



Tasman Peninsula Historical Society Inc.

# Newsletter

Volume 2. Issue 2

July 2020

## Welcome to our second newsletter for 2020

Whilst COVID-19 restrictions have significantly relaxed since our May Newsletter and some semblance of 'normal' is returning, we are still unable to hold business meetings at the Courthouse without capping numbers. As promised, we will use this Newsletter to keep you up to date with the status of projects and what is being planned for the near future.

Our newsletters, exhibitions, events and records will become more accessible as Keith commences a website redevelopment project with a focus on content. Work continues on compiling a list of local places that we think have historical significance and should be recorded for posterity. Social distancing doesn't mean we have to be distanced socially. Graham has offered to lead some local history walks so our members can come together in an outdoor setting (more details on page 2). John Smith's son, Cedrick, shares the restoration of a Smith family heirloom on page 4. We make a call for help with tasks and ask you to delve into your archives, and we share a story about the *Matilda's* important connection to Tasman Island. We finish with James' thought provoking ideas for dealing with the topical issue of historical statues.

Anne Hoyle  
President

### Dates to remember:

- 3 Aug TPHS committee meeting
- 3 Aug Copy deadline for Chronicle
- 15 Aug Coal Mines walk
- 22 Aug Point Puer walk
- 7 Sep TPHS business meeting (to be confirmed)
- 5 Oct TPHS business meeting (to be confirmed)
- 2 Nov TPHS business meeting (to be confirmed)
- Nov Publication of Chronicle 20
- tba Launch of Chronicle 20

### Main priorities for next four months:

- Convict Trail project
  - Map
  - Roadside interpretation panels
- Chronicle no. 20
  - Cover montage
  - Articles (due 3 Aug)
- Audit of chronicles to find references to buildings
- Local heritage list
- Indexing of TPHS Bus Tour notes
- Website redevelopment
- TPHS Life memberships

## PROJECT UPDATE: Convict Trail - Tourist Map and Roadside Interpretation Panels

The closure of the heritage room at the State Library has prevented follow up on some historic images to be used and this has slowed the project. The map however is awfully close to completion!

## PROJECT UPDATE: Local heritage list

The list has the potential to become a fantastic resource, bringing together all places on the Tasman and Forestier Peninsula's that have some local heritage significance. The document will continue to grow, linking stories, images, people and industry together in one record.



*This rustic cottage on Little's Road, circa 1890, was the first home of George and Alice Spaulding and was one of the oldest surviving pioneer-built houses on Tasman Peninsula until its collapse in 2008. George "Preacher" Spaulding and his brother, William, were instrumental in establishing the Church of Christ on Tasman Peninsula.*

*Image: P Rigozzi (2004)*

## VOLUNTEERS WANTED for the following tasks:

- Proofing and publication of no. 20
- Coordinate printing of interpretation panels for the Convict Trail
- Recording oral history associated with local heritage places

Contact: Graham Speight

## Local History Walks to be led by Graham Speight

It's a while since we all got together, so two walks are proposed for August. TPHS members will have priority in the first instance as numbers will be limited to allow Graham's detailed commentary to be easily heard. The tours will take two and a half hours and most of the walking is on formed pathways or sandy tracks. There are some slight gradients. You will drive yourself to the sites for a **9.30am start**.

### The Coal Mines— Saturday 15th August

Many locals know the Coal mines as a place where they have always been able to go for recreation – a beautiful place with haunting ruins and walks through a bushland setting that is home to 150 bird species. But how well do you really know the Coal Mines? Graham says: "In recent times I have taken groups of locals on tours of the site and they are amazed at what there is to see and the history they had missed".

The mines were originally developed as a place of punishment (the men worked underground in chains), but the authorities soon learned that this was not the most productive way to mine coal. Later the mines were operated as a private enterprise. They operated for more than 70 years. The Coal Mines are probably Australia's closest link to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. You will visit sites that are rarely frequented by visitors and learn of the ingenuity and practical science that made this enterprise happen.

This is not the usual convict tour. It is more detailed and designed for people who have some knowledge of the site.

Explore the ruins of this World Heritage site with a guide who has been researching in this area for more than ten years. Walk in the steps of the convicts who came to know the mines as a living hell. There are some tall tales and extraordinary stories of resilience and survival, but there is also humour and controversy. We have first-hand accounts of some of the miners and their experiences at the mines.

