



# Launceston Historical Society Inc.

## Newsletter No 177

April 2021

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PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

*Bringing together people with an interest in history*

### Welcome to the Committee Members for 2021

Thank you to everyone who attended the Annual General Meeting on Sunday 21 February 2021. This was the first meeting we have had since everything closed after the John West Lecture in March 2020. John Dent took the Chair while the new committee for 2021 was elected.

Marion Sargent was re-appointed President for her tenth term. The other executive committee members are Kelli Schultz (Vice-President), Leonie Prevost (Treasurer and Public Officer), Prue McCausland (Correspondence Secretary), Catherine Pearce (Minute Secretary). The re-elected committee members are Karin Lê, Brad Wood, Sue Bell, Wendy Roberts and Carol Fuller. We welcome one new recruit, Jordana Lory, who came on board after the AGM. Thank you to James Smith who has stepped down from the Committee.

The 2020 Annual Report can be read online: <http://launcestonhistory.org.au/publications/annual-reports/>

### AGM Guest Speaker: Nigel Burch



**Robert Smith and speaker Nigel Burch at the February meeting.**

#### Sir Richard Dry

After the AGM on 21 February Nigel Burch presented a riveting tale on Sir Richard Dry, son of a convict, who became the first Tasmanian born premier and knight. He was immensely popular and cavorted between his homes in Hobart and Quamby attending dances, gambling, and flirting with women. He preferred the company of men, and his marriage to Clara Meredith was one of convenience. She proved to be the perfect hostess and diplomat. When Dry died in office in 1869 three funeral

services were held in his honour – in Hobart, Launceston and Hagley.

Thousands of people gathered to watch his cortege pass through villages all along the route. A legend in his own lifetime, he is still remembered today.

This was the first of our lectures to be streamed live on the day by Zoom and is also available to watch here: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AvArbseKo3FQhv4B6E9\\_r80cooxPumDA/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AvArbseKo3FQhv4B6E9_r80cooxPumDA/view?usp=sharing)

## John West Memorial Lecture: Dr Eric Ratcliff



Lecturer Dr Eric Ratcliff and Professor Dom Geraghty.

The 33<sup>rd</sup> John West Memorial Lecture, held at UTAS, Newnham campus on Friday 12 March by Dr Eric Ratcliff, on *John West's Launceston, how it came and where it went* was excellent. He presented a detailed analysis of the development of Launceston from the earliest days of British settlement to now with numerous illustrations.

President Marion Sargent was MC, Professor Dominic Geraghty from UTAS introduced Dr Ratcliff and Wendy Roberts offered a vote of thanks. Numbers were limited to 60 this year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Through our website you can listen to the Lecture on the UTAS [Island of Ideas SoundCloud channel](#) or on the City Park Radio Podcast under Community Stories, or read the text with pictures as a pdf: [launcestonhistory.org.au/activities/previous-john-west-memorial-lectures](http://launcestonhistory.org.au/activities/previous-john-west-memorial-lectures).

## April Meeting

**Sunday 18 April 2021 – 2pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum at Inveresk**

**John Dent OAM & Darren Watton, Kings Meadows Road Station**

The Kings Meadows Road Station was built by the VDL Government from August 1836 to house convicts building the Evandale to Launceston water scheme and Hobart Road. It was abandoned about 2½ years later. Its location since then has been a mystery despite a plan being prepared in 1838. The lecture will outline the hunt to rediscover its location and the archaeological dig that took place to uncover its secrets.

**John Dent** is currently President of The West Tamar Historical Society and is a member of Launceston Historical Society, the Friends of The Launceston Mechanics' Institute and is on the committee of the Tasmanian Family History Society (Launceston). John has published numerous articles and given many talks on various aspects of northern Tasmanian history and has recently co-authored the book on York Town. He is a registered land surveyor in private practice and has used his surveying skills to uncover many aspects of our earliest history. John was awarded an OAM in 1996 and is a member of Rotary.

