

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM  
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 10 JULY 2012 AT 8PM.**

Present: The Vice-President, Ian Terry in the chair and around 65 members and friends.

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

Business: The Vice-President referred to the series of talks being given at Port Arthur and to our forthcoming excursion to Moonah. A copy of the annual report of the Bruny Island Historical Society's annual report was tabled.

Speaker: The President introduced Jacqueline Fox as the second speaker this year who had recently qualified for her Ph D. That research underlay her presentation tonight, 'John Lewes Pedder (1793-1859): Some new perspectives on a colonial judge'.

Dr (elect!) Fox began by remarking that Pedder was among several colonial judges appointed in the years soon after 1820. He held office, as chief justice of Van Diemen's Land/Tasmania for an unusually long time (1824-54), but has won only a little scholarly attention. Around him there have gathered a number of pejorative characterisations—as a 'puppet of government' (especially through George Arthur's term as Lieutenant-Governor) and a 'hanging judge'; he is thus depicted as a despotic tyrant, a local Judge Jeffreys. Doctor Fox accepted that Pedder indeed sent some 260 persons to the gallows, but affirmed that these characterisations failed to tell the truth about the whole man. His blackening derived in large part from anti-transportationists and other locals who sought self-government. Further shaping the critical image were the writings of JE Calder in the 1870s; the *Truth* newspaper's *History of Tasmania*, 1915, and several articles in Sydney tabloids during the 1970s and 1980s. Some latter day academic writing has conformed to these hostile views of Pedder, John Bennett's influential biography presenting him as cold, insecure, the epitome of dullness. One writer to present Pedder in more sympathetic terms was James Bonwick who yet recast the judge's complex and humanitarian concerns for Aboriginal people as a prediction of inevitable extinction.

In her own research Doctor Fox had pursued a deliberately sensitive and sympathetic reading of the historical record; influenced especially by Canadian exemplars, she sought to locate her subject in his outward social relations. Pedder's sentences often fell short of execution, even when the law allowed that verdict. The marriage to his cousin Maria appears to have been a happy one, grounded in reciprocal warmth with her gentry-style family. In the colony she proved benevolent and amicable. Pedder's sense of family commitment was most remarkably illustrated in the care he gave to the illegitimate and in time orphan children his brother fathered in Van Diemen's Land in the early 1830s; his will recognised this progeny. Likewise Pedder showed himself a benevolent employer, urging a pardon for one of his long-serving assigned men (this one transported for treason), and assuring Arthur that he would act as gaoler of another, notwithstanding the culprit's several colonial offences.

After several questions, the Vice-President remarked on the excellence of the presentation, and the meeting closed at 9pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President