

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION HELD AT THE 'OLD WOOLSTORE', HOBART, ON
TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2013 AT 8PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair, and about 100 members and friends.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous AGM were circulated, and approved.

Business: After welcoming members the President reviewed the Association's activities in 2012, highlights including three excellent issues of the *Papers* and four excursions. She thanked those responsible for these results, the speakers at monthly meetings, and the Association's office-holders. In moving her re-election, unopposed, Michael Roe gave reciprocal thanks. Nor were elections required for other office-holders who were to be Vice-President Ian Terry; Secretary, Andy McKinlay; Treasurer, Ross Kelly; Editor, Heather Felton; Committee, Alison Alexander, Margaret Glover, Stefan Petrow, Michael Roe, Caitlin Sutton. The Treasurer distributed a financial report for the year: matters were satisfactory, although reduction in interest rates would necessitate vigilance to ensure that income met expenditure in 2013. Malcolm Groom was re-elected as auditor.

Speakers: The President remarked that tonight there were to be two speakers, Beth McLeod and Dan Sprod. Both had given enormous service to the Association, duly marked by Honorary Life Membership. Beth was to speak first, her subject 'Personal Perspectives in the writings of a World War II Serviceman'. Mrs McLeod indicated that she was drawing upon the remarkably rich store of letters written by her father, Donald Tribolet, while serving in Egypt and Libya, 1941-4. The early letters were written in very small script on poor quality paper; those defects were later overcome, but use of a fountain pen had to be discarded because it became clogged with sand. They engaged in much banter about family matters, in precisely his peace-time style. One local issue for discussion was progress of the first trans-Derwent bridge, and in October '43 reply could at last tell that the family had driven to Bellerive. The letters repeatedly asserted the writer's good health and spirits, and relative freedom from danger. Serving with the RAF, on secondment from the RAAF, he remained a loyal Australian/Tasmanian, three of his British colleagues consequently migrating to the island. He foresaw no great threat to Tasmania from Japan's entry into the war, forecasting from its outset that American resources would ensure victory for the Allies. Accounts of leave taken in Jerusalem and Cairo were rich in detail and analysis, remarking for example on Jewish-Arab hostility and gross conditions in Egyptian hospitals. Italians, Egyptians, and Sudanese were all employed as servants on the aerodrome, the final group winning most approval. The letters satirised Australian concern about the cessation of inter-State cricket and temperatures rising above 101 degrees; much comment on the war by journalists and self-professed experts were dismissed as 'twaddle'. Censorship necessitated that there be only oblique references to the changing balance of Middle East conflict, but he stressed the role of the air force in the Allies' ultimate victory over Rommel; meanwhile there went praise to Churchill for giving full support to the Soviets. Into 1944 comment increasingly spoke of final victory, albeit forecasting that the war's economic costs would impact hard into the future. He returned to civilian life in Tasmania September 1944.

Mr Sprod's subject was 'Matthew Flinders in exile on Ile de France (Mauritius) 1803-10'. He began by relating how shipwreck disasters had thwarted completion of Flinders's survey of Australian waters, and caused him in September 1803 to leave Sydney for Britain aboard the 29-ton *Cumberland*, 'a mere boat'. Its increasing dilapidation forced Flinders to seek refuge at Mauritius, a French possession. His latest information had been that Britain and France were now at peace, but in fact hostilities had resumed. Flinders carried an international passport, but this cited command of his original craft, not the *Cumberland*. Accordingly he was put in detention by the Captain-General Charles Decaen—an arrogant and dictatorial man, further antagonised by Flinders' own imperious manner. After a spell in very dismal surroundings, his health then deteriorating, Flinders moved into increasingly better conditions. He lived among the island's French elite, able to prepare accounts of his Austral navigation. Withal, he yearned all the time for release, in this receiving support from his local friends. Meanwhile efforts were made internationally in this cause. Decaen remained obdurate until realisation that Britain would soon take control of Mauritius moved him to allow intervention in terms directed by the Governor-General of India. On release, Flinders travelled via the Cape of Good Hope to Britain, arriving there in late 1810 after more than six years in detention and nine since departure. He reunited with his wife Ann, whom he had married shortly before that departure. A daughter was born to them, but Flinders' health was again deteriorating. He died 9 July 1814, exactly simultaneously with publication of his mighty *Voyage to Terra Australis*. Among the slides of Mauritius displayed during the talk were two depicting memorials to Flinders, one erected in 1942, the other in 2003. Thus prevailed some local memory of the man's association with this place.

After questions, the President spoke of this as a memorable evening, and the meeting closed at 9:25pm. Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President