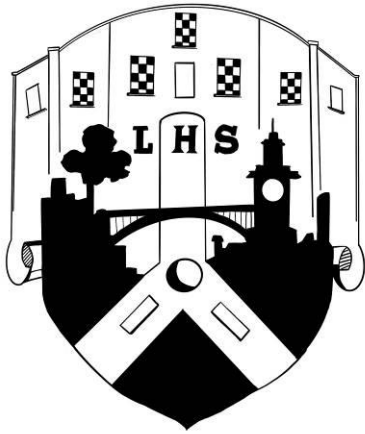




Launceston Historical Society Inc.

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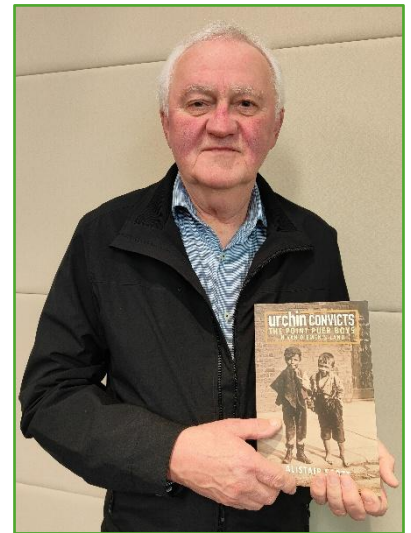
PO BOX 1296 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Bringing together people with an interest in history

Urchin Convicts

Dr Alistair Scott presented a fascinating talk on his book *Urchin Convicts* at the Launceston Historical Society meeting on Sunday, 19 July 2026. Not much remains of the juvenile penal establishment at Point Puer today, but between January 1834 and February 1849 it was a place of incarceration for 2,100 boys. More than 700 were there at any one time. The idea was to clear Britain's streets of boys who were thieves, pickpockets and homeless orphans and send them to Van Diemen's Land where it was hoped they would be reformed and become 'useful and worthy members of the colony'. However, Point Puer, with its harsh discipline and limited trade training failed in its purpose. After the expiration of their sentences the young men were turned out on the streets of Hobart 'homeless, friendless and penniless'. Understandably, most of them did not fare well in the colony. Alistair highlighted some of the more successful men, such as John Wright at Longford, Humphrey Sherriff at Deloraine and Golden Ashton of Ashton's Circus fame. The remarkable story by a former Point Puer boy who's autobiography was published in *The Empire* newspaper on 16 October 1867 was most likely Thomas Loveday, who eventually married, had eight children, worked as a shoemaker and was caretaker of St David's Cemetery.

Alistair has recently won two awards for his book – the Kay Daniels Award for Convict History and Heritage organised by the Australian Historical Association and the Dick and Joan Green Family Award for Tasmanian History.



Threats and fear in Tasmania



At the Launceston Historical Society meeting on Sunday, 16 August 2026 **Dr Anne Green** presented an extremely interesting paper on the threats and fear of invasion that Tasmanians have felt from the early colonial days to the present. In the early 1800s it was feared that the French would settle the southern parts of Australia and Van Diemen's Land. The British colonists set up batteries of guns pointing down the Tamar and the Derwent to defend their newly taken lands. The Crimean War in 1854 led to concerns that the Russians might attack. Tasmania felt more vulnerable when the British troops left in the 1870s. The threat was real during World War I when German raiders cruised the waters off Tasmania. Mines were laid in Bass Strait, and one was found washed up on a beach near Falmouth in 1918. Tasmania's isolation did not mitigate the fear of attack during World War II. By then there was the risk of attack from aeroplanes, and the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) and Civil Defence Legion (CDL) were established to protect the population and infrastructure from bombs. Air raid lookouts were set up; underground shelters and trenches were constructed and cleaning up after mock bombings was practised. Thankfully, Tasmania was spared from military action.



On the forager trail of Thomas Jeffrey

Dr Jeanette Thompson told a tale of convicts, bushrangers, violence, murder and cannibalism at the Launceston Historical Society meeting on Sunday 20 September 2026. Thomas Jeffrey (1791-1826) led a short and brutal life after being sent to sea by his father, a butcher, at 12 years of age. After the trauma of taking part in the Battle of Trafalgar and suffering abuse and violence in the ranks, he was rejected by his family when he returned to Bristol. He embarked on a life of strong drink and crime, was convicted of burglary at Nottingham and was transported to New South Wales in 1820. He took to the bush with five others; two were killed and eaten by Jeffrey and the rest of the gang.

