Editorial

More grant success

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and his colleagues at the University of Tasmania have swept the board with successes in the latest ARC Linkage Grant round. These grants build partnerships with institutions and private enterprises and will bring wonderful new services and creative products out of the Founders & Survivors project.

And still more success

Our colleague, Dr Alison Alexander, who drove the first transcription of the convict records for Founders & Survivors back in 2008-9, has won the $25,000 National Biography Award for her biography of Lady Jane Franklin.

Alison is Tasmania’s most prolific historian, with a corpus of work across biography social history, local history, industrial history and the editorship of the Companion to Tasmanian History.

This National Biography Award is the pinnacle—so far—of an extraordinary career. It has been praised for the subtlety, wit and insight into a complex, controversial woman. Congratulations Alison!

Scottish Convicts

In March 2014 Janet McCalman delivered a public lecture for the Scottish Centre for Diaspora Studies at the University of Edinburgh. In it she called for volunteers to do more work on Scottish convicts, especially for locals and visitors to collect precognitions or trial documents from the National Archives of Scotland.

Workplace Deaths

Tony Stagg reflects on some of the more dramatic workplace deaths he has found while transcribing records for Rebecca Kippen.

TAHO Portal

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart also reports on the exciting new portal under preparation by TAHO.

New Book

An edited version of the public lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh in March by Janet McCalman.

Scottish Convicts

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Volunteers’ Corner

More Grant Success

Hamish Maxwell Stewart reports on the latest University of Tasmania funding for the project.

Founders and Survivors received two more grants in the latest Australian Research Council Linkage round. The Linkage scheme is designed to encourage collaboration between university based research teams and industry and community partners. The funds we received will help us to expand our existing understanding of the manner in which transportation impacted upon convict lives, as well as helping us to disseminate our findings in ever more imaginative and user friendly ways.

The first project is called Treating Criminals from Ship to Shore and was designed to help explore life in convict hulks. As part of this research we will transcribe selected hulk registers enabling us to identify the convicts who were sentenced to transportation—but were never sent. We will also explore sickness and death amongst prisoners before they commenced the voyage to Australia. The lag between sentencing and setting sail was almost twice the length of time that convicts spent at sea. What happened to prisoners prior to embarkation almost certainly impacted upon their survival chances on the voyage to Australia. Treating Criminals will be the first individual level exploration of convict life in the hulks and will help us to understand more about the lives convicts led prior to being lagged to Van Diemen’s Land.

The team is led by Associate Professors Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Penny Edmonds from the University of Tasmania, but also includes Professors Christopher Lueg and Michael Twidale (Universities of Tasmania and Illinois)—experts in digital humanities computing issues. The industry partners are Professor Lucy Frost from the Female Convict Research Centre (FCRC) and Steve Thomas from Roar Film. Treating Criminals will cement the relationship between Founders and Survivors and these two dynamic organisations. The FCRC has already worked closely with Founders and Survivors to improve the quality of record linkage across the 1.25 million lines of data assembled to date. Previous collaborations with Roar Film have led to the development of the website, Founders and Survivors Storylines and the much acclaimed theatrical production Vandemonian Lags. This new venture will result in a computer simulation in which school children will learn public health history by attempting to emulate the success that surgeon superintendents had in keeping convicts alive at sea.

A snapshot of a page from the game for schools under development by Roar Films, where players put into practice the remedies employed by surgeons at sea. See more at http://www.roarfilm.com.au/

The second project, Capital Offending, will delve into convict bank accounts. Many convicts brought money and property with them that was banked on arrival in Australia. Other convicts earned money under sentence which was also paid into bank accounts. This grant will allow the Founders and Survivors team to explore the distribution of financial assets owned by convicts. The team will also examine the extent to which capital formation allowed some to go straight, find a marriage partner, migrate to other colonies or even return to Britain or Ireland.

This team is led by Associate Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart (University of Tasmania), Dr Rebecca Kippen (University of Melbourne) and Professor Kris Inwood (University of Guelph, Canada). These three existing Founders and Survivors members are joined by Professor Mardi Dungey (University of Tasmania) who is an expert in the economics of marriage. Professor Lucy Frost, FCRC, is again an industry partner as is Ross Latham from the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO). The project team was put together with an eye to further improving the information that is available online through the FCRC site and the TAHO convict search portal. One of the issues that the team will tackle is the dispersed nature of the Tasmanian convict archive. Different record groups have found their way over the years into a variety of separate archival, museum and library collections. Our aim is to systematically rebuild an online virtual convict archive—you could think of this as a digital restoration project. The bank accounts will be the first stage of this long-term initiative.
Founders & Survivors have been working with the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office to improve the functionality and appearance of the existing convict search portal.

The new portal, which will go live soon, will direct researchers to high quality digital images of the individual pages they wish to access. The current system takes users to the start of each volume—it can take considerable time to leaf through dozens of pages online to find the record that you want. The new search engine will rectify this providing similar functionality to that available via the Founders and Survivors website. Some further improvements have been built in. Users, for example, will be directed to the correct page in the Probation Era conduct records, as well as the Assignment Period.

The new system incorporates the results of extensive record linkage conducted by the Founders and Survivors team, increasing both the speed with which records can be accessed and the range of available record images. A particularly nice feature is that a search will also bring up all census, birth, death and marriage records as well as departures and other information for individuals with the same or similar names to those typed into the portal.

