



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
Australian Capital Territory Branch

# COMMONWEALTH NEWS

RCS Newsletter Autumn 2020

Patron: H.E. General the Hon. David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) Governor-General of Australia

## COMMONWEALTH DAY CELEBRATED WITH SONG, DANCE AND HOPE FOR THE EARTH

The richness of Canberra's diverse community was on display at a joyful and uplifting Multi-faith, Multi-cultural Celebration on Commonwealth Day in March, attended by our Patron, the Governor-General, H.E. General David Hurley and Mrs Hurley, at the Centre of Christianity and Culture in Barton.

The tolling of the giant bell in the Centre's courtyard, once of each of the 54 Commonwealth nations, marked the beginning of the celebration, followed by the beating of the Fijian Lali Drum and the massed choir of the Papua-New Guinea Peroveta singers to welcome the official guests into the chapel.

The first indication that the celebration was starting was a loud clang of a metal drum, signalling the arrival of two long and writhing Chinese 'lions', down the aisles and across the stage in a traditional Lion Dance of the Chinese community. Then followed an Aboriginal *Acknowledgement of Country* by didgeridoo player, Duncan Smith.

The 2020 theme, *Climate Action and the Commonwealth*, was addressed by the Centre's Executive Director, the Rt. Rev. Professor Stephen Pickard, whose message was made all the stronger by reference to the recent bushfires that ravaged much of the Eastern coast of Australia, destroying many thousands of hectares of native forest, including one-third of the ACT, and an estimated one billion native animals.

Canberra's Faith Communities at the celebration included Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Sikh, Baha'i, Jain and Buddhist on whose behalf statements pertinent to their core beliefs were read by Mr Dean Sahu Khan, Chair of the ACT Interfaith Committee, and Dr Natalie Mobini, representing the Baha'i Community.

More cultural performances came from the Gujarat Samaj Indian Women dancers, the African Gospel Choir, the Chorus of Women singing *Lament for Gaia* and the Canberra Men's Choir with *What a Wonderful World*. The Celebration ended with everyone singing the Australian National Anthem, and, after the Blessing and Dismissal, *We are Australian*, the chorus of which seemed so appropriate for the occasion:

*We are one, but we are many,  
And from all the lands on earth we come.  
We'll share a dream and sing with one voice,  
I am, you are, we are Australian.*



*The Governor-General H.E. General David Hurley and Mrs Hurley with dancers from the Indian-Sub-continent Cultural program, Gujarat Samaj, who performed during the celebration. The Governor-General read the Queen's 2020 Commonwealth Day Message. Bishop Stephen Pickard, (far right) gave the keynote address on Climate Action and the Commonwealth. The event was organised by the Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee whose Convenor is Hugh Craft and includes a number of RCS members including Branch Councillors, Kanti Jinna, Bradley Innes and Jack Milne.*

Photo: Terry Walls

## FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

This is the first message that I am writing to our members since my election as President at our AGM in February. As I said at the time, I am conscious of the honour being given to me, following so many presidents of high distinction who have held the position since our foundation in 1958. I am also fortunate that I am heading a society that has flourished in the good and safe hands of recent presidents, Colin Milner, Kanti Jinna and Hugh Craft, two of whom continue to serve on Council, Hugh as Vice-President and Kanti as Secretary. We will miss the presence of Colin on Council, but as an immediate past president, is an *ex officio* member entitled to attend our meetings as often as his current endeavours—including finishing his PhD—will allow.

Commonwealth Week events this year were a great success, as all those taking part agreed. We were delighted that our patron, the Governor-General, H.E. General the Honorable David Hurley and Mrs Hurley were able to attend the Multi-faith, Multi-cultural Celebration on Commonwealth Day, and that the Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Mr Isaiya Kabira, High Commissioner for Kenya, accepted our invitation to be guest speaker at our annual Commonwealth Dinner. The cricket match, once more a permanent fixture on our calendar, was held on a beautiful day on one of the most attractive grounds in Canberra, the Forestry Oval in Yarralumla. Thanks must go to our Secretary, Kanti Jinna, ably assisted by RCS Councillor, Elmo Jacob, for all the work they did in collaboration with the Sri Lankan High Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It was such an enjoyable day that, in the end, nobody cared who won—at least, the Commonwealth team and its supporters didn't seem to care that it lost! This attitude would be approved by Cricket Tragics everywhere; it's the game, you see, not the winning or losing. Donations collected at the match will go to The Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT which provides emergency and long-term support to break the cycle of domestic violence in the community.

