

## VAN DIEMEN'S LAND AND THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851

by Michael Roe

(with six plates)

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Imperial authorities questioned whether so distant Van Diemen's Land could participate in the 'Great Exhibition' to be held at London's Crystal Palace in 1851, but as it transpired, the locals made a notable showing. Aspiring to display the positives of 'his' colony, Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Denison was the driving force behind this participation, with Joseph Milligan his chief aide and members of the local Royal Society notably assisting. The range and types of exhibits were remarkable and fascinating. Contributions came from various local quarters, one of interest being an ex-convict with whom Denison had some political liaison, whereas, conversely, Denison's critics tended to abstain from involvement. Women played a role in contributing exhibition pieces, as did Aboriginal Tasmanians – Milligan no doubt crucial in orchestrating this. Denison was especially concerned to display Tasmanian timber, and other primary produce, but the thrust of the Exhibition was to celebrate human skills, and the contributions of manufactured goods and superior hand-crafted items conformed to that pattern. The world saw exhibits bespeaking an active, achieving society, and although the Vandiemonian contribution won modest notice in the British press, locals gained a share of the many awards granted to exhibitors. Not that the whole story was triumphant – some jealousies resulted and its difficulties and tensions also told of time and place.

**Key Words:** Van Diemen's Land, Great Exhibition 1851, Sir William Denison, Vandiemonian, Tasmaniana.

### INTRODUCTION

On 12 April 1850 Britain's Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, signed a despatch to Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Denison that enclosed a prospectus of the Great Exhibition to be held in London a year hence, under the active patronage of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort and supervised by distinguished Commissioners (TA GO 1/1/77, Inward Dispatch, 12 April 1850). Grey told Denison his hope was that Britain's colonies would have their part in this undertaking but remarked that the vast distance between Van Diemen's Land and the London metropolis might force an exception in this instance. The cited deadline for submissions was 1 March 1851. Instead, Denison, ever a man of determined and self-righteous action, seized the chance to tell the world of his domain's resource, and, as it transpired, he largely succeeded in conquering the tyranny of distance.

As an engineer by training, and of a family active in Britain's industrial boom, Denison fitted the Exhibition task. Among his pertinent activities since taking office in 1847 was to energise the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land, achieving its fusion with the older 'Tasmanian Society', and appointing Joseph Milligan as salaried Secretary (conjoint with his Superintendence of the Aboriginal station at Oyster Cover). Milligan and the Society were to be the Governor's instruments in the Exhibition project. Denison had anticipated Grey's approach, prompting Royal Society discussion on 4 and 18 July 1850 of a possible Tasmanian display at the Exhibition (RST Council Meeting Minutes 4 & 18 July 1850, RSA/A2). Grey's despatch arrived in early August, and on the 15th Denison reported its content at

a further Society meeting. 'His Excellency mentioned oils of the Black and Sperm Whales, or the finest samples of wheat – of wool, of furs, of timber useful and ornamental; of our coals and also of such manufactures as we possess.' (ibid.). There was now appointed a 'general' committee to oversee the task, but immediate action lay with a sub-committee comprising Denison, Milligan, Robert Officer, W.S. Sharland and Hugh Hull. Within days it met and prepared a statement as to the materials that might be offered.

The statement was endorsed by the 'general' committee on the 24th, which now further determined to ask approval from the Legislative Council for expenditure up to £250, and to ask Charles McLachlan, an important figure in local business and politics at the time, to be its London agent. Both moves won acquiescence. Invitations then went to some fifty individuals inviting them to join further committees that would vet submissions, and such committees were duly formed (*Hobart Town Gazette* 3 September 1850, p. 702).

Another initiative was to establish an action group in Launceston, with Joseph Milligan's brother Alexander appointed the leader. An interesting member was R.C. Gunn, erstwhile authority of the Tasmanian Society and important in its merger with the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land. Gunn now managed properties of the late Robert Lawrence, whose daughter and widow had both married into the Milligan family. Also serving on the northern committee were Presbyterian leader R.K. Ewing, Anglican counterpart R.R. Davies, naturalist-surgeon James Grant, and Charles and Andrew Henty. All were Royal Society members (*Launceston Examiner* 2 July 1850, p. 4).

A despatch from Denison to Grey dated 26 August acknowledged the latter's April communiqué and told of pertinent events, back to July (TA CO 280/62). It affirmed that the colony would meet its quota of available space (1200 super feet, half for corridors and half for items), but accepted possible difficulty in meeting the 1 March deadline. Could Grey seek lenience for this distant place?

The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 3 September published this 'statement' from the Society, calling for submissions, stressing how brief was the time in which to act, and setting a context:

*The committee desire to impress upon the Landowners, Merchants, Tradesmen, and Inhabitants generally of this Island, that it is of last importance than no inferior or second-rate sample of our staple products, such as wheat and wool, should be exhibited where they will stand in juxtaposition and have to bear comparison with the finest commodities of a similar description from the most favoured regions of the world; and that it is quite as essential, in order to secure a just appreciation of the importance and value of our ornamental timbers and other raw material the produce of the Island, that the best craftsmanship which the Colony is possessed of should be bestowed upon them,—bearing in mind that here also comparison must be sustained with the finest materials, and the highest efforts of the best workmen of the world at the present time.*

*Confident that Tasmanian wheat, wool, and timbers, whether for ship-building or ornamental purposes, need not shrink in comparison for a prize in the eyes of the civilised world, and solicitous that no advantage which the Colony possesses should from apathy or inadvertence be thrown away, the Committee repeats that they are most anxious to have it in their power to forward for exposition the finest samples which the Island affords; and they earnestly, therefore, entreat persons possessed of first-rate qualities to forward samples without delay.*

*Great Britain, confident in the vast and varied resources of an empire on which the sun never sets, and in the possession of machinery, engineering skill and artisanship all but omnipotent, has challenged the world to competition. Let us not think that we bring a feeble and inefficient contingent to the aid of our mighty Fatherland. We have corn, wool, and oil, for man's necessities and his comfort — we have coal and iron to give him power and command — we have timber (not to be surpassed in the world) for ship-building and for ornamental purposes; at once elements of national strength, and a guarantee for advancement in commerce, civilisation, and refinement.*

(*Hobart Town Gazette* 3 September 1850, p. 701)

These Churchillian words probably came from Denison's hand, with the committees assisting. Denison authorised that the government printer issue 500 copies of this statement for general distribution (TA CSO 24/1/173/5010).

Joseph Milligan and the committees now set to garnering exhibits. Presumably government officers joined the task but

there is little information as to how the process proceeded. What inducements were held out to prospective exhibitors? How stringent were the committees in vetting items? While no answers can be given, a little more is known of the northern committee than the southern ones, as it reported to the Royal Society in Hobart in mid-September of 'doing all in their power [but] they were not sanguine that they will be able to affect a great deal' (RST Council Meeting Minutes 18 September 1850, RSA/A2). Yet this committee did advertise in the press, as it seems no southern group did. One important decision of the committee-in-chief was to send exhibits by the *Derwent*, at £5 per ton (excepting £3 for 'long timber').

Papers received from the Colonial Office in mid-November might have added to the committees' burden. The London elite spelled out exhibitors' responsibility for packaging their wares and post-Exhibition disposal. As against this, Customs duties would not be exacted. Bronze medal prizes would be awarded, with honourable mentions following. Multiple juries would determine award winners, and all this was outlined in the *Hobart Town Gazette* (26 November 1850, pp. 1023–1026).