We are excited about this and will be working with TAHO in the future to further increase the range and usability of this new one stop search portal. We hope that it is a system that will prove even more efficient than the celebrated powers of recall possessed by Lieutenant William Gunn. Gunn was the longstanding Superintendent of Convicts who was said to possess an elephantine memory. The Patriot Exile, Linus Miller, recounted how this official had only to sight a convict in order to be able to recount the offence for which they had been transported, their place of birth and other details lodged deep in the bureaucratic machine that drove the prison without walls. TAHO users will now have the paperwork of the convict system at their fingertips, allowing them call up information from multiple related pages in an instant.

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart

Convicts to Diggers: A Demography Of Life Courses, Families and Generations

After successful workshops in May (Melbourne) and Hobart (June) we now have a team of a dozen outstanding volunteers who are transcribing information from the service records of Tasmanian-born World War One service personnel, and linking these Diggers back through their Tasmanian ancestry. This is being done using Google Docs spreadsheets and search functions developed by the project’s Systems Designer, Sandra Silcot.

We already have some exciting results from the 300 records that have been completed so far. We are finding much higher levels of convict ancestry than we expected, with more than 80 per cent of the Diggers having either Tasmanian or NSW convicts in their family tree. For example, we have so far found a number of Diggers who are descended from Nathaniel Lucas and Olivia Gascoigne, who were convicts in the first party of transportees to Norfolk Island in 1788. Some of their 13 children later migrated to Launceston and established businesses that traded goods up and down the east coast of Australia. It is estimated that Nathaniel and Olivia had more than 25,000 descendants in 2001 (Matthew 2011), making them one of Australia’s most prolific convict families.

We aim to have close to 1,000 records completed by the end of the year, and to have them ready for analysis early in 2015. We will use the data to explore relationships between heredity, early-life experiences, individual and familial characteristics, protracted stress, family formation, and upward mobility. The project will continue through 2015 if we receive more funding. We should find out in October 2014 if our application for further funding has been successful.

Our volunteers are carrying out wonderful detective work to trace Digger ancestry through a variety of online sources, dealing with common names, and those who lied about their ages or enlisted under false names (of which there were many). A big thank you to our fantastic volunteers who are making this study possible, to our fabulous checkers Nola Beagley and Tricia Curry, and to our sensational Systems Designer Sandra Silcot who keeps the whole show running.

Rebecca Kippen

Reference
Scottish Convicts in Van Diemen's Land and Victoria

Janet McCalman, University of Melbourne

In the Sydney Morning Herald of 6 July 1914, a loving son and daughter inserted a memorial with this verse:

In these ears as long as hearing hears
A low set bell seems to toll
The passing of a dearest mother
That ever walked on earth.¹

The loving mother was Alexandrina Askew and her grieving son and daughter had been living with her until her death in 1913 at 24 Jersey St, Woollahra, Sydney—a pleasant two-storied terrace house, then the abode of the respectable working class and lower middle class. With the passage of time and gentrification, it was sold in 2009 for $3.3 million.

The life history recorded on her death certificate by her son, gave her age as 77 years, her birthplace as Invernesshire, her parents’ names were unknown to him. However he reported she had lived in the colony of Victoria for 31 years, and New South Wales for 28; that she had married in Melbourne at the age of eighteen to William George Askew, that she had six named children living, aged from 58 to 44 and had lost one boy and two girls: nine children altogether.²

There were some omissions from this most respectable life history. Alexandrina did come from Invernesshire, but she was born in Fife, and Victoria. She had been a colonial transport, having been transported on the Tory in 1845. Moreover, she had had another child—Roderick born in January 1849 at the Cascades Female Factory while under sentence. Roderick’s probable death is not recorded.³

Her previous appearances in the Australian press had been in late 1867 in Victoria. She had been a colonial sensation, given publicity by an inflated article in the Illustrated Australian News of 25 November under the headline of ‘A LADY SWINDLER’;

A very clever series of depredations have recently been perpetrated by a lady swindler as she is termed by the victims. It appears that for a length of time the lady has been in the habit of visiting lodging houses and inquiring for apartments. Having satisfied herself of the respectability of the house, she proceeds to inquire into the character of the neighbourhood and having obtained the fullest information of the next door neighbour, she takes her leave of the lodging houses, stating that she has been re-commended by the person she first visited. She describes herself as the wife of a squatter whose station is situated near Piggoreet, and that she requires the apartments for herself and husband. Having agreed to take the lodgings she proceeds to pay a deposit, when, lo! on feeling in her pocket, she cries, ‘I’ve lost my purse; they have stolen my purse,’ and forthwith commences to lament and bemoan her loss, exclaiming ‘What shall I do; what will my husband say.’ The landlady naturally takes compassion on her forlorn condition, and promptly offers her the loan of a few pounds to alleviate her distress until she has time to communicate with her husband. The offer is accepted after many refusals, and the would-be lodger goes on her way rejoicing never to return again. Such are the facts as told in upwards of a dozen cases reported to the police, and there seems little doubt that the lady in each case is the same. The lady is always accompanied by a little boy, dressed in Highland costume, whose tears mingled with the sobs of his mother are the secret of the facility with which she accomplishes her schemes.⁴
She had successfully persuaded, mostly other poor people, of her superior social standing and her alleged connections. Outside Melbourne she would suddenly appear from the bush and often disappear back into it afterwards. Throughout all her cases she insisted her husband was a wealthy squatter near Piggoreet with 30,000 sheep and 900 head of cattle. As she collected more funds, her clothes became better and more ladylike. Her final conquest in the suburb of Richmond in Melbourne was with the family of a coach-maker, one of whose buggies she fancied. They invited her to take sherry. Conversation flowed —of the squatter husband, the home property. Mrs Askew took particular interest in the daughter of the family, who was poorly and in need of country air—prompting her to invite the daughter to travel with her to Piggoreet and stay awhile to recover her health. Such a pity it was that the new friends should miss each other the next day at Spencer Street Station.