You will learn of Barclay's tigers, the homosexuality (sinkholes of vice and infamy), cells cut into the coal, ruthless overseers, corruption and confusion. The scale of the works at the Coal Mines and the complexity of the mining operations undertaken there will surprise you and so will some of the stories - it is an extraordinary place to know and understand.

### Point Puer—Saturday 22nd August

In 1833 in London a ten-year old boy was hanged for the theft of tuppence worth of printer's ink. Ten years later nine-year old James Lynch, another Londoner, was transported for seven years for stealing three boxes of toys. In this era the age of criminal responsibility was young (seven years old) and children as young as ten years of age could be transported. About 7000 of them came to Van Diemen's Land and three thousand four hundred of

them passed through Point Puer. Each one of those boys has a story and each of those stories is known to us. Point Puer is a treasure trove of the most amazing tales and an extraordinary place to discover.

In 1834 in correspondence to the private secretary of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London Governor Arthur noted:

*You are aware that by the last two or three vessels a most unusual number of boys were sent out: it is utterly impossible to imagine a more corrupt fraternity of depraved little felons...all are objects of compassion – to assign them is impossible and I, therefore, caused about 100 to be removed to Tasman's peninsula.*

This was how it all began. Many people think they know the Point Puer story. For many locals it is the backdrop to their fishing expeditions and a place to walk their dog and you will often hear people say, "it is a lovely place, but there is not much out there". Nothing could be further from the truth. There is an extraordinarily rich history to be found and there are some amazing sights to explore. You just have to know what you are looking at! The reality is that very few people really know what actually happened at Point Puer and few know it well. The myth making of books like *For the Term of his Natural Life* have given rise to a narrative that bears no relation to what really happened there. And this is further confused by what you see when you get there. There is little in the way of interpretation and the formed tracks do not take you to where the action is. The fabric of the boy's prison is all still there – it is an archaeological site of outstanding heritage value – a World Heritage Site. Even without its extraordinarily rich history it is visually stunning with great vistas and some of Australia's most pristine beaches.

This tour is not the same as earlier tours of the Point - it is more detailed and takes you to different places over a different time frame.

The tour is unique – the story combines the cast of *Oliver Twist* with the script of *The Lord of the Flies*. It is shocking, confronting, sad and funny. To get a sense of what we are talking about you have to conjure up the world's worst boys' school. Eight hundred of Britain's finest thrown together on a barren and wind-swept rock supervised by a staff of misfits (mad, mercenary, missionary and drunk) and backed up by sullen British soldiers who couldn't believe that they had been sent to the end of the earth to chase little boys.

Graham Speight

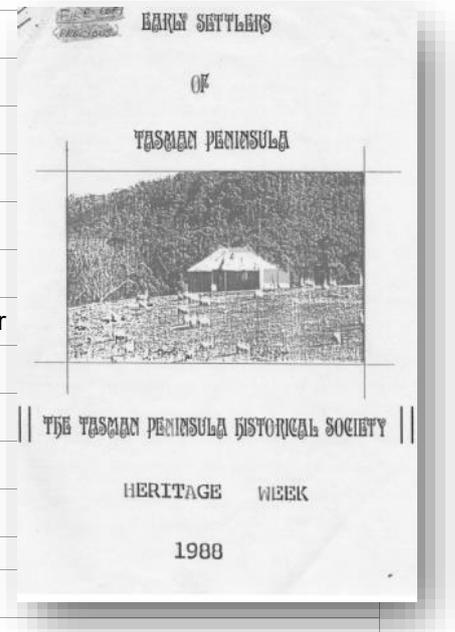
**PROJECT UPDATE: Indexing of TPHS Bus Tour Notes**

The Society has conducted an impressive number of bus tours over the course of its 34 years. The notes prepared to accompany the tours are a treasure trove of information. To make that information easily accessible I am working on a searchable index that combines all of them. The table below lists all tours that I am aware of. To my knowledge there is one set of notes missing - **Sheds Part 2**. If you happen to have a copy in your collection, or if you have others that I have missed, please let me know.