### Local politics

Local politics had some bearing on future developments. In the background lay the passage in Britain (August 1850) of the *Australian Colonies Government Act*; this was to come into force a year hence and thereby the local Legislative Council would expand, with a majority of elected members (Townsend 1977). Vandemonian support for such reform came largely from elites, anxious to secure further power over their domain; backing came also from the press, especially the *Hobart Town Courier*. Overall, these forces sought the end of convict transportation to Tasmania, so Denison and Earl Grey, who strongly supported transportation, became the targets of their attack. The Grey–Denison sponsorship of the Exhibition perhaps tainted it among these opponents of the Governor and deterred them from participating. While that claim must be hesitant, there can be no doubt that Denison saw the Exhibition as offering scope to display what his governance had achieved.

The story has a further side. While one must hesitate in proposing that colonial elites resiled from supporting the Exhibition, a corollary has more force: the roll of local exhibitors clinches that the project won favour from a 'rising middle class' such as has been the dynamic of change in many a society. In turn, Van Diemen's Land's history ensured that ex-convicts were prominent among mobile types. This makes all the more interesting (whether as cause, effect, or mere coincidence) a current surge of politics from that quarter: early in October 1850 was founded the 'Tasmanian Union', strong in support of Denison and still stronger in antipathy to anti-transportationists, seen as determined to impose monstrous stigma on all ex-convicts (Roe 2016). Feeling was mutual: 'they return, like dogs to their vomit, and seek to play off Sir William Denison as the friend of the prisoner,' said *The Courier* of Union leadership (*The Courier* 9 November 1850, p. 2).

Meanwhile, Milligan and the committees persevered. Proposed exhibits were gathered in Hobart and some final vetting then applied. The *Advertiser*, alone among established journals in supporting Denison, noticed in mid-November that items were now on display and for three days before exhibits went aboard the *Derwent*, they stood in the ballroom of Government House. Everyone – but especially ‘operatives’ – were invited to see them; responders approached 2000 (*The Britannia And Trades' Advocate* 21 November 1850, p. 2; *The Cornwall Chronicle* 28 November 1850, p. 847).

A Denison despatch joined the cargo, repeating earlier doubts as to meeting the 1 March deadline, and again seeking Grey's support for lenience ‘in favour of a Colony at so great a distance, the Inhabitants of which have exerted themselves so strenuously’ (Denison & Denison 2004, p. 139, p. 148). Denison remarked that the exhibits included several from government institutions, convict stations and the Orphan School, and asked that should any money arise from post-Exhibition sale of the school's offerings, that it goes to the children. The colony's splendid timbers, continued Denison, well might come before Admiralty's notice. Also, aboard *Derwent* was an overview of the exhibits and their proposed arrangement, provided by Milligan as the author. Meanwhile, Lady Denison told her mother that ‘we really muster a very respectable assortment’ of items, and likewise invoked the Exhibition as she wrote to a British friend in March 1851, encouraging the recipient to pressure her influential husband to boost Tasmanian timber.

*Derwent* sailed in mid-December 1850 and arrived in London on 31 March 1851, stretching the deadline by a mere 30 days. McLachlan helped in getting exhibits to display, but evidently more active was Edward Barnard, the ‘Colonial Agent’ – a shadowy but important office. Onerous enough, the couple's task was minuscule compared to the overall preparations needed for the Exhibition's debut in Hyde Park's Crystal Palace on 1 May. The official *Catalogue* (Catalogue 1851) became ready just a day before and its big volumes pulsed with descriptive detail, further supported by a decorative poster advertised in the *Illustrated London News* on 24 May (pl. 1). Robert Ellis (British Museum Librarian and editor-in-chief) noted apropos Tasmania ‘...some interesting and attractive articles of furniture, ... a few specimens of textile manufacture, ... a remarkable number of specimens of fur, ... woods applicable for every purpose of art or use’ (Routledge 1851, p. 992). ‘Huron’ [sic] pine received special praise, that solecism often repeated; ‘Tasmania’ and ‘Van Diemen's Land’ were used randomly (as in this paper).

While Van Diemen's Land's independence was perhaps overly stated as a country among Britain's possessions in Australasia, its extensive contribution of objects was correctly noted (pl. 2). A full list of local exhibits is contained in the *Catalogue*, with many columns detailing their use or collection, drawing from Milligan's personal account (Catalogue 1851, Vol. 2, pp. 992–1000). They must be read with care as obviously Milligan presented the items in the best possible light. Some exhibitors remain mysterious; such entries as those for Denison, the Milligans,

McLachlan and more modest others indicate the channel of collection rather than the creator of the item. The *Catalogue* included at least one entry – having Denison's particular esteem – that never made the Exhibition. This was a mighty Blue Gum *Eucalyptus globulus* plank cut at Long Bay in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and hailing from the Huon yard of eminent shipwright John Watson (pl. 3). Its size proved overwhelming. The enormous plank at its original size (length 146 ft, breadth 20 in., depth 6 in.) was too much for the *Derwent* and had to be transported by another vessel (*The Courier* 15 January 1851, p. 2; Outward despatch, 23 January 1851, TA CO 280/73). The *Australasia* which left Hobart in late January 1851 carried a document revising the entry lists originally sent by the *Derwent*; this account presumably told of the plank's trouble, but it arrived too late to be corrected in the *Catalogue*. The plank was last reported at Manchester, on the way hailed by the London *Times* as ‘supposed to be the longest ... in the world’ (*The Courier* 17 November 1852, p. 2). Presumably, items damaged in transit which included some honey, hops and wheat/flour, also made the *Catalogue* but not the ‘Palace’.

## CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITORS AND EXHIBITS

Withal, the *Catalogue* offers an insight into the fascinating and rich diversity of Tasmaniana (<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001511518>, 177–182), presented here under exhibitors' names with its associated detail:

- “ABBOTT, John: ‘iron-sand, a fine emery-like substance which occurs in thin layers on the sea-shores of Long Bay in D'Entrecasteaux Channel’.
- ADCOCK, Mrs. Mary, Hobart: two canisters of preserved meat.
- AKERS, C.S. (Royal Engineers) Lieutenant C.S.: N[orfolk] I[sland] pine.
- ANDERSON (? possibly ARMSTRONG), Hobart: set of ladies' tortoiseshell combs.
- BARNARD, James, Hobart: swansdown skins.
- BICHENO, J.E.: alum, found near Bridgewater; limestone from the Western Marshes ‘at a place noted for extensive caverns,’ and from Mount Wellington foothills.
- BLACKBURN, J., and THOMSON, J.: model of Bridgewater bridge, ‘constructed of Huon pine ... on the scale of an inch to a foot ... erected by the exhibitors from their own design ... constructed by W. Armstrong, under the direction of W.P. Kay ... the length of the bridge is 960 f[ee]t., the breadth of the roadway is 24 ft., and it is raised upon piles, the number of which is 363; the piles measure from 65 to 90 ft. each in length, and are driven through mud and soft clay ... The whole length of the bridge and causeway is 3,3312 ft. The work was begun in 1833 by Colonel, now the Right Hon Sir George Arthur, and completed in 1849 under the Government of his Excellency Sir W.T. Denison, at an entire cost of upwards of £50,000. The navigation





PLATE 1 — The beautifully illustrated London Great Exhibition poster, which appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in May 1851. (Special & Rare Collections, Morris Miller Library, UTAS)





THE countries represented under this head, and above enumerated, have sent interesting collections of native produce of different kinds. Of these, the collection from Van Diemen's Land is the most extensive, comprising objects sent by a considerable number of exhibitors. In each instance, however, the attempt had been made to send for exhibition such articles as represented best the peculiar products of the country exhibiting. Many of the objects are of great importance to the merchant seeking a new source for known materials.—R. E.

