

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TASMANIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION, HELD IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY ROOM, TASMANIAN MUSEUM
AND ART GALLERY ON TUESDAY 8 MARCH 2011.**

Present: The President, Caroline Homer, in the chair, and about 70 members and friends.

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

Business: The 'Pugin' excursion on 12 February had been altogether successful. The biennial Tasmanian local history conference would be held on 2 July, hosted by the Maritime Museum; its theme was life on Tasmanian islands, and papers were invited. On 1 April a seminar would be held in Hobart concerning the UNESCO 'Memory of the World' project.

Speaker: The President introduced Reverend Professor Michael Tate, eschewing any further detail as this address was autobiographical in nature.

Professor Tate began by remarking that he had striven to overcome his natural virtue of modesty in order to contribute to the 'Tasmanian Life' series. While born in Sydney (6 July 1945) he had strong Tasmanian connections on his father's side, and the family settled in Hobart in 1956. His schooling proceeded at St Virgil's. Tasmania was then a highly sectarian society, St Virgil's encouraging its pupils to assert their Catholic identity; withal, Tate's history teacher encouraged him to engage in wider reading, which opened new vistas. Aided by a Commonwealth Scholarship, Tate began studying law at the University of Tasmania in 1963. In October he suffered a severe road accident, but in recovery achieved academic distinction while engaging also in issues of broader social concern. Winning a scholarship to Oxford he proposed first to pursue further legal studies, but instead turned to theology; he was altogether in tune with the broadening of Catholic thought, as signified especially by Vatican Two. Especially the learning of Greek made for difficulties in pursuing his Oxford degree, but they were overcome. In 1971 Tate returned to Tasmania as a lecturer in law, specialising in public and constitutional aspects. Issues raised by the Vietnamese war, especially rigid conscription for military service, prompted him to join the ALP. Assisted by some fortuitous events, he gained election to the Senate in 1977. Fulfilling an electoral promise he shifted (for five years) to Devonport, finding that place unhappily constricted, but a forcing-ground for his political skills. A remarkable event involving him as 'local member' came in late 1983 as Prime Minister Hawke insisted on visiting the West Coast, where anger raged at the federal government's ban on the Franklin dam; the man's charisma confounded fears of possibly murderous attacks upon him.

Returned to Parliament and to Hobart, Tate was busy on many fronts. Joining with the University of Tasmania's business manager, Peter Byers, he won substantial benefits for that institution. A horrendous episode came with Parliamentary enquiries into alleged improper behaviour of Judge Lionel Murphy. Tate had a key role in this process, and ultimately decided against Murphy. This threatened to end his hopes of achieving Ministerial rank, but in 1987 he did win such office, first as Special Minister for State, then as Minister for Justice. As well, he had to represent other Ministers in the Senate, and manage the passage of much legislation through that House, where the government lacked a majority. Further successful in the 1993 election, Tate thought he might well become Attorney-General; instead Prime Minister Keating denied him any office, this decision probably an echo of Hawke-Keating struggles for leadership.

Angered and distressed, Tate asked for an overseas appointment. Accordingly he became Ambassador to both the Netherlands and the Holy See. The former post offered opportunity for association with the International Court of Justice and the Yugoslav War Crimes Tribunal, the latter's mighty work crucially benefiting from Australian expertise. But overall Ambassadorial life was too 'glittery'. A poem by WH Auden inspired Tate to foresee joining the priesthood—a decision that surprised the Pope at their final meeting. Returned to Hobart, Tate fulfilled his intent, serving first at Bridgewater and then at Sandy Bay. He resumed ties with the University, lecturing on international issues.

After repeated applause, the President thanked the speaker, the meeting closed at 9:20pm.

Michael Roe for Secretary

Caroline Homer, President