

The Crabtree Foundation (Australian Chapter)
2005 Annual Oration
McCrabtree

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming this evening. And I would also like to thank you from the Presidents bottom.

Last year when I was invited to give this esteemed oration, I asked naively if I had to buy a ticket? Of course he replied. Somehow it reminded me of hiring a consultant someone you pay to hear your own words!

A week or so ago, in order to make tonight's Oration appropriate, I asked Elder Kilbride for details of tonights audience broken down by age and sex. "That will cover most of them" he relied. However, I persisted "Will it be a high class turnout?" He thought for a moment and said "Most of them will think of the Lone Ranger when they hear the William Tell Overture . However, he did caution me to be careful of bad language and sexual innuendo as ladies would be present. Up to now Pat, the ladies have behaved impeccably!

He did mention that tonight we have representatives of the Monash "A" list, the Monash "B" list and the Monash Wine list. Also not to get the wrong impression if some the audience give a standing ovation towards the end of the evening as they have a problem with hemorrhoids!

Over the years distinguish Orators have revealed different contributions this great man Crabtree has made to the future of mankind. To reflect on a few random examples; Elder McGrath in his oration *Erotic Influences on Crabtree's Musical Contribution to the Chinese Pizza Industry* told an unbelievable (at least very few people believed it) tale of fast-food, fast-music and even faster women. Some time later Elder A'Vard in his oration *Was Crabtree a Thespian?* outlined his effective, if antisocial, method for putting fires on stage. Members may recall that most thought he was taking the ****. In more recent times Elder Robinson in an oration *Crabtree Pulls It Off!* told of his uncanny ability to read Playboy with one hand the other hand was used to follow the very small print used in those early days. The impact of Crabtree was such that that magazine now uses much less print and concentrates on the bigger issues.

All in all, members may have wondered what made this man so special, how was he able to do so many great things, why had God favoured him with such an abundance of talents? After much research, involving three phone calls (one of which was a wrong number) and a walk past the Hardgrave Library, I can now reveal the answer.... .

Crabtree was Scottish!

Crabtree was born in the highlands of Scotland to a simple woman who enjoyed the basic pleasures of life and the company of men, in particular most of the Company of Royal Gorbals Fusiliers stationed at the local army barracks. Crabtree often wondered why he had so many Uncles? When she became with child the only facts of which she was certain was the father wore a kilt, had the first names Joe or **Rab** and the surname may have been “McPhee”. Since this adequately described more than half of the regiment she decided not to pursue a possible father.

The village Registrar of Births had two notable traits; she was extremely hard of hearing and had twenty seven children. Every night when she and her husband went to bed he would turn to her and ask “Would you like to read or what?” She would reply “What?”, and hence the large family. In fact she ran out of names to call her husband. Her youngest son was called Justin because he slept very close to the door.

When Crabtree’s mother went to register the birth and said that the fathers name was “Rab McPhee” the Registrar misheard her and entered the name “Crabtree”. And so the legend begins.

The village Crabtree lived in was very welcoming to strangers. A story is told of an Englishman who rented a local cottage for a holiday. Late one night he heard a hefty knock on his front door and opened it to find a large Scotsman (six foot twelve inches tall) with a red beard in full highland regalia, including a glengary bonnet with a feather on top. “I have come to invite you to a Ceilidh” He said. “What’s a Ceilidh?” asked the Englishman. “A Ceilidh is a night with a lot of singing, a lot of dancing, a lot of drinking and a lot of sex” said the Highlander. “Will I have to get dressed up?” asked the Englishman. “No, you are fine as you are. “How many people will be there?” “Only you and me”

Crabtree lived a simple life in this remote Scottish village; an almost “Brigadoon - like” existence. There was the Miss McGonigal, a lady who refused to go to school, never read a book and generally complained about everything to the Village Policeman, Constable McPhatter. Children playing too noisily, weather unusually wet, a faulty lamp post, anything at all. McPhatter was a kindly soul who always listened to her moans and pretended to take notes.