PLATE 2 — Repute of Van Diemen's Land in the British Colonies (Catalogue 1851, Vol 2, p. 988).

**WATSON, JOHN, Hobart Town.**

346 Plank of blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*); length, 146 ft., breadth, 20 in., depth, 6 in.

[The various species of *Eucalyptus* attain generally a great size both in girth and length in sheltered situations, where the forest is thick, where there is no grass, and where injury has never or very rarely been sustained from bush-fires. Blue gum has been measured upwards of 90 feet round near Tolosa, on the northern aspect of Mount Wellington range, and on the southern side, according to the Rev. T. J. Ewing, one of the species has been measured 102 ft. at 3 or 4 ft. from the ground. Another *Eucalyptus*, called stringy bark, exists near the Cam River, on the north coast, measuring 64 ft. of solid timber at 4 ft. from the ground; the tree, having somewhat the form of a four-sided column with its angles bevelled, is 200 ft. to the first limb, where it is estimated to be more than 4 ft. in diameter, giving the enormous cubic measurement in the trunk alone of more than 1,000 tons of timber.]

PLATE 3 — Information about the 'big plank' as recorded in the exhibition catalogue. The plank was not subsequently displayed at the exhibition due to difficulties in transport (Catalogue 1851, Vol 2, p. 999).

of the river has been secured by the construction of a moveable platform, or rolling bridge ... The longitudinal beams upon which rests the platform or roadway of the moveable or rolling portion of the bridge, are shod with iron, and travel upon large flanged wheels, fixed upon a pier intended for the purpose, and the mode of moving this rolling part is by powerful crab-winch, working on toothed rails fixed on the framing of the bridge, worked by men standing on the moving part and moving with it. The lateral platforms are also moved in and out by crab winches fixed on the framing below.' [Thomson also exhibited a 'coloured, sectional elevation' of the mighty work.]

BONNEY, Joseph, Perth; Tasmanian birds, in case; manna, 'an exudation from the white gum-tree ... its properties are similar too, but less powerful than those of the manna of the druggist'.

BOYD, James: Marble from Maria Island cut and dressed as paperweights.

BROCK, Henry, Hobart: 'common seamen's biscuits'; ship biscuits.

BROWN, John, Launceston; blackwood sideboard; top of star loo table in Huon pine and blackwood; lady's table of muskwood.

BROWN, Fielding, Hobart: candlestick in NI ironwood, the tops from root of NI pine.

BROWN & COMPANY, Hobart: white wheat, casks in Huon pine and blackwood, with wattle hoops; oil of black whale, sperm whale, and black fish.

BROWNRIGG, Francis, Reverend: muskwood.

BURGESS, Mrs. Emma, Hobart: 'worsted work, representing a branch from a blue gum tree in flower, with four birds of Tasmania perched on the twigs. The birds are a redbreast, a small honey-sucker, a pardalote, and the blue-headed wren. The frames of this and the next are of the timber of the myrtle-tree of Van Diemen's Land, made by Mr. Pearson [Pierson], of Hobart Town;' 'worsted work, representing a group of indigenous flowers of Tasmania. In the centre is a waratah; immediately over it is a head of the grass-tree of Mount Wellington, in flower, then in order come *Acacia vercillata*, *Billiardiera longiflora*, *Acacia armata* (an exotic), *Richea* sp., *Acacia mollissima*, *Acacia verniciflua*, *Casuarina quadrivalvis*, *Pomaderris*, *Boronia variabilis*, *Tetratheca* sp., *Solanum laciniatum*'.

BUTTON, Thomas, Launceston: dressed kangaroo skin; parchment.

BUTTON, William, Launceston: samples of glue; solution of mimosa bark (noted for its tanning efficacy); dressed kangaroo skin.

CHAMPION, William, Hobart: 'round turnover table [of muskwood] with brass work and springs of Tasmanian manufacture.' [See also Hamilton and Moses, below.]

CLAYTON, Henry, Norfolk Plains: flour, cask in wattle.

CLEBURNE, Richard., Hobart: soap.

COX, Francis: Tasmanian insects, in case.

DAVIES, Archdeacon R.R.: rug of black opossum skins; ditto, brush-kangaroo.

DEANE, DRAY, & DEANE: wheat. [This was a London

firm specialising in agricultural machinery, seemingly agents for McPherson & Francis (see below).]

DENISON: Blue gum log; stringy bark; blackwood; sassafras; myrtle; tobacco leaf (NI); arrow-root (NI); maize (NI); cayenne pepper (NI); wheats – Farmer's friend, white velvet; James's Essex; golden drop, white Kent, mother of plenty, velvet, white Lammas (all NI); Chidham wheat; muskwood; myrtle; cedar or pencil pine; celery-topped pine; driptone (NI); rosewood; roll of tweed ('manufactured by the inhabitants of Cascades' establishment'); loo-top table, dogwood; 'pedestals for the same'; sofa-table top, chess board inlaid; rug of various furs – brush kangaroo/wallaby; forest kangaroo; black opossum; native cat (eastern quoll); tiger-cat (spotted-tail quoll); six tanned platypus skins; section of honey suckle tree; ditto, she-oak; NI maple; blue gum sections; limestone (Maria Island); calcareous grit (NI); blood juice, derived from a tree (NI); walking stick made from whale bone; coffee (NI); potash from blackwood, wattle, oak, peppermint; blue gum; red ochre from jasperous iron ore; yellow ochre; marl; white oak; pine; iron-wood (NI).

DE LITTLE, Robert, Launceston: galena from the Tamar; iron ore from York River.

DIXON, James, Isis: flax ('this exhibitor ... is endeavouring to establish the cultivation of the flax in Tasmania'); box of dried apples ('generally, more fruits are dried in the northern than the southern side of Van Diemen's Land').

DOUGLAS RIVER COAL COMPANY: two bushels of coal.

DOWLING, Henry: *Tasmanian Calendar* [Wood's ... *Kalendar*], 1848, '49, and '50.

DUNN, Hobart: *Mylitta Australis*, native bread from the Snug Estate, North West Bay. 'The native bread of Tasmania, which grows underground, like the truffle of England, and, like it, has a peculiar smell. It is edible. Having formed in a half-roasted state, portion of the diet of aborigines, and has been successfully tried in soup and in puddings. This specimen is unusually large, having weighed 14½ lbs in 1846, at present it weighs 10½ lbs'.

FENTON, Mrs. Elizabeth: honey.

FLEGG, Charles, Hobart: Wellington boots of kangaroo skin.

FOWLER, W., Maria Island: dogwood; muskwood; [s]he-oak; ironwood.

FRASER, Andrew, Hobart: pair of carriage wheels, made of blackwood and blue gum.

FREEMAN, Edward, Reverend, Brown's River: veneers of Tasmanian oak, [s]he-oak, cherry tree, and honeysuckle tree; myrtle tree knot.

GRANT, James, Fingal (of Tullochgorum): three ram fleeces, weighing up to 4 lbs.

