

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

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.

Business: The President opened the meeting. Attention was drawn to a recent book concerning Haughton Forrest. Introducing Professor Michael Bennett, Ms Homer spoke of his long association with the University of Tasmania. While much of his research had been directed to British history, he had pursued several local interests, one underlying tonight's topic: 'The Life and Opinions of William Bugby, c.1852-1928'.

Speaker: Professor Bennett began by referring to a public meeting held in Hobart in 1887 to discuss appropriate responses to a current smallpox outbreak in Launceston. Against the tenor of proceedings William Bugby deplored any panic response, and urged sympathy, rather than fear, for the north; vaccination, he continued, was more a danger than a cure. Soon afterwards, Bugby published a pamphlet developing this argument. His stance had international resonance, signified by his corresponding with evolutionary biologist AR Wallace. Pursuit of Bugby's many interests had entailed diverse research, including an interview with his grand-daughter, now resident in Burnie. Bugby's story linked with the intellectual vigor then present in Tasmania.

The man's forebears had been active Protestants in Britain, but William followed a variant path. Charles Voysey's 'Theist' beliefs evidently were close to his younger self, but in time he moved closer to agnosticism. His interests ranged over Biblical archaeology, Greek and Hebrew scholarship, and extra-sensory psychology. He had much musical talent.

Though he might have spent some time in other Australasian colonies, Bugby first appears in Tasmania in 1886. Presumably he sought better health, and new-world opportunity. He briefly taught music and dance at Horton College, Ross, then probably had a spell as a family tutor in Middleton. Moving to Hobart he was active in the Temperance movement and Protestant affairs. His airing of determined opinions already provoked criticism from the *Mercury*. The smallpox episode was apropos, but stirring orthodoxy still more was his advocacy of spiritualism and psychic research. In the mid-90s he worked at Latrobe, and then Melbourne, but soon returned to teaching in Hobart. Now too William married Lucy King, of Stanley. Joining the Education Department he had an unhappy spell at 'the barbarous district' of Forcett. His advocacy of vegetarianism and rigid personal hygiene further indicated his alienation from mainstream convention. After various further postings he came to Black Brush in 1906. The reminiscences of Mick McShane, as collected by Michael Sprod, testified to the efficacy of the teacher's 'stern but gentle' style. He occasionally visited Hobart, especially to speak at the Unitarian Church, while developing and expanding his range of eccentric but not absurd causes. Bugby argued, for instance, for a kind of organic agriculture, and also for sun-bathing, simple clothing, and cremation. He thought sex equality a fundamental principle of the natural order. He often invoked 'England' as offering a guide to virtue, but his England differed much from that invoked by Tasmanian elites. During the 1914-14 war Bugby remarked that British bombs were more likely to kill (admirable) Saxon women rather than (evil) Prussian men. Sympathetic identification with Tasmania strengthened over the years, leading William to praise Tasmanian youth and to support the State's secession from the Commonwealth.

Lucy Bugby died of tuberculosis in 1921, and William retired in 1923. Through to his death in 1928 he continued to write letters to the *Mercury*, and perhaps to like-minded enthusiasts world-wide. That his was a poignant story became further evident in a statement he wrote before retirement. It deplored that he had met nothing but negative criticism from Departmental inspectors, whereas if encouraged he could have given his pupils much of value. Yet the best way to remember him would be to heed Mick McShane's verdict that Bugby was 'one of the greatest men I ever met'.

Following many questions, the meeting closed at 9:15pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President