



Launceston Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter No 131

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PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

"Bringing together people with an interest in history"

Launceston Architecture

On 10 July 2011 Dr Anne Neale provided a captivated audience with a preview of her work on an architectural guide to the commercial, industrial and civic buildings in the central part of Launceston. She will include the city's many historically significant-buildings bounded by the Esplanade, Wellington, York and Tamar streets. Her illustrated guide to those in St John Street gave a brief overview of what is in store for us in the forthcoming publication. It will contain a fold-out map, a street-by-street photograph with details on the architect, style and date of each building, including those no longer standing, and a section for aficionados on different types of buildings.



Faith Layton and Dr Anne Neale. Photo: M Sargent.



Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Andrew Gregg. Photo: M Sargent.

Convicts: Sickness and Death

On 21 August 2011 Associate Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart presented a wonderful oversight of the *Founders and Survivors* project. This mammoth study is an attempt to trace and document all the people who came to Van Diemen's Land on 340 convict ships from the British Isles. Using records of the voyages, surgeons' journals, trials, gaol and hulk registers, births, deaths and marriages – and linking these to soldiers who enlisted in the First World War – Tasmania potentially will be the most documented place on earth. The treatment of the convicts, their diet, health and living conditions are all included in this research.

LAUNCESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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All correspondence should be sent to: PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250 or launcestonhistory@gmail.com
Society Website: www.launcestonhistory.org.au

September Talk

Sunday 18 September 2011 – 2.30pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Inveresk.

Robyn Lake, *Trade trails ...convict cabinet-makers transported during the Assignment Period 1804-1839*

The convict records provide compelling evidence that it was not chance, but the nature and extent of prisoners' skills which primarily determined their fate in Van Diemen's Land. Through the stories of four cabinet-makers, this talk explores the circumstances under which such skilled mechanics served their sentences, and the contentious issue of what access colonists had to this valuable workforce.

Robyn was born in New Zealand, and moved to Queensland with her family in 1959. She was involved in the management of the Auto Museum established by her father George Gilltrap, which became one of the Gold Coast's premier tourist attractions.

In 1994 Robyn and her husband Denis moved to Launceston, where Denis established an antique furniture restoration business. Their extensive research into Tasmania's furniture history covers the making, importation, sale and uses of furniture up to 1930.

The focus of Robyn's current research is to uncover the stories of more than 500 convicts with furniture trade-related skills who served their sentences in the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land.

October Talk

Sunday 16 October 2011 – 2.30pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Inveresk.

Andrew Gregg, *"Of greatest service to the Norfolk Plains": The contrasting colonial careers of Roderic O'Connor and William Bryan*

Roderic O'Connor and William Bryan sailed from Ireland to Van Diemen's Land on O'Connor's ship the *Ardent* in 1824. Both men acquired large estates at Norfolk Plains and by 1830 were glowing examples of colonial success. However, over the course of the next five years, Bryan's fortunes altered dramatically. He became embroiled in a public scandal that ultimately saw his 30 assigned servants withdrawn during harvest. This paper seeks to highlight how the forces of colonialism brought together people of similar creeds; yet how individual circumstances could differ profoundly, using these two fascinating settlers as examples.

Andrew Gregg, studying a PhD in colonial history at the University of Tasmania, is writing a biography of Roderic O'Connor. His work on *Brickendon* formed the basis of much of the World Heritage nomination for *Brickendon* and *Woolmers*, and has influenced heavily the interpretation onsite to date.

Research Topic

Sunday 18 September 2011: Tony Walker, once the food and wine writer for *The Examiner*, will give a five-minute talk on his research topic *Tasmania's wine industry* – before Robyn Lake's talk.

Advance Notice of Activities

Sunday 20 November 2011: Steve Radford, *Holymans – 150 years*

Sunday 4 December 2011: Richard Mulvaney, *Reflections on his first year at the QVMAG*. Venue to be advised.

Sunday Talks: We are pleased to welcome Gavin Devine of TASCOS, Tasmanian Audio Services Company, to our monthly meetings. Gavin, or one of his team, will be attending the talks to set up and improve the sound system and record the proceedings. CDs of the talks are available at the Community History section of the QVMAG. www.tascosound.com

Members' Column

New Members: The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Brian Fitzpatrick, Steven Jones, Robert and Lynne Mockridge and Kelli Schultz.

