

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

Present: The President, Dr Alison Alexander, in the chair and about 65 members and friends.

Apologies: Kevin Green, Stefan Petrow, Ian Terry.

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

Business: The President first alluded with regret to the recent deaths of Frank Bolt and Jeff Ransley, active members of the Association. Reference was made also to publication of a book by Dan Sprod concerning the Flinders/Bass circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land

Speaker: The President introduced Rodney Thomson as a graduate of the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney, who joined the History Department at the University of Tasmania in 1975. Distinguished in both teaching and research, he had achieved Professorial rank before engaging full-time in the cataloguing of the medieval collections of several renowned British libraries. Professor Thomson's subject tonight was 'Bringing European Learning to Van Diemen's Land: The Library of Christ College'.

Professor Thomson began by remarking that it was somewhat strange that he, an historian of medieval Europe, should be addressing THRA. His interest in relevant matters had begun in 2007 as he was asked to organise a display of early books held by the University of Tasmania. He found that in its earlier years the University's Library had acquired by donation some forty items dating from before 1600, including a truly iconic work—the first printed Greek Grammar, dating from 1529, bearing a remarkable illustration of how printing then proceeded. However Thomson's interest had come to concentrate on the holdings derived in 1999 from Christ College. This institution had been mooted by Sir John and Lady Franklin, aided especially from Britain by the famed Thomas Arnold. Its aim was to educate a local elite in the mode of 'the Christian and the gentleman', the model being that of an Oxbridge college. This elite, went the argument, alone could redeem Van Diemen's Land from the terrible burden of being a convict dump. The College project met various problems but at length got under way in 1846, located at Bishopsbourne, near Cressy. From the beginning its leaders were concerned to build a library of high quality. This duly happened, largely thanks to some generous donors. Of supreme interest were items deriving from the collection of Archdeacon RW Davies, a bibliophile especially interested in collecting items from early European printers. Also to join the College collection, although as a distinct entity, was the collection from 'Ancanthe', the museum of natural science founded by Jane Franklin at Lenah Valley.

The College never flourished, in 1856 going into recess and through the decades ahead to undergo adaptations that made a depressing story. The Library was moved around, with damage and loss resulting (that story reaching a grim climax so late as 1980 with the loss of John Gould's marvellous work on Australian birds). Accordingly one would have to judge that the Library had but little effect in the education of those who ever attended the College.

Professor Thomson then turned to describing some outstanding items in the collection, in each case suggesting their import to an 'historian of the book'. Works cited included a marvellous edition of Plutarch's *Lives*, printed in Venice, 1478; Pliny's *Natural History*, Basel, 1525 (rebound in Hobart in 1962, but retaining a chain-staple, deriving from its days at Magdalen College, Oxford); Erasmus' last book, Basel, 1535; a work by Ambrose, Basel 1555, at one time in the collection of Ubo Emmius, a Dutch Calvinist, historian and geographer, founder of a school that still survives; Charles de l'Ecluse, *On Certain Rare Plants Found In Spain*, the author being curator of the Leyden Botanical Gardens and cruciale in developing the Dutch bulb industry.

Professor Thomson concluded by remarking that a conservation project was now under way, and encouraged members of the audience to consider assisting this project. The President thanked him for a 'wonderful talk', and the meeting adjourned to Christmas cheer at 9:10pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary
Alison Alexander, President