In a nearby village, a circus was visiting and unfortunately the elephant escaped. It found its way in to Miss McGonigals garden and she awoke to find a strange creature, the likes of which she had never seen, in her garden. Quick as a flash she went to the police station. “There is a large grey animal in my garden” she told McPhatter. “How big is it?” he asked. “At least ten feet tall” she replied. “Where is it?” “In my vegetable patch” “Any distinguishing features?” “It has the largest thickest tail you ever did see” “What is it doing?” “It is lifting my cabbages with its tail one by one” “And what is it doing with them? “You would never believe me!”

The parish Priest was full of goodness and tended to his flock with care. One of his parishioners was an old widow who lived a considerable distance from the main

road. Every Friday he would pay a visit and she talked about this and that. A subject he knew little about. On leaving she always insisted in giving him a bag of hazelnuts as a parting gift. Although he loved hazelnuts, he felt a bit guilty about the old lady spending her savings on a gift for him and decided after a few months to tell her that such a gift was unnecessary. He explained that his visits formed part of his pastoral duties. "No you don't understand she said. You come on a Friday and my son-in-law comes on a Monday. He always brings a bag of chocolate hazelnuts. But I have no teeth and can only suck the chocolate!" The old Priest often wondered why some of the hazelnuts had a little bit of chocolate attached to them!

Crabtree was very fond of animals. He particularly liked fillet steak! One evening he was walking past the local abattoir and saw a young piglet in an outside pen. He decided that it must be saved but how to do it? Across the street was an empty pram. In it was a pink blanket and a white bonnet with pink frills around the edge. Quick as a flash he borrowed the pram and into it went the piglet. The pink blanket was tucked up to its chin and on its head went the white bonnet... the one with the pink frills around its edge, and down the road he went. Horrors, in the distance coming towards him was Constable McPhatter and from the strange way he was walking either he had had an accident or he had been drinking heavily. A sniff of the evening air confirmed the smell of whisky but did not exclude other possibilities. "Allo, Allo, Allo" said McPhatter "What have we here?" "I was just taking my baby niece for some evening air" replied Crabtree. McPhatter, ever the gentleman, took off his helmet, bent down and kissed the baby on the cheek. He straightened up, shook his head and drew Crabtree near. "You will need a big dowry for that one" he said.

The piglet was set loose in the countryside to enjoy the rest of its life. The next day it was eaten by a fox, who was also fond of animals!

Apart a brief periods of employment: firstly acting as the spokesman for a bicycle company, followed by a period as poet-in-residence at the Sewage Works (this suited his particular style of poetry) and a successful career designing scarecrows (he was outstanding in the Field), Crabtree's first real job was as the Science Correspondent for the Ardrishaig, Tichnabuaich and Auchtermuchty Weekly News, which was published monthly. This was a twelve page newspaper, where the middle ten pages had not changed in twenty years there was not much news in Ardrishaig, Tichnabruaich or Auchtermuchty! It was a typical local rag. The "Lost and Found" column contained a notice "Lost border collie. One ear missing, part of tail chewed, blind in one eye.. ..answers to the name of lucky" The "For Sale" column contained an advert "For sale. One granite headstone. Suitable for someone named McGinty". A local Farmer named McGregor's wife passed away and he felt obligated, to place a notice in the paper. He was known to very cautious with money. He went to the office and asked that the words "McGregor dead" be inserted the intimations column. The receptionist explained that the minimum charge was two pounds for five words. The next issue contained the intimation "McGregor dead. Tractor for sale".

