

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM  
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 8 JUNE, 2010.**

Present: The President, Ms Caroline Homer in the chair, and about 50 members and friends.

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

Business: The President referred first to the death of Patricia Ratcliff, notable as a writer of history and founder of the Launceston Historical Society. She remarked too on the proposed excursion to the old Penitentiary on 26 June, and a forthcoming seminar, 'Founders and Survivors', linking convicts with genealogical research.

Speaker: The President introduced Chris Woods as one who had worked in the Archives Office of Tasmania, and written a study of female convicts. Her topic tonight was 'Imperial Lunatics at Impression Bay and Port Arthur'. Ms Woods began by remarking that while doing archival classification she became interested in this subject, especially the records at CON127. The term 'Imperial Lunatics' derived from the fact that the British government (most reluctantly) paid for the upkeep of these people through to their death. The general hospital at New Norfolk took insane patients from 1827, but from 1846 to 1874 male convict lunatics went to the Invalid Depot at Impression Bay and from 1857 to 1877 to Port Arthur, the model prison being adapted to this use. Inmate numbers remained fairly stable at around 80, the total number approximating 400. Individuals often moved between various places of detention. Frequently men were admitted for observation, but then discharged. Dementia and melancholia were frequent, with violence sometimes apparent, most notoriously in the case of John Quigley. The diet was meagre, and one mode of punishment was further restriction of food; other punitive treatment included use of straitjacket and handcuffing. Medical attention, however, was quite intense and generally sympathetic, notably for those approaching death. Post-mortem examination sought to identify abnormality, sometimes no such evidence appearing. In some cases malingering and deception were suspected; in such instances, and others, there arose the question as to where lay the borderline between criminality and madness.

Ms Woods noted various sub-groups within the whole. A handful of inmates were not transportees, but men convicted in the colonies; Daniel A'Hearne, wife-murderer, had come as a soldier. Among non-Britons were an Indian, a Russian, a Frenchman, and a French-Canadian; the last, Jean Baptiste Gauthier, spent 59 years in various Tasmanian asylums. Three inmates had spent time at Point Puer in earlier life. Several were photographed for official purposes, the dramatic portrait of John Barnes being currently used in presentation of Port Arthur material.

Some patients had shown signs of mental instability while still in Britain, and surely should never have been transported. Others, while under conviction in Tasmania, had suffered grossly severe flogging and other punishment, which might have contributed to their affliction. Yet asylum life was not altogether miserable, effort being made to provide recreation and amusement. On the closure of the Port Arthur establishment in 1877 inmates went to the 'Cascades' asylum located at the erstwhile female factory, South Hobart. When that closed in 1890 the survivors were distributed between New Norfolk, the New Town Invalids' Depot, and a special ward at the Hobart Gaol. Last lunatic to die was George Walsh, in 1913. In conclusion Ms Woods remarked that overwhelmingly these men never became husbands and fathers, and so could find no place in family histories. She hoped that her paper would give some recognition to them.

After numerous questions, the President thanked the Speaker for an enthralling talk, and the meeting closed at 9pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President