

The city of Launceston's first 200 years

In July this year in Launceston's City Park a beautiful bronze statue of Ronald Campbell Gunn was unveiled. Gunn was a towering figure in the history of Tasmania; his was a major contribution to the intellectual and cultural development of Van Diemen's Land.

He was one of the people responsible for the formation of the Launceston Horticultural Society, and the Tasmanian Society – later the Royal Society of Tasmania. He went on to become an appointed member of the Legislative Council and then a member of the first elected House of Assembly.

His enduring memorial is as much the beautiful City Park, to which he devoted a great deal of his energy, as the bronze by sculptor Peter Collett. The park has, for the half century or so that I can recall, been much as it is in 2006. Fortunately, the same can be said of much of the city of Launceston.

Throughout its two centuries Launceston has known great prosperity as well as times of hardship. It was during the mining boom of the 1880s that many of Launceston's characteristic Victorian buildings were constructed and it was at this time that much of the character of the city was formed.

Like any modern city Launceston has continued to develop. However, quite unlike most, it has retained very

largely its feel as a compact, serene city that is a place primarily for its people.

Recent developments such as the Inveresk Campus of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and the Old Seaport are brilliant adaptations of existing sites for modern use without sacrificing the cultural values of these areas. The QVMAG is a story in itself – being the only major museum in Australia not located in a capital city. The Paterson Street Campus is so much a part of the state's living history that it is to be hoped that is never 're-developed'. Certainly it is one of the places in Tasmania that generates a great deal of positive comment in 'letters to the editor' from overseas and interstate visitors for its appeal as a beautiful building and as a traditional museum.

Looking around the city it is reassuring to note the absence of inappropriate high-rise developments and the care that is lavished on both public and private buildings, parks and gardens and the smaller features that make Launceston what it is – a beautiful regional city, a great place to live and work, and an exemplar to the rest of the nation of the importance of a balance between heritage and sensible change.

Congratulations to Launceston and Launcestonians for your achievements in your first 200 years!

