

**AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
REMARKS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE ALAN BLOW AO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DRAWING ROOM, GOVERNMENT HOUSE
TUESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Good evening and welcome to this reception for speakers, presenters and sponsors attending the Australian Geography Teachers Association National Conference.

To begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, their enduring culture, and the impacts of colonisation upon our First People.

And may I acknowledge among you:

- Your conference organisers, Debbie Claridge and Karen Caporelli
- Caryn Shield and the other Board members, and
- Your keynote speaker, Dr Shane Gould.

I will be brief in my remarks, as we have an excellent musical performance to enjoy shortly.

Tasmania has had some famous visitors who made comments that may interest you. Charles Darwin came here on HMS *Beagle* in 1836 and remarked that the woods were untidy. He also noted that some of the local sandstones appeared to have been deposited under polar conditions, though the scientific community did not start thinking about continental drift until well over a century later.

The novelist Anthony Trollope visited here in the 1870s. He said that, "Everything in Tasmania is more English than England herself". He also said that Mt Wellington was "just enough of a mountain to give excitement to ladies and gentlemen in middle life".

Mark Twain came to Hobart on a lecture tour in 1895. He described Mt Wellington as being "massive and noble like his brother Etna". He must have been in middle life.

Because the study of Geography includes the study of economic resources derived from physical features of the Earth, I am going to tell you about three such elements that form part of the fabric of this historic building, which was completed in 1857.

Government House was built on this site not primarily because of its imposing presence overlooking the city and river, but because of a sandstone quarry on the site, which some of you may have seen as today's beautiful ornamental lake. The sandstone is of exceptional quality, with a high silica content, and that was recognised as far back as 1805 when the quarry was first established.

In fact, some of Hobart's earliest buildings, constructed of inferior sandstone from other quarries, were found to become unstable after just a few years.

The thousands of tiles that make up the various roofs of the buildings were originally shipped here from a slate quarry in Wales, at the orders of the architect, William Porden Kay.

After the necessary economies induced by World War Two, a government report found that the whole of the roof-covering had deteriorated very badly. There was difficulty obtaining enough slates of the required size to effect repairs, and the report therefore recommended that the tiles should all be replaced with galvanised corrugated iron.

Fortunately, the then Governor, Sir Ronald Cross, held out against that cheaper, easier, heritage-wrecking alternative. He wrote to a slate mine company in Carnarvon, Wales, the Dorothea Slate Quarry Company. One of the directors wrote back to Sir Ronald, saying this:

"It seems possible that this Quarry supplied the original slates because about a hundred years ago we had two schooners which used to carry slates to Hobart and other Australian ports ... We do not normally export slates now, but we will do all we can to help rather than let you resort to the use of corrugated iron even on parts of the roof that do not show from the front."

That quarry closed in 1971. Since then, additional tiles have been obtained from a quarry in Spain. Their colour, incidentally, is technically known as "slight purple".

The third element to bring to your attention is in this room. Some of the fireplaces including this one [HE gesture] are made of Carrara marble, from the great mines of Carrara in Tuscany, generally described as the finest sources of marble in the world.

Famous examples of the use of Carrara marble include London's Marble Arch, Rome's Pantheon, and Michelangelo's statue of David in Florence.

Ladies and gentlemen, in concluding, may I wish you a most successful and enjoyable conference in Hobart. We are all certainly pleased to have you here, after Covid enforced the almost complete absence of national and international gatherings in Tasmania. Your return is most welcome!

Thank you.