She was to appear in courts in Geelong, Buninyong, Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat, each time able to evade conviction and long-term imprisonment because she had never actually asked or demanded money or assistance—it was always freely offered to her. Only the Melbourne police were able to prosecute her under the Vagrancy Act. When a miner from Bulldog (later Illabarook and a neighbouring mining hamlet to Piggoreet south of Ballarat) offered on behalf of her husband, in reality, a poor miner at Bulldog, to pay back all the money she had ‘borrowed’, the judge said that was not sufficient and sentenced her to two weeks gaol, in consideration of the five weeks spent on remand.

Around the 14th January 1868 she travelled from Melbourne to Ballarat after being discharged from gaol. On the way she obtained a lift from the agent of a local politician. He reported her as a ‘short, stout woman with a baby in arms’ whose husband had failed to collect her in Melbourne. She had been very communicative, explaining she was ‘on business, on a lawsuit’. And she was a sister to Mr Grant. She alighted by request near the settlement at Gordons, saying she wanted to go through the bush. She was still many miles across country from home.

A week later on 20th January she was in Bacchus Marsh Court attending to that lawsuit. This time she sat demurely with her counsel, Mr Gell, at the bar, not in the dock, nursing her youngest child. The case was brought by a fellow highlander, William McDonald, who complained that he had given her accommodation, and that she had regaled him with the account of her noble father who owned Glenmoriston estate in Scotland, her squatter husband who had 30,000 sheep etc and her thriving shop in Ballarat. Furthermore, when she discovered in the morning that her purse was unaccountably empty of three cheques for £70, and a carriage and three pounds were pressed upon her, she had promised him a cow, some Mountain Dew whiskey and enough money to ‘make him a gentleman’. Mrs Askew had a good barrister, who mocked William McDonald for his gullibility: the poor Highlander snapped back: “I only took her to Mr Johnston’s [for a buggy] because she was a Scotchwoman and represented herself to be the daughter of a nobleman. She talked Gaelic to me and I to her. I have talked Gaelic to better than you Mr Gell.”

So who was Alexandrina Askew? Where did she really come from? She arrived as Alexandrina Grant on the convict ship the Tory in Hobart in 1845, with 38 other Scottish women among a shipload of 170, otherwise from England. She was eighteen, allegedly born in Inverness, literate, and transported for ‘falsehoods, fraud and wilful imposition’ in obtaining clothes. Like all convicts transported by Scottish courts, she had form: had already served 60 days for theft, and she reported that she had done 6 months for ‘leaving my place’. She had been convicted in Aberdeen at the age of 17, and had been ‘on the town’—that is a public prostitute—for two years. She was born in Fife in 1827 as the daughter of Alexander Grant, deceased, now a ‘laborer in eternity’, and Jane Dempster. She is to be found in the 1841 census, aged 14 (if there is a mistake in her age) in the tiny community of Croy in Inverness as an agricultural labourer living in the dwelling attached to a farm run by John and Hugh Rose. It was later described as ‘a very inferior thatched house with outhouses’. A Janet Grant was recorded as an agricultural labourer attached to another farm. If this was Alexandrina and her mother, was this the ‘place’ from which she had absconded, only to be imprisoned for six months and find herself homeless, destitute and ‘on the town’ in Aberdeen?

If it was, then it might explain the content of her fantasy self into which she escaped so publicly in the goldfields of Victoria in 1867. The communities of Dalcross and Croy were untouched, it seems from the census, by the clearances that had shattered highland communities elsewhere. In this land of Clan Rose, there was still the ‘Big House’ with Lady Lillias Rose and the many gradations of caste and obligation were spelt out across the landscape.

Alexandrina was at the bottom of the social ladder, yet there was a school where she had learned to read and write in English. She was obviously bright, and imaginative. Perhaps she longed to be well regarded, a woman of quality, to matter, and have a proper family. When she alighted in Hobart she recited off an imaginary family to the convict clerk: father John, brothers William, James, Dennis, Alexander, John and Donald, plus sister Elizabeth, all at her native place. There is no sign of them in the census: in fact there is no Dennis Grant anywhere in Scotland before 1901. The one relative who was
real, her mother, is omitted. Or was fantasy the way she coped with unbearable grief and humiliation? It seems her outbreak in 1867 was preceded by the death of one of her children. Did she suffer from ‘fixed delusions’ or was she simply a liar?

On the voyage out, the perceptive and sympathetic ship surgeon described her as ‘orderly but precious’. Under her seven-year sentence she was frequently absent without leave, meeting men at night and consequently bore an illegitimate child in the Cascades Female Factory in 1849. She found no one to marry her, and domestic service was not to her liking, so she spent most of her sentence in the female factories. She was twice dismissed for telling falsehoods and misrepresentation, and was forbidden to work in Hobart or Launceston. She did not make a good impression. Therefore when she went to Port Phillip and quickly attracted a young new immigrant from Bermondsey in London, she put her age down, excised her convict past, and reinvented herself to build the family, if not the social position she craved.