**Darren Watton** is an archaeologist with Southern Archaeology. He has extensive experience in all aspects of archaeological work and heritage management, specialising in historical research, archaeological assessments, method statements, heritage surveying, monitoring, excavation, cataloguing and report writing.



**Felt hat found at the Kings Meadows Road Station November 2018.**

## LHS Archaeology Group: Annandale Dig

Southern Archaeology will be leading an archaeological dig at *Annandale*, Pateena Road from 12-17 April. Learn what happens on a real dig in five trenches in the floor of a two-storey stone building shell and nearby house. \$50 per day, \$35 half day, \$200 five days. For LHS members only. Contact John on [john.dent@pda.com.au](mailto:john.dent@pda.com.au)

## May Meeting

Sunday 16 May 2021 – 2pm at the Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum at Inveresk

**Derek Binns, *John Francis: Royal assassin, Launceston builder***



In 1842 John Francis attempted to shoot Queen Victoria. Tried and sentenced to death, he was transported to Van Diemen's Land. Upon obtaining a Conditional Pardon he established a construction firm in Launceston and for over a decade won tenders to build some iconic landmarks, including the Town Hall (pictured). What led to Francis trying to shoot the Queen? Why was he transported rather than executed? Which of his Launceston buildings still stand? Learn about Launceston's very own Royal assassin.

**Derek Binns** has been working at the Launceston Library for 30 years and his last 10 years have been spent working with Local History. In 2017 he learned about John Francis when the Library received a request for information from the BBC. He continued researching and presented a public lecture in 2018

for the Library's initial series of Lunchbox Lectures. In April 2019 he had a paper published in the Tasmanian Historical Research Association's *Papers and Proceedings*.

## LHS Activities for 2021

Launceston Historical Society meetings are usually held at the meeting room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk, on the third Sunday of the month at 2pm, unless otherwise notified.

Bookings are essential as the Museum meeting room can accommodate 70 people only. Either email [launcestonhistory@gmail.com](mailto:launcestonhistory@gmail.com) or phone the secretary Prue McCausland on 03 6327 2540 to register. Free for members, visitors are welcome to attend at \$4 each.

The meeting will be livestreamed on Zoom. A link will be provided to members closer to the date.

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| <b>20 June</b>      | <b>Dr Alicia Dennis</b> , Pugh Day Lecture, <i>The Role of Anaesthetists in Safe Childbirth in Australia – from pioneers to present day</i>                                  |
| <b>18 July</b>      | <b>Alan Townsend</b> , <i>If these walls could talk</i>  |
| <b>15 August</b>    | <b>Robert Smith</b> , <i>William Henry Clayton: an amateur's perspective of the legacy of the architect in Tasmania and New Zealand</i> (To be held in the Auditorium)       |
| <b>19 September</b> | <b>Dr Nic Haygarth</b> , Mead, Smith, von Stieglitz Lecture, <i>Who killed the Tigers? A preliminary analysis of applicants for the Tasmanian thylacine bounty 1888–1909</i> |
| <b>17 October</b>   | <b>Nigel Burch</b> , <i>Sir John Evans</i>   |
| <b>1 November</b>   | <b>Excursion to Swansea</b> (Monday long weekend)  |
| <b>21 November</b>  | <b>Graeme Williams</b> , <i>Around Tasmania with Spurling</i>  |

Earlier talks are available on our website, so catch up on ones you missed or listen to them again: <http://launcestonhistory.org.au/lhs-lecture-series/>

## New Members

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Lyn Dent, Jenny Dornauf, Robin Dornauf, Gret Gordon, Narella Harker, Katrina Hill, Julieanne Mani, Kathy Ranson and Felix Ratcliff.

## Membership Form

A membership form is available on our website: [Membership Form.pdf](#). Sunday meetings are free for LHS members, and \$4 for visitors. As most of the Sunday Lectures were postponed in 2020, financial memberships have been rolled over to 2021.

## Our History

These stories on Launceston's history have been contributed by our members. You are welcome to send articles of 470 words, with at least three pictures, to the president [marionsargent@bigpond.com](mailto:marionsargent@bigpond.com). Read the stories in *The Sunday Examiner* or on [Facebook](#).

