

LADY POTTER AC

Biography

The life of Lady Potter, born Primrose Catherine Anderson-Stuart on 23 April 1931, has been defined by three great loves: family, the arts and animals. Her father, Dr Bouverie Anderson-Stuart, was a Sydney radiologist and her mother Catherine, whom she adored, was a granddaughter of the manse, a cultured woman who inspired Lady Potter's lifelong passion for both the arts, and for involvement in the community.

Energetic, vivacious, attractive and with a wicked sense of humour, Lady Potter has spent much of her life as an active and passionate supporter and advocate for her causes, unafraid to speak out and use her position to influence, persuade and bring about change. In 1988, these qualities were officially recognised when she was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for her contribution to the community, followed by a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1993.

Her course was set when, as a young girl in Sydney, Primrose Anderson-Stuart, a student at Ascham School, was regularly taken by her mother to theatre, ballet, opera and concerts, establishing a lifelong love and appreciation for the Arts. She received a high standard of education, although she admits to being something of a mischief-maker, whose good marks in Bible Studies were largely the result of time spent in detention for giggling in class! Her family was actively involved in the community, with a young Primrose arranging fêtes for the Junior Red Cross, serving tea to the men who came to their door during the Great Depression, and her mother establishing a Mothercraft network. Her father, a man she describes as 'great fun, with a remarkable ear for music' supported the Royal Blind Society.

A striking beauty, Lady Potter's innate sense of style was first recognised in London in 1951, when following her formal introduction at Court, she was proclaimed by five British newspapers to be the best-dressed debutante at Royal Ascot. In 1952, the 21-year-old Primrose caught the eye of Roger Dunlop, a Sydney GP. The two were married for 17 years, and had a daughter also called Primrose, before the marriage was dissolved in 1969.

In 1972, at a dinner hosted by Bill and Sonia McMahon in Sydney, Primrose met the handsome and debonair Sir Ian Potter. The initial attraction blossomed into love, and sharing an interest in the arts, travel and philanthropy, the two courted for three years before marrying in 1975. Sir Ian described this as a time when his home life was 'truly happy'.

As a young woman in Sydney in the 1960s, Primrose was often seen cycling around the hills of the Eastern suburbs with a pack of canine companions trailing behind her. Dogs, especially poodles and spaniels, have been constant features of Lady Potter's life and in the 1960s as well as breeding poodles, she took on various roles including Presidency of the Ladies Kennel Club from 1964 - 68 and was a RASKC Poodle Breed Judge for several years. Today, her animal companions are two Burmese cats, Beatle and Figaro. Lady Potter's passion for animals is not confined to domestic pets and she has taken on various roles promoting animal causes including Ambassador for the Royal Zoological Society since 2002, Life Member of The International Snow Leopard Trust, and maintaining an active interest in wildlife conservation.

It is in the arts however, that Lady Potter has made an indelible mark. The list of her patronages, memberships, honours and committees is exhaustive, spanning almost all aspects of the arts from opera to theatre, through to ballet to contemporary art. A great lover of opera, Lady Potter was Founding Honorary Patron of the Melba Foundation and Founding Patron of the Victorian Opera Company and Patron-in-Chief of The Melbourne Opera Company. She was also Director and Victorian Chairman of The Elizabethan Theatre Trust and Founding Director of the Bell Shakespeare Company.

Contemporary art has benefited from her support over many years. She has been Patron of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, is Director of The Ian Potter Museum of Art at Melbourne University, Honorary Life Member of the National Gallery of Victoria and was Founding Benefactor of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Another defining passion is ballet. It is a love into which she has invested a great deal of time and effort, taking on roles such as presiding over committees for major fundraising galas including The Australian Ballet's Royal Bicentennial Gala in 1988 and the company's 30th Anniversary London Gala in 1992. She has been President of Annual Giving (formerly The Australian Ballet Club) at The Australian Ballet since 1992 and was a Director on the board of The Australian Ballet School 1992 – 98. Lady Potter does, however, confess to not being ballerina material herself, preferring to take to the floor for a little ballroom dancing when she gets the opportunity.

Lady Potter's community involvement does not end with the Arts. Her great sense of community and a natural curiosity about the world around her has resulted in the development of a wide range of other interests. She was a Founding Director of International Specialist Skills Institute and of the Williamson Community Leadership Program, which is now Leadership Australia, as well as a Fellow of the Institute of Directors, Australia. Lady Potter was presented with an Honorary Doctorate from Australian Catholic University and is a Member of The Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem and currently sits on the International Grand Magistral Council.

As the daughter of a radiologist and the granddaughter of Sir Thomas Anderson-Stuart, who established the Medical School at the University of Sydney, Lady Potter's interest in Medical Research was further fostered during her marriage to Sir Ian Potter, who was a great supporter of the sector. Sir Ian passed away in 1994 but her involvement continued and she remains a Member of several major institutions including the Florey Neuroscience Institutes, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, the Macfarlane Burnett Institute and is also a Member of the Royal Society.

Lady Potter is actively involved as Life Governor of The Ian Potter Foundation, one of Australia's leading philanthropic organisations, which supports a wide and varied range of community activities including education, community wellbeing, science, healthy communities, medical research, the environment and, of course, the arts. She is also Trustee of The Ian Potter Cultural Trust that supports the development of exceptional emerging artists.

Sparked by her formative trip to England and Italy in 1951, Lady Potter has always loved to travel and has a particular affection for Italy. Her mother spoke fluent Italian and their car trip around the Bel Paese began a fascination for the country that continues to this day. Lady Potter is a Trustee of the Palladio Foundation in Melbourne and in 2003 she was awarded the *Commendatore al merito della Repubblica Italiana* (Commander Knighthood - Italy's highest honour) for her work promoting Italian culture in Australia.

Throughout Lady Potter's Melbourne apartment, framed photographs of the people and events that have shaped her life adorn the shelves. Family features strongly, with images of her granddaughter Zofia, daughter Primrose and late husband Sir Ian, predominating. Hundreds of photographs of her parents, brother, grandparents, great-grandparents, and aunts and uncles are on display stretching back to the 1800s. Lady Potter knows the names of every one, reflecting her great sense of family history and pride in their individual stories and their part in helping to shape the person she has become.

Lady Potter's philosophy on life is to "meet it halfway, don't just wait for it to come to you, go out there and grab it with both hands." And that, most would agree, is exactly what she does.