Contact: Anne Hoyle, Ph: 0458 290 521

*Below: The cover of the 1988 tour notes featured Spaulding's Cottage on Little's Road.*

No.	YEAR	TITLE
1	1987	Hobart to Taranna by M V Cartela
2	1988	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
3	1992	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
4	1993	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
5	1994	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
6	1995	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula – Tombstone Tour
7	1997	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
8	1998	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
9	2000	Bus Tour 2000 [Point Puer]
10	2001	Bus Tour November 2001 [Eaglehawk Neck]
11	2002	Early Settlers of Tasman Peninsula
12	2003	Heritage Tour of Bream Creek area
13	2004	Sheds in Industry – past and present
14	2005	SHEDS - PART 2 - <b>MISSING</b>
15	2006	Jetties and Piers of the Peninsula
16	2009	A look at some post-convict era early homes between Premaydena and Eaglehawk Neck
17	2010	Early Settlers R.I.P. – A tour to last resting places of many of our early settlers
18	2011	A tour of some early homes of the Nubeena district
19	2013	Bus Trip to Bangor
20	2015	The Tasman Peninsula: window of opportunity for Norfolk Islanders
21	2017	All aboard the charabanc: a pleasure trip looking at early tourism on the Peninsula



**PROJECT UPDATE: Chronicle 20 & audit**

Competition entries from local school students have been collected. Helen Kerr Smith has volunteered to be the judge.

Anni McGinniss and Fay Odell are conducting an audit of past Chronicles to find all references to buildings that could be included on the local heritage list.

**Can you help? We are looking for images of the following buildings:**

- “Lottah”, Shoobridge’s house, Roaring Beach Road, destroyed by fire
- “Taviuni”, Heyward’s federation house at Koonya, destroyed by fire in the winter of 2006
- “Hope Banks”, Bert & Dorothy Kingston’s house, Newmans Creek Road, destroyed by fire
- Spotswood’s Cottage, Dunalley, destroyed by fire in 2013
- Gary Nichols house, formerly the Taranna Post Office, destroyed by fire

Copy Deadline 3rd August  
to Graham Speight:  
speight.g@hotmail.com

# Freezing Time: through the lens of great, great uncle Elwick

*I find it fascinating how people often develop the same interests and attributes of long gone family members which they have never met. It's extremely good fortune in the case of this camera because had I not developed this interest, it's entirely possible this camera may have never lived a second Life. There's something special about having the privilege of being the first person in a significant period of time to click the shutter and freeze the moment.*



The camera is a 5x7" Half Plate size Thornton Pickard Royal Favourite field camera from circa 1901 and belonged to Elwick Smith, my Great, Great Uncle. The camera emerged from my grandma's attic during a clean up and was passed onto my father by my disinterested grandma.



*A young Elwick Smith with his camera*

My dad hadn't realised that the camera was a full camera. When I discovered it in his cupboard I knew exactly what I was looking at, as I already had a keen interest in photography and had always wanted to try large format photography ever since seeing the wilderness photography of Peter Dombrovskis.

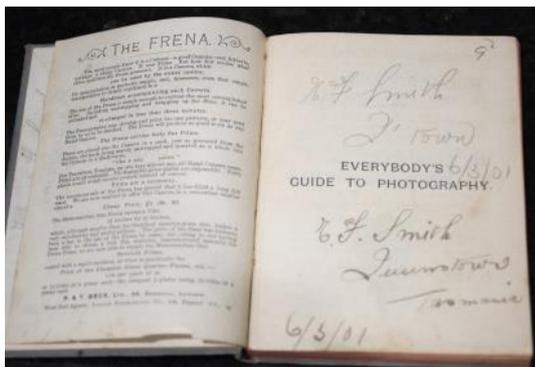
Beneath the dust was a camera in remarkable condition for its age. I took it upon myself to restore it back into working order.

I didn't have to replace the original leather bellows, which are usually beyond repair. I simply had to fill in all the pinholes. Some of these were admittedly larger than pinholes however. The trickiest repair was the focal blind shutter. I ordered some expensive silk shutter curtain material from Japan and carefully measured up the mangled original curtain. The resulting curtain works like a dream. Also tricky was the creation of Waterhouse Stops. These are aperture discs that are inserted through a slot in the side of the lens barrel. They control the amount of light entering the lens and the depth of field in the image, or in layman's terms, how much of the image is focused. Through the creation of these I miraculously began to actually understand maths. I produced these apertures to standardised sizes so that I can calculate exposure times using a light-meter.

