

TASMANIAN STATE RECORDS.

By J. MOORE-ROBINSON, F.R.G.S.

(Librarian and Publicity Officer, Chief Secretary's
Department, Tasmania.)

[Originally written for the Hobart meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, January, 1921. Revised, and in part re-written, and read before the Royal Society of Tasmania, 8th August, 1921.]*

A careful consideration of all facts concerned compels the belief that, ranking in prime importance among State functions, is a proper preservation of State Records. Other processes being normally in a continual state of progression or development, can never share the innate quality of Records. Records do not develop—they are the imprint of current events. They stand alone in the world of Science.

Records have not been well treated by Australia since she took her place among the living entities of the earth. It is the exception to find important Records explicit and reliable. For instance, the very date of Captain Cook's discovery of the N.S.W. coast is now called in question, owing to an alleged error by the Great Navigator in his calculations in crossing the 180th Meridian, while sailing westward from Tahiti in 1770. It is true that December 1st, 1642, has never been challenged as the day on which Tasman cast anchor on Tasmania's coast; yet many different dates have been assigned to Bowen's Settlement at Risdon in 1803. The almanacs up to 1893 give the date of Bowen's landing as August 10th, 1803. In those of the following year that date is altered to September 12th, and later September 13th, 1803, is adopted. Curiously enough, in *Walch's Red Book* for 1920 the date is assigned as September 14th, owing probably to an error in copying. So careful an author as James Backhouse Walker writes ("First Settlement of the Derwent," *Early Tasmania*, p. 26):—

"I have searched in vain hitherto in printed
"accounts for the correct date of Bowen's Settlement.

* Owing to the Shipping Strike, the Meeting of the A.A.A.S. which was to have been held in Hobart in January, had to be held in Melbourne. Many difficulties had to be overcome, and it was found impossible to publish the usual full report of the A.A.A.S. Meeting and to print all papers. Arrangements were, therefore, made for certain papers to be read before the Society and published in the Papers and Proceedings for 1921.

"The dates given vary from June to August, but I think we may henceforth consider it settled, on the authority of official documents, that the birthday of Tasmania was Tuesday, the 7th day of September, 1803."

Walker's conclusion is not correct, and his error is due, not to lack of examination on his part, but to the careless, inconclusive, and incomplete Records of the period. Bowen himself reported that he arrived at Risdon "on Sunday, September 12th, 1803." As a matter of fact he made an error in the day of the month. The correct dates of that important event are:—

Lady Nelson (tender) arrived at Risdon Cove at 6 p.m. on *Thursday*, September 8th, 1803.

Albion (with Bowen on board) arrived at 8 a.m. on *Sunday*, September 11th, 1803.

Proof of these dates is given by Dr. F. Watson, Editor of the *Australian Historical Records*, Series III., Vol. I., and to that author much credit is due for patient investigation and careful examination. In these circumstances it is pleasant to be able to state that the Records of the Tasmanian Government give great promise of affording not only verification of disputed statements, but the discovery of new and important facts.

One specific instance of the latter will suffice on this point. The exact history of Port Arthur has always been regarded as a lost possibility owing to the non-existence of earlier Records of the famous Settlement. It was loosely stated "that Port Arthur was born in 1830." The Tasmanian Historians, West (1862) and Fenton (1884), totally ignore so important a point. Since commencing the work of indexing the MS. Records in the Chief Secretary's Department, I have been fortunate enough to find:—

(1) Governor Arthur's autographed Minute dated September 7th, 1830, giving instructions to found Port Arthur.

(2) The Report to Arthur of Assistant Surgeon John James Russell, the first Commandant, dated from the Settlement October 2nd, and giving details of his landing there on September 22nd, 1830.

(3) Several other documents relating to the same subject.

These documents establish with authority, not only the exact date of the Settlement's birth, but the more important fact that at least in the beginning it was not designed as the ultra or super-penal station into which it afterwards developed, and from which it has derived its somewhat unenviable fame. The dates and facts given in these documents are explicit, and though their detail is not as full as might be desired, they afford a sufficient ground on which Port Arthur's story may be accurately based. They establish the fact that Port Arthur was primarily designed as a timber station, which might indeed be worked by prisoners more suitable (owing to their bad conduct) for life away from convicts of better dispositions. But Russell's testimony is clear:—

“Port Arthur,” he writes, in the first Despatch referred to, “forms a fine capacious harbour, and from “the quantity of *good Timber* with which its Coast “abounds, I have no doubt but that it will answer *the “main object* of its establishment as a settlement.”

Therefore, Port Arthur was designed and opened as a Timber station such as others then in existence at Birch's Bay and elsewhere.

