



Launceston Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter No 123

July 2010

ISSN 1036-7950

PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

"Bringing together people with an interest in history"

Tasmania's Convicts

Alison Alexander's fascinating talk on 16 May was well attended by many people with convict ancestors. Alison's new book *Tasmania's convicts: how felons built a free society* was a direct result from her work with Founders and Survivors – see www.foundersandsurvivors.org. 91% of the 72,500 prisoners who came to VDL were petty thieves. At least half went to Victoria when freed, and most were good at hiding their past. The stigma of our convict history started to break down in the 1970s. Now it is a source of pride to find a convict ancestor; it adds spice to our family histories. Peter Richardson also presented a brief overview of his PhD study of the lives of former convicts, with an amusing account of the day in the life of one Dan Connor in December 1867.



*Roger Valentine and Alison Alexander after the talk.
Photo: M Sargent*



Speaker Nick Clements with Ian Gasking. Photo: M Sargent

The Black War

On 20 June 2010 Nick Clements provided a thought-provoking insight into the Aboriginal perspective of the Black War in Van Diemen's Land from 1825-31. As their lands were taken from them the original inhabitants lived in fear of the settlers. Unable to procure food or shelter they were constantly on the move looking for a safe place to live. Nick has reconstructed the days leading up to the murders of colonists Bartholomew Boyle Thomas and James Parker on 31 August 1831. He is attempting to understand the emotions behind the conflict using G A Robinson's journals and other primary and secondary sources of the early colonial period.

LAUNCESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Society Website: www.launcestonhistory.org.au

July Talk

Sunday 18 July 2010 – 2.30pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Inveresk.

Eleanor Cave: Van Diemen's Land Correspondents: Colonial Natural History in Practice

Eleanor Cave is a PhD candidate at the school of History and Classics at the University of Tasmania. She is researching the contribution of nineteenth century Vandemonian natural history collectors to global botanical science. In particular she is focussing upon collectors such as Robert Lawrence, Ronald Gunn and William Archer and their connections with William and Joseph Hooker in Britain. Eleanor holds degrees in both history and botany, and previously has researched the food gardens at the Port Arthur penal settlement.

In 1961 Thomas Burns and John Skemp published an edited collection of transcribed letters, *Van Diemen's Land Correspondents 1827-1849*. At its heart was a series of correspondence between collector Ronald Campbell Gunn in VDL, and Sir William Jackson Hooker in Britain. It contained a wealth of information and insights into early settlement life in Van Diemen's Land, as well as providing an excellent source for studying the history of science in colonial Australia. Whilst their work is excellent, it is incomplete. During the course of my research I have amassed further correspondence, diaries and notes, as well as information gleaned from examining historic plant collections. Together, this material provides a more rounded concept of the practice of natural history in the colonial context.

August Talk

Sunday 15 August 2010 – 2.30pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Inveresk.

Steve Radford: Shipping in Western Bass Strait

Steve Radford, in his youth, used to view the departure of small ships leaving Town Pier (now Launceston Seaport) from his home in Trevallyn and wondered how these little vessels would fare when exposed to the rough seas of Bass Strait. Later when he was employed by the PMG (now Telstra) on Flinders Island he saw at first hand how the island trading vessels operated in all types of weather conditions to get the freight and mail across these stormy waters. At the same time he gained a Commercial Pilot Licence and was able to view from above the difficulties and dangers of these maritime operations. Later when employed by the Department of Civil Aviation at Wynyard Airport he made many flights between the North-West and King Island and again observed sea conditions, which whilst still rough, often differed from those in eastern Bass Strait. He also worked for several short periods at King Island Airport (near Currie) and during his leisure time went around the island taking note of the ports and other facilities that assisted shipping operations to this part of the Strait.

Two years ago he gave a talk on shipping to the Furneaux group of islands. In this talk he will outline the similarities and differences of the operators involved. Where shipping was concerned, politics (the Tasmanian Government was heavily involved) and personalities played a crucial part in providing an adequate service to such isolated communities and there were marked differences between King and

Flinders Islands. Other ports such as Smithton and Stanley also will be mentioned as they too played an important role in sea transport in western Bass Strait, not only to King Island but to the mainland. Stock transport also saw such islands as Robbins and Three Hummock feature in shipping history.

