

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, ON TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2010

Present: The president, Caroline Homer, in the chair and about 45 members and friends.

Apologies: Michael Roe

Minutes: The minutes of the December meeting were read and accepted

Business: The president thanked Alison Alexander for her work as previous president. She announced the launch of Alison's book on 18 March, and a Historians' Walk on the Overland Track.

Speaker: The President introduced Dr Roger Kellaway, who spoke on the topic, 'Temporary Tasmanians? New Zealanders at the Zeehan Silver Rush, 1891–1895'. In 1891, 1,222 persons arrived in Tasmania direct from New Zealand. This was more than three times the annual average of the preceding decade. In 1892, departures to New Zealand were equally abnormal. The most obvious explanation for this unusual pattern involved the activities of T.A. Reynolds and Company. Loosely associated with the Union Steam Ship Company, Reynolds and Co. had the contract to build the Strahan to Zeehan Railway. Unable to secure sufficient workers locally, they recruited large numbers of labourers in Dunedin. The completion of the railway, the difficult natural environment and the temporary collapse of the silver boom following the failure of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land saw many of the navvies return to New Zealand on the expiry of their contract.

The railway project by itself cannot explain the large number of New Zealanders coming to Tasmania in the early 1890s. The Zeehan silver field offered other attractions, especially for residents of declining mining regions in New Zealand. Miners, mine managers, share brokers, storekeepers and others left stagnant townships throughout Central Otago and the Thames to seek their fortune on Tasmania's West Coast. This study examines the importance of Zeehan as a magnet for New Zealanders by measuring its impact on the scale of inter-colonial migration. The paper also considers the information flows in the New Zealand press that provided the stimulus for emigration despite the majority of reports being negative. Some attention will be placed on the wider significance of the influx of a skilled mining population into a largely non-mining colony.

The President thanked Dr Kellaway for his most interesting talk, praising especially on his excellent graphs and tables. After a lively question session, members enjoyed supper.

Alison Alexander for Secretary.