



Launceston Historical Society Inc.

Newsletter No 203

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PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Bringing together people with an interest in history

Welcome to the Committee Members for 2026

Thank you to everyone who attended the Annual General Meeting on Sunday 15 February 2026.

Mike McCausland took the chair while the new committee for 2026 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), Franky Del Vecchio (Correspondence Secretary). The re-elected Committee members are Wendy Roberts, Brad Wood, Sue Bell, Carol Fuller, and Phil Page. We welcomed one new recruit, Judith Blayden, when Prue McCausland stepped down after 12 years as correspondence Secretary.

The 2025 Annual Report can be read online: <http://launcestonhistory.org.au/publications/annual-reports/>

AGM Guest Speaker: Sophie Appleby



The first Launceston Historical Society meeting for the year, on Sunday 15 February 2026, began with a short AGM followed by **Sophie Appleby** delivering a vivid account of her convict ancestor Robert Cowburn, also known as “Harlequin Bob”.

Sophie has spent several years researching her 15 convict ancestors. “Harlequin Bob” had the most interesting story, so Sophie has delved deeper into his past. Robert, a cotton spinner, born in Lancashire, England on 22 January 1801, died of debility aged 72 in the Sorell district of Tasmania on 3 August 1873.

Sophie’s research has uncovered some gruesome finds. “Harlequin Bob” was transported to Van Diemen’s Land for robbing an old farmer. His life was one of violence and drunkenness. Robert escaped from Macquarie Harbour with the Pieman, Thomas Kent, and walked south to Port Davey where they were rescued in a wretched state, he endured multiple lashes, assaulted and murdered people (but was acquitted), and may have resorted to cannibalism. His obituary in *The Mercury* under the heading “Our Paupers” claims he was a soldier, absconder, a constable, and took part in the Black Line. Sophie wanted to find out how much was true, and she has concluded that much of it was. She did indeed unfold a “a chequered and eventful life.”

John West Memorial Lecture: Brad Williams



Brad Williams with Marion Sargent, President

Brad Williams presented an excellent talk on the exhumations at the former Queenborough Cemetery at Hutchins School, Hobart on Sunday 15 March.

The private cemetery was in operation from 1875 until 1925 when it was purchased by the Hobart City Council due to scandalous behaviour by the Cemetery Trust workers. There were approximately 13,000 to 15,000 people buried there, but only half were included in the burial registers. By 1957 it had become overgrown and people wanted to get rid of the eyesore. Some of the monuments were relocated, and 1,100 bodies were exhumed in 1964 to enable the Hutchins School to be built there.

Sixty years later Hutchins planned a redevelopment in their grounds and were shocked when heavy machinery uncovered human remains. The developers contacted Brad to say they had “a bit of a problem” and

were told they had a big problem. Building works stopped in April 2024 and archaeologists moved in to carefully record and excavate each body.

A total of 1,981 were exhumed and although it wasn't a requirement, Brad and his team identified 90% of the people. There were 1,400 adults, 435 infants and 146 children. They were reburied at Cornelian Bay on 11 June 2025, each small coffin bearing a stainless-steel name plate. Families and denominations were grouped together where possible. This excavation was only a part of the former cemetery; there are still many more bodies lying underneath the Hutchins schoolyard.

Brad concluded his lecture with an overview of other hidden cemeteries in Hobart and Launceston. Afternoon tea was enjoyed after the lecture. Listen here: [Our Podcast - Launceston City Park Radio](#).

April Meeting: Rosalie Triolo OAM FRHSV

‘Our Tasmanian Schools and the War’: School, Family and Community Experiences, 1914-18 and Beyond

Sunday 19 April 2026 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk

A photograph of Perth State School, taken in 1916 and which her grandmother held dear, sparked a lifetime interest for Rosalie. While many Australian historians have focussed understandably on the military events and consequences of the Great War for soldiers, nurses, families and local communities, fewer have adopted a school community lens. Such a lens reminds us that children, as well as teachers and education authorities, experienced the war, including the deaths and woundings of people they knew and loved.



This highly visual presentation of Tasmanian photographs, artefacts and Education Department sources foregrounds experiences rarely considered. Beginning with one family, the Perth school and its local community, it presents the experiences as true for other Tasmanian families, schools and communities. Attendees will receive a free publication produced for the Anzac Centenary by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Distributed to every Australian school and library, it was written by Rosalie and captures the above.

Rosalie Triolo is President of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, and a member of Launceston Historical Society and the Tasmanian Historical Research Association. She is a RHSV Councillor and past-President of the History Teachers' Association of Victoria. Through the latter, she has worked with the Tasmanian History Teachers' Association. For over 25 years at Monash University, she helped develop specialist teachers of History, numerous from Tasmania. She is much awarded for her World War I research.

May Meeting: Dianne Cassidy

Launceston Girls' Industrial School

Sunday 17 May 2026 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



The Launceston Girls' Industrial School was established in 1877 by leading members of Launceston's Protestant community as a way of helping to get young girls away from a life of vice, and to train them in domestic duties.

Girls who were abandoned by their parents, others whose parents were incarcerated, sick or deceased, and even girls labelled uncontrollable were all able to be admitted, providing they had the signature of two justices and were not of the Catholic persuasion.

Constantly struggling for funds in the early days, the school relied on generous donations of cash and food from the community. As it was a private institution, Government help was distinctly lacking early on and the north versus south rivalry for funding was very much in evidence.

This talk will cover the inception of the school, the various locations it operated from, and the success or otherwise of some of the girls.