However, each Issue of the Ardrishaig, Tichnabruaich and Auchtermuchty weekly news, published monthly, was a sell-out due to the advert for Miss Fifi's Tea Room and Palace of Endless Pleasure, which included a voucher for ten percent discount on desired services. Miss Fifi's establishment was strictly "men-only". As soon as an Issue appeared it was immediately purchased by the men folk. The women simply thought it was a "manthing" to read newspapers and spend such long periods drinking tea. Also, the strange interest in tea meant that husbands were taking little interest in their wives. Something had to be done! One wife met her husband at the front door wearing only her pink tweed underwear (tweed is very hard wearing) and said in a sultry tone "Would you like a night of super sex?".

Her husband was taken aback and replied "Is it tomato soup?".

Another wife happened to visit her daughter-in-law unexpectantly and found her lying on the couch naked. Slightly embarrassed the daughter-in-law explained that this was her "love-suit" and it usually had the right effect. Back home the wife thought she would give this a try and lay on the couch waiting for her husband. He came through the door, took one look at her and said "what that?". "Its my "love suit" she replied in a soft voice". "It needs ironing" said the husband "What's for tea?".

Recognising that their husbands had a large appetite for tea, at each dinner time a one gallon pot of tea was put in front of them. And of course they were expected to drink it. However, this had unfortunate side effects. In a moment of tenderness in the matrimonial bed many a husband would leap out of bed and run to the toilet at the bottom of the garden and spend some considerable time there. To while away the time most of the toilets had a small library, a pack of cards and a set of dominos. This form of absence was known as "time-in-lieu" (a term that remains to this day).

On evening in a contemplative mood, Crabtree looked at the sky. He identified the constellations of Sirius and Orion, the Milky Way, Mars and the brightly shining North Star, which must have guided many a lost mariner safely home. As he gazed at the wonder of God's creation he thought to himself "I must put a roof on this Dunny".

As a Science correspondent Crabtree kept the villagers up to date with new inventions. One such English invention was the wooden toilet seat. This was a great improvement over the centuries old cast iron toilet seat, which claimed many a layer of skin on a cold winters morning. Because of this the villagers had perfected a form of levitation long before the mystical gurus of the Far East. However, Crabtree improved the design even further by putting a hole in the middle. Even today, although the materials of manufacture may be plastic, **the basic Crabtree design maintains. So once each day, or every week or so if you are on health food, you should give thanks to the genius of Joseph Crabtree.**

Crabtree reported that the modern homes in England all had indoor toilets. Immediately, this became a must-have for the villagers. So, with the wife on one end

and the husband on the other, the toilets were brought from the bottom of the garden and placed in the living room. Now you must remember that house sizes in those early days were very modest and when the toilet was in use it was very difficult for others in the room to maintain polite conversation. Indeed, depending on which vegetable was in season, many a sheepdog was sent running for its life. To this day there is a legend of two gundogs still searching the marshes for fallen ducks. However, once again, the basic design for indoor toilets **reported by Crabtree maintains to this day.**

Yet another English innovation reported by Crabtree was the wire toilet brush. Once again it became a must-have for every household. However, after a month or so the villagers were becoming disenchanted. There was general agreement that it was very efficient but most were slowly returning to the old ways of using toilet paper. This was further exacerbated by the cold Highland winds which caused problems with the women's tweed underwear (very hardwearing) and the men's drafty kilts. The village had lost the ability to smile. Most walked around with concerned looks on their faces. Indeed, it would not be understatement to say that the whole village was deeply scarred by this English invention. A meeting was held in the town hall attended by the whole village,, at which they unanimously agreed that the wire toilet brush had to go. A bonfire was lit in the village square, into which each household threw their toilet brush and facing south with gestures of the hand shouted suggestions as to what the English could do with their wire toilet brushes! The term brush **fire** is still used **to this day.**

Crabtree's career took a sudden change when reading the Employment Opportunities column in the Ardrishaig, Tichnabruaich and Auchtermuchty weekly news, published monthly. He saw a vacancy at the University of Oxford for a newly established Chair in Linguistics. He applied without delay and was duly called for interview. The interview panel consisted of elderly Dons of that ancient University and each in turn asked him questions. To each he gave a long and expansive reply. Unfortunately, they understood not a word but not wishing to show ignorance to their colleagues, pretended they understood by nodding their head and saying "Uh uh". While Crabtree retired to an anteroom the Professors discussed the candidates and agreed that what better person could there be for the Foundation Chair of Linguistics than someone who spoke a language that no one understood. At the same time Crabtree thought to himself "I got here not a moment too soon. These English are barely able to communicate. They can only grunt and nod their heads". And so Crabtree entered the strange world academia.

