a sensational trip through a unique history. Militating against this possibility is appalling urban planning that has seen many of these towns compromised and their histories, individual character and aesthetic appeal submerged under a tsunami of cheap and ill-controlled subdivision and transcendently ugly modern interpolations. I cite as a choice example the bottle shop right on the highway at Brighton, as desperate a piece of built crap as one could find outside the former Soviet Union or some backwater in Asia.

**The Tasmanian novelist Richard Flanagan, one of the most important of Australia's contemporary writers, once said that Tasmania is an invitation to dream and here are some of my dreams:**

**That building in Hobart will be better controlled, more respectful of heritage. That developers respect the scale and history of the place.**

**I dream that the unique chain of villages – Pontville, Kempton, Oatlands, Ross, Tunbridge, Bothwell, Hamilton, and Campbell Town, although the latter might be a lost cause - could become an antipodean equivalent of the charming towns and villages one encounters when pootling through Tuscany or Umbria or Provence, not pickled Disneytowns but living places where the past is respected and the present embraced, where the inhabitants take pride in their gardens and the presentation of their towns and don't paint important heritage**

**buildings egg yellow or fluorescent orange.**

**The Heritage Highway could then truly deliver what its name promises.**

**Services would need to be improved along the way. The service I've encountered in the bakery at Ross for instance is about the most aggressively unpleasant I've had in a state where people are on the whole infinitely more friendly than on the mainland.**

**With presentation and service improved you have a serious heritage experience worthy of the name.**

**But most of all I dream of rescuing what's left of the rich treasure of historic buildings in the state.**

**In a recent article for the Financial Review colour magazine I wrote this:**

***Tasmania has an estimated two-thirds of all 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings listed on the Federal Government's heritage database. Packed into this tiny island, the smallest of the states of Australia, are an estimated five thousand five hundred churches, chapels, barns and dwellings of all kind, from shepherds' huts to miniscule Regency workmen's cottages to massive stone mansions. Some, like the houses in Molly Keane's novels, are still lived in and loved despite leaky roofs and rattling windows. Even if their owners lack the funds to undertake costly restoration, at least water still flows through the pipes like blood through veins, the lights are on and fires keep them tolerably dry, so for the time being at least they are safe. Others are less secure.***

***During the nineteen fifties and sixties, the conventional wisdom was that your average heritage property could be easily and***

*inexpensively converted to an adaptive new use such as a house museum or a B and B. Neither of these solutions has proved entirely satisfactory. Experience on the mainland suggests that when an old house or building can no longer be used for its original purpose and is restored, tidied and opened to the public, there is an initial flurry of interest and publicity. But almost inevitably, enthusiasm wanes, visitor flow becomes a trickle and, without an income, the property gradually slips back into shabbiness, as has happened at several New South Wales National Trust properties, Riversdale in Goulburn, Everglades at Leura and in Sydney, Juniper Hall in Paddington. In all of these, the house museum notion has been tried and found wanting. In Tasmania, Narryna in Hobart and Clarendon near Evandale are further examples of a pattern of well-intentioned but spectacularly inefficient amateur management resulting in diminished interest and plummeting income. The B and B*

*solution is also problematical in that many heritage properties, although considerably larger than your average Federation bungalow, are not large enough to be run profitably.*

In the article I've suggested possible solutions to the problem of conservation, particularly via leasehold and have suggested three models, three British, the Spitalfields Trust, the Landmark trust and English Heritage, and one Australian, the hugely successful New South Wales Historic Houses Trust.

Here are some of the places we used to illustrate that article.

## **SLIDE SHOW.**

Perhaps a start could be made by selecting ten or even half a dozen properties for attention and upgrading. This will require delicate negotiation

with owners or with existing management bodies. In Hobart I would select *Narynna* in the centre of the Battery Point precinct, a beautiful property with a fine collection but organized on the lines of a Polish picnic with amateur standards of presentation that would shame Bandywallop.

Not far from where we are meeting today is another candidate for a makeover, the handsomest colonial house and estate in the state, *Clarendon*. For any informed visitor it is a profound disappointment and needs urgent professional management. Money has been thrown at it in the worst possible way. Its management committee, convinced that the sole reason that visitor numbers were in decline, was that there was nowhere for them to have a cup of tea, spent half a million dollars to clamp on to the front a conservatory like restaurant. It's glass so it's too hot in summer, too hard to heat in winter and no one has been

able to make a go of it. And yet that money spent on a proper restoration of the interior would have made it a showplace of the state. Alas, with the National Trust, the amateur tail seems to wag the professional dog.

