

Launceston Historical Society Inc.

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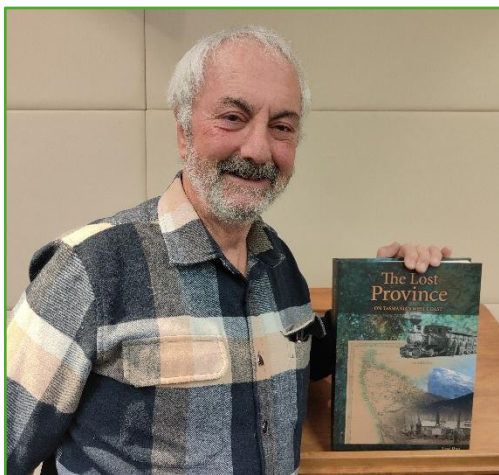
Bringing together people with an interest in history

'Our first baptism of fire'

On 13 April 2025 **Stefan Petrow** presented a lecture on Northern Tasmanians in the 12th Battalion at Gallipoli, April 1915. He drew on research for his book *Tasmanian Anzacs*, in which he strives to find stories of what happened and how they felt, using diaries and letters of the soldiers and their families. He asked why men enrolled to fight. There is little evidence from the soldiers themselves, but they joined to support King and Country, because their mates did, they would be paid to travel abroad, and it was the "right thing to do". Recruits travelled to the Pontville Training Camp where they were subjected to long marches, drill movements and rifle shooting. The first contingent left on the *Geelong* in October 1914 and sailed to Egypt before embarking for their baptism of fire at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. They were confronted by sheer cliffs, inadequate food, exhaustion, insufficient ammunition, and many were killed. The myth that it was a glorious making of a nation is far from the truth. It was a bloody battle that left families anxiously waiting for months to find out what had happened to their loved ones.



Marion Sargent and Speaker Stefan Petrow.



The Lost Province

On 18 May 2025, **Lou Rae** spoke about the inspiration, research and writing of his latest book, *The Lost Province on Tasmania's West Coast*. His love of bushwalking and fossicking around long-gone settlements and mining areas piqued his interest in how people lived on the West Coast in the early days. Lou has included interesting stories and numerous photos and maps to illustrate his 408-page book. Using the writings of early explorers, settlers and newspapers, the book covers Aboriginal settlements, the convict period, the drive to find gold and other minerals in the 1850s and the evolution and battle for dominance of the Mount Lyell Company and the Broken Hill Proprietary Company. There was bribery, treachery, feuds, false job tenders, working over the government and taking advantage of the isolation. Mt Lyell battled with poor management, subterfuge, unionism, the White Australia policy and the disastrous mine fire in 1912. The book goes up to the Depression years in the 1930s when a road was finally pushed through to the West Coast making it more accessible to the rest of Tasmania. The newspapers wrote of the 'Lost Province', as they discovered that all the profits from the mines were going straight to Melbourne!



Charles St John David or RT Sargent?

On Sunday 15 June 2025, **Marion Sargent** presented a fascinating story on the City Engineer & Surveyor, known as Charles St John David. After 11 years in Brisbane, he was appointed to the Launceston Council on 1 March 1892. He was a widely respected “excellent and faithful” servant for 32 years, until his death on 17 July 1924. Among the numerous projects he undertook were the Duck Reach Power Station and associated infrastructure, the Victoria Swimming and Turkish Baths, the Cataract Gorge tea rooms and Alexandra Suspension Bridge, the layout and buildings at the Carr Villa Cemetery, and the tramways and tramsheds. He was also involved with several community groups. Marion revealed that David was born in Chepstow, Wales on the 7 August 1855 as Richard Thomas Sargent. He had a thoroughly practical training in his father’s business and set up his own business as a builder, joiner, undertaker and general contractor in January 1876. Richard married Katie Brant in August 1877, and their son Percival Gower Sargent was born in May 1878. Then Richard left Wales and sailed to Moreton Bay, Queensland, arriving in January 1880, as Charles David. The mystery remains as to why Uncle Dick, the ‘wild one’, left his home, but he was given a civic funeral and buried near the entrance of Carr Villa, in the tranquil memorial park that he designed in his adopted home of Launceston. *Sophie Appleby will deliver her lecture on ‘Harlequin Bob’ in 2026.*

July Meeting: Alison Alexander

***‘A low state of public morals in Launceston’:
Van Diemen’s Land in 1820 from the Bigge Report***

Sunday 20 July 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



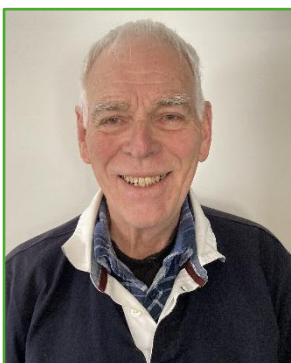
In 1820 Commissioner Bigge interviewed 80 inhabitants for his report on Van Diemen’s Land to the British Government. The transcripts of the interviews give a fascinating insight into the young colony.

