

Hazel Crockett celebrates her 100th birthday

A lifespan of one hundred years is a long time for anyone to look back over. When Hazel Crockett was four she remembers her two uncles calling at home to say goodbye, on the eve of their excited departure for the Great War. Hazel's uncles never returned. One fell on the fire-raked slopes of Gallipoli, the other lies buried on the Somme near Ypres.

Fast-forward to 7 August 2011. Hazel Crockett has just celebrated her 100th birthday. And she did it in style, befitting the occasion. One hundred and twenty family and friends, including 22 children, joined Hazel at Milford-on-Sea for a special birthday party. A number of family and friends even made the long journey from Australia just to spend the day with Hazel.

Hazel received birthday greetings from some very important people. Her Majesty The Queen sent Hazel a congratulatory birthday greeting, as did the Princess Royal and Prime Minister David Cameron. The Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, sent Hazel a birthday greeting, and best wishes also were received from the Governor-General of Australia, Quentin Bryce. The Presidents of Rotary International and *Save the Children* completed a long list of well wishers. The President of London Legacy, Lindsay Birrell, read out a special birthday message from The Australian High Commissioner, His Excellency John Dauth AO LVO. President Lindsay also explained that Hazel remains the oldest Legacy widow living outside of Australia.



Hazel Crockett (nee Grant) was born in 1911 at Bendigo in north-west Victoria. When Hazel was six her family moved to the small town of Daylesford, set in the rolling foothills of the Great Dividing Range. It was here, in her formative years, that Hazel proved herself a keen sportswoman. She loved horseriding and swimming, played tennis, golf and even tried her hand at shooting, often with a bruised shoulder to show for her

trouble.

Hazel's husband, John Crockett, was born in Daylesford. The difficult and straitened years of the Great Depression meant that John was unable to complete the last section of his

training as a Civil Engineer. Instead, he found work in the local Butter Factory. So began a long and highly successful career in the dairy industry. John and Hazel were married in Daylesford in 1938. During World War Two John served as a navigator on Sunderland Flying Boats with 228 Squadron, based at Pembroke Dock in south-west Wales.

Single-sentence extracts from John's diary notes from the war tell their own story: 'A dicey landing', reads one entry. 'Starboard float torn off, all hands on wingtip.' Another entry finds John's aircraft in the thick of the action: 'U-boat sighted and attacked. 40 holes in tail fin. Bags of flak.' While her husband was away on active service, Hazel, like many Australian women, supported the war effort at home by 'plane-spotting' from a high water tower overlooking Daylesford.

After the war John and Hazel lived in Barham for four years. Here, they became actively involved in community work and keenly supported civic causes and charities, particularly the RSL and local hospitals. Later, John and Hazel moved to Finley, which was to be their home for the next fourteen years. It was at Finley that Rotary became an integral part of their lives, and John became a founding member of the club. Finally, John and Hazel moved to Cobram.

It was here, beside the broad flow of the River Murray, on the border of New South Wales and Victoria, that John continued his good work with Rotary. Eventually, he was elected District Governor. At Cobram Hazel became very involved with *Save the Children*. Over the years she has made hundreds of rag dolls for the charity. If she was unable to obtain materials free, she covered the cost herself. All of the proceeds from the sale of rag dolls went directly to *Save the Children*. At her 100th birthday party, Hazel presented one of her rag dolls to the youngest guest, an infant almost 100 years younger than herself. In recognition of her contribution to the charity Hazel was made a life member of *Save the Children*. The Rotary Club of Cobram made Hazel a Paul Harris Fellow for her work with *Save the Children*.

After John's death in 1995, Hazel moved to England to be with her daughter, Margaret and her family. Hazel settled in Hordle, near Lymington in Hampshire. On her arrival in 1996 London Legacy offered their assistance, when and where required. Legatee Ed Bennett looked after Hazel's interests for many years, and, more recently, Legatee John Crowe. Hazel also joined the Milford-on-Sea branch of *Save the Children*, adding to the many years of her good work in Australia.

Hazel's 100th birthday was a joyous and happy celebration toasted with speeches, fine champagne and good food. Legatee Ed Bennett said Grace, as he had done at many of Hazel's birthday parties, including her 99th. Later, Hazel cut the first slice of a birthday cake in the shape of Australia and decorated with hand-made Australian wildflowers. Everywhere were smiling faces, laughter and warm friendship. Throughout, Hazel sat relaxed and happy as she greeted each guest with her warm and lovely smile. Hazel's granddaughter, Kathryn, best summed up the spirit of the occasion: 'Nana, we are so proud of you on this most special of days ... Let us raise our glasses to Hazel.'