A few weeks after moving to Oxford Crabtree wrote to his mother saying that the English were "very bad mannered, swore a lot and often hammered on his door at night". He reassured his mother that he "did not let it get to him and just retired to his room every night and played his bagpipes". His style of playing was a mixture of classical and what we now know as rap, sometimes abbreviated to "crap". One evening he played so well that the bagpipes burst and became unusable. But life also had its bright side, since his English colleagues became much more friendly towards him.

After a while he began to wonder why some of his professorial colleagues had

strange nicknames and asked the font of all wisdom, the Department Secretary. Pointing to the Notice Board he asked “Why is he referred to as Daisy?” “Well you see “Some days he’s in ~‘ replied the Secretary. “Why is he called the Pimpernel?” “The students seek him here, they seek him there...”

What about him, referred to as DE? “Ah you see, he’s in charge of Distance Education and likes to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the University”.

Finally, “Why do people refer to him in such quiet tones?” “Well you see no one has seen him in years, most think he’s dead, but the students keep passing his exams and the average is always 50%.”

Crabtree developed the 52 minute lecture, something **that** is still used to this day. Being slightly absent minded, occasionally he would walk in to completely the wrong class, give his lecture and after 52 minutes walk away leaving the students bewildered and confused. Something **that** occasionally continues **to this day**. On one occasion he walked in to a class of final year anatomy students, looked around and did not recognize any faces but decided to give his lecture anyway. The students understood the occasional word and some thought he was talking about Indian cookery, others about Russian poetry or something about the building of Eskimo igloos. After 52 minutes he left the lecture theatre and close examination of the students notes showed that the only two words they had all copied down in common were “Good morning”.

Crabtree contribution to statistical medical science is also worthy of mention and his famous formula is often quoted by Politicians to this day. He conclusively proved that “seven out of every ten Doctors leaves three”.

“The Vice Chancellor of Oxford University at that time was a kindly soul much loved by his colleagues. On one occasion he spent some time in hospital for a minor operation and the University Council decided to send him a “Get well” card. It read “It has been decided to send you our best wishes for a speedy recovery by ten votes to nine”. There is no record of the opinion of the nine.

As with most VC’s he liked to foster links with the local community. He received a request from the President of the local Rotary Club to nominate a Professor as after dinner speaker at the Annual general Meeting. The subject matter was unimportant but the speaker should be witty. The VC knew his Professors well and although learned in their fields, only a few were even slightly funny. He replied that unfortunately he could not supply a wit but he had a few half-wits.

The VC received a letter from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office seeking a Professor willing to go and assist a developing country in Africa. He sent round a memo for volunteers, asking what they would do and how much their fees would be?

The Professor of Civil Engineering replied saying that for 3000 pounds he would go and assist with the design of bridges. The Professor of Law replied that for 6000 pounds he would help to draft a new constitution. Crabtree replied saying that his fee

would be 9000 pounds. The VC called him to a meeting and enquired “What would you do for 9000 pounds?”. “Well you see” said Crabtree. “It’s 3000 pounds for you, 3000 pounds for me and we’ll send the Civil Engineer”

And so the legend lives on!

The ghost of Crabtree can still be heard in the late evening at campuses throughout the world whispering words of encouragement to students. It is easily distinguishable from other ghosts since the students invariably reply “Pardon?”