

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 80 members and guests.

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

Business: The President welcomed those attending, especially members of the family associated with tonight's paper; she thanked the organisers of the recent splendid excursion to Westbury. The Treasurer foreshadowed increases in subscription fees, made necessary by expenditure recently outstripping income. Mentioned too were the impending launch of the Knopwood Diary CD, and of a book of JB Walker's letters edited by Margaret Glover. Next day there was to be a symposium at TMAG on remembrance of World War One.

Speaker: Mr Ian Terry's subject for tonight's address was

**“Making Disloyal Statements”: The Case of Dr Fritz Noetling, engineer,
anthropologist, ... spy?**

Noetling was born at Mannheim and educated at the Universities of Bonn and Strasburg. Geology was his major interest and from 1887 to 1903 he served in the Geological Survey of India. His many publications ranged to such fields as ethnology and pre-history, especially of Burma, he thereby winning considerable appreciation. Less happily, there are hints of his involvement in dubious trafficking of ancient artefacts. In 1898 Fritz met and married Ethel Seal, daughter of a leading Hobart citizen. The couple settled in Tasmania in 1906. Noetling became active in the affairs of the Royal Society, the Museum, Field Naturalists, Royal Tennis Club, and the Tasmanian Club. He was honoured as ‘a great authority on the Stone Age’, and the first of his many Royal Society papers dealt with Aboriginal stone implements; he collected great numbers of artefacts, despatching them to institutions throughout Europe. Other papers addressed more general aspects of Aboriginal life. Noetling wrongly dated the arrival in Tasmania of Aborigines as no earlier than 10,000 years past, and saw their society as doomed to extinction, irrespective of European impact. Claiming expertise as a mining engineer he became involved in various business ventures; his pertinent surveys to be sometime criticised by both contemporaries and historians (notably Lindsay Whitham) as extravagant and superficial. Barn Bluff, Balfour, and Branxholme were among relevant sites. Yet Noetling also upheld environmental conservation, notably of the Gordon River. His work as a Fisheries Commissioner has won approval from Tony Harrison. In 1908 he became a naturalised citizen.

From 1912 tensions between Germany and Britain became more palpable. Perhaps in response the Noetlings shifted to New Norfolk, Fritz becoming involved in local affairs and orcharding, his other interests diminishing although he retained much communal esteem. War's outbreak had grim effect, as anti-German feeling magnified. One symptom was the protest of Colonel Thomas Evans at Noetling's continuing attendance at the Tasmanian Club. Accusations of spying already wafted. The Club's executive took no action against Noetling, but in November 1915 police arrested him for ‘making disloyal statements’, and he was interned at what was appropriately termed a ‘concentration camp’ at Holdsworthy, New South Wales. The Australian War Memorial holds papers in Noetling's hand that doubtless encouraged authority to suspect him. Mr Terry had striven to have this material translated (or decrypted), but to date without success. Rumour has proposed that still more incriminating papers were subsequently found at the couple's New Norfolk home. So the central issue remains in doubt. Pressures generated by War's outbreak might have prompted the man into dubious activity, but it seems scarcely possible that he was planted by German authorities as a spy. At Holdsworthy he wrote a treatise on ‘The Cosmic Numbers of the Great Pyramid’. In June 1919 his naturalisation was cancelled. There followed repatriation, and in 1928 death at Baden Baden. His widow lived in Hobart until 1954, always as ‘Mrs Noetling’.

The President thanked Mr Terry for a ‘terrific’ presentation, and the meeting closed at 9:05pm.