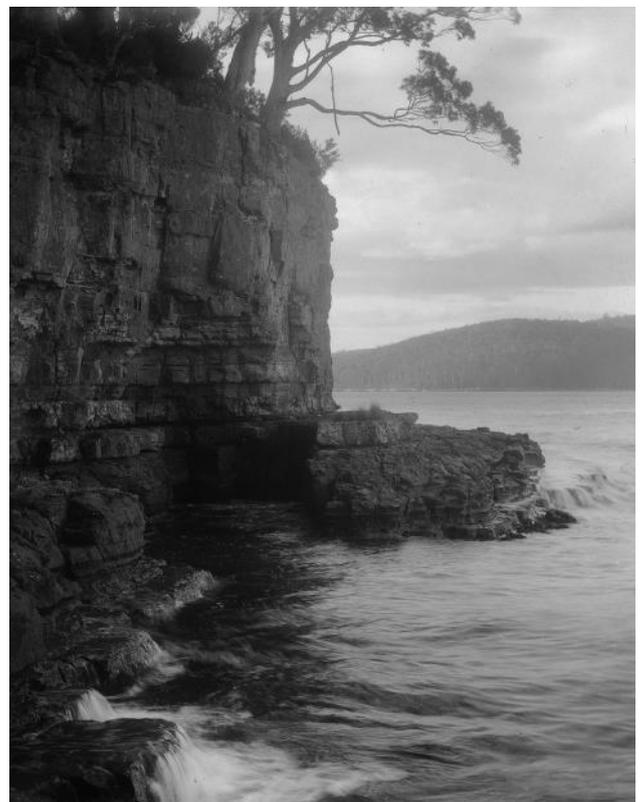
The original book holder style dark slides housed two 5x7" glass plate negatives but I have adapted these to hold two 4x5" sheet films, by creating balsa wood frames that sit in place of the glass plate negative.

I learnt most of what I know about early large format photography from Elwick's instructional photography book, which has his signature, location and date recorded. It's probable that he earned a decent amount of money through mining-related exploits while living on the west coast of Tasmania. I have no idea how affordable this kind of camera was in those days, but I can only imagine that a camera of this kind was not something that a lot of people owned. Having a camera like this also implies having all the other specialty equipment and space to complete photographic tasks.

Cedrick Smith,  
Highcroft



*Instructional photography book signed:  
"E.F. Smith, Queenstown, Tasmania 6/5/01"*



*Point Puer, taken by Cedrick Smith using restored camera*

This article scanned from the *Maritime Times of Tasmania* (No. 64 Spring 2018) provides a glimpse into the life of a lighthouse family.

## Matilda

### getting the mail to Tasman Island

by Mark Hosking with Don Mitchell

*Matilda's* life as a fishing boat was described by fisherman Jim Bridge in *Maritime Times* (2007, No 19 p. 9). But fishing has always been a precarious business and when the Tasman Island lighthouse was built the Moodys took the opportunity of supplementing their fishing income by taking on a contract to deliver mail to the island. The lighthouse was commissioned in April 1906 and the Lighthouse Log Book mentions *Matilda* for the first time on 2 September 1906: 'Boarded fishing boat *Matilda* and landed mails and Supt.'s son'.

It seems that the contract to land mails required a visit to the island every two weeks, a schedule which would probably have been fairly easy to fit in with the boat's fishing activities. But the nature of the landing, requiring cargo and passengers to be transferred from a boat maintaining its position between the rocky island and a smaller offshore island via a basket suspended from a flying fox, meant that the weather could easily interfere with the schedule. The brevity of the notes in the Log give no real idea of the difficulties that must have been encountered, 'Moody Bros. off island with mail flag, unable to land' (1 June 1913); 'Fishing Boat *Matilda* with mails - tried to land them. It was too rough' (7 June 1907); or simply: 'Moody Bros. landed 6 weeks mail' (2 April 1922).

While six weeks was the longest recorded interval between landings, the contract allowed for the Moodys to be called in for additional trips, with three days being the shortest interval between visits noted in the Log. The Log also records deliveries by other vessels, with *Olive May*, *Florence May*, *Iolanthe* and *Terra Linna* among the vessels mentioned in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Other cargoes were occasionally carried; a load of sand was landed in 1929. Medicines, and spare parts for the light, are also mentioned. It may be that it was a request for an extra trip for a special cargo that led to the Moodys handing in their contract; one story recorded by Michael Staples suggests that an argument ensued with the keeper when the Moodys were summoned out on a rough night to find that the keeper wanted them to fetch a baby's dummy.

The mail boat was the usual means of getting to and from the island for the lighthouse superintendents, their families and workmen. One rather sad journey provides the connection with our Museum today.