GUNN, William, Launceston: mutton-bird feathers ('much used for pillows, bolsters, and mattresses'); with Alexander MILLIGAN: mutton-bird oil ('said to possess value as a liniment in rheumatism, and it burns with a clear bright light. The sooty petrel frequents certain low sandy islands in Bass's Straits in vast numbers during the

- summer, burrowing to lay its solitary egg, and literally undermining the ground.')
- HADDON, Captain W.C., Royal Engineers: muskwood.
- HAMILTON, William, Hobart: 'hall chair of blackwood with a raised shield cut on the back, kangaroo and emu for supporters, surmounted by a rose, with thistle on one side and shamrock on the other;' 'small round table of Huon pine with chess-board in the centre.' [Almost certainly the maker of item under 'Champion' above, see Watson 1993, Lake 2009.]
- HART, Charles(?), Hobart: glue; neats' feet oil; oil from sheep trotters.
- HAYNES, John, Hobart confectioner: various pickles – red cabbage, walnut, cauliflower, onions, 'mixed', tomato sauce.
- HOOD, R.V., Hobart: silver wattle; muskwood; blackwood; Huon pine; myrtle; 'huron [sic] pine picture frame, with gilt moulding; the gold leaf made by Mr. Hood;' myrtlewood picture frame; 'gold leaf, manufactured from Californian gold; gold-beaters' skin.' [See also, Royal Society, below.]
- HULL, Hugh, Hobart: 'Half section of the trunk of the Tolosa tree (*Pittiscorum bicolor*). This is the wood of which the aborigines made their waddies or clubs.' [See also J. Milligan, below.]
- INCE, W.H., London: 'A list of Australian birds, belonging to the late John Matthew Robert Ince, Esq., commander of H.M.S. "Pilot," and collected during the surveying service of H.M.S. "Fly."' [There followed a 43-strong listing. 'These specimens illustrate the ornithology of Van Diemen's Land as well as that of the Great Main of New Holland,' said the *Catalogue*, and expert advice (D. Abbott, pers. comm.) suggests that but few items were of Tasmanian provenance. Ince died soon after his Tasmanian sojourn, his father evidently instigating the exhibit].
- JENNINGS, T.D., Hobart: Huon pine churn.
- KEMP, George: cornelian, from the shore 'opposite Hobart'.
- KERMODE, R.Q., Mona Vale: fine wool.
- LIPSCOMBE, Frederick, Hobart: white Lammas wheat; dressed flax; ham ('cured by Mr. Marshall'); Huon pine table.
- LOWES, T.Y., Hobart: *Mylitta Australis* [native bread], obtained at Glenorchy seventeen years ago; shark oil.
- LUMSDEN, Andrew, Hobart: loo table-top, Huon pine, and pedestal.
- McLACHLAN, Charles: specimen of 'silicised' [silicified] wood. 'This magnificent tree was discovered on the estate of Richard Barker, Esq. of Macquarie Plains; ... it was 12 ft. high, and imbedded in lava, and distinctly surrounded by two flows of scoria, which at some distant day had brought out the juices of the tree to its surface, and because by a combination of silex [silica], completely vitrified, and surrounded the tree with a glossy surface, the interior of the tree producing opal wood. On a minute examination of the wood by Dr. [Joseph Dalton] Hooker, when here in the "Erebus," it has been discovered to be a species of tree not growing in the neighbourhood, and appears to be of the pine or coniferous species. It is conjectured it was originally thrown up by an eruption of a volcano to a considerable height and came down with its heavy end first upon a bed of sand and had there remained for ages. In describing the tree he says: — "The manner in which the outer layers of wood, when exposed by the removal of the bark, separate into the ultimate fibres of which it is composed, forming an amianthus-like mass on the ventricle of the stump in one place, and covering the ground with a white powder commonly called native pounce, is very curious." It is 10 ft. high, and when first discovered 3 ft. 6 ins. diameter, and has been excavated at very considerable expense and labour and was in a perfectly perpendicular position on the point of a ridge of rocks.'
- McKENZIE, Mrs. Flora, Bothwell: knitted gloves and lady's cape of opossum fur.
- McNAUGHTAN, Alexander, Hobart: velvet wheat, white wheat; 'superfine flour'; muskwood; writing desk and dressing case, both made of muskwood, inlaid with blackwood, she-oak, and myrtle.
- McPHERSON & FRANCIS, Hobart: wheat sample, 'weighing 65½ lbs. per imperial bushel'. [John McPherson and James Francis ran a provedore business; Francis seems the likely grower.]
- MARRIOTT, Archdeacon F.A.: muskwood picture frame; walking-stick of Tasmania oak.
- MARSHALL, George, Pittwater: wheat and oats.
- MARSHALL, Hobart: whip and whip-thongs.
- MILLIGAN, Alexander: 'biscuit, manufactured of Tasmanian flour.' [See also 'Gunn', above.]
- MILLIGAN, Joseph: Sassafras bark ('used medicinally as a bitter and a stomachic'); hones for edged tools; resin of the grass-tree ('highly inflammable, yielding, on combustion, a clear white flame and rich fragrant odour, ... said to be used in churches in place of frankincense; it dyes calico a nankin colour, and may become the basis of a varnish ... very abundant in Flinders Island and neighbouring islands'); cross section of trunk of ironwood *Lignum vitae* ('the density and hardness of this wood is such as to have led to its application in making sheaves for ships' blocks'); carpenter's bench-screw; three pairs of shoe-lasts; 'necklaces of shells, as worn by the aborigines of Tasmania (The shell composing these necklaces seems to be closely related to the *Phasianella*. It is very abundant in the various bays and sinuosities of the island. It possesses a nacreous brilliant lustre, which is disclosed by removal of the cuticle, and this the aborigines' effect by soaking in vinegar, and using friction. Various tints, black, blue, and green, are afterwards given by boiling with tea, charcoal, &c.)'; all three volumes of the *Tasmanian Journal [of Natural History]*; snuff box, ironwood; ditto, muskwood; ditto, Huon pine; ditto ('globular'), from tooth of a sperm whale; ladies' thread-holder, turned; ladies' puff-box, turned; goblet, turned; 'section of *Richea pandanifolia*, obtained Macquarie Harbour ... sliced, bevelled, and French-polished, to show the pith, medullary, rays and beautiful markings ... grows like a palm and attains



