

25 years Erasmus

The genesis of the Erasmus Foundation took place on a balmy autumn afternoon in the year 1965. About twenty Dutchmen had their weekly social gathering at 40 Keam Street in Ivanhoe, the home of one of their foundation members, Hans Snelleman. Sipping genever and enjoying the beautiful view from the house terrace, Dick van den Noordaa, our senior member, broached a subject that gradually developed into a lively exchange of ideas.

Dick, whose wife was Australian born, suggested that our circle of friends should do something for the community in which we lived and worked with so much satisfaction. We were all 25 years younger then and the various propositions, ideas and suggestions were debated with verve, passion and a fair degree of eloquence. We discussed all sorts of charities we could either found or contribute to and in line with our custom, we left without having resolved anything. It would have been a pity to have come to a final decision that very same evening; the subject would be good for at least another two meetings.

We went home, pondered over it, discussed it with our wives, resumed the debates and concluded that there were enough charities to which we contributed already; that there were also plenty of Dutch clubs and societies but there was nothing known to us where Dutch and Australian people did something together. After the proposers and the devil's advocates had done their jobs, an accord was reached; to form a Netherlands-Australian Cultural Society.

A steering committee under Dick van den Noordaa was appointed and invitations to attend a foundation meeting were sent to a large number of prospective members. Meanwhile, we had been thinking of a suitable name for the society; the name of Desiderius Erasmus found favour. Erasmus the great Dutch philosopher and humanist, had been an intimate friend of the English philosopher Sir Thomas More, who was later beheaded by his king. These two men represented, in their time, reason and tolerance based on broad cultural ideals as well as general justice.

A meeting was called for mid-October 1965. This gathering was held in the large canteen of Plastalon Ltd., Highett. There were about one hundred people present who were welcomed by the host and addressed by Dick who, in his inimitable English, interspersed with a few Rotterdam expressions, explained the objectives of the Society. A draft constitution was read out, clause by clause, by Jan Voordijk who, about twelve months later, was to succeed Dick as President of the Erasmus Foundation. The steering committee was elected as the provisional Executive

Committee, preparing the final form of the Constitution which was signed on the 20th September 1966.

Immediately after the October meeting the Committee was active and organised the first lecture night which was held in the theatre of the National Mutual Life Assurance company in Collins Street. The fortunes of the society varied: years with many successful meetings alternated with lean years when the membership declined. In March 1977 a more sociable format was adopted with the introduction of dinner-and-guest-speaker meetings at the Kelvin Club in the city. The society moved house again in October 1982 when meetings were held at the City and Overseas Club in Windsor until July 1985. Since then, meetings have taken place at the present convivial rendez-vous the Danish Club in Middle Park.

The objectives of the Erasmus Foundation, to form a link between Dutch and Australian cultures, drew the attention of the Prince Bernhard Fund in the Netherlands. In July 1970 a grant of 5000 guilders was received in order to further these aims.

In honour of the late Professor Jacob Smit, erstwhile head of the Dutch Department at Melbourne University, a fund was established in his name in November, 1973. From this fund an annual prize was to be awarded to an outstanding student of Dutch language and literature, nominated by the teaching staff. The first award was made to Susan A. Bradley in September 1974.

In June 1980, John Hopkins, Dean of the School of Music, Victorian College of the Arts, requested the sponsorship of the Erasmus Foundation to establish a Trust Fund in the memory of Willem van Otterloo, the famous Dutch conductor. A prize of \$ 2000 has since been awarded annually to a music student to enable the recipient to pursue post-graduate study overseas.

Over a period of 25 years, there have naturally been many changes in the composition of the committee. The present Committee consists of the following members:

President: Jonas Kreveld (original founding member)

First Secretary: Peter Downie (1967)

Treasurer: Henk Korsten (1973)

Minute Secretary: Sue van Dorssen (1973)

Convenor: Nic Buis (1985)

Member: Jan Ferwerda (1986)

Secretary: Frans Bos (1989)

Member: Jan Stracke (1990)

With a continuing healthy membership, the Erasmus Foundation looks forward to the next 25 years.

Jonas Kreveld
President