

**ART SOCIETY OF TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2019**

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Art Society of Tasmania's move to Ancanthe, your historic home in Lenah Valley.

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, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

Acknowledging the traditional and original owners of this land at an anniversary associated with Lady Jane Franklin's Gallery Ancanthe, it is impossible to not remember that Jane Franklin took two Aboriginal children, Mathinna and Timem/ernidic or 'Timeo' as she called him, to reside at Government House. Alison Alexander suggests Jane Franklin's motive for 'adopting' the Aboriginal children was not to help them, but rather because she wanted to see what effect civilisation had on them – a scientific interest rather than charitable or maternal.ⁱ This is an interpretation supported by Amanda Johnson's essay on Jane Franklin, which points out that, in many ways, the attitudes of the Franklins to Aboriginal Tasmanians and culture were liberal and at the other end of the spectrum to Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur's views.ⁱⁱ

So it seems to me that a similar motivation explains both Jane Franklin's building of Ancanthe and the taking of Mathinna and Timem/ernidic. Just as she preferred to host public lectures on botany, science and ethnography rather than balls, she planned and built Ancanthe as a natural history museum and art gallery.ⁱⁱⁱ

When it opened in October 1843 it housed natural history specimens and a small library of books.

But who designed her classical temple-style building? Prominent 20th Century architect Robin Boyd, in his book on Australian architecture – rather provocatively entitled *The Australian Ugliness* – speculates that the architect could have been either of: William Porden Kay, nephew of Sir John Franklin’s first wife; or James Blackburn, Public Works Department architect who the Franklins knew personally; or sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey, a Londoner – the latter person because when Jane first conceived of the idea for her arcadian building she wrote to her sister Mary Simpkinson in England asking her to sound Chantrey out.^{iv}

Robin Boyd’s book was first published in 1960 and I have no idea how good his research was; but, with respect to Robin Boyd, I suggest that my Official Secretary’s is better. He has discovered that the *Launceston Examiner* of Saturday 8 October 1842^v was quite clear on the matter and I quote:

The plan of the museum is the production of a private architect, whose tender for its erection has been accepted. Mr Blackburn, of Hobart Town, drew the specification, and a contract has been entered into with him to complete the building.

And Alison Alexanders agrees – it *was* Blackburn.^{vi} Boyd has been described as arguably Australia’s most influential architect^{vii} and he was quite taken with Ancanthe. He wrote:

The span of the rake’s progress of Australian taste can perhaps be seen most simply in a single little building: The Lady Franklin Museum near Hobart ...^{viii} The building was a functional expression of the improving democratic ideals of good Sir John Franklin and his sympathetic wife.^{ix}

He documents the sad decline and neglect of the building after it was handed to Christ College in accordance with the trust deed executed by the Franklins and which decline, he says, paralleled the steady decline in standards of taste and sensibility (the rake’s progress) along with the gradual ascent into a more humane and decent society.

Boyd is also critical of the Council’s first attempts at restoration and of the ‘public lavatory, painted green and yellow’ that was added near the rear of the building.^x But I am sure he would be delighted to see the condition

of the building today and approve of the new location of the public toilets over the road. Just as Jane Franklin would approve of its current use, particularly if Boyd was right in saying she wished to combine the natural history content of the museum with art.

So, congratulations on this milestone anniversary and please now do enjoy the reception.

Thank you.

ⁱ Alison Alexander, *The Ambitions of Jane Franklin: Victorian Lady Adventurer*, p 129.

ⁱⁱ Amanda Johnson, 'Making an Expedition of Herself: Lady Jane Franklin as Queen of the Tasmanian Extinction Narrative' (2014) 14(5) *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/download/9925/9813> accessed 27 November 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Letter to her sister Mary Simpkinson, 21 February 1841.

^{iv} Boyd p. 122.

^v Page 4.

^{vi} Alexander, p 118.

^{vii} Bio note on page facing title page of the 2010 edition with Christos Tsiolkas Foreword.

^{viii} Boyd, Robin, *The Australian Ugliness*, p. 119.

^{ix} Boyd p. 120.

^x *Ibid.*