



Launceston Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter No 159

September 2017

ISSN 1036-7950

PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Bringing together people since 1988 with an interest in history

The clock of St John's Church, Launceston

We had a full house at Jenny Gill's entertaining talk on 16 July 2017. Why was the town clock at St John's Church controversial? According to Jenny, no-one wanted to take responsibility for its upkeep and for 50 years or so it was unreliable. Nevertheless, since 1829 one, two or three clock faces have kept the citizens of Launceston informed of the approximate time. Jenny told us stories of the people who kept the clock working and of significant events that occurred under its gaze. It is a pity that the chimes have been silenced. See *The Examiner*, 13 July 2017, page 15, "Society talk takes a trip through time".

Robyn Lake has shed more light on the original clock. The second set of brass wheels were made by the convict William Newman per *Princess Charlotte*. After the first clock was removed in 1835 it lay in Henry Howe's auction mart for many years before being purchased by Mr Newman for "Auld lang syne".



Speaker Jenny Gill.

Why do kids hate Australian History?



Catherine Pearce and Bradley Wood with Louise Zarmati.

Dr Louise Zarmati presented an entertaining talk on Sunday 20 August 2017 on training teachers how to teach history. She gave us some interesting statistics on how many pre-service teachers know little about Australian history. But it is comforting to know that history is being taught in schools from kindergarten to grade 10. It is an option in the Senior Secondary years. The Australian Curriculum website gives an overview of what is taught each year. It is up to the teachers to make it interesting.

Louise gave the audience a quiz with 20 questions on Australian history. It was fun to do.

September Audio-Visual Presentation

Guy Burns & Eric Sargent: *Clytie & Me*

Sunday 17 September 2017 – 2pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum at Inveresk



Eric Sargent with his boat *Clytie*.

Guy Burns was born in Queensland and came to Tasmania in 1980. Once here, he started bushwalking. His fascination with photographing Tasmania's wilderness and the characters he met led him to produce audio-visual slide shows every year or two from 1983 until 1998. He held several public showings at the Ulverstone Civic Theatre. He is now converting his original AV's to Blu-ray format. In recent years, he has created several more audio-visuals on topics such as Lake Pedder, the North-West Walking Club and the one we will see on 17 September, *Clytie & Me*.

The subject of this audio-visual is **Eric Sargent** who grew up by the sea at East Wynyard. Born in 1928, it follows his life in the Scouts, bushwalking – including two epic trips walking across the Tasmanian highlands

in 1947 and 1948 – family man, carpenter, proprietor of Craclair Tours for 37 years, and in retirement, building and paddling canoes. The *Clytie* was a much-loved 33-inch wooden boat built in 1925 and given to Eric as a Christmas gift 10 years later. In 2004, he retrieved the boat from a cupboard and restored her. The *Clytie* now has pride of place at the front entrance of his home. The boat was named after the trading ketch *Clytie* that plied the waters between the Furneaux Group and Launceston from 1879 until 1901. She was wrecked on King Island in 1902.

October Talk

Barbara Hatley: *Launceston on Stage: a History of Amateur Theatre in Launceston*

Sunday 15 October 2017 – 2pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum at Inveresk

How to explain the liveliness of performance activities in Launceston – the number and variety of amateur theatre companies, dance and musical groups, keenly supported by local audiences?

A major factor is Launceston's size – large enough to produce significant numbers of talented performers: compact enough to give them a sense of performing for the city as a whole, and for

audience members to feel represented, involved. Crucially,

people with performing skills and interests coming to Launceston to work in other areas, as teachers, academics, radio broadcasters, medical doctors, were quickly spotted, made vital connections, joined performance groups. This presentation will recount the stories of key figures in Launceston theatre over the decades, trace their contributions to the dynamics of performance activities, then reflect briefly on recent developments. Hopefully some of these living legends will be able to attend this celebration of their lives!

Barbara Hatley came to Launceston in 2000 as Head of Asian Studies at the University of Tasmania where she now has a Professor Emeritus position. With much experience of Indonesian performance, her major field of research, she was intrigued by the richness of the Launceston theatre scene, attended many performances, made contact with theatre groups and interviewed key participants.



Girl performers at play in *Calendar Girls*.

Education, Flagellation and Recreation: The Story of Royal Park Floods & Flood Protection

By Catherine Pearce



Royal Park during the devastating 1929 floods. Launceston Collection, TAHO, LPIC 84/1/78.

