

# Launceston Historical Society Inc.

## Newsletter No 198

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PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

*Bringing together people with an interest in history*

### Welcome to the Committee Members for 2025

Thank you to everyone who attended the Annual General Meeting on Sunday 16 February 2025.

John Dent took the chair while the new committee for 2025 was elected.

Marion Sargent was re-appointed President. The other Executive Committee members are Sophie Appleby (Vice-President), Leonie Prevost (Treasurer and Public Officer), Catherine Pearce (Minute Secretary), Prue McCausland (Correspondence Secretary). The re-elected Committee members are Wendy Roberts, Brad Wood, Sue Bell, Carol Fuller, and Phil Page. We welcome one recruit, Franky Del Vecchio, after Karin Lê stepped down after eight years.

The 2024 Annual Report can be read online: <http://launcestonhistory.org.au/publications/annual-reports/>

### AGM Guest Speakers: Jai Paterson & John Dent



**Speakers Jai Paterson & John Dent**

They describe what people ate and wore, their occupations, where they lived, how they spoke, and the inside of hotels. It provides brilliant first-hand accounts under oath of disputes, assaults, stealing, embezzlement, insubordination and mutinous conduct that occurred in the fledgling penal colony.

The Index can be purchased for \$20 from the TFHS rooms at The Stables, Tamar Street, Launceston on Tuesdays from 10am to 3pm, or through their website [Tasmanian Family History Society Launceston](http://Tasmanian Family History Society Launceston). Transcriptions of individual cases can be bought for \$10 each.

The guest speakers, Jai Paterson and John Dent, presented a riveting account of their project with the Tasmanian Family History Society (TFHS) transcribing and indexing Launceston Court Records from 1827, 1828 and 1832.

There are 103 cases, and 460 names in the court records. These include convicts, free men and women, publicans, magistrates, ships' captains and crews.

The depositions were heard before justices who had no training but were considered the elite of society. The amount of detail is astounding. The personal testaments by the accused, witnesses and prosecutors give an insight into people's lives at the time.



**V-P Sophie Appleby & Helen Stuart**

## John West Memorial Lecture: Hamish Maxwell-Stewart



On 16 March 2025, we had a full house for the excellent 37<sup>th</sup> John West lecture delivered by Hamish Maxwell-Stewart pictured on the right with Michael Quinlan. It was illustrated with numerous diagrams and charts reflecting the in-depth study Hamish is undertaking on convict records through Digital History Tasmania. He drew on a body of work by Monika Schwarz and Michael Quinlan on unfree workers.

Convicts sent to Australia before 1840 were either assigned to free settlers or worked for the government, embodied in this quote: “The British stole time from thieves in order to steal a continent.”

After providing an overview of the big picture of convictism, Hamish focussed on Notman’s road gang. Robert Melross Notman was a notorious superintendent in charge of convicts building the main road between Launceston and Perth. Notman’s gang had the highest number of absconders, so Hamish asked why they were running.

It appears that Notman’s chain gang was created as a temporary penal station between those at Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur – somewhere to send the secondary offenders. It was a horror story.

It had the highest rate of punishment in NSW and VDL. Hamish argues that the convicts were taking collective action and planned campaigns against the harsh working conditions, lack of food, inadequate clothing and severe punishments for minor offences. Notman’s men had a reputation for building the best roads, but they were desperate characters who took industrial action to escape their brutal treatment.

## April Meeting: Stefan Petrow

***‘Our first baptism of fire’:***

***Northern Tasmanian soldiers in the 12th Battalion at Gallipoli, April 1915***

**Sunday 13 April 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk**

Everyone knows that Australian soldiers fought in World War One and that horrific casualties were suffered at Gallipoli in 1915, but the details of what Tasmanian soldiers experienced is not so well known. On 13 April Stefan Petrow will fill in those details and tell us about why Northern Tasmanians enlisted for war, what training they received in Tasmania, Egypt and Lemnos to prepare them for battle and, where possible in their own words, what happened to them in April 1915 and how it affected their families. Stefan will be drawing on his latest book *Tasmanian Anzacs: Those Who Served, Their Families and the Impact of World War One. Volume 1: The 12th and 52nd Battalions* (2024).