References:

'The Lightkeeper's Daughter' by Fiona Rice (excerpt from the Three Capes Track walkers' guidebook, *Encounters on the Edge*).

Staples, Michael (2002) *Matilda*. Conservation Assessment.

In March 1929 Andy Mitchell was stationed at the light as Assistant Keeper, along with his wife, Myrtle, and two daughters Joan and Joyce (above). The youngest, three-year-old Joyce, fell gravely ill with pneumonia and, with a sou-westerley that had been howling for days, flag-signalling had failed to attract attention. All the station's messenger pigeons had been released, but none survived the flight to North Hobart. We can only imagine the increasing anxiety of those on the island as a huge bonfire was lit to attract attention. After a ship passing in the night reported the fire to authorities in Hobart, *Matilda* was despatched to investigate.

The Log reports that on Saturday 16 March, at 11am, 'Mrs Mitchell and two children left Tasman in the fishing boat *Matilda* en route for Hobart to see the doctor. Children ill'. Assistant Mitchell left the following Saturday, after *Matilda* had delivered mail and sand, but sadly Joyce died in Hobart six days later. The depleted family arrived back on the island a month later on Monday 29 April, the Log recording in its unemotional manner 'Assistant Mitchell's wife and child arrive at Tasman at noon back from recreation leave and commenced duty'.

A year later Joan and her pregnant mother left the island on *Matilda* again. They took the public bus from Port Arthur to Hobart, where Myrtle was delivered of a baby boy, Don. While Myrtle convalesced Andy was transferred to Maatsuyker and the family never returned to Tasman Island. Don, now in his late 80s, is still a regular Wednesday volunteer at the Museum and the humble fishing vessel, so deeply connected to his family, is preserved on its pontoon across the road. ■

## *Back page opinion*

### The Statue Issue

I feel very conflicted with the present debate about statues of historical people – let's face it white, male colonists – and whether they should be taken down. On the one hand, the feelings of Aboriginal people about having monuments preserved which commemorate men involved in their dispossession – and worse – are absolutely to be respected. On the other, as someone involved in historical research and writing, I feel that taking the statues down would be a denial of history. I have a couple of alternative strategies, but first, I want to tell a story.

When I was in St Petersburg in 1981 – when it was called Leningrad and was part of the Soviet Union - I was perplexed to see an equestrian statue of Peter the Great standing proudly in a public square. I naively thought that such tsarist monuments would have been all torn down after the revolution of 1917. Even more surprising to me, I was informed that during the dreadful 900-day siege of Leningrad in the Second World War the statue had been heavily protected with sandbags and other defences, and that the Leningraders were proud that it had survived, when over one million of them had died. I went to the Siege of Leningrad memorial and saw the vast burial field. The people of the city saw the statue of the Tsar as part of their history and their heritage even though Peter had been no friend of the common people. His building of the city - almost floating it on to a malarial swamp in the delta of the River Neva - had cost thousands of labourers' lives.

So that is one response to historical monuments, and we are, here, obviously in a different place and time – also no Australian colonial statue that I can

think of comes close to the equestrian Peter in Petersburg, which is quite magnificent. But I do think that we have to accept that the statues we are agonising about were put up to commemorate people who were prominent in their time, and we need to know why they were so honoured and we need to tell why we might not so honour them today. Rather than tearing down the monuments, let us interpret them. We could do this, *in situ*, in two ways. Put up interpretation boards next to the historical statues explaining who these men were, and why their record is, now, not so shining and bright.

That would be one step, but what if we put up parallel statues of Aboriginal people alongside them, with the interpretation boards? In my birth-place, Hobart, we could have a statue of Truganini alongside the despicable William Crowther (or one of William Lanney whose body Crowther dug up and mutilated). And we could have one of Mathinna alongside Governor Franklin – that's a tragic tale. In Melbourne, put up Barak parallel to Batman: in Sydney, Bennelong next to Phillip or Pemulwuy with his adversary, Macquarie. The point is to understand the past and to learn from it – not to hide it. I fear that just taking down the statues would be an aid to historical amnesia. We don't want to slip back into what anthropologist Bill Stanner called the 'The Great Australian Silence' – about the treatment of the indigenous people - especially not now, when Aboriginal issues seem to have, at last, gained some traction with the general public.

James Parker  
Premaydena, Tasmania

## **Preserving yesterday's history for tomorrow's generations**

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