

**ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA AND TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART  
GALLERY APOLOGY**

**PREAMBLE**

**HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**

**CENTRAL GALLERY TMAG, MONDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2021**

Thank you for inviting me to deliver a Preamble to the Apologies from the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

There is important symbolism, I think, in the invitation to the Governor to perform this role today, given the long association of this position with both organisations. Lieutenant-Governors and then, after self-government, Governors have always been the Royal Society's President and more recently Patron. And from the earliest days the Governor has had a close relationship with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. For these reasons the island's Vice-Regal representative has been at least complicit in the Society's and the Museum's omissions and misdeeds and their consequences.

I will briefly explain the historical ties which makes it appropriate to pair these two Apologies.

The Royal Society of Tasmania (then of Van Diemen's Land) was founded in 1843 by Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Eardley Wilmot with the aim of increasing knowledge, in particular knowledge about the island, and promoting research. For much of its history, the Governor, as President, attended and chaired its meetings. From the earliest days, the Society began building up collections of art and natural history specimens including Aboriginal artefacts and ancestral remains, all of which were housed in the Royal Society's Museum, the foundation stone of which was laid by Governor Sir Henry Fox Young in 1861.<sup>1</sup>

In 1885 the Society relinquished the building and most of the collections to the people of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Museum was born, to become known as the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery after it opened a gallery wing four years later. Until 2017 the trustees of the Museum were required to present an Annual Report of the proceedings and progress of the Institution to the Governor and these reports included acquisitions.

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<sup>1</sup> W Bryden, 'Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery: historical Note' (1966) *100 Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 21, 24.

The two organisations, while maintaining connections and some common membership of governing bodies – indeed the Museum’s first Curator after it was transferred from the Royal Society was also the Secretary of the Royal Society, positions he held until 1907<sup>2</sup> – have had separate Acts of Parliament and separate boards of governance since 1885. The Royal Society is still based at TMAG, albeit with its entrance in Davey Street.

It is important to note that these Apologies are not simply an apology for past actions, important as truth-telling is to acknowledge the devaluing of a culture that dates back at least 40,000 years, the acts of desecration and disrespect in relation to ancestral remains and cultural artefacts and the assertions of extinction and denial of survival of the Aboriginal people of Iutruwita Tasmania.

These Apologies also look to the future with undertakings to change the narrative, to play an important role in communicating the cultural and spiritual significance of Country in the lives of our First Peoples of Iutruwita/Tasmania and in fostering the continuity of their culture; to make the respective institutions inclusive, respectful, equitable and welcoming to Tasmanian Aboriginal people; and the Apologies embrace a commitment to playing a part in redressing the inequalities experienced by our First Peoples that the two organisations have contributed to.

And finally, as both organisations acknowledge, these Apologies are not given in the expectation of acceptance or receiving anything in return from the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. But they are intended to signal a commitment to a different and better future.

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Morton was Curator and then Director of the Tasmanian Museum from 1884-1907 (Bryen, n 1, 26) and secretary of the Royal Society of Tasmania from 1887-1907 (J Somerville, ‘The Royal Society of Tasmania, 1843-1943’ *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, 1943, 199, 217.)