Finally, the tragedies of shipwrecks will be discussed. King Island is known as the “graveyard” of many ships, probably no other section of coastline in Australia has such a concentration of loss of life and property than that of King Island. Mention of the loss of the *Will Watch* whilst en route from Ulverstone to King Island in 1958 will be discussed in detail.

Advance Notice of Activities

Sunday 19 September 2010: Patsy Cameron and Linn Miller, *Telling places in country: following historical storylines home*

Sunday 17 October 2010: Dianne Snowden, *Convict Women in Northern Tasmania*

Sunday 21 November 2010: Julie Gough, *Norfolk Plains revealed?*

Vale Patricia Ratcliff



Eric and Patricia Ratcliff. Photo: M Sargent

Patricia Ratcliff OAM peacefully passed away on 31 May 2010. A founding member of the Launceston Historical Society, Patricia convened a public meeting on 25 October 1988 to mark the centenary of Launceston being declared a city. She was the inaugural secretary/treasurer and elected chairman in 1990. Her vision was to bring together people with an interest in history. Patricia’s passion for John West, Congregational Minister and founder of *The Launceston Examiner*, anti-transportation campaigner and arguably the “Father of Federation” led to her instigating the annual *The Examiner*-John West Memorial Lecture. It was fitting that Patricia’s funeral was held at Milton Hall in Frederick Street, which was built for West. Our heartfelt sympathy goes to her husband Eric and family as we all mourn the loss of a valued member and citizen.

Members’ Column

New Members: The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Elizabeth Bath, Julian Burgess, Lesley Long and Barney Reynolds.

Archaeology Group: The next meeting will be on 31 August 2010 (the last Tuesday) at 1.00pm at the Phil Leonard Room, Launceston Library.

Papers and Proceedings: The P&Ps for 2007 and 2008 finally have been published. Members who have paid already will have received copies in the mail. Extra copies are available for \$12.00 each.

LHS Website: New member Barney Reynolds kindly has updated our website. A new application form is available on the site with the updated subscription fees. The latest newsletter has been uploaded in PDF format. To save volunteer time, postage and paper it has been decided that now we should offer the choice of receiving newsletters by post or through an email link to the website. All those members who have given us an email address will receive the September newsletter notification by email; unless the editor is informed otherwise. Email marionsargent@bigpond.com or phone 6331 4890 (leave a message). Those members without email will continue to receive the newsletter by post. See the website at www.launcestonhistory.org.au and click on “current newsletter”.

History Prize 2010

Once again the Launceston Historical Society is conducting a history competition for school children. This year's topic is "An important historic event" allowing the students to select an event from Tasmania or Australia. There are six sections from grades 3 to 10, with three prizes to be awarded in each category. The Ratcliff Prize, worth \$50.00, will be awarded to the best researched and presented entry overall. The total prize pool of book vouchers is \$650.00. Carol Fuller is co-ordinating the competition with local schools.

Recent publications by members

Kathryn Evans, *Drought, fires and flood on the pastoral frontier: 1820 to 1855*, in THRA P&P, Vol 57, No 1, April 2010, pages 28-39.



Jenny Gill, *Holy Trinity Church, Launceston – A history from 1838*, was launched at the Holy Trinity Church on 4 July 2010. Copies will be available for sale for \$69.50 at the next LHS meeting on 18 July when Jenny will present a short talk on the writing of the book. See a review in *The Examiner* on 26 June 2010, page 43.

Virtual tour of Launceston

Jenny Gill (pictured here) was chauffeur-driven in this car to The Boathouse where she presented a powerpoint potted tour of Launceston's beautiful corner buildings at the Model-A-Ford Club of Victoria (& Tasmania) Conference in March.

Frederick McCubbin's Church

Marcus Bastiaan is compiling research on the Australian artist Frederick McCubbin's life and lesser known works. He is hoping to identify this Tasmanian church which is attributed to McCubbin. The artist was born in 1855 and died in 1917. Please email Marcus if you can help with any information. marcusbastiaan@hotmail.com



200th Anniversary of William Paterson's Death

The 21st June marked the 200th anniversary of the death of the founding leader of the Port Dalrymple settlement. Lieutenant-governor William Paterson, on his way back to England, died at sea off Cape Horn on that day in 1810. He had spent over four years establishing the settlements at York Town and Launceston from October 1804 until he returned to Sydney in January 1809.