My dream for *Clarendon* is that it might be restored to the kind of appearance it had when owned by the Cox family, that the 1940's plaster store dummies draped in inappropriate and out of period costume be consigned to auction and that the visitor might have an informed and accurate, rather than a speculative amateur view of what life was like there in its heyday. It would also provide a venue for all manner of events that would help with badly needed maintenance funds.

Ironically, in nearby Evandale, we have a splendid example of an attractive, thriving village that has real life, a community - minded populace, a nationally renowned art event in the

**annual Glover Prize, a great market and scads of visitor appeal. And it has managed to avoid looking like Legoland.**

**I dream of a scheme where some of the owners of private properties of great architectural significance might be persuaded to open them say four times a year, not on an *ad hoc* basis but a coordinated one. I have some experience in this in that I lived for ten years in an historic house Sydney. It was and still is owned by the local council from whom I leased it. I rehabilitated the house, created a fine garden, and loved doing so. A condition of the lease was that I opened it to the public four times a year and the record attendance on one single weekend was fifteen thousand visitors. I was only able to do this because (a) the place looks sensational and (b) the garden was beautiful so one attracted both the voyeurs and the horticulturally minded.**

**I dream of a better presentation of Woolmers Estate. The house is wonderful and so is the garden but the so-called National Rose Garden is pretty ordinary. I could list ten reasons for this from poor design to a dull collection of specimens – why not all period roses rather than so many modern hybrids? Frankly, a splendid kitchen garden from which people could learn about heritage vegetables would be more interesting and instructive in these times of concern about food production. In the Loire Valley in France there is a chateau where the owner, Prince Louis-Albert de Broglie , also known as the tomato prince, grows nothing but tomatoes and has over six hundred and fifty rare varieties. Extremely promotionally minded he runs an annual festival of the tomato that draws 10,000 tomato-lovers from around the world. And he markets the seeds, as well as the predictable jams and chutneys.**

**And at Woolmers a beautiful adjunct to the**

**estate, Woolmers Cottage, remains in a poor state. Properly restored and furnished it could provide an added attraction to what is already a pretty pleasant if imperfect experience.**

**And I dream especially of that marvelous little arts festival for Hobart, one that takes over the town, attracts international artists, stages appropriate operas and plays in the glorious Theatre Royal, concerts in churches and historic buildings, ropes in all the commercial galleries and features a uniquely Tasmanian exhibition at TMAG and some grand outdoor celebration at Morilla, that coordinates restaurants and provides a showcase of all that unique in Tasmania.**

**If I may revert to Rosser Reeves whom I mentioned at the beginning of this talk, what Reeves also insisted the product being sold by advertising should actually be superior to the competition. He believed, as I do, that no**

**amount of advertising can move inferior goods or create demand where it does not exist.**

**So the tasks are twofold. Create the product, make sure it's unique and particular, and sell it with conviction, gusto and faith.**

**I am having a shot at putting my money where my mouth is. I have bought this house in Kempton. It has a marvelous history and I think I am respectful of that in the restoration, which has already taken three years and more patience than I have ever had to muster in my life. When it's finished I'll open it from time to time. I may use the stables for a monthly antique market of the type one sees in Paris. I may even make it available for the occasional wedding or fundraising function for some cause I believe in, such as the Tasmanian Symphony or the Wilderness Society. But most of all I hope to bring some life back to a little town that once had more Georgian buildings than it has today,**

**that had a few thriving businesses and a real community spirit. The local pub burned down, the two antique shops closed. The fire claimed most of one of the earliest and loveliest and most historic shops in Tasmania.**

**But it can bounce back so long as we have faith and dreams. And if ever there was a time for a major renaissance of Tasmania it's now when the three leaders of our political parties are all young and ambitious, not tired and disillusioned.**

**Tasmania is the most dichotomous place I know of in the world. The divisions of class and prosperity and education and beliefs are profound and the polarities palpable. Someone needs to help heal the divisions and to unite the place with a common vision for a prosperity and pride that can be shared by all, a passion to be the best, which in so many ways we are. And one of the first things to go must be fear of**

**criticism. Smugness and self-satisfaction are the great enemies of progress. We're OK but we can be so, so much better.**

**ENDS**