

VALE BOB PARKER

Vale Bob Parker, CICA Life Member, friend and major contributor to the Australian crane industry.

IT WAS WITH GREAT SADNESS THAT

CICA announced the passing of Life Member Bob Parker. He had bravely fought a battle with cancer for some time and peacefully succumbed in mid-May.

Although Bob was clearly a pioneer during the early days of the Australian crane industry, his wife Betty would like him to also be remembered for his love of his family, "he loved cranes, but his love of family always shone through," she said.

Bob spent a lifetime in the crane industry, starting as a rigger, and moving through crane driving and estimating to senior management positions. Much of the early time was spent in Sydney and Brisbane with Maros Constructions. Since then, the bulk of his time was spent with Brambles.

He was a key player in the formation of a crane hire association in Queensland; and was on the organising committee for the first national crane conference, held at the Broadbeach Hotel on the Gold Coast in 1979. He served as the State and National President of the association, and consistently supported the industry through service on various committees over the years.

Bob was able to combine the practicality of his early background and an appreciation of the role and conditions of the worker at the 'coal face' with a breadth of vision which came from his rise through the management ranks and contact with other sectors of the industry.

Despite the hours spent at work and on industry service, he was a committed family man. Bob was awarded the Con Popov memorial award for service to the crane industry at the 1999 annual CICA dinner at which time he was greeted

Rob Way presents the Con Popov Memorial Trophy to Bob Parker at the 1999 dinner.



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by the surprise appearance of his wife Betty with a message of support and congratulations from his children and grandchildren.

Given Bob's 'call to arms' in his acceptance speech for the award, Bob was asked for his views of where the industry should be heading, which he agreed to give in his capacity as an individual who has spent well over 40 years in the

industry in various positions, and who has been actively involved in the Crane Hirers Association since its inception.

Bob's view was that the history of the industry needs to be understood in order to appreciate current problems, and to find a way forward.

The industry started with large family-owned hire companies in the major cities who first used simple cranes

they made themselves, then war surplus slewing cranes, before imported cranes became generally available in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As the major companies upgraded their fleets, they created a buoyant second-hand market for the cranes they traded or retired from their fleets, creating a path for new people (often former operators) to enter the industry.

supported by the prevailing hire rates.

This was particularly pronounced with the strengthening of the Yen during the 1980s, creating a volatile market for new equipment. A consequent change of this era was a blurring of the boundary between the hirers and the marketers.

Bob believed that as a whole the industry did not mature sufficiently to work under the changing climate of

people in this category had a slip-up, attracting the attention of the authorities; and the penalties were quite onerous, including jail.

Bob believed that while the industry had become quite efficient and cost-effective over the years, its safety record was not particularly good and quite costly to the individuals and companies involved, as well as to the community at large. The problem increased when technology brought changes bringing onto the market, increasingly lighter cranes capable of lifting greater weights, and the industry needed to learn how to use these cranes safely and effectively.

Bob believed that with States now showing a willingness to investigate and prosecute, rather than maintain the previous 'hands off' approach until a serious accident occurred, the days of the 'rate cutter' and 'overloader' were numbered.

With the expansion of the industry, a number of people from the major hire companies saw the need for an official voice for the industry, with Victoria being the first State to get an association up and running. Bob recalled Bill Shaw as a key figure in spreading the message and pushing for a national council to promote common interests, including uniformity (because each state developed its own regulations, the State associations would remain the day-to-day engine of the industry.)

Problems that existed at the time were; dumping of unsuitable cranes; crane hire and hirers becoming defacto second hand dealers and a failure of the industry to adjust hire rates in line with improvements in crane technology, forcing it to buy to a price that could be

self-regulation in the late 1980s and 1990s, covering areas such as safety, employment (enterprise bargaining) and the general business climate. This left the responsible players with a dilemma in how to respond to the rate cutters and 'overloaders'. When the government allowed the import of used equipment in the early 1990s, the flood gates were opened, and control of the industry was effectively lost.

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It was only a matter of time before

He believed the industry should support moves to shake out the corner cutters, rather than hide from such measures. He further believed that an industry body needs to consider who it represents, as it works to lift the profile of the hire industry, because the craneage users will seek safer, more productive alternatives if the crane hire industry cannot satisfy those demands.

Bob was awarded life membership in 1994 and was he was the recipient of the Con Popov Memorial Trophy in 1999. These awards recognised his outstanding contribution to the Australian crane industry which he so rightly deserved.

Bob was a good friend to many and will be sorely missed. ●



The class of '79 reunites. Those from the inaugural meeting on the Gold Coast regathered at the Sydney conference in 1999. There are some young, but familiar faces. Bob is 6th from left at rear. Betty is centre front.