Photographs Online

Visit the updated website of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery where 30 000 photographs and other records are gradually being added for easy access: www.qvmag.tas.gov.au.

Launceston's Commandants *By Barbara Valentine*

Lieutenant-Colonel William Balfour of the 40th Regiment was appointed Commandant at Port Dalrymple on 6 April 1825, replacing Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Cameron who left his residence at George Town on 6 April 1825 and departed on the *Cumberland*.¹ The headquarters of the north of the colony was moved from George Town to Launceston in 1825 and Charlotte Balfour, wife of Commandant Lieutenant-Colonel William Balfour, died there at Government House on 22 August 1825, aged 33.²

Edward Abbott, a retired army officer, appointed Civil Commandant at Launceston in January 1826 to succeed Military Commandant Balfour, arrived in the town early in 1826.³ Although he expected to reside in Government House as former commandants had done, a house was rented for him and he received an allowance for rent.⁴ Abbott was still Civil Commandant at the time of his death which occurred at Government Cottage, Launceston, on 31 July 1832. His funeral procession left from Government House for the service at St John's Church.⁵

Major Fairtlough of the 63rd Regiment was appointed Commandant in September 1832.⁶ On his departure from Launceston early in 1834 the inhabitants presented him with a valuable piece of plate as a mark of esteem and respect and Lieutenant-Governor Arthur praised his high sense of zeal and extreme discretion in discharging the duties of office.⁷

Major Fairweather of the 21st Fusiliers was Commandant from 4 January 1834 to 23 April 1835. He succeeded Major Fairtlough, whose regiment was proceeding to India.⁸ Major Deare of the 21st Fusiliers was appointed Commandant on 23 April 1835. He replaced Major Fairweather who left to assume command of his regiment in Hobart.⁹

Major Ryan of the 50th Regiment was Commandant from 7 December 1835, replacing Major Deare, who was proceeding to Head Quarters to join his regiment.¹⁰ Major Mainwaring of the 51st Light Infantry was appointed Commandant of Launceston on 16 May 1839.¹¹ Major Edward St Maur of the 51st Regiment was appointed Commandant on 1 July 1840, replacing Major Mainwaring who had retired to Head Quarters.¹²

Lieutenant-Colonel Cumberland of the 96th Regiment was commandant from 1 March 1843 until he left Launceston in September 1845, when the office of civil commandant in the north was discontinued. He replaced Major St Maur who had returned to Head Quarters. Whilst Cumberland was commandant, some 40 to 50 soldiers of the 96th Regiment rampaged through the town, attacking citizens and damaging property.¹³

George Fuller, in his *Recollections of Launceston 1836-1847*¹⁴ says that the Commandant's residence was on the east side of Tamar Street near the York Street corner and this is where it is marked on Thomas Scott's *Plan of Launceston and its vicinity* in Ross's *Hobart Town almanack for the year 1832* and on Smythe's 1835 *Plan of the town of Launceston VDL*. However Fuller says that Cumberland lived on the south side of Brisbane Street not far from the west corner of Tamar Street.

¹ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 8 April 1825; Diane Phillips, *An eligible situation: the early history of George Town and Low Head*, Jamison Centre, ACT, 2004.

² Jenny Gill, *Engraved in memory*, Launceston, 1988.

³ *Historic Records of Australia*, series 3, vol. 5, pp. 29-35, 139, 296, 501; *Colonial Times*, 20 January 1826, p. 3, c. 3.

⁴ *HRA*, series 3, vol. 5, p. 34; series 3, vol. 7, p. 71; *Hobart Town Gazette* 25 March 1826.

⁵ *Independent*, 4 August 1832, p. 2, c. 2, 4; *Launceston Advertiser*, 7 August 1832, p. 254, c. 3-4.

⁶ *Hobart Town Courier*, 14 September 1832, p. 2.

⁷ *Hobart Town Courier*, 3 January 1834; *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 January 1834.

⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 10 January 1834; TAHO Wayn Index.

⁹ *HTG*, 23 April 1835.