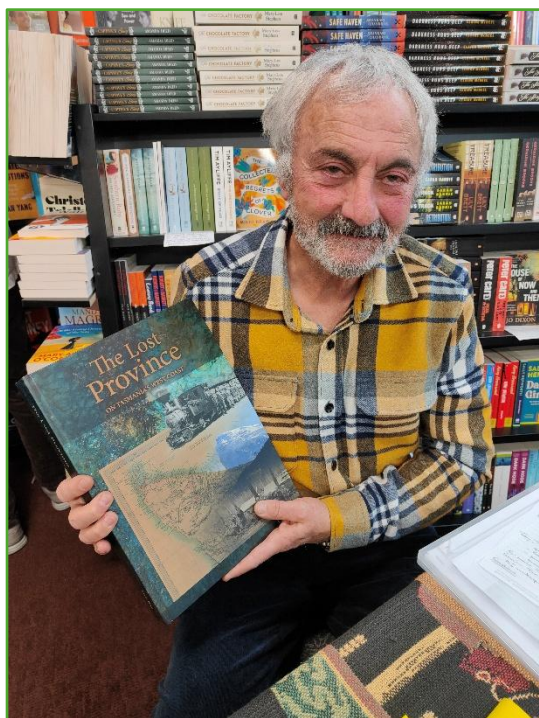


**Stefan Petrow at the Launceston launch of *Tasmanian Anzacs* & B Company, 12th Battalion, Brighton, 1914.**

## May Meeting: Lou Rae

### *The Lost Province on Tasmania's West Coast*

Sunday 18 May 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



*The Lost Province on Tasmania's West Coast* begins with the early European visitation to the western shores of Van Diemen's Land. Occupation by the early settlers was marred by its difficult and dangerous access, by ship or overland, with dense vegetation, numerous mountain ranges and a lack of resources impeding progress. It was not until the quest for gold in the 1850s, and then the might of the Broken Hill Proprietary tycoons in the late 1880s, that the silver fields of Zeehan soared in value and the vast copper riches of Mt Lyell were developed. In the 1890s the building of railways, tramways and wharf facilities sparked a mining revolution where fortunes were won and lost. Behind the mining and industrial revolution was the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company. Given its share dividends, profits and company control were directed entirely through Melbourne, the Lyell population found it easier to travel to Melbourne for holidays, household goods and services. Hence, Queenstown was considered an 'outer suburb' – or the 'Lost Province' – of Melbourne!

**Lou Rae** is the author of eight books, mainly about mining and railways on Tasmania's West Coast.

## June Meeting: Sophie Appleby

### *Harlequin Bob: The "chequered and eventful" life of Robert Cowburn*

Sunday 15 June 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk

Sophie's presentation will explore the "chequered and eventful" life of early convict and ancestor Robert "Harlequin Bob" Cowburn, a cotton spinner from Lancaster, England. In 1819, Robert was convicted of larceny and sentenced to seven years' transportation. His arrival in Van Diemen's Land set off a series of events that would see his escapades live on for generations in Tasmanian folklore. What began as a routine ancestor search has evolved into a six-year journey to unravel the myths, truths, and lies of Harlequin Bob's mysterious life. Was he a British soldier? A constable on the Black Line? A bushranger? A murderer? Or just a manipulative storyteller? Either way, in the words of his obituary, "were his life written, as he himself has frequently said, it would 'a tale unfold'."

**Sophie Appleby** is a Heritage Officer for the City of Launceston, as well as a writer and multidisciplinary artist. She is the Vice-President of the Launceston Historical Society and the President of the Book Council of Lutruwita/Tasmania. A sixth-generation Tasmanian, her interest in family history began over a decade ago when she embarked on a search for belonging and reconnection to her Scottish and Irish heritage. She hopes to share her passion for Tasmanian history and inspire a new generation of historical researchers through the creative arts, community projects, and social media.



## LHS Activities 2025

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. Admission is free for members, and \$5 for visitors. Bring some cash for a chance to win a prize in the raffle.

<b>20 July</b>	<b>Alison Alexander</b> , <i>Rogues and Scoundrels in Launceston</i>
<b>17 August</b>	<b>Richard Mack</b> , <i>James Austin of Austins Ferry</i>
<b>21 September</b>	<b>Steve Radford</b> , <i>Reginald Munro: Aviator Extraordinaire</i>
<b>19 October</b>	<b>Darren Watton &amp; John Dent</b> , <i>Perth Cottage Archaeological Dig</i> (Mead, Smith, von Stieglitz Memorial Lecture)
<b>27 October</b>	<b>Annual Spring Excursion</b> , Convict Penitentiary & TMAG, Hobart (Monday)
<b>16 November</b>	<b>Bradley Wood</b> , <i>Debunking the Myth. The True Story of Waubadebar</i>
<b>24-28 November</b>	<b>Archaeology Dig</b> , Mt Ireh, Longford (Monday to Friday)

