

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2015 AT 8 PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 55 members and guests.

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

Business: The President referred to the forthcoming excursion to the Derwent Valley on 28 March, and to the availability for sale of the recently published fourth volume of the Index to the Association's *Papers*. Dr Alexander spoke of a seminar to be held at the Female Factory on 9 May, its subject 'Women Convicts Who Succeeded'.

Speaker: The President introduced Ms Ann Porteus, whose subject tonight was 'Toogoolawa: A Transient Abode'. Ms Porteus began by remarking that it was now some twenty-five years since she began to live at this residence, 309 Davey Street. It would appear that the oldest part of the present building was a cottage, probably built around 1837; there had been 'Georgian' additions probably in the 'fifties, and then most substantial 'Victorian' rebuilding in the 1870s. This history remained apparent in the floorplan of today (shown in one of many slides displayed throughout the talk). Further renovations and alteration had continued throughout the whole period: a fire in 1907 had caused much damage to the front of the house, while the extensive wrap-around verandah was dismantled in the 1960s. When Ms Porteus became owner she confronted an extraordinarily complex and dilapidated situation. Thus the original cottage, shingle roof and all, was still extant, albeit altogether surrounded by later building. The house had been divided into 'flats' in crude and bewildering manner. Partitions obstructed internal movement, even the stairway being half in the house, half outside. Rising damp was pervasive; much of the electric wiring had lost its original lead coating, and lay exposed on timbers. Walls were covered in many layers of paint and kalsomine. One room had evidently housed a hydroponic garden. Foundations were shaky, and the site's drainage altogether deficient. The immediately prior owner had 'improved' the premises by random additions from various houses he had demolished. All these were problems that Ms Porteus had addressed over the years. One reward had been to find that still extant was not only the aforesaid cottage but many other early features, including ceiling cornices and French shutters. The house now comprised five apartments, and one more was to follow.

The property had originally been part of the extensive 'Birch Estate'. The widow of Thomas Birch, Sarah Birch Hodgson, had been the first owner of this particular site, and presumably of the cottage, which probably had been part of the Holbrook Dairy. Later owners were a Mr Ferguson, likely builder of the 'Victorian' additions, and Moses Ward, a notable chemist who gave the property its name from a home he owned in Queensland. Especially from around 1900 a great many people had lived (usually briefly) in one or other part of the house—hence the sub-title of tonight's talk. Owners seem to have suffered frequent financial and familial difficulties: there was an angry side to the site's story. In more recent times flats had often been let to University students, some rumbustious parties duly resulting.

In concluding Ms Porteus spoke of other properties she had renovated, including a pair of conjoined cottages in Macquarie Street, and the premises of her 'Sidewalk Gallery' at Salamanca. After wide-ranging questions and discussion, the President thanked the speaker and the meeting closed at 9.05pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

President