

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND
ART GALLERY ON TUESDAY 14 JULY 2009 AT 8PM.**

Present: The President, Dr Alison Alexander in the chair, and about 55 members and friends.

Apologies: Mary McKinlay, Stefan Petrow.

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

Business: The President first remarked on the success of the excursion to Runnymede, and then spoke of the committee's review of the Association's financial situation. Expenses were considerably higher than income from subscriptions, etc. Accordingly the committee had resolved to increase subscriptions from next year. It also had considered proposals for a 'gold coin donation' at meetings, and would further pursue this possibility.

Speaker: The President introduced Kathryn Medlock as curator of vertebrate zoology at TMAG. She had curated a major exhibition on the thylacine, and was pursuing further research on the subject. Her topic tonight was 'From Pest to Icon: Tigers and Tasmanian Directors'.

Ms Medlock began by reference to the Royal Society's moves from the mid-1840s to establish a Museum. The institution received its first thylacine skin in 1856. Another addition in 1858 prompted the *Mercury* to speak of these 'nearly obsolete animals'. These years saw enormous interest world-wide in zoological matters, and rare Tasmanian species were avidly sought. One instance of the Museum's trading came in 1873 with swap of thylacine material for moa bones from Christchurch, New Zealand. Between 1856 and 1884 some 34 thylacines had been donated to the Museum, but today only one of these can be identified. The period immediately ahead saw systematic extermination of the thylacine. Now too came reorganisation of the Museum, with Alexander Morton the able Director. He tried to persuade government that thylacines had scientific and exchange value, but the increasing scarcity of the animal made their pelts ever more valuable on the open market. Records of the time are very poor, but certainly Morton did gather material and engage in some exchange, notably with the Australian Museum, Sydney.

Robert Hall succeeded Morton in 1908. He was sensitive to how poor was the Museum's thylacine collection, and sought assistance from the police in improving this situation.. International competition always proved formidable. In 1909 Theodore Thomson Flynn came to the University of Tasmania, and as Trustee of the Museum stressed how important it was that research proceed on the thylacine. In 1912 Flynn became acting curator of the Museum and intensified efforts at acquiring material, but with little success. Likewise nothing came of his plan for a reserve wherein thylacines could survive and multiply. Flynn's very enthusiasm for thylacine research created problems, as the Trustees came to believe that he was treating Museum material as if it were his own. In 1922 there came a new Director – Clive Lord, not a scientist by training but altogether committed. The difficulty of building a good collection of Tasmanian fauna much distressed Lord, but he did acquire enough to refurbish galleries, largely unchanged since Morton's day. On Lord's death in 1933 he was succeeded by Joseph Pearson, who continued to argue for protection of the tiger. But it was too late – on the very night of the first Clive Lord Memorial Lecture, 1936, the last known tiger died at the Hobart Zoo. In 1937 and '38 the Museum mounted excursions in search of the tiger, and offered £50 for a live specimen – all without avail. Notwithstanding this, further material was collected from time to time. The future Sir William Crowther, Trustee of the Museum, kept interest alive, and in 1963 donated his own collection. Overall, however, the thylacine story quietened during the Directorships of William Bryden and Donald Gregg. However in 1991, during Patricia Sabine's tenure, a major exhibition devoted to the tiger was mounted at the Museum and toured nationally. Bill Bleathman's term had seen (2008) the acquisition of a remarkable tiger-skin rug. The story would doubtless continue into the future, especially through the application of new scientific technology.

After questions, the President thanked the speaker, and the meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Alison Alexander, President