Why is this story worth telling beyond its poignancy? It matters because Alexandrina Grant was an exceptional success among Scottish convict women transported to Tasmania in the first half of the nineteenth century. She lived into her ninth decade, she was not a conspicuous drunkard, she married a free man who stayed with her until his death, she bore ten children, six of whom lived into middle life and she successfully delivered and reared the illegitimate child of her second daughter under the common fiction that she was her own. Moreover, two of her daughters, including the one who had a baby out of wedlock at sixteen, married very good providers, even if one was an eccentric self-styled Swiss-Italian professor who dealt over the years variously in mesmerism, phrenology, homeopathy and marriage brokerage. And despite her periods of mental illness and fabulism, she was apparently loved. Few of the 1636 Scottish women in our sample achieved anything like this ordinary triumph over poverty, stigma and marginalisation.\(^9\)

Mary Lochrie who came out on the Margaret in 1843 was even younger at 17, and had been on the town in Glasgow since she was 14. She had six convictions for theft, could read and write, was a Roman Catholic and had red hair. She reported a large family: father Neal Thompson, mother Mary, eight brothers and two sisters, all in Glasgow, 11 children in all. On board ship the surgeon praised her as ‘tidy, clean and quiet’. Once in Tasmania she remained quiet, and was punished only once with six days solitary confinement for being absent without leave, probably while courting John Harrold, an English convict who had a good trade as a cooper and whom she married in 1846. By 1847 she had a ticket of leave and they were living as man and wife. She bore two daughters. Emma and Mary, in the next two years and in January 1852 she had a free certificate.\(^1\) The couple were now able to move to Melbourne, which was in the first flush of the gold rush. By 1856 John and Mary Harrold were running a disorderly house in Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne’s red light district.

That year their son James died from ‘want of natural nourishment’—Mary was not feeding him. By 1860 the marriage had broken down—Mary seems to have taken up with a younger man whom Harrold savagely assaulted. On 21 October their son John died alone in the hospital, aged six, from brain fever. A week later Mary had her husband in court for desertion and maintenance. She claimed he earned £4 a week; he counter claimed that she was not of a respectable character, leading ‘a most dissipated life’. He was ordered to take his two children home. A year later Mary was charged with running a common brothel and her daughters Emma and Mary aged 13 and 11, and two other young girls were charged with ‘vagrancy’—code for prostitution. The mother of one claimed that her daughter had been lured away by Mrs Harrold. Mary Lochrie had returned to what she had learned on the streets of Glasgow, prostituting children.\(^2\) Daughter Emma continued to offend but both girls married young, Emma dying at just 30 from heart disease suggestive of syphilis. Sister Mary lived to her 70s but lost her first three children, also suggestive of syphilis. Mary Lochrie died alone in the Benevolent Asylum at the age of 38 from tuberculosis.\(^3\) Mary Lochrie’s transportation, despite her ‘tidy, quiet demeanour’ ended in tragedy.

"Above: Little Lon’ where Mary Lochrie lived in Melbourne (Museum Victoria)."

Next page: Glasgow slums where her journey started.
Scots were certainly under-represented in the convict population transported to Tasmania: comprising about 14 per cent of the women but only around 5 per cent of the men. This was not, as one Australian historian of Scottish heritage imagined, because the Scots were ‘less prone to criminality’. Rather it had everything to do with the higher standards of the Scottish courts and their preference to transport only those who were criminal ‘by habit and repute’ and probably beyond redemption. Furthermore Scottish courts handed down the shortest sentences, even though the criminal material before them had longer records. English courts, especially before the 1830s, handed down terrible sentences for crimes against property while Irish Courts, especially once the Famine struck, were shovelling out paupers. Irish Courts were also prone to ignoring petitions of innocence in the case of perceived political troublemakers. In a hierarchy of bad, worse and worst convicts: the Irish were often not really bad at all, and the Scots were among the worst. We know very little about Scottish male convicts, but one of the best books on female convicts, Lucy Frost’s *Abandoned Women: Scottish convicts exiled beyond the seas* (2012) demonstrates what can be achieved with the Scottish precognitions or trial documents. It is also the best book for understanding the convict experience during the Assignment period.

Malcolm Prentis has challenged historians to explore the distinctiveness of Scottish convicts. And we are finding, now that we have researched almost 30,000 of the 63,000 convicts transported to Tasmania, that the Scottish convicts were different. They were more literate than the English, let alone the Irish, many of whom were not native English speakers. They were more skilled. They were more urban. They were more migratory. They were slightly taller. They were younger. They had shorter sentences. They were more likely to be single. They should have done a little better as convicts and after sentence than the English and the Irish, but they didn’t. They were more disturbed under sentence, more often in trouble, significantly more likely to die as prisoners, which shortened their overall life span as a population. If they did survive and marry, the only difference was that they had larger families. Like the Irish, they have more common names and are harder to trace after they left the gaze of the penal system, but we have also found that the convicts who were more likely to remain visible in the historical record were those with the best characters under sentence. Those with poor characters died younger and we have found that the experience of solitary confinement was more damaging to a convict’s life span than being flogged. Hence the convicts we have traced are biased towards the more successful.

Overall, literate convicts with skills stood the best chance of doing well after sentence, but not if they were Scottish. The Scots were, in contrast to the Irish and rural English, more often members of a criminal class, more acculturated by criminal society because a higher proportion had come from the metropolises of Glasgow and Edinburgh. And it was Edinburgh, especially for women, which was the Scottish crime capital. Like London, it was a service economy with little work for women outside domestic service. But what was its pre-Rebus crime culture? There are hints in convicts’ stories, but a systematic analysis of the precognitions would lay the basis for a history of the underworld.