- the height of thirty to forty feet; Macquarie Harbour pinkwood ('attains an elevation of from 100 to 150 feet, ... chiefly on the western side of the island ... fine-grained and very hard, ... used for making sheaves' for ships' blocks'); Huon pine butter-churn; 'seven baskets made by the aborigines of Tasmania; four models of Aboriginal canoes made of the bark of *Melaleuca squarrosa* which the natives used to cross to Brune Island,' 'model of a water-pitcher, made by the aborigines ... of the broad-leaved kelp, and is large enough to hold a quart or two of water. The only other vessel possessed by the aborigines for carrying a supply of water was a sea-shell, a large cymba, occasionally cast upon the northern shore of Van Diemen's Land, which contained about a quart'.
- With Hugh HULL: kino from various eucalypts, 'said to be equal, as a medicinal agent, to the kino from the East Indies.'
- MOSES, Samuel, Hobart: 'jaw of a sperm whale, with forty-eight teeth,' whalebone, 'an important export.'
- MOSES, CHAMPION & Co: eight sperm whale teeth.
- MURRAY, William, Hobart: box of starch ('there are now several starch manufactories in Hobart Town.');
- box of Huon pine; mould candles.
- OAKDEN, Philip, Launceston: two Leicester fleeces ('the produce of sheep imported from the best flocks in England in 1837, is exhibited to show the improvement in the softness and silky appearance of the fleece, which is attributed to the climate.')
- PATTERSON, Hobart: malt, cask in wattle.
- PECK, George: cribbage boards, veneered and inlaid.
- PEARSON, Leonard, Hobart: pier table of polished blackwood. [See also Burgess, above.]
- QUEEN'S ORPHAN SCHOOLS: woollen gloves; woollen socks and stockings; knitted shawl.
- QUINN, M., Hobart: polished blue gum; maple veneer.
- REES (REEVES?): 'wattle-bark, chopped, as it is prepared for the tan-pits'.
- REEVES, I.G., Hobart: various leather samples including skins of kangaroo and calf; leather racks in horse ('cordovan') hide; 'skin-wool'. [See also Royal Society, below.]
- REGAN, John, Hobart: Nine dressed kangaroo skins, tanned with wattle bark.
- RICHARDSON BROTHERS & CO, London: two wool specimens.
- ROBINSON, Charles, Westbury: gun-stock of polished blackwood.
- ROLWEGAN, George, Hobart: 'Book printed and published in Van Diemen's Land, bound in colonial calf, gilt and letter with gold leaf manufactured in Hobart Town from Californian gold.' [This evidently was the first volume of the Royal Society's *Papers*, further noticed below.]
- ROUT, William, Hobart: cheese; honey; linen; leather portmanteau; rope lines; four brushes. 'Tanned skins with the hair on of the *Thylacinus cynocephalus*.' 'The thylacine is peculiar to Van Diemen's Land, and as its ravages amongst the flocks of the settlers are as destructive as those of the wolf in other countries, it is hunted down with great perseverance, and will probably be the first of existing quadrupeds which will be extirpated.'; 'Six tanned skins of the *Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*. The platypus of the colonists.' 'Combines with the hair and fur of a mammalian quadruped, the webbed feet and the beak of a duck, while the male has spurs on its legs like a cock. In its internal anatomy ... offers many resemblances to both birds and reptiles and forms the nearest link in the mammalian series to the oviparous classes;' horsehair; honey; beeswax; 'in no country, it is supposed do bees thrive better than in Van Diemen's Land ... now become naturalized in the forests, and many of the hollow trees are filled with the produce'.
- (COUNCIL OF) ROYAL SOCIETY OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND: Volume One of its *Papers and Proceedings*. 'Printed by Messrs. Best, and bound by Mr. Rolwegan, Collins Street, Hobart Town. The lithographs by Mr. Thomas Brown[e], Macquarie Street ... Bound in colonial calf skin, tanned and dressed by Mr. Reeves. Gilt and lettered with gold leaf, manufactured from Californian gold, by Mr. Hood, Collins Street, Hobart Town.'
- SCREEN, William, Hobart, ex-mariner publican: walking-stick, of whale bone, 'with round head and cut to resemble a man-rope knot'.
- SHARLAND, Mrs. Frances, George Town: 'pressed algae, collected by the exhibitor'.
- SHARLAND, W.S. [as agent of female kin?]: 'carriage-rug made of skins of the black opossum, lined with skins of the native cat;' 'thread lace, made by a girl eleven years of age.'
- SLY, James, Hobart: pair of dress boots, in kangaroo skin and bullock hide.
- SMITH, C.T.: hops; fine wool; cheese.
- SMITH, Philip, Ross: wool.
- SMITH, Naval Lieutenant: jams – raspberry and currant, green gooseberry, red gooseberry, quince; Epsom salts; wattle-tree gum from near Mount Dromedary ('equal to the gum-arabic of the shops').
- STRACHAN, Richard, Bonnington: two boxes of salt.
- STRUTT, William, Hobart: Marble from Maria Island, partially dressed.
- SYMONDS, E., Hobart: corn, barley, willow rods, 'fire-screen for chair back,' of willow, locally grown, dressed and dyed; bottle basket; fishing basket; double-handed baskets; book basket; knife basket; child's basket; key basket, open basket, long basket, straw (from NI) hat; sieve hoop of Huon pine.
- TIBBS, Charles: Hobart: crockery from Hobart's Domain clay.
- TOOTH, Edwin, Bagdad: malt; lambs' wool gloves.
- VALENTINE, William., Campbell Town: 'Three pieces of Huron [sic] pine, bored in the solid piece, with stops &c. (Two of these are bored in solid pine and are found to yield a softer and more mellow tone than those made of wood not so hard in the grain. It is considered that the tube, being free from joints and glue, and made of very durable wood, when properly seasoned, will be little influenced by atmospheric changes. The small pipe has a stopper, which being removed, an octave above will be produced. The stopped pipe is regarded as a novelty;



it gives a very soft note, well adapted for the treble half of the stop-dispance [diapason] of a chamber-organ. The third is exhibited to show how an open pipe of the usual construction may be tuned by means of a stopper, without injury to its use.’

VON STIEGLITZ, Mrs. Anne, Break O'Day: lady's cape of possum fur.

WALKER, Abraham, Norfolk Plains: plumbago (black lead); 'found ... in a shaft where lodes of lead and copper are expected to be realised'.

WALKER, John, Hobart: pearl barley; fine flour; white wheat; casks by a Hobart cooper named Johnson.

WARD, Charles, Hobart: 'Bushman's ankle-boots, of colonial material;' shoe-blackening.

WATCHORN, William, Hobart: tallow ('The exhibitor claims to have been the first to export tallow to England from the colony;' see below).

WATSON, John, Hobart: plank of blue gum, 146 feet by twenty inches by six inches. 'The various species of *Eucalyptus* attain generally a great size in girth and length in sheltered situations ... Blue gum has been measured upwards of 90 feet round near Tolosa, on the northern aspects of Mount Wellington range, and on the southern side ... 102 ft. at 3 or 4 ft. from the ground. Another *Eucalyptus*, called stringy bark, exists near the Cam River, on the north coast, measuring 64 ft. of solid timber at 4 ft. from the ground; the tree, having somewhat the form of a four-sided column with its angles bevelled, is 200 ft. to the first limb, where it is estimated to be more than 4 ft. in diameter, giving the enormous cubic measurement in the trunk alone of more than 1,000 tons of timber.'

WHITESIDES, James, Hobart: polished blackwood; myrtlewood; muskwood (Lake 2009).

WISEMAN, John, Hobart: whip, 'thong of colonial leather, and the stick a young sassafras of Tasmania;' 'two ladies' riding whips of whalebone, tipped with silver by Mr. [Charles] Jones; whip for stock-hunting; stock-hunter's saddle; stock-hunter's breastplate.

## NOTABLE ITEMS

In the gaze of eternity, premier position must go to an item that scarcely met criteria for exhibition – the 'silicised wood' appearing under Charles McLachlan's name (pl. 4). The renowned J.D. Hooker was in Hobart as a member of the *Erebus* Antarctic venture in 1841, and this wood came to be discussed between him and Charles Darwin (Darwin 1845). McLachlan might have gone to pains to secure it for the Exhibition but exactly when the item was removed to London is unclear.

It transpired that ancient Vandiemonian timber won display, as did various specimens of the colony's latter-day timber. They received approval, notwithstanding the absence of John Watson's mighty plank. Perhaps yet more attractive were the items of art/craft in wood. William Hamilton is famed as a maker of fine furniture and the *Catalogue's* notice of his exhibited chair told of its splendid

conflation of imperial and local symbols. This style was to be adopted as its (continuing) insignia by the first Hobart municipal council – as explained below, a pro-Denison group, upheld by the ex-convict interest and its sympathisers. Hamilton was a free migrant, but that he allied with the municipal council's backers is further hinted by another work of his being exhibited by its owner, William Champion – very much a Tasmanian Union man, ex-convict and publican. The liquor interest was strong behind the Union, Champion's pub notable too for being a centre of local trade unionism, a modest but interesting element in the social mix.