Most Launcestonians would have heard about the great flood of 1929, but perhaps fewer know about the city's long history of floods. Early maps show the lower parts of Royal Park as marshland surrounded by mud-banks.¹ In the winter of 1809 settlers experienced their first flood that inundated low-lying areas to the depth of about three feet.² Before 1929 significant floods were recorded in 1852, 1863, 1889, 1893 and 1905.³ It seems Launceston has been flooding since the dawn of time.

The 1929 flood had a devastating effect on Royal Park. The Yacht Club lost half its fleet, the beach was wrecked, the bowling club pavilion was dumped in the middle of the green, and boats, logs and debris were spread all over the lawns. Subsequently a scheme to protect the city was developed, based on a 1959 report by Professor Munro, Chair of Civil Engineering at UNSW. The following year the Launceston Flood Protection Board was established by Act of Parliament. For eight years it worked to construct training walls and levees.

On 31 May 1969 at 2pm the three-million-dollar scheme had its first test – the worst flood to hit Launceston since 1929. In the words of historian John Reynolds:

Thousands of people watched the unforgettable scene in the late winter afternoon when the wild flood waters met the River Tamar, and instead of breaking the banks, they saw them contained by the levees. Launceston had entered into a new era when disastrous flooding need no longer be feared.⁴

¹ TAHO, PWD266/1/975

² Jill Koshin, 'Flood Protection' in *On the Tide* 3, p. 50

³ Eric Millington, 'The 1893 Flood' in *On the Tide* 2, p. 152

⁴ John Reynolds, *Launceston: History of an Australian City*, p. 188

Education, Flagellation and Recreation: The Story of Royal Park The Victoria Swimming & Turkish Baths

By Marion Sargent



Victoria Baths, c.1897. E Cummings, QVMAG 1991_P_0556.

The Victoria Swimming and Turkish Baths were built on a portion of the Depot Grounds next to the Court House. They were designed by the City Surveyor, Charles St John David.

The foundation stone was laid by the Mayor, Robert Sadler, on 23 June 1897 in honour of Queen Victoria's record reign of 60 years.

In September 1897, the Council accepted the tender from John Todd Farmilo to build the baths, which had an ornate brick façade. There was a large pool for men, a smaller one for the ladies out the back, private bathrooms for those who didn't have baths at home, and Turkish baths.

A four-roomed caretakers' cottage was located on the eastern side. But, when the Council first advertised for a caretaker not one tender was received. In April 1898, they recommended that married couples should apply at a salary of £104 per annum plus quarters, fuel and electric light. 133 applications were submitted and James McIver was selected.

The grand opening took place on 20 August 1898 by the then Mayor, Samuel Sutton, who had been opposed to the baths on financial grounds, but was now pleased to see them completed.

For 51 years, they were enjoyed by people – learning to swim, taking part in competitions, for life-saving training and having fun on the rings, trapezes and spring-boards. Jockeys used the Turkish baths to reduce their weight before race meetings.

From the mid-1930s the Launceston Technical College was lobbying for the Victoria Baths site to be made over to the school. By this time, they were considered backward. Mixed bathing was no longer taboo, there was a call for heated water and more natural light, the pools were too small, and there was nowhere to sunbake.

When Mr EA Gee gave a talk to the Launceston Fifty Thousand League at the National Café in October 1934 he said that "Cleanliness was next to Godliness. Yet there were 30 churches in Launceston and only one small swimming pool".¹

By mid-1945 the Baths were transferred to the Education Department for extensions to the Technical College. The façade, offices and caretakers' cottage were finally demolished in April 1949 to make way for new classrooms. The smaller pool remained until the 1960s – it was known as the Tech swimming pool.

¹ *The Examiner*, 30 October 1934, page 6

From the Past

***Launceston Advertiser*, Monday 5 April 1830, page 2.**

Lt-Gov. Colonel George Arthur's visit to Launceston

On Thursday last, about 5 o'clock P. M. His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor and Family, accompanied by the Venerable the Archdeacon Broughton, arrived in Launceston. A salute in their honor was fired from the battery in the Barrack yard; the troops were under arms at Government House to receive them. After alighting, His Excellency examined the troops, and conversed for a few minutes with Captain Donaldson.

On Friday and Saturday His Excellency was employed in surveying and planning various improvements (the want of which we have often pointed out), and we have it from good authority, that several useful and highly desirable improvements are to be proceeded with instantly; amongst others, a good Wharf, a Bridge, a Custom House, a Female Factory, and though last on the list, not the least wanted, a quantity of stone is to be forthwith laid on our Streets. Tenders for which, as will be seen by the Inspector's advertisement, are to be forwarded to his office by Wednesday next.