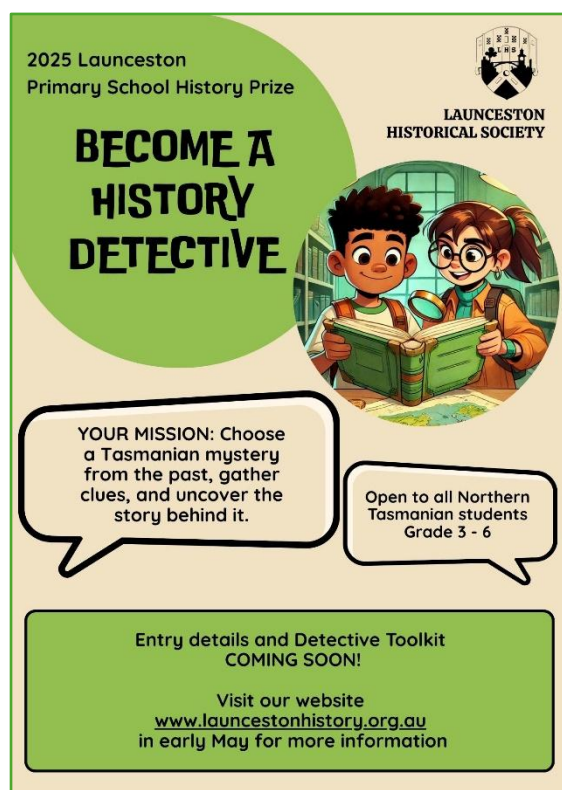
The **audio recordings** of earlier talks are available on our website, so catch up the on ones you missed or listen to them again: [LHS Lecture Series Audio](#)

## New Members

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Charlotte Faine & Adel Yousif, Lynne Fitzgerald & Rod Hunt, Lorriane Frankling, Macel & Steve Johnston, Danny McCormick, Robyn & Nicholas Reaburn, Alison Rolleston, Dianne Stebbing, Astrid Vogel-Reed & Sean Reed, Brian & Brenda White, Angela Williams.

## Membership Form

Membership forms are available on our website in both PDF and Word formats. Sunday meetings are free for LHS members. **Renewals for 2025 were due on 31 December 2024.** We encourage members to pay by direct debit into our Commonwealth Bank of Australia account: BSB 067-003 A/C No. 2804 8638, by cheque in the mail, or by cash or EFTPOS at the next meeting you attend. Thank you to those members who have renewed their membership for 2025. Make sure you are financial to remain on the email list.



2025 Launceston  
Primary School History Prize

**BECOME A HISTORY DETECTIVE**

LAUNCESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**YOUR MISSION:** Choose a Tasmanian mystery from the past, gather clues, and uncover the story behind it.

Open to all Northern Tasmanian students  
Grade 3 - 6

Entry details and Detective Toolkit  
COMING SOON!

Visit our website  
[www.launcestonhistory.org.au](http://www.launcestonhistory.org.au)  
in early May for more information

## Primary History Prize 2025

The LHS Primary History Prize opens on 28 April and completed entries are due by 17 October 2025. Encourage your children and grandchildren from northern Tasmania in grades 3 to 6 to become a history detective. Their mission is to choose a Tasmanian mystery from the past, gather clues and uncover the story behind it. Some suggestions are a person, an object, a place, a building, or family history.

The judging criteria will concentrate on the originality of the topic, accuracy of research, acknowledgment of sources, and visual and language presentation. Vouchers from Petrarch's Bookshop will be awarded to the best entries. Guidelines and entry forms will be sent to schools and placed on the LHS website.

For further information contact Carol Fuller: phone 0419 116 636 or email [carol.fuller@bigpond.com](mailto:carol.fuller@bigpond.com).

On 11 March 2025 Tania Rattray MLC highlighted in Parliament the LHS History Prize presentation at the Evandale Primary School in 2024. She is proud of what children in her electorate have achieved.

## Launceston History Centre



The Open Day on 7 February 2025 at the old Kindergarten at 56 Frederick Street, Launceston was a great success. About 100 people came through the door for tours and talks by John Dent, who explained the vision for the Launceston History Centre.

When Gus Green attended the kindergarten many years ago the children were given fairy bread, so that was the refreshment served. The opportunity to look over the building brought back fond memories for past students and teachers.

The first working bee at the LHC was held on Sunday 23 March. An enthusiastic group of eight supporters cleaned up some of the yard.