Take another instance, that of Drake, England's greatest adventurer. Old Fuller, in his immortal *Worthies*, thus describes Drake: “A very religious man towards God and “His Houses, chaste in his life, just in his dealings, true of “his word, and merciful to those under him.” Truly a model panegyric. Yet Drake had been accused not only of being a Pirate, but of being the murderer of his friend, that courtly gentleman Thomas Doughty. And but for the accidental discovery of a 16th Century Record, Drake's name might never have been freed from this suspicion. A lady, Mrs. Zelia Nuttall, student of Mexican Archæology, a few years ago, was pursuing her researches in the National Archives of Mexico, when she chanced on a dust-covered tome. On examination this proved to be the declaration of Nuno da Silva concerning his compulsory association with “Francisco Drac,” who, it will be remembered, captured da Silva, and used him as a Pilot while on the Spanish Main. In his Declarations to the Spanish Inquisitors da Silva stated that Doughty challenged Drake's authority to behead him, and that Drake in reply, produced

“some papers, kissed them, raised them to his forehead, “and read them with a loud voice.”

All present recognised these as the warrants of Elizabeth of England, granting Drake, in terms similar to those used in the case of Richard Grenville, absolute power of life and death over all who sailed under him.

Thus has a Record—the musty Record of the Spanish pilot—proved the judicial execution of Doughty, and scouted the attainters of England's Sea Hero. Instances like this might be multiplied, but I am sure these two are sufficient to lend insistence to my claim for the completion and preservation of Records.

After this somewhat lengthy exegesis of Records in general, let me state the position relative to the Early Records of the Tasmanian Government.

Subsequent to the 24th of May, 1824, when Colonel George Arthur assumed the Lieut.-Governorship of Tasmania, the State Records are reasonably ample and complete, both in MS. and printed forms, and in narrative and in statistical styles. Prior to that period the Records are meagre, non-sequential, and altogether inadequate. Thus we have two prime Epochs with which I shall deal separately:—

FIRST EPOCH. PRE-ARTHUR.

This Epoch may be conveniently classified in three subdivisions:—

(a) *Discovery*, 1642-1803. This period begins with Tasman's discovery of Van Diemen's Land, and includes the successive discoveries and surveys effected by Marion du Fresne (1772), Furneaux (1773), Cook (1777), possibly La Perouse (1788), Cox (1789), D'Entrecasteaux (1792-3), Hayes (1794), Bass and Flinders (1793), and Baudin (1802). So far as Tasmanian ownership is concerned, no MS. exists of the work of these Early Voyagers. All we know of them has been learned from Records belonging to other peoples and nations. Not one stroke of the pen exists in Tasmania from the hands of this galaxy of illustrious Navigators.

(b) *Settlement*, 1803-4. The three names prominent in this period are those of Lieut. John Bowen, who on September 11th, 1803, landed at Risdon to form the first Settlement in Tasmania; Lt.-Col. David Collins, who on the 21st February, 1804, founded the present capital of Tasmania; and Lt.-Col. Wm. Paterson. The latter arrived at Port Dalrymple (River Tamar) on November 4th, 1804, in H.M.S.

Buffalo, but that ship dragged her anchor during the night in a strong gale from the North-West, and went aground. As a consequence, seven days were lost before Col. Paterson came to a safe anchorage, and on November 11th, 1804, effected the beginning of Settlement in the North of this Island, which he named George Town.

To these three names, or perchance more fairly to the Navigators of the Discovery Period, should be added the name of William Collins. This officer (later Hobart's first Harbour Master), who came out with Governor Collins to engage in the Seal Fishing, was despatched from Port Phillip to examine Port Dalrymple, and landed there from that famous ship in Tasmanian history, the *Lady Nelson*, on January 1st, 1804, three and a half months after Bowen had landed at Risdon. Wm. Collins spent three weeks, examining the Tamar, and was much impressed, claiming its beauty to be "not surpassed in the world." The credit of this voyage, however, must be shared between Wm. Collins and Lieut. Symons, who commanded the *Lady Nelson*.

Of this period, too, Tasmania possesses no written Records. We have at our disposal only the Records of other States, which, however, are sufficient to give us a fairly clear view of all the leading events. But these, even the official Reports and Despatches, are lamentably lacking in those details which the Historian finds so necessary to enable him to obtain correct colour and evolve an accurate perspective.