Another free-migrant furniture-maker to exhibit was Andrew Lumsden. Britain's 'Antiques Road Show' television program reported that the table he exhibited in 1851 went spurned for decades, but that after its television appearance on the program it returned to Australia and was valued at up to £150 000 (Tassell & Morris-Nunn 1984, pp. 109–110; Crouch 1994). A similar Lumsden table brought some £30 in early 1960s Hobart (author's knowledge); it fetched a thousand times that in 2011.) One Launceston furniture-maker to exhibit was the talented John Brown, who in 1849 had proposed that his fellow-craftsmen should exhibit their wares in Britain. Of other exhibits in wood the most intriguing is William Valentine's 'Huron' pine organ-work.

Two 'gentry' ladies of local birth and Denisonian affinity presented items celebrating nature. The appeal of Emma Burgess's tapestry was embellished by a frame from another skilled wood craftsman, Leonard Pearson. Emma was born in 1827, daughter of James Ross, once the teacher of George Arthur's children and a commanding journalist of the colony's earlier days; her husband, Murray, was the son of a senior bureaucrat and himself able in like service. Frances (Schaw) Sharland was the daughter of an old-Eton soldier turned Arthurian administrator, and wife of W.S. Sharland, Legislative Councillor allied to the Governor. Her algae won 'unbounded admiration' from British savants. The Sharlands' daughter Julia (born 1837) was the likely eleven-year-old thread-lacer, and if so, then she was another native-born exhibitor. Anne von Stieglitz, Elisabeth Fenton and Flora McKenzie ranked among 'gentry', but were of overseas birth.

The girls from the Orphan School who contributed their handicrafts added to the story of femininity (and presumably native birth). Other pertinent women were inmates of the Cascades 'women's prison' whose tweed appeared under Denison's name – the sole obvious convict contribution, although that was not spelt out. The preserved meats of Mrs Adcock, illiterate spouse of a Hobart 'pork butcher', might seem a mundane offering, yet a London journalist saw them as promising Australia's capacity to boost the livelihood of British workers, and her produce won further praise (*The Courier* 4 February 1852, p. 4). For posterity, much more important were items entered by Joseph Milligan, as Superintendent of the Aboriginal station at Oyster Cove. Aboriginal women surely had the greater part in making the baskets, shell necklaces and kelp water-pail (pl. 5), but like the

Orphanage girls and Cascades women (and the putative Sharland daughter too), they were all anonymous.

Leatherware's chief protagonist was I.G. Reeves, who claimed in May 1851 that the product had garnered £30 000 in exports through the past year. A free migrant, Reeves was ultra-active in pro-Denison politics; the speech exalting leather (and also citing the Exhibition as an 'imperishable monument of the industrial arts') belonged to that story. Reeves further appeared in the *Catalogue* for his calf-skin binding of the Royal Society *Papers*. After leaving the island he won election to Victoria's Legislative Assembly.

### PRAISE FOR THE COLONY

That Tasmania's effort achieved Denison's purpose has been this paper's theme, and various commentators spoke to appropriate effect. Prime among them was Secretary of State Earl Grey. Speaking in the House of Lords, on 9 May 1851, Grey said of the island, 'considering its population it

made a better show than any other colony that we possessed' (*House of Lords Historical Hansard* 9 May 1851; Denison & Denison 2004, p. 161). Lady Denison remarked on being 'mightily pleased at this, partly because I am very anxious for the honour and credit of this colony, but chiefly because I think it is in great measure due to William that we have succeeded so well'.

Less partial opinion yet echoed Grey's approval. Overall, the Empire did not rally all that strongly to the Exhibition, succumbing to such difficulties as the Earl himself had seen likely to disbar Van Diemen's Land (Hollingshead 1862, Auerbach & Hoffenberg 2008). Sheer bulk showed the island's effort – thence came 80 'packages' to London as against, for example, 12 from New South Wales, and 29 from South Australia. Occupation of space in the Crystal Palace echoed these statistics, and the story went beyond numbers. A *Sydney Morning Herald* correspondent from London told that 'We must give our sister Tasmania the *pas*, whether as regards the number of her contributors or the ability and care with which the descriptive part has been

McLACHLAN, —.

#### 348 Specimens of silicized wood from Van Diemen's Land.

[This magnificent tree was discovered on the estate of Richard Barker, Esq., of Macquarie Plains, Van Diemen's Land, 32 miles from the City of Hobart Town, in the district of New Norfolk; it was 12 ft. high, and imbedded in lava, and distinctly surrounded by two flows of scoria, which at some distant day had brought out the juices of the tree to its surface, and became by a combination of silex, completely vitrified, and surrounded the tree with a glossy surface, the interior of the tree producing opal wood. On a minute examination of the wood by Dr. Hooker, when here in the "Erebus," it has been discovered to be a species of tree not growing in the neighbourhood, and appears to be of the pine or coniferous species. It is conjectured it was originally thrown up by an eruption of a volcano to a considerable height, and came down with its heavy end first upon a bed of sand, and had there remained for ages. In describing the tree he says:—"The manner in which the outer layers of wood, when exposed by the removal of the bark, separate into the ultimate fibres of which it is composed, forming an amianthus-like mass on the ventricle of the stump in one place, and covering the ground with a white powder commonly called native pounce, is very curious." It is 10 ft. high, and when first discovered, 3 ft. 6 ins. diameter, and has been excavated at very considerable expense and labour, and was in a perfectly perpendicular position on the point of a ridge of rocks.]

PLATE 4 — The exhibits of silicised (petrified) wood attracted much attention; the magnificent specimens were originally collected from Macquarie Plains near New Norfolk (*Catalogue* 1851, Vol 2, p. 999).



executed.' London's *Morning Herald* made a like colonial comparison and judged that 'Van Diemen's Land has a much larger and more varied display and has already made considerable advances in native manufactures'. Another London voice declared that 'Van Diemen's Land sends by far the most complete and valuable collection from the Australian colonies', while *The Illustrated London News* affirmed that 'Van Diemen's Land makes a gay display of fancy woods and 'possum skins'. A further commentator praised the colony's advance in 'native manufactures', somewhat surprised that 'worsted work should be sent to the Exhibition from the antipodes'. Scientific luminaries applauded Milligan's work as presenting 'the most clearly arranged and the most explanatory of all the catalogues', while a popular *Guide to the Great Exhibition* affirmed that the Vandiemonian display:

... is most satisfactorily abundant in its ocular evidences of civilization. Their cloths, preserved meats (beef-steak to wit! [Mrs Adcock's second hit]), enamelled hides and excellent furniture, almost equalling our own for make and taste of execution, are triumphant proof of the progress of knowledge and industry over brute force and self-contented un-intellectuality.  
(Routledge & Co 1851, pp. 121–122)

Appropriate to all this was John Tallis's inclusion of a stunning map of Tasmania in the newly published *Illustrated Atlas and Modern History of the World*, celebrating the Exhibition (Tallis & Martin 1851, p. 59).

