

POLICE ASSOCIATION FIRST TO THE 100-YEAR MARK

By David Russell

Premier Jay Weatherill and more than 300 guests helped mark the centenary of the Police Association at a special Town Hall dinner on Wednesday night. The police union – the oldest in Australia – had turned 100 that day, just six hours before Mr Weatherill proposed a toast to it against the backdrop of the towering Walker pipe organ.

The gathering, which rose to its feet with raised glasses, included interstate police union presidents, Opposition leader Isobel Redmond and other MPs, and Commissioner Mal Hyde.

Mr Weatherill's toast had followed the key address of the night by association president Mark Carroll. His emotion-charged speech, which covered the union's dramatic history and revered identities, kept the audience transfixed.

Flanked by images of iconic Police Association leaders, he spoke of the calibre of the courageous founders of the union.

"They, along with so many other dedicated association office-holders over the past 100 years, dared to care," he said.

"They cared about their workmates, about justice, about fair play, about

establishing conditions in which their members could better protect and serve their communities."

"These bold thinkers, these working-class visionaries wanted better not just for themselves; they wanted it across the board, for every one of their colleagues.

"More than anything, this was a humanitarian initiative."

The premier made clear his high regard for both the police and their association after master of ceremonies Mike Smithson invited him to the stage.

"Whether you were a constable in 1911, working entirely on foot, all day, every day for the princely sum of eight shillings, or whether you are a serving police officer a century later, dealing with more complex and difficult crimes, you perform a job that is absolutely vital for our community's safety," he said.

"And one other thing has been constant over the past century: the enormous trust and respect that all South Australians have for their police force.

"Over the past century the Police Association has done a tremendous job representing the South Australian police force, helping people to understand the contribution that you make to our state, and advocating for the importance of



your work to be reflected in your working conditions.

"To all of the police officers that have given so much to South Australia over the decades, and to the association that serves those who serve our state, may you have another 100 years of commitment to our police force."

The day was also marked by the dedication of the grave of association hero and icon Walter John Wissell.

For 92 years Wissell's grave was unmarked and unnoticed in the West Terrace Cemetery. The plot was not even recognizable as a grave.

Wissell was association secretary in 1917 – just before the major pay dispute of 1918 – but was transferred from Adelaide to Wallaroo.

The association has long believed that the transfer was a calculated act by the then commissioner to weaken the association and send a message to other committee members.

The following year Wissell died in hospital of pneumonia and heart failure, after being assaulted during the arrest of



a drunken man at Kadina.

The commissioner's response to Wissell's activism in support of his police colleagues had, tragically, set in motion a chain of events that would lead to the death of the father of four.

The whereabouts of the remains of Wissell was unknown until the association discovered his grave.

The newly laid grave now carries the inscription "A hero and icon revered for his commitment to the police cause and the powerful impact he made in the earliest days of Australian police unionism".

Wissell's granddaughter, Elaine Forrest, was present at the dedication ceremony. Her father was just eight years old when Wissell died, and the family knew very little about their pioneering ancestor.

"We only found out the circumstances surrounding his death three years ago," she said. Geoff Forrest, Wissell's great-grandson, was also there to pay his respects.

"It's great to know he is held in such high regard by the Police Association," he said.

The publication of the book *The First Police Union*, written by prominent award-winning *Sunday Mail* journalist Nigel Hunt, formed an important part of the centenary celebrations and was launched at the dinner.

According to association president Mark Carroll, the committee of management decision to engage Mr Hunt ensured a factual, incisive and frank look at the association and police issues in SA over 100 years.

"Nigel's journalistic credentials, his understanding of police culture, his knowledge of the industrial issues, personalities and dynamics of the Police Association, all placed him in a unique position to document its first 100 years," he said.

The ecstatic winners of the first police lottery also took to the Town Hall stage to receive their prizes – two Holden Cruzes, and cheques for \$15,000 and \$5,000.

The \$50,000 raised from the lottery was donated to grateful recipient Novita Children's Services, which provides therapy, equipment and family support to

more than 2,000 special-needs children.

For its contribution, the association received the Novita Community Partnership Award last month.

Major sponsors Southgate Holden and the Police Credit Union contributed to the prizes, while media partners Channel 7 and the *Sunday Mail* provided essential marketing and promotional support.

Mark Carroll said the lottery was conducted as a feature of the Police Association's centenary celebrations, with the aim of promoting the police community's strong history of benevolence.

"The association is grateful to members for their support for the lottery and the enthusiasm with which they sold their ticket books," he said.

"The lottery has been a huge success and members can be proud of the good it will do for special-needs children in South Australia."

The book *The First Police Union* is available for purchase by downloading an order form from [PASAweb](#) or contacting the Police Association.