



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS – OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE GARTLAND
EXHIBITION**

**GEELONG, VICTORIA
THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2019**

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

Art is the highest form of expression of the human spirit. After the chores of life, food, shelter, work; art is what we do. Just as the exquisite plumage is to the bird of paradise, art is the human signature and it is what we leave behind.

From the rock paintings of Kakadu, to the Terracotta Warriors, to the Mona Lisa, art comes in an infinite variety of forms but what underpins all of it is identity. An ancient culture telling its stories, a society giving an expression of the afterlife, a portrait of a mysterious woman, all of these are voices from the distant past telling us who they are.

In this exhibition “The Greatest Team of All”, in this our gallery, there is the best telling of the story of who we are that you will ever see. The creation of this exhibition by Bob Gartland, is itself an astounding work of art. It is the closest that we will get to the distillation of Geelong’s identity.

And that is important, because over the journey our identity has gone through many

changes.

From our incorporation as a city in 1849 by an act of the NSW Parliament as a port of a fledgling far flung settlement, to a gateway to the Gold Rush, to the centre of national action when Australia rode on the back of the sheep, a country town an industrial centre, to the present day when we are perhaps writing the next chapter in Geelong's identity, a university town, a centre of public insurance, a lifestyle city.

But one common feature through all that time has been a love of the Geelong Football Club. Established in 1859, just 10 years after the incorporation of the city itself, this football club has been the custodian of our passions. It's who we have cried for, what we have cheered about; and it is that which we have identified with. And remarkably the history of this entire love affair is right here in this incredible exhibition, thanks to Bob Gartland.

There are the everyday items which make up the personal kit of the footy fan. The membership ticket. Now my membership ticket and those of my family are located in a particular spot of a particular drawer in our house so that I know exactly where to find them on game day.

My ticket is one of millions that have been issued by football clubs of various codes around the world just this year. And every one of those membership tickets are clutched preciously by a footy fan as they go to their home ground to watch their team.

In this exhibition there is a membership ticket issued to Frederick Groom in 1864. When you look at it pause, and think. This ticket was issued 14 years before Manchester United was established, 96 years before the Dallas Cowboys. The two oldest football clubs of any code in the world today are Geelong and Melbourne making Frederick Groom's membership ticket one of the oldest existing football membership tickets in the world today.

And as we go to the ground we cannot but help by the footy record, to record the goals and to throw it on the kitchen bench when we get home as evidence the following morning that we were at the game.

In Bob Gartland's collection, astonishingly he has 97 per cent of the footy records from all the games that Geelong has ever played, including on display in this exhibition, the footy records from the nine grand finals that Geelong won to claim their nine VFL/AFL premierships, the earliest of which was in 1925.

One of the defining characteristics that it is footy season is the presence of footy cards. As a child the collection of the complete set of footy cards was a noble quest. And as an adult, well there is a football card in every crevice of every couch in our house. Bob has football cards from the very beginning of time – literally. There is a set in this exhibition from 1900, complete with signatures, which has been acknowledged as the oldest complete set of football cards in existence today.

And then there are the artefacts or those we adore: the players.

A 1925 Premiership Medallion of Ken Leahy. And another of JR Bolton from 1884. Have a look at the photo. Bolton is in the front row, second from the right, in a pose unfamiliar to those macho team photos of the current day. He is lounging on the ground, propped up on his elbow next to the great Dave Hickenbotham, the champion of this our first dominant team, and Geelong's first genuine star.

There is a cabinet devoted to that great Geelong player, captain and administrator, Charles Brownlow. In it you will see Brownlow's signature. But most poignantly is a letter from the VFL to Mrs Brownlow, who had just become a widow, sending condolences for the passing of her husband, and letting her know of the decision the league had made to award a gold medal to the fairest and best player of the competition each year in honour of her husband's name.

One of those Brownlow medals is also on display from 1989 awarded to the late great Paul Couch.

There is a letter from Reg Hickey – arguably the greatest figure in the entirety of our club's history – who among many other achievements was the premiership coach in 1952. The letter is from that same year to the father of Geoff Williams who was the club's best and fairest, talking about how proud he was of his team as players but much more importantly as men. This wider regard for their wellbeing and their growth characterised the way Reg Hickey coached.

There is a number five jumper, our most famous number, signed by both Polly Farmer and Gary Ablett. And from the present day, there are a pair of boots worn by Joel Selwood in his 250th game complete with mud still between the stops. And there is the number 11 jumper of Meghan McDonald, our first best and fairest winner in Geelong's first season in

the AFLW.

But pride of place in this exhibition is the amazing mural which adorns the western wall of the Large room. This took Bob 18 months to prepare and 50 years to collect the images of which there are 800 arranged in a timeline from 1859 right through to the present.

The first image is of Thomas Wills, the founder of the Geelong Football Club, and along with Harrison the founder of the game itself.

Just to the left down the bottom of the mural is an early photograph of a group of men from a different age and a different world. There are horse and carts, heavy leather boots befitting a more frontier society, the stiff formal wear of the Victorian age and plenty of whiskers. But if you look more closely it becomes more familiar. In the foreground is a dog. There's a young child with that tell-tale bemused look of "what is going on here". And there to the right you'll see it: a flag with the blue and white stripes. While they may be from a different world, they come from this place and they're doing what we do and feeling what we feel.

To the left is another image: this time a packed crowd at Corio Oval. Again the formal wear of the Victorian times but women this time wearing hats. But look at their eyes, the intensity in them as they follow the game. And you can just imagine them, as they see the play open up and the pathway appear to goal, issuing that collective gasp which in a moment will turn into the exhilarating involuntary roar as the Geelong goal is scored which is the lifeblood of our support.

The Geelong Football Club and this mural is a bridge across 160 years directly to their hearts and to their passions.

Work out the year in which you were 10 and go and find it on the mural. I guarantee you will see an image which will take you back to your childhood and make you smile. For me it's Sam Newman with his trademark white boots and his porn-star moustache, an icon of the 70's.

This mural is completely astounding as is the entire exhibition. Bring your kids here, walk around and let them watch you take a journey back to your childhood where they can meet your inner child. This exhibition is a repository of joy.

And it speaks to its creator Bob Garland. This is quite simply his life's work and it shows a meticulous, passionate, intelligent, creative genius. It is not too much to say that in my experience of human endeavour this is only one of two examples I've seen of total perfection. There is nothing you could do to make this collection better. And it is a wonderful gift that Bob has given to his community.

In our modern anonymous urban society where often you don't even know the names of your neighbours I sometimes think that football clubs, the Geelong Football Club, provides us with our sense of tribe and identity. "The Greatest Team of All", this exhibition, is a celebration of that. And as you experience it you will surely see, as I most certainly have, that it is the Geelong Football Club which marks the colours of our heart.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.