## ABORIGINAL CONCERNS

At least one British voice was different, protesting the fate of the island's 'now extinct Aborigines':

*In our forty years' possession of that settlement we have utterly destroyed them, by as atrocious a series of oppressions as ever were perpetrated by the unscrupulous strong upon the defenceless feeble. Yet these poor people had tastes and industry too. Their bread appears to be worth reviving as a new truffle for soup by the gourmands of Hobart Town. The specimen of the root exhibited weighs 14lb. They obtained a brilliant shell necklace by soaking and rubbing off the cuticle, and gaining various tints by hot decoctions of herbs. They procured paint by burning iron ore and reducing it to powder by grindstones. They converted sea-shells and sea-weeds into convenient water-vessels; they wove baskets' and they constructed boats with safe catamarans. All these things are exhibited. Surely, then, the men whom their greedy supplanters admit to have done this, and whom the least possible pains ever bestowed upon them proved to be capable of much more, ought not to have been hunted down, as we know they were, and then almost inveigled to be shut up in an island too small for even the few remaining. (The Courier 3 September 1851, p. 3, quoting from The Illustrated London News 24 May 1851)*

This remarkable piece appeared in *The Illustrated London News*, and duly in Hobart's *The Courier* – without comment, a loud silence.



PLATE 5 — Model canoe and kelp water-pitcher made by Tasmanian Aborigines and sent by J. Milligan to the Great Exhibition. Associated information provided with the images. **A.** Model canoe, or catamaran, made from *Melaleuca squarossa* [tea-tree] and *Leptospermum* [paper bark] bark. Made from bundles of bark, tied together with plant fibres. Both tips are broken with one tip detached. Height 26.40 cm, width 16.50 cm, depth: 78.20 cm. The model was exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, London: catalogue number 282. **B.** Water vessel made of Bull Kelp (*Durvillaea potatorum*) consisting of a single piece of dark brown coloured kelp. Sides are gathered together, and wooden sticks passed through the folds, preserving its shape. Handle is of twisted fibre, knotted together near the centre. British Museum Asset number 1613713295, image released under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

## MEDALS AND AWARDS

The honours-awarding juries ignored such tragedy and awarded medals and certificates (*Report of the Commissioners* 1852). The Exhibition Medal was reported to be one of the most magnificent ever produced by the celebrated firm of Allen and Moore from Birmingham (*Hobart Guardian* 22 October 1851, p. 3), (pl. 6). A consolidated list of locals appeared in *The Courier* (14 May 1853, p. 3), although some ambiguities remain (Royal Society of Tasmania 1854, pp. 490–492). Probably Tasmania's overall record was barely above average – yet that sufficed. Denison and Milligan both received 'Prize Medals' for their services, and further ones for their contribution: minerals and rocks specified in the former instance and 'raw materials' in the latter (doubtless referring primarily to timber, but 'his' Norfolk Island pepper also scored at this level). Further prize medallists were Boyd, Brownrigg, Douglas River Coal Company, Dowling, Fowler, Hadden, Hood, McNaughtan, McPherson & Francis, Alexander Milligan (as agent for W.B. Dean—see below) and Whitesides. Honourable Mentions went to Akers, Boyd, Brown & Company, W. Button, Denison (for Norfolk Island's arrowroot and blood-juice), Dixon, Euston, Freeman, Grant, Hull (woods), Lipscombe (for both his own flax and Marshall's ham exhibited by him), J. Milligan (for unspecified 'produce'), Moses, Murray, Quinn, Rolwegan, Rout, Smith (the Naval man, for his gum), Tooth (for his malt) and J. Walker. Then came 'Exhibitor's Medals' which were bestowed upon Adcock, Armstrong, Barnard, Bicheno, Brown, T. Button, Champion, Cleburne, Fraser, Dixon, Gunn, Hamilton, Hood, Hull, Kermod, Lowes, McKenzie, G. Marshall, Moses, Murray, Patterson, Pearson, Marriott, Peck, Reeves, Robinson, C.T. Smith, P. Smith, Strutt, W.S. Sharland, Symonds, Thomson, Tibbs, Valentine, A. Walker, J. Walker, Ward, Wiseman. Virtually all the rest got a certificate. One went even to non-exhibitor John Watson while the Bridgewater model was ignored. Further lessening confidence in the judges is their placing in the lowest category such people as Lumsden, Frances Sharland and George Rolwegan.

The jurors' commentary rarely went beyond the obvious (major citations included minerals generally and Douglas River coal especially; wheat, flour and biscuit; flax and apples; pickles, sauces, resin and gums; Norfolk Island products including 'blood juice' as dye-stuff; honey; woods generally, walking sticks and snuff boxes). One near exception lay in praising Denison and others for a 'very remarkable and interesting collection of the woods of Van Diemen's Land'. Specifically praised was the blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) – 'the beauty of this fine wood is admirably shown in some of the articles of furniture, in which its dark hue is well contrasted with the equally beautiful light wood of the Huon pine'. The variety of materials used for snuff-boxes provoked comment, with a side-remark that whale-teeth were also used for 'stick-heads and similar purposes'. Applause for Norfolk Island's produce extended to its coffee, 'a most desirable novelty'. It went thus for McPherson & Francis's wheat and Dean's biscuit, the latter's excellence contrasted with

poor British stuff recently being supplied to naval ships and convict transports. (Before migrating, Dean had made biscuit at the Royal Arsenal, Deptford.) A further reference cited 'good, dried apples grown in the colony' obviously Dixon's; pickles and sauces, obviously Haynes's, also were commended. While gaining no award, Ince's ornithology was cited as an exemplar of 'cultivation of science by the officers of the British Navy'.

Another verdict honoured nutriment of the mind (*Report of the Commissioners* 1852, p. 407, complemented at p. 426 (Rolwegan's bookbinding) and p. 452). 'The jury have examined, with real interest, several works printed in Van Diemen's Land, at Hobart Town, several of them by Henry Dowling, such as the *Tasmanian Journal [of Natural Science]*,' went a soliloquy; 'Print is a gift almost as necessary to man as speech, for the manifestation of his thoughts'. An almost-explicit message went that the distant colony had recognised such profundity, whereas overall like work made a poor showing at the Exhibition. In mistaking Dowling's home-place, the jurors failed to recognise this major contribution from Launceston. Their compliment presumably embraced the Royal Society's first *Papers*, printed by Dowling and melding skills of 'Daguerreotype and Lithographic Artist' Thomas Browne, the similarly expert R.V. Hood, and bookbinder Rolwegan (its putative exhibitor), not to mention learned authors. All were heroes of Vandiemonian culture.

## AFTERMATH

After its amazing success, the London Exhibition closed on 15 October 1851 and Tasmanian exhibits (like all others) had to be deployed. Queen Victoria accepted the Royal Society's *Papers* (see *Examiner* 31 March 1852; receipt of thanks from British Museum and Linnaean Society at Royal Society meetings, February and July 1852; *Examiner* 22 May 1852 (Geological Society), *Examiner* 31 March 1852 (proposed 'National Museum'); *Report of the Commissioners* 1852, pp. 165–171 has material relating to a proposed 'Trade Collection', seemingly the founding idea behind the Sydenham project; an extensive list of promised items from Tasmania appears). Minerals went to the Geological Society of London, other items to the Linnaean Society, the British Museum, and the display that continued in the Crystal Palace when re-located (until 1936) to suburban Sydenham. Today the British Museum holds at least the 'silicised wood' and most of the Aboriginal artefacts. 'To see those [objects] that were made by people during colonial times raises our spirits and warms our being,' Patsy Cameron said of the latter when they toured Australia in 2014 (<https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/encounters>). After the exhibition on their return, the shell necklaces were included in an 'Indigenous Australia' exhibition at the British Museum.

