My friends, I am truly delighted
to be in Longreach,
to join you here this evening
at this magnificent museum

for an occasion of celebration, friendship, of pride in achievement.

Thank you for so warmly welcoming Michael and me.

As Patron of the Qantas Foundation Memorial, it feels so good to be back in this special part of Australia.

How wonderful it is to see the country looking its best,
to feel its old buoyancy and optimism back, after 20 or so trying years.

I can sense it in the voices on the phone, and I can see it across the grass on the endless plains that we love, their wide horizons.

I spent my early years in nearby Ilfracombe, and in my middle age I have returned to the central west often to share very happy times, and very happy memories:
to talk about serious matters sometimes
but always to be enriched by those skilled in the art of conversation, entwined in warmth, wit and self-deprecating humour;
loved stories told and retold, listened to with affection
and to be greeted with hospitality like no other.

Now that I’m a grandmother, more reflective, experienced, wiser – I hope, certainly feeling things more deeply,

I think of this part of our country as home
– where I came from, where I belong, the land and people I love: who I am
– evoking that sentiment of Robbie Burns expressed so longingly “Home is where the heart is.”
I have been asking myself why, and of course the answer is found, as most things are, in my family and childhood – those first influential years which determine so much for the rest of our lives.

My family was formed here.

My father came to the west in 1919 to work in the wool industry, and my mother in the ‘30s to teach at Winton.

They met, fell in love with each other, and with the landscape, the community.

They made friendships for life, friendships steeped in shared joys and vicissitudes,

and characterised by respect, courtesy,

and a particular charm.

friendships which I have inherited and are of enormous importance to me.

I keep them in good repair.

They give me encouragement and reassurance.

They are about the past, the present, and the future.

I want to ensure that my children and grandchildren are their beneficiaries and that they learn to understand and care for “the bush” as we call it.

That they will be its advocates and supporters.

My country childhood has always stood me in great stead, with its:

sense of community and history

the regard people have for one another

the support and resourcefulness that gets you through the dry gullies

its infectious enthusiasm

the capacity for hard work, and play!

and that renowned resilience taking all things in one’s stride.

Kipling comes to mind, and so does AB Paterson.

These are qualities I value, that I hold onto, and hold up especially, when I spend time in classrooms in rural and remote Australia.

I know that sometimes bush kids wonder what they’re missing out, on in the city.

I tell them it’s the city kids who miss out on the irreplaceable adventures and opportunities of country life.

For us tonight, the message is that significant things happen out here,

twelve hundred kilometres from the capital

important things for the community, the State and the nation
The birth of Qantas was, and outstandingly remains, one of these

though I’m told that it took a beer at the Gresham in Brisbane to seal the deal.

Friends, the human energy, pride and care

invested in the Qantas Founders Museum since its establishment by local people in 1996

are demonstrations of the pioneering spirit and effort, and commitment to excellence that shine through Qantas’s 90 year history.

Fergus McMaster – from Kelso Ilfracombe, whose stature, leadership and political connections were key. His involvement signalled to others prevaricating that it was an OK venture; that they should be in it.

the former Australian Flying Corps pilots, Paul McGinness – imaginative, visionary -- Hudson Fysh, the steady hand;

and ex-AFC flight sergeant, Arthur Baird

These men

could never have known on that day in the Gresham Hotel in November 1920

that their Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services would soar to the forefront of global aviation.

They set out with a clear purpose in mind

to overcome the tyranny of distance across Queensland and the Territory,

and, to ensure their financial survival to win the government contracts for carrying mail.

Just a year after the papers were signed, the company’s first hangar and maintenance workshop were built in Longreach.

They are part of this museum today.

A year later, the first scheduled service, piloted by McGinness, carried mail from Charleville to Longreach.

The next day, 84 year-old local grazier, Alexander Kennedy, stepped aboard to become the first Qantas passenger

he had invested £11 in the company on the condition that he secure the inaugural ticket

and after 3 unsuccessful attempts, Fysh eventually got him in the air.

Of course, all this begins a much loved and fascinating story, told so superbly here at this museum.

It’s not a story of easy triumph, and never will be.

Progress came with

characteristic hard work, determination, innovation;

the insistence of the individuals at its heart on the highest standards of engineering, service and governance

their intuitive feel for risk taking

and their strategic vision that kept the commercial enterprise well ahead of the field

I want to emphasise that Qantas’s success in its formative years was due to the kind of place Western Queensland was in the 1920s, and the kind of people who lived here.
At the time, there were many young aviators struggling to establish airlines all over Australia.

Qantas had its share of struggles too, but its founders persevered,

They took to the air. They stayed there
due to the financial and moral support,

and the intrinsic faith and belief of the Western Queensland community.

Friends, there is a grand symbol of these qualities in Iris, who is with us tonight

a splendid replica of her former self

the de Havilland DH50

built by the hands and minds of Qantas – still the only airline in the world to have built and flown its own aircraft

and christened in 1926 by Lady Stonehaven, wife of our then Governor-General.

I am very pleased to be charged with the task later this evening of

officially marking Iris’s return to the fold

and affirming her place in the Qantas story

which is as much about its remarkable narrative over the past 90 years, as the accomplishment, that surely lies ahead

in the skies, on the ground, across the nation and the globe

in air travel and air rescue, in good times and hard.

Geoff Dixon wrote in his preface to the company’s 85 year history, I Still Call Australia Home

Qantas has always been an innovator and always looked to the future, but it is equally mindful of its deep foundations in the Australian community.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is immensely clear to me tonight.

My friends, It is so good to be here, and share in the celebration and promise.

Happy 90th, our Flying Kangaroo!