## Spring Excursion to Hobart

This year's excursion will be to the Convict Penitentiary and TMAG in Hobart on **Monday 27 October**.

The bus will leave the Bowls Club car park, Kings Meadows at 8am. We will have morning tea at Ross (own expense) and arrive at the Hobart Penitentiary for our 11am tour. The site is closed on Mondays so we will have it all to ourselves! There will be time after the guided tour to look up your convicts at the Convict Memorial Hamish Maxwell-Stewart has told us about. There are steep and narrow stairs to tunnels and uneven sandstone floors plus plenty of steps throughout the site. It is also cool, so bring a jacket.

Lunch (own expense) will be at the Museum Courtyard Cafe with free time to explore the Museum. At 3pm we'll leave for Launceston with a comfort stop at Campbell Town.

The price is \$95, or \$65 for National Trust members. Please send us an Expression of Interest.

## 'Our History' Articles List

Have a look at What's New on our website. A list of all the 341 '**Our History**' articles is available via the link to [OUR-HISTORY-STORIES.pdf](#). Published in *The Examiner* from 3 December 2017 until 28 December 2024, most of these are available on the Launceston Historical Society [Facebook](#) page. Many of the earlier ones only have a link to *The Examiner* website. We are still hoping to collate the first 100 into a book!

## Other Events of Interest

**Tasmanian Family History Society (Launceston Branch):** AGM with Julian Burgess speaking about the history of 56 Frederick Street, the proposed location of the Launceston History Centre. It will be held on Wednesday 16 April 2025, 2-4pm at the Elderly Citizens Club, 16 Landale Street, Invermay. Free parking is available behind the hall, with access off Queen Street. Members and non-members are welcome to attend. Entry is free and bookings are not required. Afternoon tea included.

**George Town & District Historical Society:** The Grove, George Town, 7.30pm. 21 April 2025, Des Wootton, *An interview with Don Heather: An interesting life*; 19 May 2025, History book evening by members; 16 June 2025, Steve Radford, *Reg Munro*. Email: [info@gtlhs.com](mailto:info@gtlhs.com).

**Book Council of Lutruwita/Tasmania:** Launceston Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Sunday 13 April 2025 at 2pm, Anna Maynard, *Dancing with bees*, free admission; Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 1.15pm, Adam Martin, *The Gulch*; Wednesday 18 June 2025 at 1.15pm, Jane Rawson, *Human/Nature*. Members free; non-members \$5. Inquiries: [bookcouncilt@gmail.com](mailto:bookcouncilt@gmail.com).

**Royal Society of Tasmania (Northern Branch):** Meeting Room, QV Museum, Inveresk on the fourth Sunday of each month at 1.30pm, \$7 for non-members. 27 April 2025, Lynette Ross, *The House That William Paterson Built: The Story of Launceston's Government Cottage*; 25 May 2025, Robert Anders, *How to Better Manage Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes in Tasmania*; 22 June 2025, Richard Eccleston, *Northern Tasmania's Changing Population: Implications for Policy, Planning and the Future of the Region*. Inquiries: Lois Beckwith, [loisbeckwith27@gmail.com](mailto:loisbeckwith27@gmail.com)

**Tasmanian Historical Research Association:** Legacy Function Rooms, 159 Macquarie St, Hobart on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. 13 May 2025, Penny Russell, [Eldershaw Memorial Lecture - Family archives, feminist readings](#); 10 June 2025, Keith Corbett, [Rocks and people in the story of geology in Tasmania](#); 8 July 2025, Michael Stoddart, [Tasmania's southern horizon: exploration, whaling, science, diplomacy](#). Email: [thra@thra.org.au](mailto:thra@thra.org.au).

**Oral History Workshop:** Jill Cassidy will conduct an oral history workshop at the Glenorchy Library on Saturday 24 May, 10am to 4.45pm for Oral History Tasmania. It will cover all aspects of oral history practice. Topics include the value of oral history, the use of equipment, preparation for an interview and interview technique, along with ethics and alternatives to transcription. There will be a demonstration of OHT's digital recorder, available for hire, and participants will do practice interviews and listen to interview excerpts.

Cost of the workshop is \$40 for members of OHT, \$60 for non-members of OHT and \$30 for students. Enquiries: Jill 0418 178 098, Lana 0435 861 927 or [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au). Prior registration is essential. For details and to register go to <https://events.humanitix.com/oral-history-workshop>.

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### Deadline

Items for the next *Newsletter* should be sent to the editor by **1 July 2025** at [marionsargent@bigpond.com](mailto:marionsargent@bigpond.com) or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.

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