

a centenary of canberra's catholics

Doug earned trust and respect of all

“Retired 1985 as Clerk of the House of Representatives. Joined the Attorney-General’s Department in 1949 and the Department of the House of Representatives in 1950. Became Serjeant-at-Arms 1956, Clerk Assistant 1970, Deputy Clerk 1977 and Clerk of the House in 1982. Honorary Secretary, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association since 1982. Life Member ACT Rugby Referees Association, President Navy League of Australia (ACT) since 1976, currently Vice-President of Canberra City Bowling Association. Over 20 years active involvement with the St Vincent de Paul Society.”

Thus read the citation when Doug Blake received his Order of Australia award from Queen Elizabeth at Government House, Canberra on 3 March, 1986.

Leading up to Doug’s retirement as Clerk of the House of Representatives in July 1985 a vote of appreciation was passed in the House. Among those who spoke in support of the motion were Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Leader of the Opposition Andrew Peacock, and Ian Sinclair, Leader of the National Party. The Speaker of the House also alluded to the contribution Doug had made on the international scene.

“The parliaments of the Australasian and Pacific regions with which he has had continuous involvement for over 20 years have learnt his value. The Parliament of Papua New Guinea recognised his role in the development of that Parliament by awarding him the Papua New Guinea Independence Medal in 1977. With regard to international parliamentary bodies, he has been Honorary Secretary of the Commonwealth of Australia Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association since 1982.”

The Prime Minister drew attention “to the outstanding aspect of Doug Blake’s career.

In the 21st in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, Bishop Pat Power tells of a Canberran who gave 35 years of service to the Parliament

He has always given consistent, loyal and dedicated service to the institutions that he knows and loves – his church, the Navy and this Parliament and the parliamentary system. Doug Blake has given us 35 years service in this House, 26 of them at the table of the House. In that time he has earned and retained the trust and respect of all sides of the House. That has been no easy task. The position of Clerk requires unfailing discretion, judgement, thoroughness and honesty. Doug Blake has shown all those qualities in abundance.”

Ian Sinclair recalled a photo featuring Doug refereeing a rugby game between the Parliament and the Press. The photo showed the Parliament’s front row of hooker Bill Hayden being supported by props Doug Anthony and Ian Sinclair. Bill Hayden is supposed to have whimsically remarked that it was the best support he had had in Parliament.

Doug Blake’s refereeing career grew out of his playing days for ACT club Royals, and representative football for the ACT. He went on to referee 200 first-grade games in Canberra including nine first-grade grand-finals. He refereed a number of international teams including the All Blacks (four times), the Springboks, the British Lions and a number of Pacific Island teams.

Another leading ACT referee, Peter Richards, tells how his own career began and blossomed under the guidance of Doug Blake. Peter’s father and Doug had worked together on



ABOVE: Doug Blake and Pat on their wedding day with best man his brother Reg Blake and bridesmaid Pat’s sister Joan de Mamiel.



the construction of the O’Donnell Youth Centre at St Patrick’s in Braddon. Doug talked to Peter about his craft, got him “running the line” with him and became a mentor in Peter’s own distinguished career as a referee.

Peter saw Doug Blake as a disciplinarian who was always in control of the game and worked hard on his fitness even training in the Rose Gardens of the old Parliament House. It should be noted another Canberra Catholic, Peter McPhillips, rose to great heights as a rugby referee.

Doug Blake attended De La Salle College in Ashfield, Sydney, before joining the Navy at 17, doing his officer training at HMAS Cerberus and graduating as a midshipman. He came out of the Navy at the end of the war as a sub-lieutenant but went back to the Navy Reserve when he came to Canberra in 1949 to serve with Attorney-General’s



FAR LEFT: As Serjeant-at-Arms.

LEFT: Receiving the Order of Australia award from the Queen at Government House in March 1986.

Department. VRD is the abbreviation for his Volunteer Reserve Officer Decoration. Like so many newcomers to Canberra, he began in the hostels. In Doug’s case it was Gorman House. Doug remembers it snowing for three days in July 1949.

On 6 May, 1950, Doug Blake and Pat Fox were married in St Christopher’s Pro-Cathedral with Fr Stan O’Donnell officiating.

Pat was the youngest of five girls in a prominent Catholic family living in the Mount Stromlo area. Pat’s only living sister is Joan De Mamiel. Another sister was Kitty Duffy, mother of Sr Marie Duffy, who served two terms as the last congregational leader of the Goulburn Sisters of Mercy.

Doug and Pat have celebrated 60 years of married life and have been blessed with seven children, 13 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. Part of their Sunday ritual after attending Mass is to welcome any family members who drop in.

As I spoke with Doug in preparation for this article, he was concerned that I was not

pursuing his Catholic life in sufficient depth. He reminded me that in 1976 he was in the first group of acolytes in the Archdiocese whom I helped to prepare after Archbishop Cahill expressed the desire to introduce this new lay ministry.

Part of the role of the acolyte is to be a companion and assistant to the priests. Doug had filled that role in many forms. He had been part of the Holy Name Society and served for many years in the St Vincent de Paul Society. He was the first chairman in the Archdiocese of a parish council following the Second Vatican Council when Mgr Favier established a council in the Parish of Braddon. He had been part of the leadership of the planned giving program, and, as previously mentioned, helped building the O’Donnell Centre. Later, he had a part in the building of St Brigid’s, Dickson.

Doug Blake has already claimed a very significant place in the history of Canberra.



Supporting parish initiatives
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