We are preparing a book with 100 of these stories, each with a photograph – more information to come.

No	Date	Page	Author	Title	Topic
167	7 Feb 2021	17	Dianne Cassidy	Raising a brood of children common form of exploitation	Baby farm scandal
168	14 Feb 2021	17	Nigel Burch	Dredging up ill-fated history of Tamar's trusty Ponrabbel II	Ponrabbel dredge
169	21 Feb 2021	23	Nigel Burch	Slate caused the rise and fall of Bangor	A saga of slate at Bangor
170	28 Feb 2021	23	Rod Oliver	Swapping prison for photography	William Cawston, photographer
171	7 Mar 2021	21	Kelli Schultz	Haven for state's vulnerable youngsters	Glenara, Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys
172	14 Mar 2021	21	Di Cassidy	Was double death a case of lethal love?	Bestwick arsenic poisoning
173	21 Mar 2021	21	Rod Oliver	Train spotting made child's play with help from Rotary club	Locos in City Park
174	28 Mar 2021	21	Nigel Burch	Crookes a politician and a gentleman	The worthy John Crookes
175	4 Apr 2021		Nigel Burch		AWH Humphrey, 1804
176	11 Apr 2021		Julian Burgess		Leslie William Smith

## Other Items and Events of Interest

**George Town & District Historical Society:** The Grove at 7.30pm, 19 April 2021, Mike McCausland, *William Lushington Goodwin*; 17 May 2021, *In their own words, Macquarie's 1821 visit – 200 years – Bigge Letters*. Email: [info@qtdhs.com](mailto:info@qtdhs.com)

**Tasmanian Historical Research Association:** Legacy Function Rooms, 159 Macquarie St, Hobart on the second Tuesday of each month at 8pm. 13 April 2021, Margaret Reynolds, *A Tasmanian Life*; 11 May 2021, Anne McConnell, *The history of scenic tourism and recreation on kunanyi/Mt Wellington*. Email: [info@thra.org.au](mailto:info@thra.org.au)

**National Book Council:** Launceston Library, 21 April 2021, 1pm. *Poetry Voices*. Local poets Jane Williams, Kathleen Green, Richard Chinn and Yvonne Gluyas will read a selection of their poems and talk about what inspires their writing + AGM; Royal Oak Hotel, Brisbane Street, 19 May 2021, 5.30-8pm, Martin Flanagan, *The Centre Square*, enjoy a meal, and conversation chaired by Cameron Hindrum. RSVP: [nationalbookcounciltasmania@gmail.com](mailto:nationalbookcounciltasmania@gmail.com) or [rocives@gmail.com](mailto:rocives@gmail.com)

**Westbury & Districts Historical Society:** Sunday Strolls starting at 1pm, \$5 per tour. 18 April 2021, Catholic Cemetery; 2 May 2021, Sports ground cricket stumps; 23 May 2021, William Street, Catholic Church. Contact Amanda on 0467 097 791 or [amanda.m.taylor@bigpond.com](mailto:amanda.m.taylor@bigpond.com)

**Tasmanian Family History Society (Launceston Branch):** Elderly Citizens Club, 16 Landale Street, Invermay, 21 April 2021, 2.30pm, AGM with guest speaker Pip Nielson, oral history interviewer, transcriber and life story writer. Email: [ltntasfh@bigpond.com](mailto:ltntasfh@bigpond.com)

**Royal Society of Tasmania (Northern Branch):** Meeting Room, QVMAG Museum, Inveresk, 1.30pm. 25 April 2021, Dr Christine Hansen, *Telling the stories of kanamaluka*; 23 May 2021, Dr Jennifer Lavers, *Impact of plastics on marine wildlife*. Email: [apcachris@gmail.com](mailto:apcachris@gmail.com)

## The arrival and departure of the dredge *Platypus*



The dredge *Platypus* can still be seen at the ships' burial ground at Tamar Island. (Photo: Rod Oliver)

