

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART
GALLERY AT 8PM ON TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2009.**

Present: Dr Alison Alexander opened the meeting from the chair, but indisposition then caused her to ask Michael Roe to conduct proceedings. About 70 members and friends were present.

Apologies: Paul Fenton; Margaret Glover Scott; Malcolm Groom; Elizabeth Parkes; Gillian Winter.

Minutes: The minutes of the previous annual general meeting were circulated, and were approved as a correct record.

President's Report: The President's Report for the year 2008 was circulated, and adopted.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer spoke to his report for the year 2008, which was circulated. Generally finances were buoyant; nevertheless basic running costs had run higher than income received from subscriptions and the government grant, a situation which would be addressed. The report was adopted.

Election of Office-bearers: Nominations being received only for the following, they were elected: President – Alison Alexander; Vice-President – Ian Terry; Secretary – Andrew McKinlay; Treasurer – Ross Kelly; Editor – Heather Felton; Committee – Margaret Glover Scott; Caroline Homer; Stefan Petrow; Michael Roe; Dianne Snowden.

Business: Dr Roe publicised the 'Darwin' seminar to be held the following evening, and there was reference to the excursion scheduled for March 7-8.

Speaker: Dr Roe introduced Rebekah McWhirter as a recent doctoral student who was now employed with the Menzies institute. Her topic was 'Lymph or Liberty: Smallpox vaccination in eastern Australia 1853-1901'.

Dr McWhirter first referred to the general history of vaccination. To many, it appeared to promise the only effectual response to the scourge of small pox. Such feeling prompted a Tasmanian statute of 1853 which purported to make vaccination of children compulsory. However, while gathering statistics from 1863, government made but occasional efforts to enforce the law. Vaccination numbers fluctuated much over the whole period. Upsurges arising from both administrative and personal concern came after outbreaks in one place or another – 1863 Britain; 1877 and 1881, Sydney; 1887 and 1903, Launceston. While it was logical enough to believe in the efficacy of vaccination without urging compulsion, in fact the two stances usually went together. The most determined advocates were medical men, thereby upholding the capacity of science and effective government to improve the human condition. Broader notions of positive government and social consciousness added to this drive. But counter-forces were strong, always ready to react against surges from the other side. Critics of vaccination in general and compulsion in particular pointed to the self-interest of medicos, not only in getting fees for service, but in using the issue to push for broader medicalisation of society. The antis' propaganda might appear sometimes hysterical and extreme but posterity has confirmed that infected serum could spread diseases other than smallpox. Argument that quarantine, isolation, and disinfection were more effective counter-measures always had some force, these factors having play in the world being ridden of the scourge in the late twentieth century. This argument was all the stronger in an island place like Tasmania, and probably explains the notably high level of local resistance to compulsion. Beyond that anti-vaccinators invoked the right of the individual, and of the parent, for self-determination. Liberal politicians, otherwise disposed towards social welfare, often heeded this argument. In 1898 Tasmanian legislation recognised the right of conscientious objection. The same kind of argument came to be used in other areas of debate, notably as to conscription for overseas service in World War I.

In thanking the speaker, Dr Roe invoked the theme last mentioned, remarking that this very day such issues had arisen apropos compulsory evacuation of those threatened by bushfire. He then rectified the earlier omission to appoint an auditor, Malcolm Groom being re-appointed
Michael Roe for Secretary
President