Jeffrey was sent to Van Diemen's Land in 1822 and was transferred to George Town in 1824 where he became a constable and overseer. He used a pickaxe to make a hole in the wall of the watch house so the inmates could join him for a drink at the Ship Inn. Jeffrey absconded, was flogged, assigned to hard labour, and in April 1825 was appointed flagellator and keeper at the Launceston Gaol. Jeffrey, along with John Perry, James Hopkins and Edward Russell fled the gaol on 14 December 1825.

The gang terrorised the country from Launceston, Cocked Hat, Evandale, the Nile River, then walked five miles north of Launceston where the murders continued, on to George Town and Low Head and south again where Russell was killed and eaten by his starving companions. Jeffrey was captured on 22 January 1826 at Davies' hut, Rose Rivulet in the White Hills area. Jeffrey confessed to seven murders and the monster was hanged along with Perry, Matthew Brady and two others on 4 May 1826. Hopkins was executed the following day.

Jeanette asked, was Jeffrey a felon or a forager? Was he a product of the brutal society he was living amongst? Jeanette wrote the book *Bone and Beauty: The Ribbon Boys' Rebellion*, the story of a convict uprising at Bathurst, NSW in 1830.

October Meeting: Anne Batt

Sixth Mead, Smith, von Stieglitz Memorial Lecture with afternoon tea

Taking a chance: fortune and failure in colonial Launceston

Sunday 18 October 2026 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



John Cameron Esq JP (1806-1866), merchant, of Launceston set up shop in Launceston in 1828 aged just 22. While initially his retail shop, Manchester House (later Mr. Cameron's) was his main business, he rapidly moved into wholesale (with a liquor licence), exporting primary produce and owning a lot of property. He built or bought shops and houses in the town centre to lease to other businesses, and he was also a money lender. Through all these activities, John interacted with many other early settlers. This paper looks at some of the interactions between John Cameron and his tenants, John Brown (furniture maker and undertaker), Mrs Jane Little (milliner and haberdasher), the ever-contentious William Lushington Goodwin, and retired army officer, William Wood.

Anne Batt returned to live in Tasmania in 2020 after 35 years in Western Australia. Choosing to settle in the north of the island (for the third time in her life), Anne felt the impact of Launceston's history preserved in its beautiful buildings. Although she knew her forebear, John Cameron, had lived a successful life in early Launceston, Anne determined to explore his activities through Trove, TheList and various other primary sources. Anne has used her sleuthing skills well developed as a professional librarian in academic libraries in Tasmania and Western Australia.

November Meeting: Darren Watton & John Dent

Launceston History Centre Dig - 56 Frederick Street

Sunday 15 November 2026 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk



At the end of November 2025, the Launceston History Centre held a community dig at the site of its future home at 56 Frederick Street. Over 50 people participated under archaeologists Darren Watton from Southern Archaeology and Bee Newman. Four trenches were excavated to target a possible earlier building identified from old survey plans and aerial photographs. The master of the school lived on site for a period, and it was this house that was specifically targeted.

A large amount of building material was found but no actual foundations of buildings were identified. Many artefacts were discovered during the dig which tell a story in themselves. This talk will outline the history of the site, what the archaeology uncovered and how it has

changed our understanding of the site. Several important and interesting finds were unearthed over the course of the week.

John Dent is convenor of the LHS archaeology group and has recently retired as a registered land surveyor. John is a member of many historical organisations in Launceston. He has extensively researched Launceston's history, has written numerous book chapters and newspaper articles, and has given many talks on aspects of northern Tasmania's history.

Darren Watton is the principal archaeologist with Southern Archaeology. He has extensive archaeological experience in Tasmania and interstate. Darren has supervised five community digs for the LHS and volunteers some of his time to enable LHS to offer the opportunity for its members to participate in a hands-on dig.

October: Spring Excursion

Behind the Scenes - Historic Farms & Agriculture

Wednesday 14 October 2026, Oatlands

This year we are joining a McDermott's Coach Tour travelling to the Oatlands district to visit Brian Fish's historic bullock farm where Tasmania's rural heritage has been carefully preserved through Brian's passion, knowledge and dedication. This provides a unique opportunity to experience Tasmania's rural history through the stories, skills and traditions that have been lovingly preserved at the farm. Seats are limited, price \$145.00. [McDermott's | Behind the Scenes - Historic Farms & Agriculture](#)

LHS Meetings

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](#)

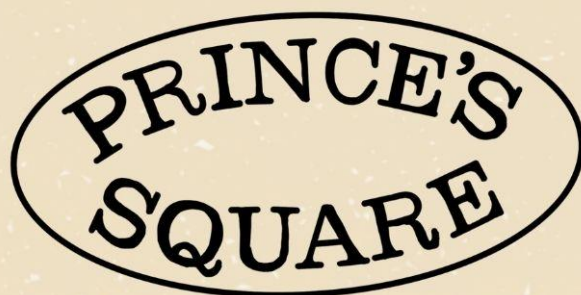
New Members

The President and Executive welcome to our Society the following new members: Mel Bessell, Maree Davenport, Luke Smith, Pat & Steve Weir, Ian Williams and a corporate member Launceston By Foot. New members for whom we still don't have any details: Robert & Valerie James.