Minute Secretary: Catherine Pearce has kindly offered to join our committee as the minute secretary.

Archaeology Group: The next meeting will be on 29 November 2011 at 1.00pm at the Phil Leonard Room, Launceston LINC.

Papers and Proceedings: The LHS 2010 Papers and Proceedings are available for sale at \$12.00.

Members' Activities: Many members were involved as presenters of papers, leaders of walks and tours and as participants at the hugely successful Australian Historical Association Regional Conference *History at the Edge* held at UTAS Inveresk Campus from 4 to 8 July 2011. Congratulations to everyone involved.

Marion Sargent re-presented the AHA paper on the Launceston Family Album prepared by Prue McCausland for National Family History Week. See www.launcestonfamilyalbum.org.au

Oatlands Excursion



See the notice and reply slip on page 6 for information about the day trip to Oatlands on Sunday 30 October 2011. Numbers are limited to 23, so don't delay in responding. Meet the bus at the RSL Club car park in Eardley Street at 8.30am. The estimated time of return is about 6pm, but it could be later.

Macquarie Celebrations

It has been almost 200 years since Governor Lachlan Macquarie visited Van Diemen's Land. Celebrations are planned to coincide with his arrival in Adventure Bay on 18 Nov 1811, his journey to Hobart, the Derwent Valley, through the Midlands to Launceston, around the Tamar Valley to George Town and finally his departure from Low Head on the *Lady Nelson* on 20 December. More details will be available in the next newsletter.

Can You Help?

Chevron: Does anyone remember the Chevron Café or Restaurant in Launceston? Where was it and when was it in operation? Please contact Leonie Prevost at the Launceston LINC, phone 6336 2642 or by email leonie.prevost@education.tas.gov.au.

Local redemption of feeble assassin

Nic Haygarth

One of the builders of Launceston's Town Hall tried to bring down the realm. John Francis, a contractor on the 1864 construction job, had taken a pot shot at Queen Victoria in London in 1842, missing at point blank range. He was the second man to suffer such regal performance anxiety, Edward Oxford having failed to nail the most powerful being on the planet two years earlier. Francis was transported for high treason.



Launceston Town Hall.

Photo from Launceston Local Studies Collection,
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

After serving five years at Port Arthur, Francis, a carpenter by trade, was assigned to ex-convict William Tyson, noted as builder of St Andrew's Kirk in 1850. The convict class was then prominent in the Launceston building industry, with bricklayers Philip Miller, John French and George Rhodes similarly bringing skills from the old country via the penitentiary. However, none of these made such a spectacular entry to the antipodes.

In September 1842 the Queen and Prince Albert, after taking their usual airing in Hyde Park, were returning down Constitution Hill in their low phaeton carriage drawn by four greys and attended by out-riders. Allegedly, a young man was heard to cry 'Damn the Queen! Why should she be such an expense to the nation? It is to support her in such grand style that us poor persons have to work hard.'¹ He produced a pistol and fired it at Her Majesty. He missed her, even though he was so close that the pistol smoke discharged into the face of Colonel Wylde, riding at Her Majesty's side. Someone shouted, 'By God, he has not killed her, he has not hurt her, but only frightened her!'² Concealing the weapon, the shooter then tried to escape, but Prince Albert rose from the carriage and pointed him out, and he soon was apprehended.

At a police station he was identified as John Francis, a 20-year-old carpenter lodging at 106 Great Titchfield Street, Oxford Market. The Privy Council, including Prince Albert, the Duke of Wellington, Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel and many other noblemen—nearly 50 men in all—was summonsed to the Home Office to examine the assailant. Having survived that ordeal, Francis was lodged in a private cell in Tothill-Fields Prison. When asked if he had money for food, the new prisoner 'in rather a despairing tone said he had not'.³

The Queen's mother, the Duchess of Kent, reportedly fell on Victoria's neck in a flood of tears when she heard of the attempt. The Queen cancelled her scheduled evening party. She would have been too busy answering the cheers of hundreds of loyal subjects who assembled outside Buckingham Palace in a show of sympathy and support. The news of the assassination attempt caused an adjournment of debate in the House of Commons. Both Houses addressed an expression of indignation to the Queen and thanked divine providence for her escape. When the Lords and Commons reassembled two days later, their dress was marked by a brilliant show of military uniforms in support of the monarch. A crowd waited outside the Home Office in hope of glimpsing the miscreant.

