

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN 'THE OLD WOOLSTORE', 1 MACQUARIE STREET,
HOBART, 13 NOVEMBER 2012 AT 8PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 50 members and friends.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous meeting were read, and approved as a true record.

Business: The Secretary referred to oncoming lecture concerning the impact of earthquakes in Japan, and films concerning the Ukraine in 1932-2 and 'The First Fagin'.

Speaker: The chairman introduced Jan Kuplis as one who had pursued many interests in education, the media, and family history. Tonight she was to speak on a remarkable Tasmanian, Tom Pickering.

Ms Kuplis began by remarking that Tom himself had spoken to THRA in 1980. That was one mark of the respectability that jazz had acquired in recent years, he having played a great part in Tasmania's jazz history. His niece she had become immersed in this story. As musician Tom sang (some critics applauding, others deploring), played, and composed; his further skills were as author, cartoonist, and librarian. Born in South Australia he grew up in Hobart and already as a teenager joined with Ian Pearce and others in a passion for jazz. His first job was with the ANZ Bank, initially in Hobart then in Westbury. By now World War 2 had begun, and call-up duly came. Tom spent most of it in Tasmania, on clerical and educational tasks. Ms Kuplis interspersed her presentation with musical tracks, the first 'Ace in the Hole', an early Pierce-Pickering item. The most renowned of their combinations was the 'Barrelhouse Four'.

Later in the 1940s Tom married, his domestic background characterised as 'Montrose Mayhem'; often he would withdraw to play the clarinet in the acoustic-perfect bathroom. Each morning he would get the family into its routine, and then go off to work, confident that the day would bring no greater challenge. Inept at all things mechanical, he was remembered by Pierce as leaving 'a trail of bruised microphones from Hobart to Brisbane'.

The next excerpt to be played by Ms Kuplis was Tom's composition 'A Late Hour', a national prize-winner in 1965. She then spoke further about his comic writing and drawing. He wrote as he spoke, having great verbal facility and wit, sometimes devising a Tasmanian-style dialect; memories of Westbury provided some of his characters. 'Potty Profiles' presented sketches of fantastic people created by Tom's imagination. They included 'Euphrasia Armpit', 'Grandiloquent Pulp', 'Alice B Topless' and 'Gobble McFluster'—each having appropriate cartoons. With all this, Tom's writing included analytical essays.

'The Damnedest Horn' was a further excerpt. It might have been played in Francois Fouché's famous underground den in Hobart, memorialised by Pierce-Pickering as 'Louis's Coffee Lounge'. Pierce's beautiful 'Maison Bleu', with Tom on clarinet, likewise invoked Ma Dwyer's pub in Salamanca Place. Their work included entertainment of troops in Vietnam, and in later times a seventeen-year stint at Wrest Point. Eartha Kitt and Louis Armstrong admired their work, signalling its international recognition. They kept alive in Tasmania a jazz style that had withered in its American home. Between them they wrote about a hundred pieces. Their fifty years' musicianship was celebrated at Hobart's Theatre Royal in 1988. Tom early argued for jazz to be taught at the Tasmanian Conservatorium; a Churchill Fellowship further marked his career. At his death he left a vast mass of material. This Ms Kuplis had brought to order. Much would go to TMAG, while in the near future several books by and about him were to appear. A final excerpt was "Flanagan's Shenanigans".

After questions, the President thanked Ms Kuplis, and the meeting closed at 9:20 pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President

