

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 12 MAY 2009.**

Present: The Vice-President, Ian Terry, in the chair, and about 80 members and friends.

Apologies: Alison Alexander, Stella Booker, Elizabeth McLeod, Dianne Snowden.

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

Business: Heather Felton was to address the Launceston Historical Society this coming Sunday, and there were to be performances based on her 'Ticklebelly Flats' at the HEC building this week; Engineers' Australia were sponsoring a lecture on the Mt Lyell disaster, 1912, at the Royal Engineers Building, 25 June.

Speakers: The Vice-President introduced David Parham and Richard Tuffin as archaeologists who had done much professional work in Tasmania. It had included various projects around Hobart's waterfront, and tonight's report on excavation of the vaults in the TMAG courtyard added to that particular story. This was all the more appropriate as Tasmania's 'Heritage Month' was now proceeding, with 'water' its dominant theme.

After some introductory remarks by David Parham, Richard Tuffin spoke on the story of the vaults as could be researched from the documentary historical record. The first pertinent building was the Commissariat Store, 1808, which to some degree replaced Hunter Island as the government's base for relevant purposes. This shift intensified with the building in the mid '20s of the Bond Store, to which the vaults were supplementary. A finger jetty (the 'Government Wharf'), in place by 1829, served the store. But the site lost its dominance as harbour development continued southward with the building in the 1830s of New Wharf and the Customs House (now part of Parliament House). As a result, by 1840 at the latest the vaults had lost their intended purpose of housing bonded goods, beyond reasonable doubt spirituous liquors predominating. For the next decade or so they probably were put to some use although detail is lacking. Already there was some above-ground building on the site, and this continued over the years. By around 1900 the vaults were asphalted over, awaiting archaeological rediscovery.

David Parham then took over the story, illustrating it with many pertinent photographs and plans. He gave a detailed account of the excavation. It posed many challenges, requiring high professional expertise. Webcams and blogs recorded the story all the while. A major crisis came with the severing of the sewage drain from TMAG's toilets: at this point Richard re-appeared wearing one of the sanitary zoot-suits that the couple donned in this emergency. Withal, David's particular concern was to explain and describe the process by which the two vaults were built. They were sizeable structures, twelve metres by five, but still not large enough to be altogether appropriate for their purpose. Most of the goods they housed would have been stored in barrels of various dimensions, presumably placed sideways so as to maximise capacity; as well there probably were bottles packed in cases with straw. Guards would have kept constant watch, with coopers also in attendance. David concluded by stressing how enjoyable and satisfying it had been to work on the project. It contributed much to this most remarkable site, and assumed a large place in the master-plan for TMAG development.. Exhilaration had further play as Richard presented a 'sound and light' kaleidoscope of slides taken during the dig.

During question time David especially stressed the dynamic complementarity of historical and archaeological study. After the Vice-President expressed thanks, the meeting closed at 9pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Alison Alexander, President