These are the general trends and in individual stories there are many exceptions and qualifications. The 1840s were a good time for male convicts to arrive because once they finished their sentences, just over Bass Strait was a gold rush, a rapidly growing city in Melbourne, new land opportunities by the 1860s, and half a million newcomers amongst whom to disappear. If we take two ships that arrived around the same time as the *Margaret* and the *Tory*—the *Barossa* in 1842 and the *Lord Petre* in 1843—that had sizeable numbers of Scots on board,
we find some intriguing patterns that deserve further exploration. Of the 27 Scots on the Barossa, deaths could only be traced for 12 of them. Three died in custody, which leaves nine. Of the 27 Scots, eight were highlanders still at the time of conviction and of those, 7 were traced to death. Highlanders, if they had stayed in the Highlands, remained visible and lived longer. One to whom we will return, William Burnett had fifteen children. The only two of the non-highlanders who were successful were skilled tradesmen—one a gunsmith, the other a blacksmith and brass finisher, trades that were valued in the colony. Four of the twelve traced died in Victoria.17

The Scots on the Lord Petre were quite different: only one highlander who disappeared; the rest were men from Glasgow and Edinburgh. Twenty out of 42 were traced to death, two died under sentence and of the remaining 18, 11 went to Victoria, most of them to the gold fields. Only four of the 27 had significant families; two died in accidents; two from early paralysis which suggests syphilis; two of them died from the drink—one committing suicide while swallowing carbolic acid while drunk; and William Thompson was stabbed to death in their tent by his convict wife on the gold fields in 1857. In 1879 she remarried another ex-convict and died a respectable woman in Castlemaine. Her descendants served in the First World War.18

How did the women fare? Of the 44 women on the Margaret, 27 could be traced to a death: 32 of the 44 married in Australia but only 20 had children. Of the 27 traced to death, just 17 died after sentence when a cause of death could be ascertained: tellingly 4 died of alcoholism and 7 of tuberculosis: a very Scottish profile of health.19 On the Tory they did a little better but mostly disappeared from sight. All but four of the 39 Scots married after sentence, but only 19 had children, most of them just one baby. One died in childbirth having her sixth confinement at the age of 30. There were fewer alcoholics, none of them was murdered, but Catherine McNair was so deaf when she walked down the railway track outside Bendigo that she did not hear the train that killed her. Eighteen of the 39 were traced to a death certificate, and many died of premature ageing.20 This is why Alexandrina Grant was exceptional.

You may remember that when she was prosecuted in Melbourne for vagrancy in January 1868, a miner from Bulldog petitioned the bench on behalf of her husband offering to pay back all the monies borrowed. It may have been William Burnett who came on the Barossa, born in Banff, the son of a deceased publican and like Alexandrina, convicted in Aberdeen. He and Alexandrina had more in common than that however, in these four samples of Scots, those who made a family that survived were more likely to have married outside the convict world. William Burnett’s wife, Margaret McFarlan, was born on Iona, and could not read or write. She bore William 15 children before he died of gastritis—she at least could speak Gaelic with Alexandrina in this small, isolated quartz mining community.21 And those

This crowd assembled in the Illabarook (Bulldog) Hall c. 1895 to witness the turning on of the gas light would have contained some of William Burnett’s many descendants.
Land was the surest pathway to security, provided an emancipist had the skill and the application and especially the luck, to survive. After the best land was taken up in Tasmania, emancipists were forced to accept plots on marginal or remote locations. If they had big families, most or all of the children would survive and the land would be too small to support them all. Few emancipists had the capital for land and stock improvement and small farming in Tasmania declined into subsistence and deep rural poverty.

The better option was to leave the island and those who came to Victoria initially had more opportunity. Emancipists were early beneficiaries of the gold rush, picking up the easy alluvial gold before the tsunami of half a million gold diggers from overseas. What mattered more in the long run were the two great achievements of the gold rush generation: first the winning of the franchise in 1856 and the Miner’s Right. The Miner’s Right cost £1 a year, gave workingmen the vote, the right to mine, build a house, and cultivate a quarter-acre block of land. Miner’s Rights on non-auriferous land were purely residential. They could be renewed annually and there were industries, some with continued mining, most with a significant population of gold-crazed miners who lived by subsistence and paid their way in gold dust and small nuggets. Emancipists with the skills or aptitudes for mining found a place and small communities of fellow ex-convicts found mutual support in numbers against stigma and their children intermarried.

The second opportunity in Victoria was the opening up of the land with land grants—the other great demand of the gold rush generation—and some emancipists ended their days as small farmers with children to carry on the family business.

Others, however, bore the stigmata of convictism in their scarred faces, crippled legs and internal demons. Victorians played at ‘spotting the Vandemonian caste’ and people who ‘looked bad’ could not get work, however hard they tried. Many women were soon able to take over a deceased or deserting husband’s miner’s right in a designated residential area. This is Margaret Berryman’s in Ballarat in 1896 when the cost had fallen to 5 shillings. Lydia Ford (per Royal Admiral 1842) was able to raise her family in Ballarat East by taking in lodgers long after her violent husband deserted her. After five years he returned in 1863, broke her door down and threatened to shoot her. He was fined and bound over and she lived in Ballarat East until she died, an old age pensioner, at the age of eighty. Only one of her four children survived her.
She had lost contact with her parents convicted of theft in Paisley in 1828. Janet Black was just ten when she was three children: starting a dynasty. quickly remarried and had another in 1852, while she was pregnant. She had five children before he died and collecting debris from shipwrecks. early settlers on the coast near Geelong was Ashby in the town of Geelong, already a mecca for Scots and Scots was Ashby in the town of Glasgow or Edinburgh found a gateway to the western districts of Victoria where Scots prospered as pastoralists and squatters. It was also home to a Gaelic church.