***Cornwall Chronicle*, Saturday 3 June 1848, page 2.**

Muddy Charles Street

Caution. — The public is cautioned not to drive any vehicle through that part of Charles-street, near the 'Sportsman's Hall', after dark, as the bog is so very deep that it will inevitably swallow everything which unfortunately gets within its vortex.

***Launceston Examiner*, 16 December 1886, page 3.**

Launceston Industrial Exhibition

A successful Industrial Exhibition was held in the Pavilion, Town Park, Launceston during December 1886 and January 1887.

When the scheme originated it was intended to hold an exposition of local articles on a very limited scale, but the project grew as it progressed. The townspeople entered heartily into the subject, and so much support was forthcoming that the Pavilion was soon found to be too small to hold the articles to be exhibited. It was then determined to build an annexe, running from Tamar street to the Pavilion, and although the increased cost scared some members of the syndicate out of the scheme, the remainder closed in and determined to carry out their work. The space in the annexe, 130ft. by 20ft., was soon taken up, and a lean-to added to the pavilion, and also engaged, whilst dilatory intending exhibitors have had the mortification of being shut out...

Near the platform stands a curiosity, which last evening attracted much attention, viz., an old tower clock, which is the property of Mr. W. Newman, of George-street, and exhibited by Messrs F. and W. Stewart. But for the moving of the pendulum and the "musical tic-tac," it would be difficult to recognise in this relic a recorder of time. The clock was manufactured some 70 years ago by a prisoner in the Launceston Gaol. It was erected in the tower of St. John's Church but the dawn of better times had its affect upon this as well as other things and in 1835 it was removed and replaced by the present clock, subsequently falling into the hands of the father of its present owner. It is not by any means a work of art, but considerable mechanical skill was manifested in its construction, which is said to have cost the Imperial Government some £1,500, though a great portion of this sum was expended on material which was misappropriated.

*A longer article about the old clock of St John's can be found in the *Launceston Examiner*, 31 December 1886, page 3. Robyn Lake has written a biographical piece on William Newman Senior. This will be included in George Fuller's *Recollections of Launceston 1836-1847*, due to be published on a dedicated website later this year.

Advance notice of LHS activities for 2017

Launceston Historical Society meetings are held at the meeting room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk, on Sundays at 2pm, unless otherwise notified.

19 November Christina Henri, *Engaging the convict legacy: art's role as a means of understanding*

Members' Column

New members:

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Wendy Burbury, Kris Gatenby, Vicki McCormack, Anne O'Connor, Diane Paech, Lynette Ross, Ray Smith and Lindsey Tyrrell.

Archaeology Group:

Email enquiries to John Dent: john.dent@pda.com.au.

Other items and events of interest

George Town & District Historical Society: Meetings take place at The Grove, George Town, at 7.30pm. 18 September 2017, *Show & Tell? Quiz or Fun Night*; 16 October 2017, *AGM / 20th Anniversary Talk & Film*. Email: info@gtdhs.com.

Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Meetings take place in the Royal Society Room, Custom House, TMAG, Hobart at 8pm. 12 September 2017, Rex Kerrison & Erika Shankley, *A Maritime Evening: The May Queen & Tasman Lighthouse*; 10 October 2017, Dianne Snowden, *After the Orphan Schools*. Website: <http://www.thra.org.au>; Email: info@thra.org.au.

Launceston Rotary Club of Launceston Open Doors: Sunday, 17 September, adults \$15.

Beaconsfield Anglican Church Floral Festival: Saturday, 4 November, 1pm, Jenny Gill will be speaking on Alexander North, an outstanding church architect.

LGH Historical Committee: Sunday, 26 November, 2pm, Dan Huon, *Gordon Cumming's War: the Australian Army Medical Corps on the Western Front 1916-1919*, Lecture Theatre, level 2, Launceston General Hospital. Part of the annual medical seminar series. Free afternoon tea.

Launceston Historical Society

President	Marion Sargent	6331 4890
Vice-President	Catherine Pearce	
Minute Secretary	Catherine Pearce	
Correspondence Secretary	Prue McCausland	6327 2540
Treasurer	Leonie Prevost	6391 5511
Newsletter Editor	Marion Sargent	6331 4890
Publicity Officer	Terry Neal	0414 199 276 6343 7940

Postal address: PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Email: launcestonhistory@gmail.com Website: www.launcestonhistory.org.au

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/launcestonhistory>

Deadline

Items for the next *Newsletter* should be sent to the editor by **1 Nov 2017** at marionsargent@bigpond.com or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.