### **Cornwall Chronicle, Saturday 19 June 1847, page 2:**

STEAM DREDGE.— The River about our wharves is fast filling up; the wharves falling down and are altogether in a state of shameful dilapidation; notwithstanding a revenue is derived from the Port of some £40,000's year, its necessities are not considered, nor the smallest outlay of money permitted for the accommodation of its trade; the last accounts from Sydney announce that a sum of £5,000 has been placed on the estimates for the ensuing year to provide a steam dredge for the harbour of Port Phillip. Cannot our Government be shamed into doing justice to the Port of Launceston?

### **Launceston Examiner, Tuesday 29 March 1898, page 6:**

#### DREDGING THE TAMAR, ARRIVAL OF THE *PLATYPUS*.

The dredge *Platypus*, which was recently purchased by the Marine Board for dredging the Tamar, reached port, in tow of the tug *Wybia* yesterday afternoon at 4.30, and her arrival caused a considerable amount of interest, a very large number of persons, including many prominent citizens, being on the wharf when she berthed. When it became known that the *Wybia* had met with some rather rough weather during the latter part of the voyage Captain Bradley, the harbour master, who had charge of the tug, received many congratulations on the excellent trip he had made. The *Platypus*, on entering the port, was gaily decked with bunting, and the fact of a dredge being honoured in this manner caused no small amount of amusement. The *Wybia* accomplished her mission in quick time, as she only left here on Monday last.

### **The Examiner, Wednesday 22 June 1932, page 6:**

#### SINKING OF *PLATYPUS*.

Acting under instructions from the Marine Board, the Harbour Master (Captain W. A. Clark) yesterday took the old bucket dredger *Platypus* down the river and sank her in the vicinity of Tamar Island. This dredger was built over 50 years ago for the Melbourne Harbour Trust, and about 30 years ago she was purchased by the Launceston Marine Board. She did good service in dredging the river until replaced by the *Ponrabbell*, but for many years she has been lying idle. Little dismantling was done, as the risk of dropping portion of the heavy ironwork through the thin plates was too great. The dredger was therefore towed to the "burial ground" and sunk by opening the sea cocks.

## York Town: A respectable looking village



**'A view of Yorkton, Port Dalrymple', by JW Lewin 1809, copied from GP Harris 1808. (Mitchell Library, SLNSW)**

The long-awaited book on the history of York Town is now available for sale. Co-authored by John Dent, Helen Phillips and Alma Ranson over a 20-year period, the book gives a detailed account of the British occupation in 1804 of northern Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). An area at the head of the western arm on the Tamar River, Port Dalrymple, was the site chosen by Lieutenant-Governor William Paterson as his command post and the seat of government. He established the township of York Town, with a guard house, barracks, gaol, hospital, store-house, gardens, including a botanical garden, and cemetery. Paterson built houses for the people in his care including one for himself and his wife Elizabeth. This was the third settlement with a lieutenant-governor in

command that had been established from Sydney, the first being Norfolk Island (1798) and the second Hobart in southern Tasmania (1803).

Until now the exact number of people at Port Dalrymple has not been known nor have all the names of these at least 205 souls. Recently discovered documents have revealed details of the trials and achievements of the settlers at York Town and how they survived to continue and found the town of Launceston. The writers share the story of the people and the settlement of York Town until its abandonment; included are biographies of all people known to have been at York Town until 1808. This is followed by the later history of York Town and its neighbours. The book covers 215 years of history in the Port Dalrymple area.

Published by the West Tamar Historical Society, the book has 470 pages, pictures, maps, index, and bibliography. Cost is \$60, postage \$13 extra, but collection points are available. Contact John Dent to place an order, [john.dent@pda.com.au](mailto:john.dent@pda.com.au) or 0408 133 656.

### Launceston Historical Society

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### Deadline

Items for the next *Newsletter* should be sent to the editor by **1 June 2021** at [marionsargent@bigpond.com](mailto:marionsargent@bigpond.com) or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.