

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 14 APRIL 2009.**

Present: The President, Dr Alison Alexander, in the chair, and about 55 members and friends.

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

Business: The President announced that the next issue of the *Papers* was about to be issued, and referred to book publications by the Female Factor group and Graeme Broxam.

Speaker: The President welcomed Dr Bruce Davis, who would contribute to the 'Tasmanian Life' series, so successful a feature of the Association's program through recent years.

Dr Davis began by recognising the particularity of Tasmania. Its people lived between mountain and sea, on the edge of the world. Some of its human history was dark, yet its natural beauty surpassing. To live here was a privilege, but that entailed obligation. He was born in January 1931, his father a builder who served with distinction through World War 2. His mother worked as a bookbinder at Walch's. The family had links with Bruny Island, dating back to 1826. An important childhood influence on Bruce was his grandfather, who urged on him the essentials first of a personal ethic, and second the value of constant book-reading. His education passed in the State system, many fine teachers contributing.

Much concerned with ensuring security, Bruce's father encouraged him to become a cadet engineer with the HEC; that gave reasonable pay to a youth, but entailed six years of part-time study. The work was fascinating, among other things teaching the skill and intelligence of the everyday worker. To meet recent migrants from Europe was further enlightening. The HEC was an organisation of remarkable quality and achievement.

The 1950s were crucial in Bruce's life. Joining the Walking Club, he made his first forays into the south-west, including wonderful spells at Lake Pedder. There he met Rosalie, whom he married in 1957. The young couple's obsession was to explore the south-west – then, in practical terms, indeed 'wilderness'. This experience crystallised their life values and sense of self.

In the mid-60s the Davis' set off on extended international travel, returning to Tasmania as Bruce received a scholarship at the University of Tasmania. After further study, he joined the academic staff there in 1970 and so continued until 1996. He held various high administrative offices. However his application for full Professorship failed because he was 'too practical'; an alternative view could be that his work in natural resource management was ahead of its time.

Throughout these years Bruce sat on various governmental enquiries. The first, 1973, considered alternatives to the flooding of Lake Pedder – frustrated by the determination of Premier Reece to proceed. From 1981-7 Bruce served, finally as chairman, on the Australian Heritage Commission, which identified items for inclusion in the 'national estate'. A profound consequent experience was to meet old-time Aboriginal elders, whose views on history and culture were transforming. Next he was appointed to the Rural Industries R&D Corporation, that strove with some success to encourage innovation in the smaller branches of the rural economy. Retirement in 1996 allowed the Davis' to intensify their overseas travel, but also saw continuation of committee service. Three interlocking State agencies concerned with environment and protection offered some interesting issues, but political interference minimised their effect. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal had more positive value, and brought insight into many diverse and unusual lives. In conclusion Bruce stressed his good fortune in having been born at a time that freed him from involvement in the twentieth century's various wars, and in such a wonderful place as Tasmania. His ultimate values were best expressed by mountain-inspired poetry, and so he ended by quoting a passage from Alfred Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.

The President thanked Dr Davis for an inspiring presentation that linked Tasmania with universal concerns. After questions, the meeting closed at 9pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Alison Alexander, President