

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM  
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 8 PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 85 members and guests.

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

Business: The President spoke of the forthcoming production of 'The Bushranger's Lover', and of the excursion to Port Arthur. She then introduced John Short, who was to speak on the history of the Bank Arcade building, for many years past owned by his wife's family.

Speaker: Mr Short began with an overview of the building's history back to 1815 or so. Most notable of earlier owners was James Whitesides, who thence conducted business as a distinguished timber craftsman; his work included chairs for the presiding dignitaries of Parliament and he was appointed cabinet-maker in the service of the Duke of Edinburgh on the latter's 1867-8 tour. Whitesides reconstructed the existing building around 1860, giving it the form it would retain for a century and a half. An 1874 photograph showed the fine, clear lines of the building. It had unusually high ceilings, and so its three storeys (with attic and basement) loomed all the larger. Before then the building had been smaller, and lacked chimneys, yet was prominent enough to be noticed in James Sprent's survey of 1841, Augustus Earle's panorama of 1827, and a sketch by GW Evans in 1820. An owner around this last time was Martin Tim[m]s who had come to the colony as Provost-Marshal, but lost that position and sank into poverty.

It was the still earlier period that had attracted the speaker's interest, and led him into exhaustive research, combining work on archives with on-site archaeology. Indicative of its very early origins, the building plan did not conform to the rules laid down by Governor Macquarie in 1811: the building was aligned not to Liverpool Street but to Hobart Rivulet. It appeared that the first structure was of timber, with techniques similar to those cited by Robert Knopwood in reference to his own cottage and by JP Fawcner apropos the first Government House. The basement was probably there from the outset, its plaster and paint having no later counterpart. Soon the timber was replaced by stone. It would seem likely that the building's economic function was as a shop-cum-store. Hobart Rivulet was then navigable at least to this point and the building was likely the hub of resultant economic activity of considerable order.

Evidence pointed to an owner around 1810-15 being one William Sherrard—who almost certainly came as a convict on the *Calcutta*, although precise documentation is lacking. Mr Short's researches pushed still further back. Pertinent sources included a sketch-map by GP Harris, Knopwood's diary, and latter-day reconstructions by Alfred Mault (who had access to now-lost work by James Meehan) and Frank Bolt; Google Earth also played its part. They supported a hypothesis that the timber building existed from earliest settlement days, and that its first owner was William Collins—then Harbour Master in the colony but in years past close to suffering death by execution in Sydney. In May 1806 Collins had available to him the services of the aforesaid William Sherrard, a stonemason by trade. Accordingly, this was the most likely date for the building's transformation from timber to stone. If these readings were correct, they must lift still higher the site's historical significance. James Broadbent had declared the Collins hypothesis 'plausible', and he was very careful in such matters.

Throughout Mr Short had shown pertinent illustrations, drawn from both archival sources and from the site itself. The latter included some 'wrought' nails, of rare English manufacture and probably of the earliest period; one of them, three inches long, has no known counterpart, anywhere. Use of such heavy-duty items cohered with the building's use for commerce, as against pure domesticity. After hearty applause, at 9:15 the meeting adjourned to the tea-room, where several artefacts were available for inspection.