The Queen's appearance at the opera on the day following the attempt on her life invoked further patriotism:

At that moment, one burst of applause was heard from every part of the house; hats and handkerchiefs were seen waving in all directions; in short there was every possible



St Andrew's Church, Launceston.

Photo from Launceston Local Studies Collection,
Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office

¹ 'Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty', *Examiner* 8 October 1842, p.6.

² 'Treasonable Attempt to Assassinate the Queen', *The Australian* 7 October 1842, pp.2-3.

³ 'Treasonable Attempt to Assassinate the Queen', *The Australian* 7 October 1842, pp.2-3.

demonstration of the liveliest joy at Her Majesty's escape from the late most villainous attempt. She stood at the front of her box, evincing the greatest presence of mind, though evidently touched at the enthusiasm of the audience, and curtsied repeatedly, while Prince Albert bowed in reply to the loud congratulations. The opera was not suffered to proceed till the national anthem was again sung ... Her Majesty remaining standing during the anthem, and at the conclusion of almost every line, there was a fresh burst of applause, to which she returned a fresh acknowledgment. The words, 'Scatter her enemies,' in particular called forth the most deafening acclamations.⁴

It turned out to be Francis' second attempt to shoot the Queen—made on consecutive days. On the Sunday he had presented a pistol before Her Majesty's carriage in St James Park but not fired it, reportedly muttering 'I wish I had done it' (or, according to another witness, 'They may take me if they like, I don't care. I was a fool not to shoot.')

Francis was thick-set, swarthy, of shabby appearance. His father, a stage carpenter at Covent Garden Theatre, and his younger sister, Jane, resided at 100 Titchfield Street, an abode Francis had left 12 months earlier after an altercation with his father. Sometimes Francis had worked with his father at Covent Garden, 'where he was considered very clever in the construction of pantomime tricks'.⁶

His new track would be life-changing. In July 1841 Francis had been acquitted on a charge of stealing a purse containing 32 sovereigns.⁷ Latterly, he had taken to frequenting the Caledonian Coffee House, where he would make a cup of coffee last for several hours. He appeared to be broke (he owed rent money), unemployed and listless. A few days before the assassination attempt, Francis made a decisive but ill-considered attempt to change his life. He rented a shop, had 'Francis, Tobacconist' painted over the door, ordered in snuff, cigars and tobacco and opened this new business. He also robbed his housemate—apparently in order to pay for his stock in trade. This crime was discovered and the stolen money recovered before he could pay his creditors, who promptly closed his new career by repossessing everything.

At this point Francis bought a pistol from a pawnbroker for three shillings. Two days later he aimed it at the future Empress of India. Police examination of Francis' boxes of belongings revealed scraps of poetry and other writings but nothing suspicious, nothing which would explain his assault on the monarch.⁸

At trial, Francis' counsel, Clarkson, battled the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General. Francis pleaded not guilty to the charge that he 'maliciously and traitorously did compass and imagine, cause and intend, to bring and put our said Lady the Queen to death'. Chief Justice Tindal summed up by telling the jury that the great question was the contents of the pistol at the time it was discharged, and the intention of the accused when discharging it.

After 43 minutes deliberation, the jury found him not guilty on the first count of firing a pistol loaded with gunpowder and ball. Instead he was found guilty of firing a pistol loaded with gunpowder and some other destructive material—which amounted to a conviction for high treason. The sentence was classical:

That you ... be hanged by the neck until you are dead; and after you are dead, your head be severed from your body, and that your body be cut into four quarters, and placed at the disposal of her Majesty as she shall think fit.⁹

Thankfully, Her Majesty saw fit to scatter her enemies in a different manner, sending Francis' still-breathing four quarters to Australia—for the term of his natural life.¹⁰

⁴ 'Treasonable Attempt to Assassinate the Queen', *The Australian* 7 October 1842, pp.2-3.

