

A DISTINGUISHED PATRON OF DROMANA FOOTBALL CLUB

Ref: 2020/7



Justice Higgins -Former Patron of Dromana Football Club

INTRODUCTION

The following rare article was unearthed in a copy of the 'Frankston & Somerville Post' (dated: June 20th 1923) .

It is an enlightening extract because it discusses the hopes of the Dromana Football Club in that season (1923) and, in so doing refers to the three club champions of the era: George McLear, Ern Rudduck and Doug Chapman. Much has been written about this prominent trio from Dromana previously on this website. Not only were they magnificent players for DFC, but each went onto play VFL football.

Ern Rudduck played 14 games for Collingwood (1907). George McLear played three games for Richmond in 1914 ; and Doug Chapman played a total of 33 games with Richmond and Melbourne in the period 1908-1913.

The other intriguing discovery in this article is the fact that one of Australia's most illustrious High Court Judges, Justice H. B. Higgins, was, at one time, the Patron of the Dromana Football Club.

Although the concept of a club patron has faded over the years, in earlier times, the patron was an important position within clubs; and it usually offered to a distinguished person who accepted an honorary position to support and promote the football club.

In olden days at Dromana Football Club, the patron was regarded as the major figurehead of the club.

In his time, Justice H.B Higgins was a dominant and persuasive person in national politics and legal circles; and it must have been a great honour for the Dromana Football Club to have secured his patronage . The footnotes accompanying this newspaper extract attempt to give a brief summary of Justice Higgins' life; and hopefully explain his association with the Dromana Football Club during those early years.

DROMANA'S DARKEST DAYS SOME BRILLIANT PLAYERS PRODUCED IN THE PAST

(By "Observer".)

As originally published in the
'Frankston & Somerville Standard'
June 20th 1923. Page: 6

The Dromana Football Club was one of the first competing clubs in the Peninsula Association, which, by the way, came into existence on the suggestion of the late Mr. Fred Jostlear, who was employed by "The Standard" at the time. There were plenty of sportsmen of the same mind as he, and when they decided to start the association, Dromana was one of the first to come forward.

Today, Dromana is not a dangerous proposition, but they were at one time, and who knows but history may not yet repeat itself?

Of course, Dromana is in a difficult position. In a sense, they are too far away, both for themselves to travel, and for visiting teams. And they do not get the public support they deserve. This is an unfortunate fact, but one that has to be faced by many country clubs, especially when they are so weakly constituted that winning matches is out of their line.

Dromana is going through an evolutionary period known as days of agony, but they may yet have their days of joy. There is a time and place for everything. At one time, Sorrento played in the Peninsula Association - they were to oppose Hastings in the 1905 premier ship, but forfeited - but in subsequent years they merged into Dromana, and Italo Cesari, now shining with Geelong, was one who came from there.

At one time in Dromana's history, Sir Justice Higgins was one of the patrons. He was at that time Attorney General of Australia, and had a seat in the House of Representatives.

Looking back a few years, one is surprised at the number of fine players who have originated from the ranks of the Dromana club. There was Ernie Rudduck, for instance. He was of the aggressive type, a well-constituted player, without brilliance except of the dogged, determined variety.

Rudduck played with Richmond first, but transferred to Collingwood at a subsequent date. Douglas Chapman was another notable player that Dromana unearthed, and, in due course represented to Richmond.

Chapman was an ideal type of youth and there was no doubt about his ability as a footballer. He represented Victoria against South Australia more than once, and also played against Tasmania at Hobart.

Of him it is said that he kicked a goal from 78 yards at Richmond, and one, against Mornington, from 65 yards, when he was only 17 years of age. In 1907, Chapman was one of the League's leading stars.

Next to Rudduck and Chapman comes the gentlemanly George McLear, who has had a long and honourable career with Dromana. For years, he has been one of their best players, and is playing as well as ever this season. In 1909, George was at the very zenith of his fame, and Essendon secured his services.

Jim McLear, his brother, also had short League experience; he was a big player, with ability, but was not the brilliant man George proved on so many occasions.

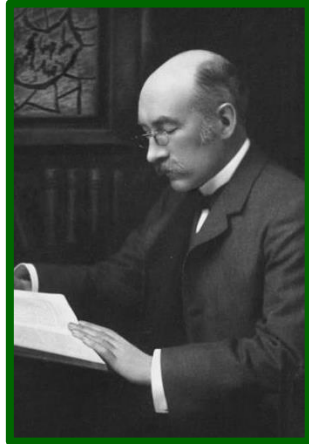
These are only a few of their outstanding players-one recalls Watty Gibson, Lacco, Billy Evans (who, like Gibson, had experience with Fitzroy for a time), Hoskins, Cleine and a host of others. I shall, perhaps, have more to say of these in future issues.

