

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 70 members and guests.

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

Business: Ms Homer welcomed attenders on this stormy night. She referred to TMAG's current exhibition on migrant women, while Brian Rieusset spoke to THRA's excursion to Scots Church on 5 June. In introducing Craig Collins, Ms Homer remarked on the pleasure of having in the audience several descendants of Andrew Bent.

Tonight's subject was *'Hobart Town 1816: Andrew Bent and Fermenting Change'*.

Mr Collins began by stressing the pertinent research most assiduously undertaken by his Bent kinswoman, Sally Bloomfield. His account began with the arrival at the Derwent of the *Kangaroo*, Charles Jeffreys captain, late April 1816. Aboard was a quantity of type, essential to Bent's historic role, and also his future wife, Mary Kirk. There followed several festivities, the grandest hosted by Lieut-Governor Thomas Davey, two hundred years ago to this very day. Bent was baptised in London 24 October 1791; he had two younger brothers, the boys orphaned by 1805 and all to come to Australia as convicts. Andrew was ill-made, a Cockney in his accent and sense of (black) humour. He had trained as a printer, certainly on the *Public Ledger* and possibly on *The Times*. Tried in 1810 for burglary, his capital sentence was commuted to life servitude. After arrival in Sydney in 1812, Bent soon was removed to Hobart Town. Thomas Davey's term as Lieutenant-Governor began in that year, his style appalling both NSW Governor Lachlan Macquarie and home authorities. A more immediate problem for Davey was Michael Howe's resolute audacity. In response Davey declared martial law, and Bent's first imprint, September 1815, presented a statement by settlers in support of this action. Davey sent other Bent imprints back to London, doubtless thereby seeking to create a favourable image of his governorship. On 11 May 1816 appeared the first issue of the *Hobart Town Gazette*; its role under Bent to be one marker of the changes fermented by the interplay of himself, Davey, Jeffreys, and Howe. Jeffreys's dubious trading activities and disobeyal of orders had offended Macquarie, who blocked the seafarer's efforts to publish an account of his (impressive) navigation through the Great Barrier Reef. Bent, grateful for Jeffreys's supply of type, published a prototype edition of the *Gazette*, telling this story. In September '16 came long-awaited news of Bent receiving a Conditional Pardon, and immediately afterwards he married Mary Kirk, the register declaring him 'Free'. All the while Howe taunted Davey, even sending him a letter written in blood. Davey resigned at year's end, the few documents he left behind including a recipe for a 'cocktail of spirits'.

When William Sorell arrived in 1817 as successor Lieutenant-Governor he found Bent duly 'humble', but had a confrontation with Jeffreys, who nevertheless succeeded in landing a big cargo of alcoholic liquor. Then Jeffreys sailed away, carrying copies of various issues of the *Gazette*, including the prototype, which in time he circulated through the British press. Whereas Jeffreys made Bent's work known in Britain, its local circulation even included Howe's bushrangers. Bent was to publish what JA Ferguson has termed Australia's 'first work of general literature', *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bushrangers* (1819). All his technical work showed remarkably high quality. Andrew and Mary had eleven children (and many latter-day descendants). Being a pew-holder at St David's was one mark of achieving social respect. However George Arthur, Lieut-Governor from 1824, abhorred both assertive ex-convicts and newspaper criticism—Bent in the van—directed against his regime. Hence exploded controversy over freedom of the local press, Arthur failing to win such control as he wanted. Through to his death in 1851 Bent lived to Macquarie's ideal of the redeemed convict, proving himself as good as any man.

After some lively questions, the meeting closed at 9:15pm.