

ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA 175TH ANNIVERSARY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2018

Good evening and welcome to this reception marking the 175th anniversary of the Royal Society of Tasmania.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land— the Mouheneener people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

May I acknowledge among you:

- Mary Koolhof, Vice-President;
- David Wilson, Honorary Secretary and Peter Meyer, Honorary Treasurer;
- Janet Carding TMAG Director and Royal Society of Tasmania Council Member, and fellow Council members;
- Alderman Ron Christie, Lord Mayor of Hobart;
- Professor David H Green, Member, and Fellow of the Royal Society in London;
- Professor Jim Williams, Australian Academy of Science Vice-President, and colleagues Isobel Griffin and Karin Holt.

This is indeed an auspicious occasion, the Society having been founded in 1843 by Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, at a meeting held on 14 October in the library at Old Government House, Macquarie Street. The name assigned was, 'The Botanical and Horticultural Society of Van Diemen's Land'.

And when Queen Victoria became Patron in 1844, the name changed to 'The Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land for Horticulture, Botany and the Advancement of Science', from which the current name derives.

In its early years, the Society established the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens. And of course the Eardley-Wilmot Wall, which he ordered constructed by convicts in the mid-1840s, is an enduring symbol of the close relationship between Government House and the RTBG.

There has been an equally close link between Government House and the Society since its inception, with succeeding Lieutenant-Governors and then Governors being President until 2002 and Patron since then.

As the oldest scientific society in Australia, your Society has built up a most remarkable collection of publications, dating back to the very earliest years. And the substantial collections of art and natural history specimens, all housed in The Royal Society of Tasmania Museum, became the basis of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery when, in 1885, the Society gifted them to the State Government, reserving ownership chiefly of works on paper.

Likewise your substantial library of rare books and collection of historic maps, housed in the Morris Miller Library at the University of Tasmania, represent a most important part of our State's collection of Tasmaniana.

Many of you attended this year's Royal Society of Tasmania Medal Presentation and Lecture, in August, the recipient being Ross Large.

And in a few weeks' time I look forward to launching *Poles Apart: Fascination Fame and Folly*, edited by Anita and Brita Hansen, the RST publication about your long association with the worlds poles and their expeditions, science, natural history and more.

This follows publication four years ago of your very well received title *The Library at the End of the World* – launched by the Lieutenant-Governor, Alan Blow.

Both of these publications derive from your extensive and precious historical collections.

And, again, they reinforce the close links between the Office of the Governor and the Royal Society of Tasmania.

I will conclude with a small but not necessarily insignificant other connection between our two establishments. It is this. Last week my Official Secretary David Owen sent to your Honorary Secretary David Wilson an email to which was attached the following from the Hobart Courier dated Tuesday 14 October 1856, and I quote (necessarily abbreviated):

“Royal Society of Tasmania. The monthly meeting of the Royal Society for October was held on the evening of Wednesday last, 8th instant, at the Museum, Harrington-street ... The presentations announced were as follows ...

“From W. P. Kay, Esq [new Government House architect] was received a fossil bone obtained in a block of sandstone at the quarry in the Public Domain, [at] the New Government House.

“Dr Milligan drew special attention to this fossil – apparently belonging to an extinct Saurian of large size; it has been found in beds hitherto regarded as part of the series of sandstones between the anthracite coal and the carboniferous limestone ... [the members] carefully examined the rare unique fossil, and considered that it might probably prove a metatarsal bone of a Saurian ... Dr. Milligan said it was his intention to have it first accurately figured by the daguerreotype or calotype process for publication, and then to forward it to Professor [Richard] Owen for his observations .”

End quote. Where is the fossil we wondered? As promised David Wilson reported back. There were actually two specimens found on different dates. The cast of one and the actual fossil of the other are held in the TMAG collection. Both were leg bones of a Triassic amphibian species.

On that intriguing note, congratulations again on your 175th Anniversary.

Thank you.