After a 34-year career working for Libraries Tasmania, **Dianne Cassidy** now spends her retirement researching the more unknown and unheralded histories of Launceston people and organisations. She has for many years been involved with research for Digital History Tasmania and the Female Convicts Research Centre. She is the author of several books including: *Cypress Street Cemetery*; *Charles Street General Cemetery 1841 to 1925*; and *On the Town: Prostitutes and Brothels of 19th Century Launceston*.

June Meeting: Julian Burgess

St John's, Launceston's First Church 1825-2025

Sunday 21 June 2026 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk

In 1824 the northern headquarters of Van Diemen's Land was relocated from George Town to Launceston and in the same year the foundation stone was laid for the town's first church. The first Divine Service was held in the nearly completed building on 16 December 1825 by the courageous Reverend John Youl who was the first ordained minister to serve in northern Van Diemen's Land.

The Church of England was the church of the British Empire and St John's became the mother church in northern Tasmania. Throughout the 19th century its ministers and church officials were influential in the life of the region. The clock in its tower served as the town clock for more than 80 years and it was the birthplace of the Launceston Church Grammar School, said to be Australia's oldest continuously operating school. While it provided spiritual guidance and support for Launcestonians its congregations in return provide monetary and material support for the expansion of the church into the imposing building it is today.

Over 200 years St John's Church has been witness to the ebb and flow of life in Launceston. It is the oldest public building in the city and the last surviving church of four built around Prince's Square in the 1800s. But St John's played a wider role in the Church of England in colonial Australia as part of a powerful force of Evangelical Christians in the development of our country. Julian Burgess' history of St John's Church was commissioned as part of the church's bicentenary celebrations last year.

Julian Burgess is a retired journalist and former Associate Editor of the *Examiner* newspaper in Launceston. He edited and wrote many of the *Examiner's* annual historical supplements between 2006 and 2014 and has written hundreds of articles on Tasmanian history.

He was a regular contributor to the Launceston Historical Society's Our History series and is the author of more than a dozen non-fiction books. He is also vice-president of the Launceston History Centre which is in the process of being established in the historic former Launceston Infant School building in Frederick Street.



St John's Anglican Church, Launceston, 2023. Photo: Marion Sargent

LHS Activities 2026

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.

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](#)

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| 19 July | Alistair Scott , <i>Urchin Convicts</i> |
| 16 August | Anne Green , Threats to Tasmania TBC |
| 20 September | Jen Thompson , <i>On the foraging trail of Thomas Jeffrey, cannibal bushranger</i> |
| 18 October | Eleanor Casella , <i>Ross Female Factory: Convict Mothers and the Nursery Ward</i> |
| October/November | Excursion TBA |
| 15 November | Darren Watton & John Dent , <i>Archaeological Dig at 56 Frederick Street</i> |

New Members

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Deborah Cook, Lynette Davidson, Fay Goold, Stephen & Deidre Loring, Cheryl Slater, Des & Lorraine Wootton. New members for whom we don't have any details: Robert & Valerie James.

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 or by cash or EFTPOS at a monthly meeting.

Archaeological Dig at Braemar Cottage

An archaeological dig at John Lamont's *Braemar Cottage* on the edge of Heritage Forest uncovered lots of interesting artefacts during the week of 23-27 March 2026. Southern Archaeology undertook the excavations for the City of Launceston who owns the 1820s cottage. Launceston Historical Society Archaeology Group members and La Trobe University students volunteered their time to investigate several trenches around the house. Photos by Marion Sargent.



Other Events of Interest

George Town & District Historical Society:

At *The Grove*, George Town, 7.30pm. 20 April 2026, Craig Dixon, *Matthew Flinders Re-burial*; 18 May 2026, *Show & Tell evening by members*; 15 June 2026, John Watts, *Goose Island and Lighthouse*. Email: info@gtlhs.com.

Book Council of Lutruwita/Tasmania:

Launceston Library, Level 2, at 1.15pm. Members free; non-members \$5. 20 May 2026, TBA. 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. 26 April 2026, Anne Clifton, *Glass Manifesto: Method & Madness*; 24 May 2026, Dr Rebecca Bradfield, *Tasmanian Law Reform Institute's Role and Activities*; 28 June 2026, Dr Vaughan Cruickshank and Dr Scott Pedersen, *The Importance of Movement: How Are Australians Active and What Else Could We Do?* Inquiries: Pippa Cotton, pippa.cotton@outlook.com.

Tasmanian Historical Research Association:

Legacy Function Rooms, 159 Macquarie St, Hobart on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. 14 April 2026, Graeme Broxam, *Competition vs Cooperation: The Holyman Story*; 12 May 2026, Helene Chung, *A Tasmanian Life*; 9 June 2026, Kathy Rundle, *Early Quakers in Tasmania and the establishment of The Friends School*. Email: info@thra.org.au.

Federation of Australian Historical Societies:

The FAHS Newsletters and eBulletins are full of stories from member societies around Australia that show a diverse and active history community. Read the Newsletters online: [Newsletters and eBulletins — Federation of Australian Historical Societies](#)

Australian Heritage Festival:

Showcasing the richness of our natural, built and cultural heritage, the National Trust works in partnership with event organisers from across Tasmania to offer access to a variety of free and ticketed events designed for the young and young at heart. In 2026, the Australian Heritage Festival runs from **18 April - 18 May**, celebrating the theme 'Change'. We invite you to explore the stories that have influenced our communities, consider how each generation reinterprets Australia's diverse cultural heritage – breathing new life into places, objects, and traditions of the past – and imagine where it can take us next. Website: [TAS | Australian Heritage Festival](#)

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Deadline

Items for the next *Newsletter* should be sent to the editor by **1 July 2026** at marionsargent@outlook.com or PO Box 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250.

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