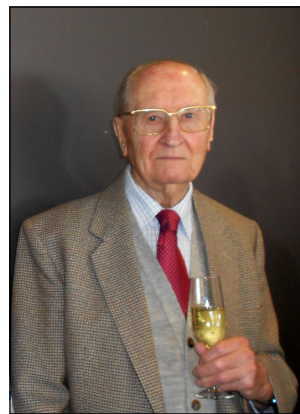
As I write this, the ACT is in the fourth week of its social distancing and lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and our Branch is holding its meetings by Zoom, organised by Branch Youth Member, Gaurav Sharma. Despite its restrictions, one striking outcome has been the way people seem kinder and more caring of each other. As the Queen, in her telecast COVID-19 broadcast, said: 'We'll meet again.' Meanwhile, stay safe, and stay kind.

**Maureen Hickman**

## VALE SYDNEY HODGES 1918—2020

With the death of Emeritus Professor Sydney Hodges in March this year, our RCS ACT Branch lost a Foundation Member, Life Member, former President, strong supporter of the Branch he helped found, and a good friend to those who have known him over many years.

Syd Hodges was born in East London, four months after his father was killed in action in France in World War I. After taking a degree in Economics and Geography at University College, London, in 1940 he joined the Territorial Army attached to an anti-aircraft battery. He married his first wife, Hilda in 1944. After the war they migrated to Tasmania, where, after a stint at teaching school, Syd came to Canberra where he taught Economics at the University of NSW, Royal Military College,



Duntroon, until his retirement 32 years later. He is remembered there as a 'fine gentleman, a learned scholar and a sage teacher', according to tributes read at his funeral.

For my part, I am indebted to Syd Hodges during the 13 years that I have been editing this newsletter, for his generosity in sharing memories and providing documents relating to the early days of the Branch. Syd's wife, Hilda, died in 1988; a few years later he married Adele and became step-father to her two daughters, Jeanette and Jill. Adele died in 2001.

**Maureen Hickman**

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## RCS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the Annual General meeting of the Royal Commonwealth Society's ACT Branch on 25 April 2020, the following were elected to the Branch Council:

<b>President:</b>	Mrs Maureen Hickman
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Dr Hugh Craft
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Mrs Ann Sutton
<b>Councillors:</b>	Dr Sunita Dhindsa
	Mr Kanti Jinna
	Mr Saurabh Singh
	Mr Gaurav Sharma

Office Bearers of Council are elected for one year and Councillors for three years. The other members of Council are Dr Elmo Jacob, Mr Bradley Innes and Mr Jack Milne. Mr Saurabh Singh was appointed to Council in 2019 and stood for election this year. Mr Kanti Jinna was appointed Secretary at the first meeting of the new Council on 2 March 2020.

## AFRICA IS ON TRACK TO BECOME 'THE CONTINENT OF THE FUTURE'

By 2050, Africa will have 2.4 billion people, a middle class of one billion, and every fourth person on earth will be in Africa, figures that might 'excite or frighten—but cannot be ignored', according to H.E. Isayia Kabira, High Commissioner for Kenya.

Speaking at the Commonwealth Dinner in March, Mr Kabira added, 'if you are thinking about the future, you should be thinking about Africa.'



*The High Commissioner for Kenya, H.E. Mr Isayia Kabira (second from right) with (l to r) Mrs Jyoti Jinna, RCS ACT Branch President, Mrs Maureen Hickman, Minister Counsellor at the Nigerian High Commission, Mrs Bola Asaju, the Nigerian High Commissioner H.E. Bello Kasaure Husseini, and the South African High Commissioner, H.E. Mr Marthinus van Schalkwyk. H.E Isayiah Kabira is Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps in Canberra.*

### PROGRESS ON THE QUEEN'S CANOPY

Since its launch at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in 2015, the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy now involves 46 member countries, large and small, in sustainable forest conservation programs to mark, in perpetuity, the Queen's service to the Commonwealth.

Participating nations are involved in 60 projects including bolstering native forests, identifying at-risk areas of flora, and in raising awareness about various methods of forest conservation.

Australia's commitment, to plant 20 million trees by the end of 2020, is a \$70 million commitment to re-establish green corridors and urban forests.

The project is led by the Royal Commonwealth Society, London, in partnership with the charity *Cool Earth* and the Commonwealth Forestry Association.

