



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 139

PREPARED & PRESENTED BY: J.T. Ruxton

DATE: 27 November 2006.

### **Very Wor. Bro. ALBERT WILLIAM JAMES (1914-2006)**

One of the longest father-son records of service to the Australian Parliament was forged when Albert William (Bert) James retired as the member for Hunter in 1980. He and his father, Rowley James served a combined term of half a century in what the Former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, recently called "a really significant Newcastle dynasty based on great family loyalty."

Whitlam worked alongside both father and son and attended the latter's funeral. He described their half-century representation as "a great achievement indeed." Their tenure has been exceeded only by the 57 years of the Watkins father and son politicians, David senior and junior, who represented Newcastle from Federation until 1958.

The son of Rowley James and Gladys (nee Davies), he was born in Collie, Western Australia, where his father pioneered the union movement in the mines, where he also worked to support his five sons and a daughter. His father returned as a coalminer to NSW in 1916 and the family lived in Pelaw Main on the northern coalfields. Bert attended Pelaw Main Primary School and Kurri Kurri Junior Technical School.

Rowley James was elected to Parliament in 1928 to represent the coalmining communities of the Hunter. In 1958 showing "true loyalty to the party leader" according to Whitlam, he stood down to provide a safe electorate for Dr H V (Bert) Evatt, the leader of the Labor Party, who was under siege in his metropolitan electorate of Barton by the French Resistance heroine, Nancy Wake. When Evatt resigned in February 1960 to accept an appointment as the Chief Justice of NSW, James was endorsed as the Labor candidate and won the by-election in April that year. Bert joined the NSW Police Force in 1935 and rose to the rank of detective sergeant. Two of his brothers also rose in the police ranks to be senior officers.

Another brother, "young" Rowley, became a teacher, and in time served as headmaster of Pelaw Main Primary School where he taught the skills that subsequently enabled Bob Brown to follow Bert James as the Member for Hunter. In 1950 Bert married Nora Bowen and they established their home on Lake Maquarie. They had three children-Rowley, Barbara and Helen. During his career in the police force, James was awarded the Police Good Conduct Medal and was recognised on three occasions for meritorious service.

Rowley James had been a powerful defender of the coalminers and an advocate of their cases. His son adopted a similar role in the Parliament, where he served on the privileges and public works committees. He was chairman of the joint committee on the Northern Territory which planned for its self-government, vigorously promoted by Whitlam, who said it was James's great service on committees for which he would be remembered. James also represented the Australian Parliament at a number of international conferences and on overseas delegations.