⁵ 'Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty', *Examiner* 8 October 1842, p.6; 'Attempt to Assassinate Her Majesty', *Australasian Chronicle* 6 October 1842, p.2.

⁶ 'Attempt on the Life of the Queen', *Australasian Chronicle* 8 October 1842, p.4.

⁷ 'Treasonable Attempt to Assassinate the Queen', *The Australian* 7 October 1842, pp.2-3.

⁸ 'Attempt on the Life of the Queen', *Australasian Chronicle* 8 October 1842, p.4.

⁹ 'Trial of John Francis for the Attempt Upon the Life of Her Majesty', *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 November 1842, p.4.

¹⁰ See Francis's Conduct Record CON33/1/29, and Indent CON14/1/16 (Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office).

Other Items and Events of Interest

National Book Council: Guest speaker for the September meeting is Peggy Bogar, author of *Bushfire Heartbreak*, a courageous story of the December 2006 bushfire that destroyed 20 homes in the Scamander area. Wednesday, 21 September 2011, 1.15pm, Phil Leonard Room, Launceston LINC, Civic Square.

George Town and District Historical Society: The next two meetings for 2011 will be: 20 September, *Tamar Shipping*; 17 October, AGM and Jenny Timmins, *Coxwain Ray Westwood*.

Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Upcoming meetings are to be held at the Royal Society Room, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, starting at 8.00 pm. 8 November, Peter Hughes, *Decorative Arts in Tasmania*. www.thra.org.au

Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies: The 26th Annual Conference *Writing Australian and Tasmanian History* is to be held on 22 October 2011 at Lecture Theatre 2, University Centre, Sandy Bay Campus, University of Tasmania, Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay. For more information please contact School of History and Classics, UTAS, Private Bag 81, Hobart, TAS 7001, phone 6226 2544 or email History.Admin@utas.edu.au.

LGH Historical Committee: A Seminar on *Benefactors* is to be held on 27 November 2011 at the LGH Lecture Theatre, Level 2. For more information please contact Paul Richards: phone 6344 4241 or email pacrichards1@bigpond.com

The Weekly Courier photographs: Thirty-five years of photographic inserts from *The Weekly Courier* newspaper now are available online. These images provide a fascinating insight into Tasmanian life from 1901 to 1935. They are accessible through a catalogue search from the LINC Tasmania website <http://www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au> Use the existing indexes (Bissett and Knowle) to find particular photos.

Deadlines

Members wishing to place items on the Agenda for the 11 October 2011 LHS Committee Meeting are requested to have these to the President by **1 October 2011**. Items for the next Newsletter should be sent to the Editor by **1 Oct 2011** at marionsargent@bigpond.com or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.

Oatlands Excursion

A day trip to Oatlands has been planned for **Sunday 30 October 2011**. A bus will leave the RSL Club car park in Eardley Street (near corner of Wellington Street) at **8.30am sharp**. Numbers are limited to 23 passengers. The cost is \$22.00, which includes bus fare, morning tea and entrance fees. The Oatlands District Historical Society will take us on a guided tour of some of the significant historic buildings at Oatlands. Lunch will be at your own expense at the bakery which uses authentic mill flour to bake its bread. A tour inside the Callington Mill is not part of the excursion. If time permits we will drive through Tunbridge on the way home. Please fill out and return the slip below with \$22.00 to: The Treasurer, Launceston Historical Society, PO Box 1296, Launceston, TAS 7250, or hand in at the meeting on Sunday 18 September. Enquiries to Steve Radford: stevjen2@bigpond.com or phone 6331 9669 or Marion Sargent: marionsargent@bigpond.com or 6331 4890.

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<p>Oatlands Excursion Sunday 30 October 2011</p> <p>Name.....</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>Phone.....Mobile.....</p> <p>Email.....</p>	<p>Return to:</p> <p>LHS Inc.</p> <p>PO Box 1296</p> <p>LAUNCESTON TAS 7250</p>
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