Women had little alternative to marriage and needed to find a steady provider. Isabella Urquhart, born in Dornoch, Sutherlandshire was convicted aged 22 in Inverness for theft after being on the town for two years. She married a Londoner and they were early settlers on the coast near Geelong where they lived by fishing, carting and collecting debris from shipwrecks. They had five children before he died in 1852, while she was pregnant. She quickly remarried and had another three children: starting a dynasty.24 But Janet Black was just ten when she was convicted of theft in Paisley in 1828. She had lost contact with her parents and the judge recommended mercy so she received seven years transportation. She married an able man, Gilbert Marshall, a successful emancipist who was an early settler in Melbourne, buying land and starting farming near Melbourne. She bore him nine children and the youngest was just a year old when Gilbert was burned to death in a tent. The family survived, even thrived, but Jane slid into hopeless alcoholism with accompanying epilepsy. She lived—or rather drank—on an income of £300 a year from the farm and paid to her by her son. She was in and out of gaol as a vagrant; would take all her clothes off to attract police attention and died in the Immigrant Asylum, the refuge of the destitute from epilepsy. What chance did she have, incarcerated by the age of ten?25

Scottish convicts bore a worse criminal histories and more commonly from Glasgow and Edinburgh, arrived in Van Diemen’s Land more acculturated into criminal culture, less nourished, more tubercular and more disturbed than the general convict population. However, there are glimpses of Highlanders who were convicted in the Highlands, who were more resilient—or perhaps less damaged. In other words, they were like rural Irish and rural English, healthier, perhaps more deferential to authority, and in the colonial economies, especially in Tasmania, more useful to their employers.

Convicts’ destinies tended to be determined before they were transported. Can I invite you to join us in finding out more from the precognitions and the parish and vital records, about what went wrong in the lives of convicts before they found themselves in the dock? The Female Convict History Centre has two stalwart researchers in Scotland, Arthur Davidson and John Waddell, who are imaging and transcribing precognitions in the National Archives of Scotland: http://www.nas.gov.uk/guides/crime.asp#justiciary.

Is there anyone out there, especially in or visiting Scotland, who would be willing to help Arthur and John?

Can we join more hands across the water?

1 Sydney Morning Herald, 6 July 1914
2 NSW Death Certificate, 1913/11593
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Over the past four years, Dr Tony Stagg has been transcribing Tasmanian death certificates to 1930 for Dr Rebecca Kippen. Here he muses on some of the more dramatic deaths he has encountered.

As an historian, I don’t normally have issues with work safety; indeed the nearest I’ve come of late to anything resembling danger occurred when I reached into a box in the State Archives and found myself a little too close to the jagged edges of some rusty paper clips on a bundle of elderly documents. Keeping in mind the spectre of lockjaw, I made a mental note to check with my G.P. on the status of my tetanus booster. Workplace safety is still a serious business today: we have evacuation drills, site inductions, fire marshals, designated emergency assembly points, portable defibrillators and high visibility jackets. You lift with your knees, wear ear protection and have some understanding of the fundamentals of CPR. There are risk assessments and specialised training for working at heights, with hazardous materials, or around heavy machinery. Everything is designed to create safe working environments. The cost of failure is something no one cares to contemplate. We might occasionally grumble about the necessity of staying inside the yellow lines, but we take for granted the expectation that the places where we work will be as safe as possible.

Even so, workplace traumatic deaths in Australia still exceed 200 annually, and the conservative estimate of deaths from work-related disease is over 2000 a year, altogether a thousand more than deaths from motor vehicle accidents a year. Australia has one of the lowest work-accident rates in the world, but avoidable workplace deaths and disease cost around 4.8 per cent of GDP a year according to Safe Work Australia. Forestry remains our most dangerous industry, and Tasmania’s per capita workplace death rate is the worst in Australia, double that of Victoria.

Even a brief glance backwards into the stories of the past reveals just how more perilous working life could be. When accidents occurred, there could be some resistance (or perhaps mere complacency) regarding the appropriation of blame or steps taken towards making an effort to enforce preventative measures. Recently as part of my work with Dr. Rebecca Kippen from the University of Melbourne, examining Tasmanian Death Registers from the first three decades of the last century, I have been looking through some of the coronial inquest files for the period held at the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO). These files contain depositions – witness statements – along with medical reports and other information presented to the Coroner. This has been an absorbing experience; as I have been in the habit of telling colleagues, lately a ‘normal’ day has found me immersed in death, carnage, despair – and really, really, bad handwriting.

What I find particularly striking about examining the inquest files themselves, rather than reading contemporary press accounts of the accidents and investigations, is that the depositions are snapshots of death – accidental and otherwise – in a raw and essentially unmediated form. Clear voices emerge, unconstrained by a reporter’s discretion or ‘colour.’ There is, admittedly, some textual trace of legal formality; yet the individual is plainly visible. The intensity of human experience when faced with sudden death, even from witnesses tasked with professional objectivity—the doctors and police constables—leaks through the cracks in procedural narration. Each inquest is a story in itself and the telling of those stories, recreating the ‘fatal narrative,’ requires a careful and considered approach. The lines between perusal and prurience, sense and sentimentality, between instructive and gratuitous, are sometimes difficult to negotiate. With this qualification in mind, and assurance that I will not dwell too deeply on details overtly visceral, I thought it may be of interest to share some of the stories I have encountered, focussing on the nature of workplace accidents in Tasmania in the early years of the 20th century.

