

**THRA MEETING MINUTES**  
**Tuesday 14 April 2015 at 8 pm.**  
**Royal Society Room, Tasmanian Museum And Art Gallery**

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

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

Business: The President spoke of the recent excursion to the Derwent Valley, warmly thanking Margy Mason-Cox for her splendid organisation. The proposed 'Anzac' excursion to Cornelian Bay Cemetery would have to be postponed. Dr Alexander spoke of a '25000 bonnets' function being organised by Christina Henri, in recognition of women convicts. Participants should meet on the morning of 7 May, outside the Art Hotel.

Speaker: The Chairman introduced David Palmer as one who, after many years' employ at the zinc works, had written a Master's thesis, the basis of his talk tonight. Its subject was 'Tasmanian Tin Smelters 1874-1901'.

Mr Palmer began by citing the discovery of tin at Mt Bischoff in 1871 by James 'Philosopher' Smith. This prompted various further discoveries, chiefly in the north-east. All contributed to a revival of the Tasmanian economy, exports of tin ore reaching their peak as early as 1877 and then declining until an upturn at century's end consequent upon the Boer War. Tasmania's ore generally comprised some 70% tin, extracted by smelting in furnaces at 1200 degrees Centigrade for 9-10 hours, with imported coal being the fuel generally used. The first and by far the most successful smelter was the 'Bischoff', established after a Sydney enterprise had failed to treat Tasmanian ore in satisfactory way. Established near the Esplanade in Launceston, on what is now the site of Boags' Brewery, this smelter operated from 1874 to 1929, processing some 200,000 tons of ore and enriching the State's economy by an estimated £20,000,000. Making for success were skilful management and access to relatively adjacent ore-fields.

Three other smelters were built in the 1870s. The 'Stanhope', sited at Waratah in 1876, had the bonus of being close to its mine, and drew capital and expertise from Victoria. The only Tasmanian smelter to use wood for heating, it lasted but two years, perhaps through prices not maintaining their early peak. An associated mine reopened in 1880, selling ore to the 'Bischoff', but this too appears to have been a short-term affair.

The 'Hobart Tin Smelter' in 1877 was prompted by discoveries on the west coast. A further driving force was the concern of Hobart businessmen to mount the tin-industry bandwagon. Plans to build the smelter on the Domain ran aground, and instead it arose at Gladstone Street Battery Point. Its chimney went seventy-feet high, ten men were employed, and in 1878 932 tons of ore were smelted, profitably. But that profit was small and the business soon fell into difficulties that forced closure in September '79. Newspaper controversy explored this failure. Managerial incompetence and over-optimistic assay of the ore played major parts. Thereafter various successor owners kept the plant in sporadic operation, but final closure came in 1885, Bond's bark mill occupying the site through decades ahead.

The 'Tasmanian Tin Smelting Company' was based in Launceston from 1878, backed by Sydney interests. Skilled management enabled relatively successful operation. At one time there were plans to take over the 'Bischoff', but the reverse happened, in 1887. The 'Anchor' smelter, at St Helen's, was funded from London, probably in hope of capitalising on the rising prices for tin due to the Boer War. It had capacity to treat forty tons of ore per week, but in fact supplies never went beyond five, and operations lasted for only six months in 1901-2. Again, managerial incapacity seems to have played a major part in this story of failure.

A lively discussion period included Heather Felton's contribution as to one of her forefathers having been associated with a smelter at St Helen's that preceded the 'Anchor'. After repeated applause for the speaker, members adjourned to supper at 9:05pm.

Michael Roe, for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President