

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

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

Business: The President's first task on this busy evening was to launch the CD version of the Knopwood diaries, published by THRA in hard cover in 1977; a particular welcome was offered to Moira and David, children of Mary Nicholls, editor of the original work. Reference was given to the Knopwood display currently presented at Narryna. Ian Terry reported that in recent weeks some 'Noetling' documents had been translated: they left open whether he was a spy, but showed that indeed he made 'disloyal' statements. Ian also spoke of THRA's recently established 'Facebook' page. The President then introduced Tony Fenton who, with aid from Janet Fenton, was to speak on

### *The cryptic history of Port Davey*

Mr Fenton began by remarking that Malcolm McRae had given a still-useful paper on Port Davey to THRA in 1959. Matthew Flinders had some sense of the Port's existence, but its firm 'discovery' awaited until 1815. Tonight the object was to present the remaining vestiges of human activity in the region, with assistance from excellent power-point illustrations. This approach would modify latter-day presentation of the area as a 'pristine wilderness', relatively untouched by man. Aboriginal occupation was evident in remaining middens, petroglyphs, an ochre mine near Schooner Cove, and the remains of a hut. Pining began in early days of European settlement, increasing after closure of the Macquarie Island penal station, with a settled population forming after 1850 and a peak reached in the 1870s. Piners had to go further and further upriver to find suitable timber; logs were carried down to the Port by floods, and then carried out to ships, although sometimes processed on shore. Whaling likewise had a long history. Three stations were established at Bramble Cove in late 1850s, perhaps as shore-bases for whaling, but more likely in support of deep-water ships pursuing the industry. A Beattie photograph of c.1895 showed masses of whalebones, and graves illustrated the human cost of the industry. Considerable shipbuilding took place at the Port. While these activities were all inspired by economic motives, science too had its part. In 1901 the area was brought within a State-wide geomagnetic survey, a bronze marker remaining (although defaced). The impending solar eclipse of May 1910 prompted an expedition to Bramble Cove led by FK McLean, a clear westward view being sought. The expedition arrived six weeks before the event, and went to great trouble, only to be frustrated on the crucial day by poor visibility. Hydrographic surveys dated back to John Oxley in 1820, and were intensified in 1850 as the region was looked upon as 'New Country' suitable for agriculture. Latter day work was conducted by *HMAS Geranium* in 1922 and *HMAS Moresby* in 1974. James Sprent included the area in his topographical survey of 1854, remnants of a cairn he built still visible; similar latterday endeavours had not required such edifices yet made their impact. In 1954 the Mines Department conducted a geological survey, its hut at Melaleuca surviving to the '80s. Geologists had burned much vegetation, since returning. Prospectors too had burned the land as they sought for minerals, from the 1850s for gold and after Bischoff for base metals; Cox Bight saw such work continuing until the 1970s, a storm in 2000 revealing evidence of a slipway and iron fabrication. Ray River and especially Melaleuca also had quite extensive tin-mining, the King and Wilson families among Melaleuca leaseholders. In the 1950s the Hydro-Electric Commission considered a dam at the Davey Gorge, to be part of the Gordon-below-Franklin scheme. Tracks had been hewn from early days, more systematically from the 1890s (to aid prospecting); in recent times the task was taken over from the Public Works Department by the Parks Service, encouraging bushwalkers and tourists. The settling at Melaleuca by the Kings and Wilsons, and Denny King's completion of an airstrip there in 1957 confirmed its role as the access point for such activity. All in all, Mr Fenton concluded, the history of the region was not so cryptic; you just had to know where to look for it.

After resounding applause, the meeting adjourned for Christmas cheer at 9:15pm.

Michael Roe, for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President.