Like so many others, Cullen Jones death was painful, unnecessary and avoidable; though one cannot help noting an unfortunate irony: his was a case of death by dyeing. The twenty year old had worked at Kelsall and Kemp’s mill in Launceston (see above) for eighteen months before turning up to his usual situation on July 1st 1930.
stirring a mass of soaking wool in one of the large vats, half set into the floor; their rims being about 60cms above the concrete. The vats contained colouring agent, heated to near boiling point. Jones and his colleagues used long wooden poles to keep the wool moving. Nothing covered the vats, though the workers wore wooden clogs studded with nails to avoid slipping on the soaked cement.

The factory floor presented many such dangers: from heated and toxic liquids to raw motive power being transferred by shaft and belt running machinery to unprotected chutes and apertures. Even experienced workers such as Jones, described by a workmate as ‘careful,’ could fall victim to a lapse in concentration. Manufacturing premises were certainly no playground, as Sidney Hume discovered in March 1904. Sidney’s father worked as an engineer at the Tasmanian Brewery in Elizabeth Street, Hobart; he and his family occupied a house on the site. The fascination of being so close to the factory obviously proved too strong for eight year old Sidney; he and his father were repeatedly warned along with other children, for wandering through the building and disturbing the workers. On the afternoon of the 19th of March, two employees were cleaning rubbish from an upper floor when the boy came to visit. They commenced to lower a box of dirt via a lift running between floors. One worker, William Beckett, told Sidney to go away and then returned to his task. He then noticed the boy was nowhere to be seen. Sidney Hume had fallen down a shaft and lay unconscious on the engine room floor some 10 metres below. He died later that day in hospital. Again, a verdict of accidental death was recorded although in this case the jury did add a rider that ‘the Brewery authorities ought to arrange some contrivance to minimise the risk of similar accidents’.

There is no evidence that Elvin Brown died as the result of a prank, although the suggestion was made at his inquest that a witness may have playfully ‘bluffed’ as he passed back a billycan of water across a spinning driveshaft to his shorter companion on the other side. Elvin Brown’s particularly violent death is one of several involving workers getting too close to the powerful engines at the heart of many industries. Often a single engine would serve to drive several machines, with a long shaft running through the plant transferring energy at various points by means of wheels and belts. Elvin worked at the Band Mill at Port Huon. He was fifteen and had been working for three months, though during that short time appears to have made himself popular with the other workers. As a new hand, Brown had been placed at the far end of the mill; the works foreman had deliberately assigned him to a task that would hopefully keep him out of harm’s way. Unfortunately it was not far enough away, as it happened, from the ever-spinning engine shaft. On the morning of the 14th May 1916, Elvin walked from his bench to get a billy can of water. A companion, Edgar Thurley, saw him and asked him to pass the can for a drink. Edgar and Elvin were then standing on opposite sides of the shaft. The billy passed over without incident once, but as Edgar passed the can back to Elvin, the latter’s coat sleeve twisted around the spinning metal, with immediate and dire results. The boys – Thurley himself was just eighteen – were some thirty metres from the engine, and although power was shut down rapidly the process still took some two minutes. It was already too late for Elvin Brown.

Works foreman Denis Cochrane appears to have been conscientious and to have taken care to warn his charges frequently of the dangers of the engine shaft. Cochrane conceded that ‘it would be possible [to place] a couple of boards over that particular shaft,’ though he noted that ‘the Inspector of Machinery passes through [the mill] once a year and any suggestions made by him to the Manager are at once carried out.’ Cochrane himself had been at the mill for sixteen years. Elvin Brown entered the Register as another Accidental Death.
While Brown’s death could be attributed to inexperience, small lapses in judgement and the slightest inattention might still claim the lives of others who had spent years working with such machinery. Fatalities associated with logging and sawmilling appear regularly amongst these files; evidence of the number of men working in the industry as well as its inherent dangers – the crushing logs, the stray limb falling, even the failure of sawblades through metal fatigue. Then there was that ever-present engine with its revolving shaft. A year after Brown’s death, Alfred Trenham was operating the power plant for Gathercole Brothers’ sawmill at Stingaree Bay on the Tasman Peninsula. Trenham had operated engines at different mills for eighteen years. On the morning of the 12th of December he was in the process of applying oil to the machinery when his shirt sleeve caught in a pulley. Again, it took some minutes for the engine to be shut down. Trenham remained conscious but it was obvious that his injuries were serious. He was placed in a car which headed for Hobart. Along the way, his companions thoughtfully stopped to lower the pressure of the car’s tyres in order to make Alfred more comfortable. The car broke down at Taranna, but by then there was no point in going further. Yet another Accidental Death was recorded by Coroner Clarke. John Palmer, who worked at the same sawmill said of Trenham: ‘I don’t think you could find a more careful man.’

