

**The Learmonth-Lermontov Family Surname Reunion Australia 2009. This much waited event took place in Hamilton**

The International visitors arrived in Melbourne on the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> February and assembled in the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) where we stayed for two nights. The guests included Mikhail and Elena Lermontov, Andrey Vladimirovich Tsuguliev from Russia, Tatiana Molchanova from the USA and Rex Learmonth from the UK.

We were welcomed and entertained by Tam and Barry Waters (Tam's mother was a very proud Learmonth) together with Brian Learmonth who were to be our guides, drivers and organisers throughout our stay.



We spent the first few days site seeing with Tam, Barry, Brian and Lou (a wife of the celebrated Australian architect James Learmonth) visiting the areas in and around Melbourne.



We were invited to a Bar B Q lunch with Gillie Learmonth and later dinner with Lou Learmonth at their homes. Both occasions were a delight.



On day three we travelled in two cars on the ferry to Port Phillip and then to Bellarine Peninsular staying at the Barwon Heads Golf Club visiting Brian and Pamela Learmonth and friends at their home followed by dinner at the Golf Club with many family members and their friends.



On day four we travelled the famous Great Ocean Road an area of scenic beauty and spectacular views staying overnight in log

cabins and dinning in the nearby restaurant.

Day five saw us travelling further on the Great Ocean Road to Peterborough where we had lunch with Robyn Paton nee-Learmonth at her holiday beach house.



We then visited the famous Twelve Apostles, spectacular limestone coastal pillars, where some of our party got a closer view

by helicopter.



We then travelled to Port Fairy a beautiful small historic fishing town where the Learmonth pioneers first crossed to live on mainland Australia. We had dinner in the local pub where we met Rodger Learmonth and his family together with a number of local people.



Day six was a day of rest and relaxation at this delightful seaside resort.

On day seven we travelled to Crawford River Winery and vineyard owned by John and Cathy Thomson, who are related to the Learmonth family.

Then to Hamilton where the main event was to take place.

This much awaited celebration took place in Hamilton, Victoria on the weekend of 28<sup>th</sup> February - 1st March 2009.

Hamilton was chosen as the venue because the districts from Portland to Coleraine were where the early Learmonth pioneers William, Peter and Alexander first came.

Brian Learmonth formally of 'Barramar' near Coleraine as 'Patriarch' chaired the celebrations assisted by Robin Paton, nee Learmonth. Tam Waters daughter of Janet Finch nee Learmonth were the driving forces of the organisation for the reunion with many other descendants and friends happily and generously contributing their time and energy..

Attendees came from all the states of Australia, Russia, America, United Kingdom and New Zealand. Most arriving in Hamilton on the Friday night to take part in an informal dinner at the 'Cally' a local hotel

The organised events commenced at 9.30 am on Saturday with registration at the United Church Hamilton, where all could see and photograph the Foundation Stones laid by the pioneering Learmonth, together with the Learmonth leaded light Memorial Windows. Tam together with her helpers had the Church Hall festooned with family tree information and photographs which had been gathered from many sources.

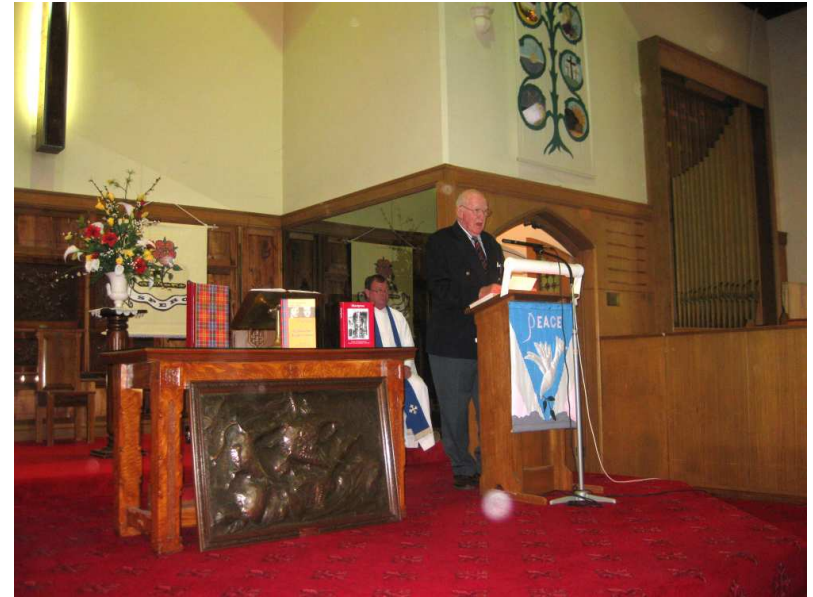


Descendants from different Learmonth families were able to gleefully trace their particular family information some of course had to be corrected which caused participants to discuss the histories displayed and connect with each other. The most pleasing aspect of the occasion was the joviality which prevailed as the individuals who may have only known other Learmonth by name were able to meet and happily exchange information. Some relatives were found who had never been imagined, over a cup of tea with Aussie icons – Lamingtons and ANZAC biscuits and constant happy chatter.