FOOTNOTES:

SIR JUSTICE HIGGINS 1851-1929 THE PATRON OF THE DROMANA FC

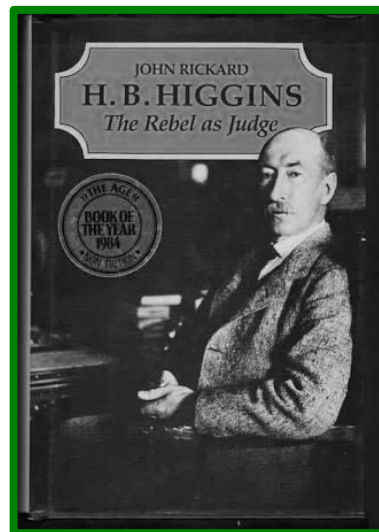
1. The former Patron of Dromana Football Club, Sir Justice Higgins is a most eminent person in Australian history. Henry Bournes Higgins was born at Newtownards, County Down in Northern Ireland on 30th June 1851. His father was a Reverend in the Church of Ireland. Henry was one of eight children.
2. The Higgins family arrived in Melbourne in 1870. During his active life, Henry, among other things became a barrister, politician and a university administrator. He was a Father of Federation and a Member of the First Commonwealth Parliament. In later years, he became the President of the Arbitration Court; and in 1906 he was appointed as a Justice to the High Court of Australia.
3. In 1903, Justice Higgins purchased the property known as Heronswood in Dromana.

4. It was in 1907 that he wrote his name into the chronicles of Australian industrial history with his celebrated judgement regarding the remuneration of workers (i.e. the Basic wage). His famous decision became known as the 'Harvester Judgement' and, in years to come, it had a profound effect on all matters regarding arbitration/conciliation and the wage structure of Australian workers.



5. One text states that Justice Higgins probably wrote the case for the famed basic wage decision at Heronswood, Dromana...

“ Judge Higgins owned Heronswood, where he probably wrote the Harvester Judgement that led to the basic wage...”



6. The recommendation to seek Justice Higgins' to become the Patron of the Dromana Football Club probably came about sometime around 1903 ...

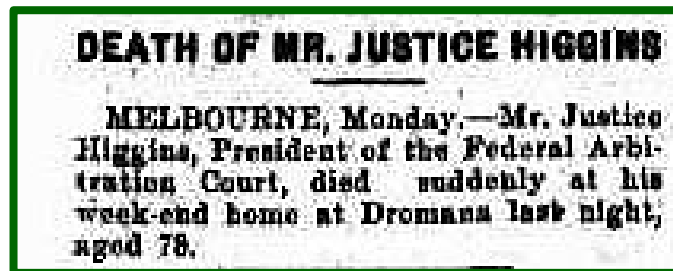
“When in 1903 Higgins acquired Heronswood at Dromana, which had been built by his old teacher Hearn and later owned by his friend Sutherland...”
ABD Volume 9 M.U.P 1983.



Héronswood – Dromana

7. Justice Higgins died at Dromana on January 13th 1929...

“ On 13 January 1929 at Heronswood, Higgins went for his regular morning walk to Arthur's Seat, after which he relaxed on the porch with his books. Early in the evening he collapsed and died.” (ABD as above) .



8. Henry Bournes Higgins was buried at the Dromana Cemetery on the 15th January 1929 and his funeral was reported in the ‘Northern Star’ newspaper...

“ The funeral of the late Mr. Justice Higgins at Dromana cemetery today was largely attended. The Federal and State Governments were represented, and there was also a large number of mourners from the Victorian Bench and Bar. “





The headstone of Henry Bournes Higgins grave at the Dromana Cemetery.



HISTORICAL NOTE: POSSIBLE ERROR RE: THE MCLEAR BROTHERS.

The above extract from the 'Frankston and Somerville Standard' has been faithfully reproduced but the reporter, (known as 'Observer') who wrote the above newspaper article, appears to have made a minor historical error regarding the VFL careers of the Mclear brothers. According to current available AFL records, George played with Richmond and his brother, Jim, played at least one game with Essendon in 1919.

THE DROMANA EXCELSIORS

DFNC Life member, Geoff Bligh, came across an interesting aspect of the early years of the Dromana Football Club. It seems that at some time, during the period 1900-1910, the club was known as the Dromana Excelsiors.

Excelsior is a word that is rarely used today but it is said to mean: 'excellent' or 'upward' and it is derived from the 19th Century Latin word meaning higher.

It an unusual name for an Australian football club; but it recorded that a cricket team, based in Frankston during that period, also used the name Excelsior also. There was a Bayside Steamer named 'Excelsior' which operated from Queen's Wharf in Melbourne in 1904; and there is an existing 'Excelsior Hotel' in Thomastown in Victoria

Further research of the newspapers of that period indicate that the listed players for the Dromana Excelsiors, in the match against Mornington, in June 1907 were: Gibson, Chapman (probably Doug) , Hazeldine, McLear, Clydesdale, Baker, Wilson, Counsel, Purves and Peaty.

THANK YOU

Thanks to Geoff Bligh for his contribution to this article.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION

Sources: DFNC archives –NLA - Personal files & DFNC publications.

Article reference: The Famous Patron of Dromana (Ref: 2020/7)

Researched and written for DFNC by: Roger Spaul -May 2020.

DFNC website administrator: Graham Stelling. DFNC Secretary-Board Member.

Email contacts: historian@dromanatigers.com.au. or admin@dromanatigers.com.au