

**THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA  
'AN EVENING WITH LOUISA'  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**[Vice-Regal Salute is played]**

Please be seated.

Good evening and a very warm welcome to this fundraising event, 'An Evening with Louisa' for the Royal Society of Tasmania's Art Collection.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea and waters.

We have much to look forward to this evening, but may I make some remarks about Louisa Anne Meredith, one of Australia's leading 19<sup>th</sup> century professional female artists.<sup>1</sup> Also, in the 1860s, Louisa wrote a suite of poems for the twelve days of Christmas called a "Masque". Music was composed as well, with matching groups of posed figures.

It was one hundred and fifty-seven years ago, in these rooms at Government House, that Louisa's 'The Masques of Christmas and of The Old and New Year' was performed.

The Souvenir booklet, images of which are in the RST program pamphlet and on display, are a unique visual record of what was a significant ensemble performance. Among those amateur thespians in the photographs are: Louisa; her husband Charles Meredith, a State member of Parliament and one-time Colonial Treasurer; Harriet Gore Browne, wife of the then Governor Sir Thomas Gore Browne 1861-1869; and Major James Wingate, a well-known Hobart photographer.

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<sup>1</sup> Notes provided by Mary Koolhof attached to 16 August 2023 email.

Given the relationship of Louisa to this Society, this is a fitting way to support and enjoy this fundraiser for an important cause – your Art Collection.

The Royal Society of Tasmania Art Collection comprises 940 artworks. 252 of these are works by Louisa Anne Meredith.

This Collection is on loan to TMAG, where it is maintained under optimum conditions for preservation.

A large portion of the funds of over \$24,000, raised at last year’s RST fundraising evening, held here, were used to purchase top-quality Solander archival storage boxes, to store the works in the RST Art Collection.

The remaining funds will be used for the conservation of targeted artworks when your Conservation Needs Assessment has finished.<sup>2</sup>

Louisa Anne Meredith had a prolific output of botanical art and had many books published – one of which was described by the *Illustrated London News* in 1859 as “The most splendid gift-book of the season” – this all confirms her place as a significant historical person.<sup>3</sup>

May I make some observations about her from Harriet Gore Browne, wife of then Governor Sir Thomas Gore Browne, whose huge diary discussed and described countless people of the time who moved in their social circles.

Harriet’s diary is titled *Beware of Mrs Browne*; and she did not hold back in her judgement of others! Louisa generally and fortunately got off lightly, as indicated in this selected extract from the diary:

“Mrs Charles Meredith, the Authoress was there. Not a natural or pleasing person, but certainly clever and agreeable to talk to. We settled to have a Shakespeare reading and she talked well. The refreshments in the dining room consisted of jellies, creams, tipsy cakes, sandwiches, tea, coffee, sherry and hot white and brown soup<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 19 November 1859 page 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Beware of Mrs Browne* page 54.

... Mrs Meredith arrived [at Government House] and as usual wanted to see me. She was very gracious<sup>5</sup> ... Mrs Meredith's charade of Pygmalion was most effective<sup>6</sup> ... Mrs Meredith, altho' her gowns generally have lost the freshness of first wear, is always in a very tastefully dressed black silk and pointed wreath of corn<sup>7</sup> ... On Sunday the 5th we spent the afternoon in turning the big office into a fit sitting room for Prince Alfred, hanging Mrs Meredith's pictures round it, spreading maroon table cloths and giving the whole room a great air of comfort<sup>8</sup> ... Welcoming the Prince on the road to Government House, 5000 schoolchildren sang Mrs Meredith's "Ode of Welcome" to him as he drove by in his carriage."<sup>9</sup>

If that was getting off lightly, one wouldn't like to be on the end of a harsh critique from Mrs Browne!

In conclusion, Government House is fortunate to own one of Louisa's original artworks, which was presented to Government House in the 1950s and usually hangs in the Royal Suite, but we have brought it down for display tonight.

And we also have on display a gift of an Illumination Address Book from Diana Frew, the great-great grand-daughter of Lady Augusta Young, wife of the first Governor to occupy this building from 1858 to 1861.

Lady Augusta Young paid a return visit to Tasmania in 1888 and, to welcome her, leading citizens signed the large velvet-and-stud covered book of seven boards, each one with signatures. The signatures are surrounded by exquisite original botanical artworks painted by Louisa Anne Meredith. There is also equally fine calligraphy in the letter addressed to Lady Young. It is probably Louisa's work as well. So, please enjoy viewing these treasures.

And please enjoy this evening. David ...

*[invites Jocelyn McPhee to respond]*

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<sup>5</sup> Page 95.

<sup>6</sup> Pages 96-7.

<sup>7</sup> Page 82.

<sup>8</sup> Page 182.

<sup>9</sup> Page 185.