(c) *Occupation, 1804-1824.* It is a period of marked laxity in almost every Department of Government, a laxity in none more marked than in that designed for the preservation of official Records. I do not desire to place individual blame, for that would be manifestly unfair. Circumstances fortuitously guided to an unfortunate end. Official jealousies, the lack of instructions, personal weakness, the vacillations of the Home Government, and many other forces active and passive, combined to the unhappy result, the which it is no part of my purpose to enter into here. Our Records, official and private, of this period are hopelessly inadequate, especially when we reflect that it is the real foundation on which the fabric of Tasmanian History should be built. A few Garrison Orders of Collins, the Journal of that worldly divine, the Rev. Robt. Knopwood, some transcripts of letters and despatches by Governor Sorell, some second-hand statements, generally garbled, concerning Commandants Giel, Murray, and others, the incidental light shed by Despatches from the Governor in

Chief to the Home Government; a few Court Documents and Survey Records, and the terse official notes and notices of the *Hobart Town Gazette*, which began publication on June 1st, 1816; these, and a few odds and ends, are the main bases on which the story of the years 1804 to 1824 has to be founded.

I will tabulate those that have come under my own notice:—

(1) Our Survey Department has some interesting Records of Land Grants, Buildings and Allotments, Statements of Fees, etc., which are being indexed, and so made available.

(2) We have a priceless original Land Grant dated December 18th, 1805, signed by Philip Gidley King, devising that "Henrietta Farm" of 100 acres on the banks of the Derwent, to Henry Hayes. This is, I believe, the oldest land document extant relating to Tasmania. In the Chief Secretary's possession.

(3) A MS. Map dated 1803 of the country East of the Derwent, by James Meehan, with that Surveyor's Field Books. In possession of Lands and Survey Department. This map, the oldest extant of Tasmania, has some curious and interesting features. These are dealt with in my *Tasmanian Nomenclature* published in 1911, and by Mr. T. Dunbabin in some articles published in *The Mercury* in 1912, and headed "In the Map Room."

(4) Two type-written copies (in the possession of the Royal Society of Tasmania) of some of Governor Sorell's Letters and Despatches dated 1818.

(5) A Book half full of Drafts and Letters to Home Government Departments by various Governors from 1818 to 1824. His Excellency the Governor has kindly allowed me to peruse this book, which is in his official possession.

(6) A book of some of the Records of the Judge Advocates Court. It is endorsed "No. 7," and dated from June 2, 1823. This is in the Chief Secretary's Vaults.

(7) Sundry Deeds and Bonds, fragmentary and disconnected, dated from 1819 onward. In the Chief Secretary's Vaults.

(8) Some unexamined Files of Correspondence which Dr. Watson and I recently found at George Town, and which are now in the possession of the Chief Secretary.

(9) A complete File of the *Hobart Town Gazette* (Government), commencing with Vol. I. on June 3rd, 1816. In the Chief Secretary's Vaults.

(10) Some Muster Rolls recently discovered at Launceston.

SECOND EPOCH. ARTHUR AND ONWARDS.

MS. CORRESPONDENCE. In the vault of the Chief Secretary, we have an invaluable collection of MS. official documents, filed from the beginning of his Regime, by Tasmania's most noteworthy Governor, Col. George Arthur. Counting to the beginning of the present century, these form a library of about 2,600 volumes, averaging about 270 pages. I am engaged in preparing these for careful investigation by compiling a Card Index of Subject, Authors, and including, where possible, the names of such prominent persons as appear. Owing to the pressure of other work, progress has been slow, but the Commonwealth has given assistance, and I am hopeful of proceeding much faster this year, and expect to have the bulk of the work done inside two years. Certain Indices and Registers exist in reference to this MS., but they are not of great value owing to (1) confused method of indexing, (2) missing files, (3) the cumbrousness involved in such a system when the dates of Files range over nearly eighty years. These disadvantages will disappear under a consecutive Card system.

These 2,600 volumes contain certain correspondence of a most valuable character (as, for instance, the beginnings of Port Arthur, referred to above), and I am hopeful that a careful search will reveal matter of utmost importance. Original Shipping Records are bound up indiscriminately in these Files, and when collated should afford intensely interesting side-lights, indeed lights of primary importance, on our early history.

GOVERNOR'S DESPATCHES. In the vault, too, is a complete series of Governor's Despatches, outward and inward, from 1824 to 1856. These, as might be expected, form a reasonably complete epitome of official acts and observations during the period covered. They have never been carefully examined, and when indexed may be expected to yield a vast number of facts, some quite new to the Historian. Some of them are the duplicate copies sent to the Secretary of State; others original copies, and some copies for filing. I do not know how the first named were returned to Tasmania, or by whose authority.