Charles McLachlan probably was happy to deal with prestigious disposals, but rank-and-file items proved burdensome (TA CSO 24/1/173/5010). Exhibitors had been asked in advance whether they wanted their goods to be sold or to name recipients in Britain. Sales were





PLATE 6 — The Bronze Exhibitor Medal awarded to many exhibitors. Medal held at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (size 44 mm diameter, Accession number T469). (Image from <https://shapingtasmania.tmag.tas.gov.au/object.aspx?ID=80>)

negligible, save that one table (almost certainly Lumsden's) brought £5. Denison's hopes for benefit to orphan children doubtless withered. McLachlan wrote in November that he had been sending off remittances 'down to the pair of boots for "Elizabeth Brown at the Shoulder of Mutton, opposite St Andrew's Church, Ipswich, England"'. All this had incurred some £100 debt. He had distributed copies of Milligan's *Catalogue* data to various parties 'interested in the welfare of the colony' and concluded (in telling words) that

*Canada stood first in the list and Van Diemen's Land second, in the productions from the British Colonies, but both had a political object in view, the former to induce Emigrants to go to that Colony, the latter to show what a Convict Colony can do ... I have now closed the (to me) very troublesome matter, in which there has been a great deal of work with but little thanks from any quarter.*

(McLachlan, TA CSO 24/1/173/5010)

Thanks, however, did come from the Royal Society of Tasmania, and expenses were met. Another sour note in McLachlan's letter told that award of prizes had caused such ill-feeling as to make the Commissioners regret having so embarked. If the judges' grading of Tasmaniana was indicative, critics had reason for complaint.

As the Exhibition proceeded in London, it kept a place in Vandiemonian affairs. At a massive anti-transportation meeting in July 1851 John West deplored that at the Crystal Palace there 'would be concentrated the productions of the labour of free men in [all] the quarters of the globe, except a few contributions from Van Diemen's Land' (*The Courier* 16 July 1851, pp. 1–3, 1 October 1851, p. 2 ('rhetoric'); *Tasmanian Colonist* 20 November 1851, p. 1 (Watchorn)). Whereas Lady Denison enthused at Earl Grey's applause for local effort, *The Courier* disparaged it: 'to such paltry shifts

of rhetoric are our rulers driven to find a defence of their policy'. The paper to give most regard to the Exhibition was a newcomer, the *Hobart Guardian*, owned by John Davies as he became a hero among erstwhile convicts. October 1851 saw the anti-Denisonians victorious at the first polls for a part-elective Legislative Council. (An unsuccessful candidate was William Watchorn, whose tallow appeared at the Exhibition. A campaign lithograph presented Watchorn as 'Old Greasy'. At a campaign meeting Watchorn 'asked if his name was to be vilified and abused for sending to the Great Exhibition the fat of the land'. Here he was interrupted by tremendous peals of laughter').

The new legislature soon heard criticism of the Royal Society for being 'exclusive', the Society's link with Denison probably feeding this animus. Yet 1852 added to the Exhibition's honour. Early February heard news of awards to locals of 'prize medals' (*The Courier* 15 September 1852, p.3, and 17 November 1852, p. 2). Public lectures applauded the Exhibition as evidence of a 'growing spirit of universal philanthropy and benevolence' and 'progress of civilization, refinement, and social happiness.' In September the actual medals arrived, honoured at a Royal Society meeting for 'beauty, ... elegance, ... high finish'. Local talk, perhaps well-founded, now declared W.B. Dean's biscuit and McPherson & Francis's wheat to have ranked superior above all Exhibition competitors.

Political action went in step. September–October 1852 saw the organising of a massive petition that told the Colonial Office of support for Denison. Now, too, Victoria's legislature passed an Act forbidding entry thither of conditionally pardoned ex-convicts (Petrow 2012). Hobart's pro-Denisonians responded with furious and justified vehemence. One mighty protest saw the Governor and his lady attend, to massive cheers. 'The arrangements ... were looked upon by our colonists much in the same light as the people of England viewed the Great Exhibition,' one

organiser said, nicely linking that event with local politics (*Hobart Guardian* 18 December 1852, pp. 2–3). The protest belonged to a campaign by pro-Denison, anti-transportation candidates for the first election of municipal councils in Hobart and Launceston. On 2 January this party triumphed in the capital.

Although news might have percolated earlier, not until May 1853 did there come the remaining medals and certificates, together with (for every exhibitor) books of jurors' reports (*Report of the Commissioners* 1852, *The Courier* 14 May 1853, pp. 2–3, Denison & Denison 2004, p. 213). The generally distributed item was a compacted *First Report of the Commissioners 1852* published by Clowes and Sons, London. Presentation sets comprised a four-volume version of the *Catalogue*, four of *Reports of the Juries*, plus *First Report of the Commissioners* (*The Courier* 17 December 1853, p. 2). In September, Lady Denison wrote of yet further bounty: 'a most beautiful illustrated catalogue and history of the great Exhibition, in eight or nine immense volumes splendidly bound ... we have had so much amusement in looking over these beautiful books before transferring them to the public library.' (Denison & Denison 2004, p. 213). The items remain phenomenal – enormous, and luxuriant in gilt, plush, leather, and illustration. The series was displayed at a Royal Society meeting in December 1853, together with a case holding samples of the various award medals. Three of the giant books remain in the State Library of Tasmania and the medal case remains at TMAG.

Against these positives there stood a story illustrating the tensions that Charles McLachlan had told to follow from prize awards. As already shown, the fine Exhibition biscuit made by Launceston baker-businessman W.B. Dean was submitted under the name of Alexander Milligan, Secretary of the northern committee. When prize medals arrived in September 1852 one was designated for Milligan. He might have thought he had earned it, but Dean demanded what indeed was *his* award, threatening physical force and legal action. Milligan soon forwarded the medal, with apology. Dean continued angry and the issue revived in mid-1853 after the arrival of those further rewards. Milligan again kept what Dean saw as due to himself, and resiled only after more lawyer-talk. All this Milligan told to the *Launceston Examiner*, which had broached the issue in terms sympathetic to Dean (*Launceston Examiner* 28 June 1853, p.5, 2 July 1853, p. 672).

The alliance between Denison and commoners lasted throughout his term. Its later stages saw the 'Oddfellows' Friendly Society become important in bonding such Hobart people as had earlier joined the Tasmanian Union and voted the winning municipal ticket. Current Oddfellows' head was Charles Jones, ex-convict, skilled silversmith, publican and contributor – via Wiseman's whips – to the Exhibition (O'Driscoll 1987). While already *patron* of the Oddfellows, Denison was inducted as a *member* just before leaving the island in January 1855 to become Governor of New South Wales and Governor-General of the Australian colonies, the Exhibition chapter perhaps helping to win

him such promotion. Venue for the Oddfellows' induction was Government House, with Jones officiating: so strange Van Diemen's Land could be! Oddfellows dominated the continuing farewells to the Governor and surely gave much of a £2000 testimonial now presented to him. The money duly funded what Denison described as 'a very magnificent silver centre-piece embodying in addition to the old stereotyped forms, groups characteristic of the employment of the people or of the nature of the productions of the country' (meaning Tasmania). Whaler, shepherd, sawyer, splitter, ploughman, kangaroo, emu, platypus, 'sassafras and other native shrubs' – all were there. The motifs were chosen by Denison, their resonance with the Exhibition quite likely deliberate.

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