Paper No. 172

Prepared and Presented by: J.T. Ruxton

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Bro. Arthur William Byrne (1923-2009)
Inventor of Roll-a-Door

Arthur Byrne was the founder of B & D Roll-A-Door and the man who brought easy opening garage doors to the world. Many Australians of the 1950s and 1960s can still sing the company's advertising song *"use a roll-a-door that's what it's for"* to the tune of the toreador song from the opera *Carmen*. This was sung in the advertisements by Brother Alan Light.

In 1946, with his business partner Paul Davidson and 140 pounds, Byrne established a steel fabricating business. The partners built a factory in Botany, undertook large engineering projects across Australia and recruited a young accountant, Ray Willoughby.

When the Sydney inventor, Ben Saul, walked into the B & D Offices with an idea for a door Byrne gave him a workplace, tools and materials but after the first attempt failed Saul lost interest and the materials were stored. Leaving the business, Saul signed away his rights to the door. Byrne and Davidson decided to give it another go. Byrne put in many years work and Gordon Lambert, a boilermaker, refined a design before they met success-the first all steel door that could be rolled and unrolled without cracking. It was made of compressed metal sheet fastened together forming a flexible curtain that rolled around an axle and spring assembly. The result was a safe, secure garage door that was easy to open. B & D introduced the slogan, "Even a child can open it."

The Roll-A-Door was unveiled at the Daily Mirror Home Show in 1956 and became a success. The company then set up a research and development programme for continuous design improvement. Davidson resigned a year later and Ray Willoughby became joint managing director.

In 1959 B & D invested in the Sydney market using the new medium of television to advertise its innovative product. Then one night, sitting in his car in his driveway, Bryne pondered the idea of opening the garage door without leaving his vehicle. He worked on the idea of a light sensitive unit signalling the door to open and soon the automatic door was invented. In the 1960s B & D went national, opening a factory in Melbourne and by 1963 the company was in the United States and Europe. Another breakthrough came with the development of Nylofelt in 1968. Opening doors was made even easier as the shoelace-like Nylofelt that ran down either side of it allowed for greaseless quiet operation.

When Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in July 1968, B & D ran a television ad campaign featuring the astronauts discovering a Roll-A-Door with a bemused Chips Rafferty behind it, sitting astride a billy can and greeting them with'"G,day mate, what kept ya?'. By 1971 introduced the Colorbond Door and in 1975 the automatic Control-a-Door. In 1985 Byrne sold B & D to Clyde Industries. In February 2009 Australia Post issued a commemorative book of stamps recognising five Australian suburban icons, B & D, Victa, Hills Hoists, Esky and Speedo.

Arthur William Byrne was born and raised in Bondi, the son of Clarrie . a milkman and his wife Patience. Athur and his brother, Leo were always on the lookout for ways to make money. They caught fish and sold them on the buses, then bought a horse and sold rides to local kids. Not happy with the shillings collected from the rides, Arthur gathered the horse manure, bagged it and sold it as fertiliser.

Family stories have it that young Arthur dismantled his bicycle to make a golf buggy and that the young entrepreneur later made a fibreglass swimming pool but could not convince manufacturers of its promise.

In adult life Byrne's great passion was sailing. In 1968 he commissioned the Sydney shipwright, Cec Quilkey, to build a Sparkman and Stephens design 48footer to rival Syd Fischer's Ragamuffin. The boat, Salacia 11, represented Australia in the 1971 Admiral's Cup in England and later that year Byrne challenged Fischer in the Sydney to Hobart, finishing third. In 1976, after his first marriage, to Ethel Whitby, ended, Byrne married Yvonne Crow. Then Len Byrne died of leukaemia in 1979 and Byrne created the Len Leukaemia Foundation. He proved a tireless generator of income for the battle against the disease. The Foundation merged with the Jenny Trust in 1980 and is known today as Cure Cancer Australia.

At a gala dinner at the Cruising Yacht Club in 2005, Byrne proudly announced that more than $10 million had been raised for research into cancer since 1979. Asked if he would like to be honoured for his services to business, yachting and charity Byrne said he did not think his efforts should ever be rewarded or recognised with a medal or a nation's honour.

Byrne was survived by Yvonne, his daughters Vickie and Diane and five grandchildren.

Arthur William Byrne was initiated, passed and raised in the three degrees of Freemasonry on 14th April 1948. 12th May 1948 and 14th July 1948 respectively in Lodge Booralee Lewis, No 598 UGL of NSW and ACT and called off on 5th July 1972.

Leonard Samuel Byrne was initiated in Lodge Empire Temperance, No 432 on 27th June 1955, Passed on 12th August 1955 in Lodge St. James of Argyll, No 786. Date of raising could not be found and called off St James of Argyll on 28th October 1968

Ref; Bollen, P. SMH 12th October 2009
Records, UGL of NSW and ACT

Arthur Byrne ... as a child caught fish and sold them on the buses.

IN RECOGNITION OF THESE AUSTRALIAN INVENTIONS, AUSTRALIA POST ISSUED THE FOLLOWING FIVE CENT STAMPS ON 19th FEBRUARY 2009:-

TIMELINE of INVENTIONS:

1928	Speedo Swimwear
1934	The Utility Truck
1940	Zinc Cream
1946	The Hills Hoist
1952	The Victa Lawnmower
1952	The Esky
1956	The B & D Roll-A-Door
1965	The Wine Cask