

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN 'THE OLD WOOLSTORE', 1 MACQUARIE STREET,
HOBART, 12 MARCH 2013 AT 8PM.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 50 members and guests.

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

Business: The President referred to a recent publication by the Launceston Historical Society. Ian Terry reported on TMAG developments; he hoped to arrange a special excursion for THRA members.

Speaker: The President introduced Phyllis Pitchford as this year's speaker in the on-going 'Tasmanian Life' series. Ms Pitchford had been active in Aboriginal affairs for some forty years, as mentor, creative writer, educationist, and administrator. She was a member of TMAG's Aboriginal Advisory committee, and is entered on the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women.

Ms Pitchford began by asking for recognition of all ancestor Elders of whatever background. To achieve status as an Elder one had to evoke recognition from others, especially the young. Early in her presentation, she suggested that matters proceed by her responding to questions from the floor. This duly happened; the following report is arranged more by topic than sequence.

Ms Pitchford spoke of her ties with Cape Barren Island. Her childhood there had been happy, enriched by family and communal strength. However some sense of unhappiness came from older women, a result of their awareness of the difficulties and prejudice that would confront her own generation in the years ahead. So it had proved. One mark of discrimination was the lack of proper medical services on the island. By contrast Dr Eric Ratcliff, while on Flinders Island, had saved her mother's life; beyond that Eric and his wife Patricia had served the Aboriginal community by their effort to preserve Wybalenna chapel. Dr Ratcliff's presence on this occasion was acknowledged by the audience.

Considerable emphasis lay on Ms Pitchford's work for community welfare. It ranged over such matters as housing, health, education, sport, and rehabilitation. Concerning the last Ms Pitchford spoke especially of her work with Aboriginal boys at Ashley home. Art and craft work had achieved positive results, as too a mentoring program for former residents. A recent delight had been to arrange a presentation of Scott Wright's 'Dream of Thylacine' at Ashleigh. Generally, she had found youths more amenable to counselling than were girls.

Responding to a question about her poetry, Ms Pitchford read her composition 'The Heart of Me'. Mutton-birding had inspired a sequence of fourteen poems. She was planning a trilogy based on the three stages of her own life. Linked activity was her involvement with Riawunna at the University of Tasmania, northern campus. There she advised students and staff as to appropriate protocols in presenting material.

A questioner asked Ms Pitchford to explain why members of the Aboriginal community—often genetically more European than Aboriginal and necessarily living within the norms (and benefits) of the settlers' culture, nevertheless stressed their separation, even alienation, from that culture. Her reply was that the issue was not one of biological statistics; the fundamental fact was her people's sense of pain at loss of a freedom they were unlikely ever to regain. The issue was probably beyond a resolution that would satisfy all parties.

In conclusion, Ms Pitchford remarked that many in the audience were of older years. She urged them not become passive, but to strive to achieve new goals.

After further thanks and applause for the speaker, the meeting closed at 9:15 pm. The chairman asked that all remember the next meeting would be the occasion of the Eldershaw Memorial Lecture at the Town Hall

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President