¹⁰ *HTG*, 4 December 1835; Michael Roe, *An imperial disaster: the wreck of the George the Third*, Sandy Bay, 2006.

¹¹ *HTG*, 17 May 1839.

¹² *HTG*, 3 July 1840.

¹³ *HTG*, 10 March 1843; Stefan Petrow, 'Military outrage: the riot of the 96th Regiment in Launceston in 1845', *THRA*, vol. 55, no. 3, December 2008; PR Eldershaw, 'Guide to the public records of Tasmania, Governor's Office', *THRA*, vol. 15, no. 3, January 1968, p. 95-96.

¹⁴ Transcribed by Margaret Szalay, Cremorne, NSW, 2003.

History of Words

The Kelso Chronicle, Scotland, 28 February 1862, page 3

In the May Newsletter was a list of words and their origins taken from this Scottish newspaper which is available at the Tasmanian Family History Society rooms at 45 Tamar Street, Launceston. Part 2 follows:

“Indigo” (indicum) from India;

“Agates” from a Sicilian river, Achates;

“Jalap” from Xalapa, a town in Mexico;

“Parchment” from Pergamum;

The “guinea” that it was originally coined (in 1663) of gold brought from the African coast, so called;

“Camlet” that is woven, at least in part, of camel’s hair;

The fashion of the cravat was borrowed from the Croats, of “Crobats”, as they used in the seventeenth century to be called.

Such has been the manufacturing progress of England that we now send our calicoes and muslins to India and the East; yet the words give standing witness that we once imported them from thence; for “calico” is from Calicut, and “muslin” from Maussul, a city in Asiatic Turkey; ermine is the spoil of the Armenian rat. (Source: *Trench’s Study of Words*)

Can You Help?

Perth history: Would anyone have any knowledge of an old shop and residence in Main Street, Perth, where Joseph and Isabella Clayton lived from at least 1861 until Isabella’s death in 1905? Also wanted is any information about ‘Perth Villa’ and the old Clayton Tannery on the South Esk River at Perth. Please contact Robert Clayton by email rclayton@bigpond.net.au or by phone on (03) 9434 7131.

Early social dance and music history: Peter Ellis is trying to locate details of dances, music and events in the very early period of settlement in Australia, generally from around 1800 to the 1840s. There is scant information about the earlier era when jigs, reels, country dances, hornpipes, step-dances and so on were at the fore. Any personal diaries, ball programmes or printed dance instruction manuals are important sources of information. Please contact Peter Ellis, a musician with the Wedderburn Old-timers, by email peterellis@bendigotelco.net.au. See <http://www.australian-heritage-dance.com/dinkum.html>

Other Items and Events of Interest

Oral History: Ian Terry from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery will talk on *More than just a river: Collecting oral histories from the Franklin River blockade, 1980–83* at a seminar for the Oral History Association of Australia (Tas Branch) at 1.30 on Saturday 7 August 2010 at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Inveresk. Other topics on the day will be the St Helens History Room video oral history project, and the difficulties of transcribing. Cost for non-members is \$5 and all are welcome. Enquiries: Jill Cassidy on 0418 178 098, or mandjassidy@gmail.com

Bridge to Bridge Cycling History Tour: LHS Vice-President Marion Sargent will lead a tour for cyclists starting from the North Esk historical interpretation panels at Hoblers Bridge Road to Kings Bridge and return, with detours to places of interest in between. This is a Tamar Bicycle Users’ Group outing, but everyone with a pushbike is welcome to join in. Just turn up at 10.00am on Sunday 12 September 2010 at the Hoblers Bridge Reserve car park. For enquiries phone 6331 4890. www.tbug.org.au

Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies 25th Annual Conference “History on the Edge” will be held on Saturday 4 September 2010 at the Life Sciences Lecture Theatre 1, Sandy Bay Campus, UTAS. Enquiries: phone 6226 2298, email Secretary@history.utas.edu.au. www.utas.edu.au/history_classics

Deadlines

Members wishing to place items on the Agenda for the 10 August 2010 LHS Committee Meeting are requested to have these to the President by **1 August 2010**. Items for the next Newsletter should be sent to the Editor by **1 September 2010** at marionsargent@bigpond.com or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.