*The RCS ACT Branch has recently embarked on producing a series of Background Papers, the first of which was on the Commonwealth and the Environment, prepared by Youth Member of the Branch Council, Bradley Innes, on which this report is based. To access the paper in full, visit the Branch website [www.rcsact.org](http://www.rcsact.org)*

'Our challenges today are the opportunities of tomorrow.'

Describing Africa as 'the continent of the future' whatever you read or hear about it, Mr Kabira said That many people have asked him where he gets 'all this optimism about the Dark Continent'. But what he sees is opportunity to find alternate ways to deal with problems such as providing clean renewable energy

where there is no electricity, and, at a local level, where there are no credit cards, teaching people how to use their mobile phones to transfer money.

Having achieved 'the political kingdom' of freedom, with the majority of African nations under democratic rule 'with a smooth handover of power and a zero tolerance of military coups' what Africa is now seeking is 'the economic kingdom'. He continued,

'Africa today is home to 30 per cent of the world's natural resources; Australia has invested over \$40 billion in 700 projects in the extractives sector, and, to further consolidate our economic gains, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement is now in its operational phase, making it much easier to trade with ourselves and with the world.'

Mr Kabira acknowledged that in 30 years time, a population of 2.4 billion people would need to be fed. But this, he sees as yet another opportunity to satisfy that need and 'get more money into the pockets of farmers', encouraged by the Kiswahili saying: *Mfuata nyuki hakosi asali*—one who follows the bees will never fail to get honey (never mind the occasional sting).

### MALDIVES REJOINS COMMONWEALTH

Maldives has rejoined the Commonwealth after withdrawal in 2016 by its then President, Abdulla Yameen, following a warning that it would be suspended unless it implemented democratic reforms.

Announcing the return of Maldives in February, Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Patricia Scotland, described the reform process under way as 'aligning with the values and principles of the Commonwealth'.

Current President, Ibrahim Mohammed Saleh described his country's re-entry on 1 February 2020 as 'a happy day for the Maldives, as we return to the family of the Commonwealth of nations'.

## CRICKET: DFAT TEAM TRIUMPHS OVER THE COMMONWEALTH



*Teams from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and The Commonwealth line up for the presentation of the Muttukumar trophy following the annual Cricket match at Canberra's Forestry Oval in March.*

The annual cricket match between a team from DFAT and one representing Commonwealth nations in Canberra, was a grand finale to celebrations marking Commonwealth Week in Canberra.

The Commonwealth Team included players from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand and the RCS ACT Branch. The match, at the Forestry Oval in Yarralumla, was held only days before the first serious warnings about COVID-19 and 'social distancing' became the rule.

Warm appreciation was expressed to the Sri Lankan High Commission for the part it played in coordination and organisation of the match which had its beginnings 53 years ago when the High Commissioner for Ceylon, Major General Anton Muttukumar, donated the trophy to the RCS ACT Branch. After a few years break,

the match was revived in 2014. Each year since, Mr Tony Muttukumar, son of the High Commissioner, has been at the match and has spoken of this father's great love of cricket and the history of the trophy, which, this year, was presented to the winning DFAT team by Ms Harinder Sidhu, until recently, Australia's High Commissioner in India.

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**All arrangements for a number of important functions and events planned for the next few months have been put on hold in light of restrictions designed to limit the spread of the Corona virus. We hope to re-schedule some of these events for later in the year.**

### VALETE

The President and Council extend their sincere condolences to the families of Professor Sydney Hodges, a Foundation Member of the RCS ACT Branch in 1958 and President from 1964 to 1966, and Mrs Robin Setchell, who, with her husband Garth, was a strong supporter of the Branch over many years. Both Professor Hodges and Mrs Setchell died in March.

### NEW ACT BRANCH MEMBERS

The RCS ACT Branch warmly welcomes new Youth members, Miss Hannah Pakula and Mr Zachariah Coleman, and new Corporate member, the Uganda High Commission in Canberra.

### 2021 INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN MELBOURNE

Melbourne, home to the Victorian Branch of the RCS, has been named as the venue for the 2021 RCS International Branches meeting. The announcement was made by RCS London in April. The meeting will coincide with the centenary of the Branch's foundation in 1921.

The last International Meeting, held in London in 2019, was well represented by Australian branches.

The RCS ACT Branch Newsletter *Commonwealth News* is published four times a year. Letters and contributions are welcome. Contact: Maureen Hickman, Editor, at [maureen.hickman@bigpond.com](mailto:maureen.hickman@bigpond.com)