

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 13 April 2010

Present: The president, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 55 members and friends.

Apologies: Michael Roe, Ian Terry, Ross Kelly

Minutes: The minutes of the March meeting were read and accepted

Business: The president announced that *Papers & Proceedings* would be ready in the following week.

Speaker: The president introduced John Dent, who spoke on the topic, 'York Town then (1804–1808) and Now (2000–2009)'. John became interested in the area because his ancestor Private James Hortle was one of the first settlers at York Town. The site was discovered by Bass and Flinders in 1798, and when the French threat encouraged British settlement at Bass Strait, Governor King was told to organise a settlement there. William Paterson's party unloaded at George Town in November 1804, but with no fresh water or good land there, moved to York Town where there was good water, and still proximity to the Strait in case of French activity. The first settlers arrived on 18 December 1804 and headquarters moved there on 4 March 1805, when Paterson started weather records.

In March Paterson bought 610 cattle, 12 calves, 34 ewes and 80 gallons of rum for over £17,000, a huge investment, but a long sea voyage, a different environment and a cold winter meant many animals died, despite attempts to save them by moving them around. There was no time to plant crops, as all resources went into caring for the cattle, but by the end of winter there were only 210 left, now on good land at Launceston. Paterson's wife Elizabeth arrived in April 1805 and they had a comfortable home, the governor's cottage. Paterson, a keen gardener, built the government gardens. But there were continual and severe problems: lack of food, failed crops, high mortality, corruption, convicts escaping, people charging each other with libel, a ship stolen by convicts – similar problems to Hobart.

By 1808 Launceston was growing in importance because agriculture was concentrated there, and the French threat had declined so there was no need to have a settlement near the mouth of the Tamar. In 1809 York Town was abandoned and almost everyone moved to Launceston. Henry Barnett was left in charge of the gardens, but the buildings fell into disrepair, and in 1884 'Kelly' Barnett was implicated in a bank robbery. York Town became an outpost where a few people eked out a living. After 1900 orcharding developed, and in 1954, the sesquicentenary of settlement, a monument was erected, but by then the site had gone back to bush.

In 2000 Richard Hooper organised a tour of the site, and the West Tamar Historical Society was formed to investigate York Town, the fourth oldest settlement in Australia. With the aid of many grants, the Society has located sites, bought land or encouraged the West Tamar Council to do so, cleared gorse, drawn up a management plan and archaeological assessment, excavated many sites and put items on display, erected signage, published a brochure, gained Tasmanian Heritage listing, and is preparing a book on York Town's history.

The president thanked John for a wide-ranging talk, from graffiti through weather to politics, and said she had found the descriptions of the archaeological work particularly interesting. John replied to many questions, and the evening ended with supper.

Alison Alexander for Secretary.