Alison Alexander was born and educated in Tasmania and has spent her career writing on many aspects of Tasmanian history. She is involved in several historical groups including the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Female Convicts Research Centre and its sister body, Convict Women’s Press, and is patron of the Tasmanian Family History Society. Alison has published more than 30 books on a wide range of subjects, her most recent being *Land of rogues and scoundrels: starting from scratch in Van Diemen’s Land*.

August Meeting: Richard Mack

James Austin: of Beehives and Ferries

Sunday 17 August 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



James Austin (1776-1831) – landless labourer, convict (by choice?), explorer (?), landowner, inn proprietor, and licenced ferry operator. A *Calcutta* convict at Port Phillip Bay in 1803, with his cousin John Earle, he was a member of Collins’ Hobart Town settlement. On gaining their freedom the cousins were granted land at Glenorchy and Old Beach, and in 1813 James built a small cottage which still stands. Following a fatal accident on the river in 1818, the government licenced a ferry to the cousins. The ferry business flourished, and the cousins built inns on each side of the river. A bluestone home was built, later named *Roseneath House*. James’ success encouraged family members to join him, assist in running the ferry, and settle in Van Diemen’s Land, and later the Port Phillip District. James died in 1831, and his ferry was replaced by the Bridgewater Causeway in 1836.

Richard Mack is descended from James’ niece, Anna Austin.

September Meeting: Steve Radford

Reginald Munro: Aviator Extraordinaire

Sunday 21 September 2025 – 2pm, Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



Courtesy of Furneaux Museum, Emta.

Reg Munro was born in Launceston in 1914 and was educated at the Technical College. His father had a grocery and bakery shop in Invermay. Reg had an early desire for speed and became Tasmanian motorcycle champion three times in a row in the 1930s. At the same time, he gained his pilot's licence and was involved in the running of the Tasmanian Aero Club at Western Junction. Upon war breaking out he was rejected by the RAAF and paid his own way to the UK where he joined the Air Transport

Auxiliary (part of the RAF). After the war Reg returned to Launceston and was the Manager/Chief Flying Instructor for the Aero Club until 1961 when he established his own charter business. So, along the way we have an adventurer and highly skilled aviator who rescued sick people from the islands (sometimes in the dark and bad weather), responsible in the main for the establishment of the Royal Flying Doctors Service in Tasmania! The tenacity and heroics, which he would never boast about, makes for the story of a remarkable man!

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 pay the required amount into the LHS CBA account BSB 067-003 A/C No. 2804 8638 and email Leonie Prevost at leonie.prevost@bigpond.com or Marion Sargent at marionsargent@bigpond.com to secure your seat on the bus.

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.

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| 19 October | Darren Watton & John Dent , <i>Perth Cottage Archaeological Dig</i> (Mead, Smith, von Stieglitz Memorial Lecture) |
| 27 October | Annual Spring Excursion , Convict Penitentiary & TMAG, Hobart (Monday) |
| 16 November | Bradley Wood , <i>Debunking the Myth. The True Story of Waubadebar</i> |
| 24-28 November | Archaeology Dig , 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](#)

Primary History Prize 2025

The LHS Primary History Prize entries are due by 17 October 2025. Encourage children 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. Vouchers from Petrarch's Bookshop will be awarded to the best entries. Guidelines and entry forms are on the LHS website: [History Prizes | Launceston Historical Society Inc.](#)

New Members

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Ian Blaydon, Neil & Judi Clarke, John Heathcote, Veronica Keach, and Rosalie Triolo.

Membership Form

Membership forms are available on our website in both PDF and Word formats. Sunday meetings are free for LHS members. We encourage new 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 a monthly meeting.

Other Events of Interest

George Town & District Historical Society: The Grove, George Town, 7.30pm. 21 July 2025, Show and tell evening by members; 18 August 2025, John Watts; 15 September 2025, Jeannette Thompson, *Bushrangers*. Email: info@gtlhs.com.

Book Council of Lutruwita/Tasmania: Launceston Library, 2nd floor. Wednesday 23 July 2025 at 1.15pm, Julian Burgess, *St John's Church*. Members free; non-members \$5. Inquiries: 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 July 2025, Jonathan Mulford, *Orthopaedic Research in Launceston, Clifford Craig Foundation*; 24 August 2025, Lisa-Ann Gershwin, *Luminous Tasmania: Nature that glows in the dark*; 28 September 2025, Leanne McLean, *Education in Tasmania: Improving outcomes and the role of the University of Tasmania*. Inquiries: Lois Beckwith, loisbeckwith27@gmail.com

Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Legacy Function Rooms, 159 Macquarie St, Hobart on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.30-9pm. 12 August 2025, Theresa Sainty, *Interpreting Palawa Ngini voices from the past through colonial documents: Staying faithful to culturally embedded meaning*; 9 September 2025, Imogen Wegman, *Edward Ford Bromley's disappearing New Town*; 14 October 2025, Alan Townsend, *Scandal & graft: the outrageous career of George Duffield*. Email: thra@thra.org.au.

Launceston Historical Society

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Deadline

Items for the next *Newsletter* should be sent to the editor by **1 Oct 2025** at marionsargent@bigpond.com or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.