

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2012 AT 8PM.

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair, and about 65 members and friends.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous meetings were read and approved.

Business: The President referred to the forthcoming excursions to Bothwell and Ouse, and to forthcoming talks at Port Arthur.

Speaker: The President introduced Tony Marshall as one who had recently retired after many years' involvement with literary heritage in Victoria and Tasmania. His subject tonight was 'Ardour and Impatience: Nathaniel Lipscomb Kentish in Van Diemen's Land 1841-9'.

Mr Marshall began by recognising pertinent studies by earlier historians, notably Dan Sprod. His own particular concern was to capture 'the whole man' of his subject. Kentish was born in 1798, and had schooling at Christ's Hospital and Winchester before training as a surveyor. He migrated to New South Wales to take up an appointment in that colony's Survey Department. There he soon quarrelled with his superiors, and turned to frenetic activity in various fields. Kentish then moved to South Australia, that pattern recurring. Next came Van Diemen's Land where in 1841 he became a contract surveyor, impressing both James Calder of the Survey Department, and Sir John Franklin. He was engaged to survey a road from Deloraine to Emu Bay, a joint project of government and the VDL Company; his assistant was Lukin, son of GT Boyes. After a promising start, which included Kentish's identification of rich farming land that he named 'Tasmania Felix', troubles arose. Robert Power, head of the Survey Department, became and ever remained a hostile critic. After a spell at Emu Bay surveying farm-lots, Kentish returned to Hobart. There he argued for abolition of capital punishment, a continuing crusade: this was one of three 'interludes' to be noted through the talk. Returning to the north-west, Kentish surveyed Burnie township. Both James Gibson of the VDL Company and Robert Power disparaged his work. Late in 1843 he was back in Hobart, arguing his case. Calder remained in support, and Sir John Eardley-Wilmot agreed. Kentish resumed his work in the north-west, but Robert Power's animosity deepened still further, evoking violent recrimination from Kentish. Meanwhile, marking interlude two, one of his strange literary works, *The Bush in South Australia*, had been printed, but a fire at Rolwegans', Hobart, destroyed all but ten of the thousand copies. Kentish continued work on the north-west road, and in face of ill-health and continuing criticism insisted that his 'line' was much superior to its precursor. As well, he stressed his discovery of fertile land. Next, from August '45 to May '46, came an attempt to survey Launceston but this project too ended in anger and remonstrance, so extreme as to suggest that Kentish had lost rationality. Kentish charged WL Goodwin with libel when the *Cornwall Chronicle* declared him 'a most atrocious swindler. Now proceeded the third interlude: a relatively successful campaign for bathing facilities in the Derwent. However other troubles continued, including a failed libel action against Lukin Boyes. In June '49 Kentish left for Melbourne. There too he became embroiled in press controversies while continuing manic activity, most interestingly when claiming discovery of a revolutionary source of motive power. This proved a mirage, and Kentish spent his last years in New South Wales, dying in Sydney in 1867.

Following questions, Ms Homer thanked the speaker and advised member that the next meeting would take place in 'The Old Woolstore', the speaker to be announced. The meeting closed at 9:15pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President