

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 11 JUNE 2013 AT 8 PM.**

Present: The Vice- President, Ian Terry, in the chair and about 75 members and guests.

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

Business: Mr Terry referred to current exhibitions at the Anglesea Barracks and the Allport Library, and to the Port Arthur program of talks.

Speaker: Mr Terry introduced as speaker Don Row, who would speak on the subject 'A Skinner Prout from the Shed', this being the product of researches conducted by Don and his wife Maggie. Both were retired academics, their respective specialties being mathematics and geography. They had contributed much to Tasmanian art history.

Dr Row declared that he was about to present a detective story, beginning with the finding of a body and aiming to convict the perpetrator. The discovery was made at an auction at Gowans' 'shed', where lesser items were auctioned. It was an accomplished but anonymous watercolour painting, on good quality paper, in fair condition, and evidently depicting a Tasmanian rural scene. WHERE was this? The image was displayed on screen, and so too a latter-day view of Geeveston, showing Hospital Bay and Shipwrights Point. The case for thus identifying the locale was very strong. But WHEN was the painting created? The work's technique, the buildings it portrayed, and especially the depicted rigging of sea-craft all indicated colonial provenance. The buildings were fewer than the census of 1851 suggested as then existing in the area, while one of the pigments used became available only in the 1830s. So the likely time-span was narrowed down. There remained the vital question of WHO was responsible. There were some 47 people with basic qualifications for the task, but that number could be winnowed down to two 'probables': Simpkinson de Wesselow and John Skinner Prout. The latter was the more likely. Comparison of his known works showed similar modes of treatment—for example the inclusion of a figure carrying a staff. Very fortunately GT Boyes's diary detailed Prout's palette, and tests based on this evidence further upheld the identification.

A remaining issue was WHY Prout should paint this particular scene. While pleasant enough, it was not conventionally picturesque. Perhaps the work was commissioned—if so, by whom? One local entrepreneur in the immediate area was Richard Hill, but preceding him had been William Wilson, and he was a more likely candidate. One oddity is that Prout did not sign the painting, a most unusual absence in a commissioned work. The death of Wilson in November 1846 might have aborted the commission.

After a vigorous question time, Mr Terry congratulated the speaker and the meeting closed at 8:55.

Michael Roe for Secretary