

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 13 JULY 2010.**

Present: The Vice-President, Ian Terry, in the chair and about 45 members and friends.

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

Business: Members were invited to the launch of Marilyn Quirk's book, *Tasmania: An Island Far Away*, to be held at the Goulburn Street Gallery on 22 July.

Speaker: The Vice-President welcomed Alison Alexander, well known to all. Her topic tonight was 'Dobson, Mitchell, and Allport: A Tasmanian Legal Firm, 1834-2009'.

Dr Alexander told that founder of the firm was John Dobson, who immigrated in 1834, probably on the advice of his cousin, Charles Swanston. By then the Supreme Court had existed for ten years, there were 27 lawyers in the colony, and the profession showed a little sophistication. Dobson soon developed an extensive practice, enabling him to purchase 'Dewent Park' at Risdon. While not universally liked, Dobson was sociable; after the death of his first wife, in 1839 he remarried and fathered further children. He engaged in various commercial activities, including money-lending. A friendship with TG Gregson turned drastically sour, a legal action between them resulting in Gregson winning damages of a massive £5000. By the 1850s prosperity had returned, but in 1864 Dobson died, no newspaper publishing an obituary. Four of John's sons became lawyers, Lambert and Henry with most distinction. Henry continued the practice, being joined as its leader by WR Giblin. When, around 1870, the latter concentrated on politics, John Mitchell replaced him. Mitchell had much business acumen as well as pursuing philanthropic and religious interests. The 1880s saw activity expand, in step especially with the colony's mining boom. In 1887 Cecil Allport joined the firm, to become a crucial figure, and his correspondence a rich historical source. Henry Dobson followed Giblin into politics, and economic troubles of the earlier nineties—especially the Van Diemen's Land Bank crash—entailed problems. Withal, an 1894 photograph of DM&A personnel conveys cheerful well-being. Henry's son Louis continued that family's tradition in the firm, while another key figure for many years was accountant WH Dawson.

With John Mitchell's death in 1909 Cecil Allport became yet more dominant, establishing multiple links with Hobart's business community, acquiring considerable personal wealth, and including Tasmanian history among his interests. He wrote a history of the Cascade Brewery, that business, Webster's, and Perpetual Trustees being chief among the firm's clients. The death on war service of his son Morton impaired Cecil, and around 1920 DM&A was at comparatively low ebb. Helping in its revival was Morton's brother, Henry, who became a full partner in 1923, three years before Cecil's own death. The memoirs of ER ('Cobber') Henry suggest that life in the office around this time was relaxed, if hierarchical. The 1930s saw notable additions to the firm's professional staff—W Ellis Cox, Rowland Turner, Tim Brettingham-Moore, Charles Johnstone. Due celebration marked the centenary of 1934. The second war and its aftermath brought another surge in Tasmanian prosperity and lawyers' business. Bill Cox and Val Smith joined DM&A late in this era. After the death of Henry Allport in 1965 (his estate establishing the Allport Library and Museum) especially Smith became a driving force in renewed expansion. By 2009 the firm numbered 11 partners and 65 employees. In retrospect its success would appear to lie in such qualities as professional integrity, avoidance of 'dodgy' areas of business, readiness to innovate within these bounds, absence of friction between partners, and wise selection of superior staff (with complementary denial of family relations who lacked competence,) and fair treatment of employees generally. The future awaits.

After the Vice-President thanked Dr Alexander, the meeting closed at 9:05pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Ian Terry, Vice President,