A welcome service conducted by the Rev Peter Cook was held at the Church which the Learmonths had helped to build.

Brian Learmonth then opened the proceedings with a well chosen welcome address, followed by His Worship the Mayor of Hamilton, Marcus Rentsch who also welcomed everybody to Hamilton.



John Lovett a descendant of the district Aborigines assisted the Rev Cook with guitar and songs; John's message to us was that the world would be a better place if we all communicated through song and music. Tam read a poem which she had composed incorporating a history of the Learmonths and their achievements. This poem is contained in the service booklet.



Photographs were then taken in front of Hamilton College by Jill Broun daughter of Janet Finch nee Learmonth.

Saturday Lunch was held at Hamilton College, the Mothers Association made everyone very welcome and comfortable, producing a delicious selection of finger foods, sandwiches, quiches, slices and fruit punch.

The Learmonth presentations were then held in the School Hall, the local Federal Member the Hon David Hawker in a short address credited the Learmonth settlers for their public spirited vision. The Deputy Principle Mr Neil McLean gave a very informative insight into the influence that the Learmonth families had on the formation of the college and the student population. Charles Page author of 'Wings of Destiny' who depicts the heroism of Wing Commander Charles Cuthbertson Learmonth DFC gave an interesting talk and video presentation.

Rex Learmonth from England gave a short talk on the history of the name Learmonth. The Lermontov's showed a DVD

on the history of George Leirmont from Scotland who settled in Russia and became the progenitor of the Lermontov family. Various people from different branches of the family then gave short presentations.

All registrants were provided with an information pack which included a district map where Learmonth places of interest were identified which included early dwellings, cemeteries, memorials etc for descendants to visit should they choose to do so.



The Saturday night dinner at the Hamilton Club was certainly a night to remember. A piper lead Mikhail Lermontov together with Rodger Learmonth through the club and on to the lawn. Mikhail wearing the Lermontov kilt and his Akubra hat carrying 'The Haggis' Rodger wearing the ancient 'Learmonth Seal' carried the 'Learmonth Silver Knife'. Rodger recited the ancient ode to 'The Haggis' stabbing it in the traditional way. Mikhail produced a Russian doll symbolically representing the Russian Lermontov's

arising from Scotland and the joy of meeting the Australian Learmonth on Australian soil.



Ninety nine diners enjoyed a splendid night of food, and great hilarity. There were of course vodka toasts to all and sundry after which Mikhail led everyone on to the dance floor where the family danced and laughed into the night.

During the dinner Tam was presented with a bronze wall panel with the 'Spero Crest and the Learmonth Spirit of Adventure' by Norma Learmonth who had acquired it from an original Family home. Tam has been charged with the huge responsibility of maintaining this panel and ensuring it passes to a person of the next generation who will be the keeper of the Australian Learmonth stories and traditions.

On Sunday morning in the Hamilton Botanical Gardens, Murray Rogerson, a poet from Glen Thompson, read a poem by Sir Walter Scott which traces the story of one of the earliest Scottish Bards - a Learmonth known as Thomas the Rhymer. This lengthy

and difficult poem written in the language of the day was splendidly presented by Murray. He also recited 'The Raven' a poem by the famous Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov in which he laments that he did not live in Scotland the land of his ancestors.

During the morning the overseas contingent were firstly taken to the local cemetery where a number of Learmonth are interned.



Then on a farm tour at 'Ballaarook' Coleraine by Russell Finch - son of Janet Finch, nee Learmonth.

A sumptuous Garden Party Luncheon was held at 'Heathleigh' hosted by the Macdonald Family. Anita Macdonald was the famed author of 'Mariposa' a chronicle of the Learmonth's in Mexico.

Tatiana Molchanova produced a DVD on the poet Mikhail Lermontov and the music inspired by him. Family members watched this beautiful DVD at their leisure.

On Monday a cavalcade of six vehicles took the overseas and other visitors to view 'Ericidoune' the fabled Scottish Baronial Manor built by the Learmonth's near Learmonth in the Ballarat region. Christine Dever and her son Michael generously conducted everyone on a tour of the Mansion and the grounds. The property has a fabulous and interesting history; Ericidoune is being painstakingly and beautifully restored by the Devers .

To mark the occasion of the 'Learmonth Reunion' and the traced connection to the Russian Lermontov's, three Sliver Birch trees were planted by Elena and Mikhail Lermontov, Tam Waters and Brian Learmonth and Tatiana Molchanova and Rex Learmonth in the grounds of Ericildoune Manor.



At the end of 209 Brian Learmonth and Tam Waters with the help

of John and Christine Dever at Ercildoune have made three plaques to commemorate the planting of the three Birch trees there on 2nd March 2009.



We then returned to the RACV Club in Melbourne where we stayed overnight saying a sad fair well the following morning to Tam, Barry and Brian who had been excellent hosts and companions throughout our trip. They really enjoyed the occasion but we all felt that they now deserved another holiday to recover.

In conclusion we all felt that the welcome and the warmth of the Australian Learmonth's, their families and their friends in making us feel part of their larger family was something that none who were there will ever forget.