

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN 'THE OLD WOOLSTORE', HOBART, ON TUESDAY 13 MARCH
2012**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 45 members and friends.

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

Business: The President referred to continuing problems arising from the building works at TMAG. The April meeting would also take place in 'The Old Woolstore', that for May was the Eldershaw Lecture and so sited at the Town Hall, and thereafter we should return to TMAG. Reference was made to the recent successful excursion to Bangor, and to the fact that there was currently proceeding a trial of free wireless facilities at the State Library, Hobart.

Speaker: Introducing Eleanor Cave, the President remarked that only very recently had she acquired the title 'Doctor'. Her topic tonight was 'The Practicalities and Realities of a Naturalist's Field Trip in Nineteenth Century Van Diemen's Land'. Dr Cave began by referring to the fortnight-long excursion made from Circular Head to the Vale of Belvoir in 1847 by Robert Campbell Gunn, then Police Magistrate at Circular Head, and Joseph Milligan, surgeon to the Van Diemen's Land Company. Gunn's special concern was botany, Milligan's geology, but both had wider interests in natural science. Gunn corresponded with major figures in British science—Joseph and William Hooker, Robert Brown, Robert Lindley—so participating in current enthusiasm for exact classification of data drawn from throughout the world. Also on the 200 kilometre Belvoir excursion were two convicts. They carried heavy loads, including Gunn's botanical 'specimen book', which ultimately weighed some forty pounds. Gunn and Milligan rode on horseback; collecting specimens, which the convicts duly added to their burden. Some fifty new plants were gathered on the excursion, with Gunn preparing 150 specimen sheets. Preparation for such excursions entailed most careful preparation. Basic items of collecting gear—vasculum and field press most notably—have changed remarkably little from that time to the present.

Dr Cave distinguished five categories of participants in such excursions. Dogs and horses were crucial animals—although sometimes rough terrain proved too much for them, with grim results. As already indicated, servants were essential as beasts of burden, while also doing menial camp work. Gentlemen companions sometimes came along, showing varying degrees of interest; James Grant of Launceston was one who made his own worthwhile contribution. Visiting gues included Joseph Hooker, William Harvey, and Bishop FR Nixon. At the apex were party leaders, Gunn and William Archer supreme examples. While both remarkable men, these two varied. Archer's uncertain health meant that he made shorter excursions to the same area; his wealth meant that he could afford more sophisticated, custom-built equipment. Gunn's equipment was simpler, but more extensive. An extant list of his specifying items 'To Take to the Bush' embraced foodstuffs, clothing, cooking gear, medicines, and toiletries. On such foundations workers in Van Diemen's Land contributed significantly to universal knowledge.

After numerous questions, the President thanked the speaker for a fascinating address, and the meeting closed at 9pm.