**LAUNCESTON
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New ways to engage young people in local history



LHS has conducted the Primary History Prize for 17 years, hoping to encourage young people to become involved in historical research. This competition has run under the auspices of schools, encouraging teachers to include the competition in their annual history curriculum.

Over the years hundreds of primary students have delved into family, local, Tasmanian and Australian history and produced some remarkable projects, PowerPoints and videos. The judges have learned much from these budding historians and been amazed at the inventiveness of some presentations.

Sadly, the curriculum has become more restrictive and teachers more overburdened. Several of our most dedicated teachers who have promoted historical research over the years have now retired, and involvement in the competition has declined as a school activity.

In 2025 the competition was redesigned to make it more of a public or family activity. In 2026 the activity has been simplified again to make it even less school based and more family orientated. The new format

is a 4-page A5 activity pamphlet which will be available at the Launceston Library, the Launceston Visitor Information Centre and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

The first of these booklets features a **treasure hunt based in Prince's Square**. It includes a bingo sheet depicting various historic buildings and monuments in and around the square which the participants can identify. Each item also has an associated question which can be answered by information available in Prince's Square.

Similar history activity pamphlets are being considered for City Park, St John Street and other historic features and places around the city. We hope that this style of historical 'research' will appeal to young people, and with their parents or grandparents, spend time in the park, or around the city, learning about local history. *Carol Fuller*

Advance Notice: John West Memorial Lecture, Stefan Petrow

Bastions of Working-Class Education or of Middle-Class Culture?

Mechanics' Institutes in Tasmania to 1871

Sunday 21 March 2027 – 2pm Meeting Room, Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk

The originators of mechanics' institutes in Britain from 1821 and the Australian colonies from 1827 believed in the power of education to improve the lives of the working classes. Some historians argue that mechanics' institutes were more necessary in Australia before 1850 than in Britain because the Australia colonies were new societies that lacked educational opportunities and needed an educated and skilled workforce to build their nascent economies, especially in a remote penal colony like Van Diemen's Land. But did mechanics' institutes in Van Diemen's Land achieve their initial aspiration of educating workers or is it more accurate to say that they catered to the cultural yearnings of the middle class? To answer that key question, this paper will focus on the origins, aims and progress to 1871 of Australia's first mechanics' institute, the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institute, formed in 1827, and the more enduring Launceston Mechanics' Institute, formed in 1842.

Stefan Petrow is an Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Tasmania. He first became interested in mechanics' institutes in 1979 and is the author of *Going to the Mechanics: The History of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute 1842-1914* (1998) and *A Priceless Gift: The Launceston Mechanics' Institute and Public Library 1906 to 1948* (2023).

New committee members needed for 2027

Four members of our committee will be standing down at the end of this year. We are therefore inviting expressions of interest from members who may be willing to step forward and join the committee. We meet once a month just before the general meeting. If you are curious to know more, please let us know. We hope some of you will consider taking this opportunity to play a more active part in the future of our society.

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.

Other events of interest

George Town & District Historical Society:

At *The Grove*, George Town, usually 7.30pm. 19 October 2026, AGM at 7pm + 2021 Kerry Finch interview with Chlo Martin about refurbishing *The Grove*; 16 November 2026, TBA; 7 December 2026, Christmas function. Email: info@gtlhs.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. Inquiries: Pippa Cotton, pippa.cotton@outlook.com.

25 October 2026, Lachlan Nicolson, *Educating for democracy during dizzying times*. Elvin Fist Lecture.

22 November 2026, Samantha Bramich, *Sleep, biomarkers and brain health: Looking earlier to improve outcomes*

Tasmanian Historical Research Association:

Legacy Function Rooms, 159 Macquarie St, Hobart on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm.

13 October 2026, Alison Alexander, *Not so squeaky clean after all: William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*

10 November 2026, Louise Zarmati and Bradley Wood, *Who was Wauba Debar?*

8 December 2026, Bill Lawson, *The Tasman Bridge disaster and its aftermath*

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](#)

200th Anniversary of Mechanics' Institutes in Australia:

A reception, walks, visits, seminar and the John West Memorial Lecture from 19 – 21 March 2027 in Hobart, Ross and Launceston. See the John West abstract above on page 5 and more information about the full program in the July 2026 Newsletter. To receive email updates please advise John Dent at ident8@bigpond.com

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Deadline

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