NEWSPAPERS. The vault contains bound volumes of Tasmanian Newspapers. The earliest of these are the *Colonial Times* of 1826 to 1856, the *Hobart Town Courier* of 1827 to 1859, the *Australasian* of 1824, *The Tasmanian* of 1826, *The Cornwall Chronicle* of 1835 to 1880, *Bent's News* of 1834 and 1837-38. The Volumes of these Newspapers are numbered and catalogued, but otherwise the information they contain is only available after arduous and exhausting search, "Page upon page, and line upon line."

HOBART TOWN GAZETTES. The Government has also a complete set of these from No. I., Vol. I., June 1st, 1816, to the present date. This set is a veritable mine of information, which, like that of the old newspapers, is not readily available. If these Volumes and the Newspapers were indexed in regard to news items, even up to the year 1850, some surprising facts would be brought to light. It is a work that I hope to see done.

THE BONWICK TRANSCRIPTS. No list would be complete without reference to the result of Mr. James Bonwick's work, undertaken at the request of the Tasmanian Government, and completed in 1892. Mr. Bonwick copied papers, some in the official custody of the Imperial Government, and others preserved in the British Museum. These include valuable documents relating to the discovery and settlement of Tasmania and New South Wales. Among them is to be found a copy of *Tasman's Journal* in Dutch (British Museum) and a copy of Woides' translation of it. The latter contains three several points quite new to History. I am hopeful of seeing it in print in the near future, as it is too good to be lost. The transcripts were largely used by the late James Backhouse Walker in preparing that series of monographs read before the Royal Society, and published in a Memorial volume called *Early Tasmania*, which entitled their author to be counted among the chief of Tasmania's historical writers. Much of the matter contained in these Transcripts is being published in that valuable Commonwealth enterprise, *The Historical Records of Australia*, under the able editorship of Dr. Frederick Watson, referred to above.

PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS. It is, I suppose, hardly necessary to state that the vault contains a complete set of Parliamentary Papers since Responsible Government in 1856, and the enactments of the earlier Legislative Council from 1837.

GAZETTES OTHER THAN TASMANIAN. Our collection of these is interesting and valuable, although rarely used. It includes:—

- (1) *SYDNEY Gazette*, 1833 to 1864.
- (2) *LONDON Gazette* (bound), 1839 to 1874. Unbound to date.
- (3) *WEST AUSTRALIA Gazette*, 1824 (No. 287) *et seq.*
- (4) *SOUTH AUSTRALIAN Gazette*, 1842 (No. 212), *et seq.*
- (5) *VICTORIAN Gazette*, June, 1852, *et seq.*
- (6) *QUEENSLAND Gazette*, 1860, 1861, 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867.
- (7) *NEW ZEALAND Gazette*, 1843 to 1866.
- (8) *AUCKLAND, WELLINGTON, SOUTHLAND and OTAGO Gazettes*, various dates from the fifties.
- (9) *CAPE OF GOOD HOPE Gazette*, January, 1847, *et seq.*

SOME SUGGESTIONS.

I do not wish to close this paper without suggesting practical application of its main purpose. I am certain that if Governments realised the value, actual and historical, of their old Records, they would have them properly indexed and available for use.

I think that a useful first step would be for all the State Governments to get into communication with a view to each having returned to its possession any documents now held by another Government.

The next step would be to arrange that all historical matter held by State Governments should be arranged, collated, and indexed on a system common to all. This is an important aspect, which will be appreciated most by those who have had the task of hunting up information in more than one State.

A further step would be an endeavour to obtain re-possession of any official documents which by one means or another have strayed from official custody.

I need scarcely stress the great advantages which would accrue if the State officers in charge of Historical Records were to be in constant communication with each other.

By these means Australia would gradually build up a solid, authoritative, and complete foundation upon which Australia's historian, when he eventuates, would be enabled to construct an historical fabric worthy of our Commonwealth, and worthy, too, of those indomitable spirits who, preceding us, have shaped for us so goodly an heritage.

CONCLUSION.

It is impossible to conclude this paper without making reference to the interest, no less than the courtesy and kindness, of the Honourable the Premier of Tasmania (Sir Walter Lee) in regard to its subject matters. The Government of which Sir Walter Lee is Premier has taken a keen interest in the Historical Records of the State, and has kindly conceded to me the privilege of committing to paper for the first time in the State's History the facts concerning Tasmania's Records, set out here. I feel this to be a great boon. The Under Secretary (Mr. D'Arcy Addison, I.S.O., M.V.O.) and Mr. Charles F. Seager (Acting Under Secretary) have been equally sympathetic.

It only remains for me to express the hope that, in the not far distant future, the secrets held latent in Government Vaults will be unveiled for the credit of the giants whose doings the Records chronicle, and the profit of those of this generation who tread the tracks they hewed out for us with so much labour.