

Thomas William Whitton (1922-2001)

by

Thomas Whitton Jnr (eldest son)

It is only when someone has gone that it is possible to realise what that person really meant. Tom Whitton, my father, died on 24th July 2001 and it is only now that his family and friends can see the full person.

It is easy to detail his history and achievements. Born in Sydney in 1922 he spent some of his early childhood in Newcastle where my grandfather was the harbour master. On return to Sydney he attended Vaucluse Public School (where all his children later attended) obtaining a scholarship to Sydney Grammar. He enjoyed his time there before gaining entry to Sydney University engineering. It was a false start as war intervened. Dad joined the navy as a rating, but after seeing a list of officer candidates put his name down and soon became the RAN's youngest officer. He had a relatively peaceful war and perhaps would have liked to stay at sea but my grandmother wanted him home again (my grandfather spent much of his early life at sea). He finished Engineering and started work in South Australia where he met my mother, married and began raising a dynasty. With five children in seven years we moved from Adelaide to Geelong followed by Bundaberg in Queensland and finally Sydney to further his engineering career. Dad had strong links with the Anglican Church throughout his life, but I suspect his sons were more aware of the time and energy he devoted to the Vaucluse Junior Rugby Club. For decades Dad worked hard for Legacy especially with the Police Co-operation Committee. He continued his studies with a degree in Economics in the sixties (to assist his career) and Arts in the eighties (to keep Mum company). However, he claimed the hardest exams he ever sat for were in Town Planning in the fifties. They were conducted in Nissen huts in the Adelaide summer. In later life he was increasingly drawn to history and much of his reading and conversation reflected this. In retirement at Wombarra he worked hard for the Friends of Wollongong Library and the Prayer Book Society.

These are the formal facts of the man, but two things made him stand out.

Firstly, as an engineer supervising the work of many others, he

invariable had an easy rapport with the "outside" workers - the foremen, clerks, drivers and tradesmen. Often there would be someone at our back gate, just passing on a Sunday afternoon, having a yarn with Dad. He was happier with the "real" workers on site than the office staff.

Secondly, as a father raising a family he stressed the importance of our education. He was always ready to help and guide. I can recall his assistance with French in 1966 about 30 years after he had finished the subject! Our sporting and social achievements were never allowed to get in the way of our education. I'm sure Diana's doctorate would have outshone playing Rugby for Australia!

To his family and friends, a great Australian and truly a gentle man.