Francis Gottschalk was, it seems from the evidence, not as careful; his demise is a clearer example of the dangers of not following procedure when working with machinery. The practice which led to his death, namely that of changing belts running from the central shaft to other machinery without first disengaging the engine, does not appear to have been, however, an unfamiliar occurrence. During the subsequent inquest, held in April 1900, shift boss Blanchard is noted as repeatedly telling workers to stop the engine first before changing over belts on pulleys. He had even threatened to sack men if they persisted in leaving the engine running. Gottschalk worked at the Mount Lyell Company’s Smelting Works at Queenstown. Mining too makes its often violent contribution to the roll of accidental death in Tasmania during this period. That April evening, Gottschalk was employed at No.1 Smelter – working the Graveyard Shift. He had successfully shifted a belt from one pulley to another (without first shutting off power), but in doing so the belt had become twisted. Like poor Cullen Jones, that twist would become his undoing. In trying to flick the belt to straighten it, Gottschalk found himself becoming more a part of the mill than anyone would perhaps care to be. In the noise and confusion which followed, his fellow workers ran to shut down the engine and free Gottschalk. He was taken to the local hospital, but little could be done. He remained unconscious, under the care of Dr. G.A. Walpole until the next day. Coroner Abbott ruled Gottschalk’s death an accident and ‘by misfortune.’ A recommendation was added to the finding ‘that the Mount Lyell Company be requested to post notices near the machinery where belting is in use to caution anyone against interfering with such belting until the machinery is stopped.’

Mount Lyell Smelting Works, Queenstown

A curious sidenote to the deaths of both Alfred Trenham and Francis Gottschalk are statements made at both inquests referring to the machinery in question as distinctly ‘feminine’: James Evans, the Engine Driver at No.1 Smelter told how Gottschalk had ‘sung out all right let her go, Jim’ – by ‘her’ Gottschalk apparently meant to start the engine. Evans then told how ‘she must have made five or six revolutions before she stopped.’ When Alfred Trenham became caught in the Stingaree Bay mill, John Palmer told the Coroner how he ‘rushed to the engine room and finding no one there pulled the lever to stop her’

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It is perhaps best at this point to step away from such mechanised violence and venture to a more pastoral environment. But even down on the farm, hazards lurk for the unwary. I conclude this rather sobering litany of lethal employment with two salutary lessons in the perils of livestock management.

James Saunders and his wife Amelia ran a small farm near Hadspen, not far from Launceston in northern Tasmania. On the morning of the 14th of November 1930, James left his home to fetch some water for their prize bull, chained in a paddock nearby (‘nobbled,’ as Amelia Saunders explained later, in order to prevent it straying). The couple had intended to visit ‘town’ after James had finished, but when he didn’t re-appear after half an hour, Mrs. Saunders went in search of her husband. She walked to the paddock and found the bull ‘looking strange.’ James was nowhere to be seen, although Amelia Saunders spotted what she recognised as part of his clothing wrapped around the chain that held the bull. She then located James, almost naked and obviously badly hurt, a little further on. Amelia managed to distract the bull with some feed enabling her to drag James into a shed. He was barely conscious but still fearful that the bull, which he had raised from a calf, would attack again. After making sure her James was secure, Amelia ran to the neighbour’s farm and begged the owner to ‘go and shoot [the] bull that wounded her husband.’ Gaunt took his son – and his shotgun – and carried out Mrs. Saunders’ instructions. James Saunders made it to the General Hospital in Launceston but survived only slightly longer than his unfortunate bull, which Mrs. Saunders described as never having attacked anyone before.
Perhaps Robert Williams’ cow knew what was coming – and that it wasn’t a refreshing drink of water. Williams was 68 and lived at Fentonbury in the Derwent Valley. Just two months before James Saunders’ fatal encounter with the bull, Williams, his two sons and another farmer, Samuel Ransley, set about the business of preparing one of their cattle for butchering. The general practice would be to first render the animal insensible by stunning it with a heavy blow. Robert Williams led the cow out and then ensued some discussion as to who would perform the deed. Williams’ son – William Williams offered to take the axe. His father gave directions but William Williams aim was slightly awry. The animal stood dazed for a few seconds, then stepped back just as Robert Williams lost his footing. The cow then stepped onto Williams’ chest, crushing his ribcage. The animal being removed, the men carried Robert to a woodpile, protesting ‘I don’t want no Doctor, I’ll be better in a few minutes.’ The stoicism and stubbornness resonate with clarity through the inquest depositions.

According to witness Samuel Ransley, when William Williams told his father that he would run home and tell them Robert was hurt, his father had told him: ‘Don’t you go & make a mouthful of it.” Later, Williams senior told his son ‘these things will happen’. Williams appears to have accepted a certain inevitability regarding his own fate, but is still resolute about maintaining control. He was later taken to the Cottage Hospital at New Norfolk, but his injuries, complicated by pneumonia, meant that he only survived for three days after the accident. The cow in question, not surprisingly, confronted its own inevitable conclusion long before Williams had been placed in neighbour Tom McCallum’s car for the drive to New Norfolk.

It’s probably worth mentioning at this juncture that, in any average year, cows still kill more people than sharks. These things will happen, indeed.

Accidents in the workplace still attract attention; there is no cause for complacency. It is easy to find fault in hindsight. Attitudes have changed – perhaps earlier generations accepted, like Robert Williams, ‘things just happen.’ It was a dangerous world, and continues to be. Reading these narratives, I cannot help but sense the tragedy in each, but as a historian I recognise the primary need to step back from such personal engagement and consider their broader contribution to our understanding of the past. These records reveal much about former work practices, about social relationships, about the communities in which these individuals lived – and died. It is not simply a matter of reading inquests as tales of death and despair but to use these accounts in conjunction with other records to inform and enhance our understanding and appreciation of history.

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