

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM  
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2013 AT 8 PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 85 members and guests.

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

Business: The President welcomed an interstate visitor, Val Schier, and then spoke with appreciation of the impending retirement from the Association's committee of Caitlin Sutton, Heather Felton, and Margaret Glover, all of whom had given great service. She also recognised the work of Anne Thwaites and Ken Wright in organising the recent highly enjoyable excursion.

Speaker: In introducing Julia Clark the President spoke of her long involvement in historical matters, having trained as an archaeologist and working in various galleries and museums, most recently at Port Arthur. She was currently pursuing doctoral research, the basis for her subject tonight, *Well known here as a daring burglar: Policing the Tasmanian community 1850-1900*".

Ms Clark began by referring to the well-known collection of photographs taken of inmates at Port Arthur penitentiary in its closing stages. She remarked on how little evidence there was as to use of these materials in tracing miscreants through subsequent years. Much more important were physical descriptions, including such matters as scars and tattoos; the tradition of making such record dated back to the time of convicts' arrival in the colony. The chief supplement to this data was 'local knowledge' gathered by police from time to time. Turning to the history of police in the island, Ms Clark remarked that George Arthur had established a highly centralised system. It had major defects, chief among them the ex-convict background of many members of the force, which provoked hostility in itself, and widespread corruption. As part of the reaction against the colony's earlier history, after self-government a highly decentralised system prevailed, with each municipality having its force, while 'territorials' looked after regions beyond municipal boundaries. This 'system', prevailing until 1898, was no more efficient than its precursor. Funding was minimal reaching a nadir in the 1870s; training was rudimentary; municipal councillors interfered to serve their own interests; jealousy rather than co-operation prevailed between the respective forces. The very fact of the police themselves being local men could create pressures making against effectiveness. However 'local' knowledge always remained important in catching offenders, and of some further help was weekly circulation of a *Police Gazette*. Some culprits were skilled in their job. An exemplar was Henry Singleton, a well-read—even charismatic—ex-convict always outspoken in hostility to authority, and an expert escaper. The man who prompted the phrase 'well known as a daring burglar' was one George Brown, he too both daring and cunning. Other culprits were altogether maladroit, often offending when drunk.

Returning to her points about the scanty use of photographs, and the many other defects in policing, Ms Clark proposed that the dominant factor in achieving effect was the readiness of everyday people to report offenders who injured their own property and persons. The alleged Australian tradition of never 'dobbing' mates did not prevail.

After several questions, and thanks from the President for a most interesting talk, the meeting closed at 9pm; the following supper offered Christmas cheer.