

**AUSTRALASIAN COASTS AND PORTS 2019 CONFERENCE**  
**SPEECH BY**  
**HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC**  
**GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA**  
**HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, HOBART, WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2019**

Good morning. Thank you to Noel Carroll, 2019 Conference Chair and Organising Committee colleagues for inviting me to launch the Australasian Coasts and Ports 2019 Conference.

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.

Here on waterfront the Mouheneener band of Tasmanian Aborigines used the area as a camping site, rich in fish and shell fish. Carbon dated middens suggest Aboriginal use goes back at least 5,000 years. The remains of an Aboriginal midden site were found as recently as 1993 during excavations on the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery site, opposite to Constitution Dock.

The Mouheneener were driven off the land here with European settlement in 1804. With its deep natural harbour and fresh water it was an excellent site for the new settlement.

It is also a most suitable venue for you and I note that the three field trips take full advantage of what is available here to study and otherwise enjoy in your areas of expertise.

Reclamation and dredging has of course changed the port dramatically from those early days. The only original area of foreshore is that around the Private Secretary's Cottage at TMAG on Macquarie Street. The first wharf, 'The Old Wharf' was built on rocky Hunter Island, which today is underneath the Macq01 hotel. Access to the shore was along a tidal sandbar which was under water half the time and people came ashore where the Hope and Anchor now stands. Hunter Island was first linked to the main shore by a stone causeway in 1820.

A decade later the number of ships and volume of cargo was too much for the Old Wharf and the Government agreed to build the New Wharf where Salamanca Place now stands.<sup>1</sup> The first warehouse was built in the 1830s and others followed in the 1840s.

The port has evolved and the waterfront has extended further into the river. With less shipping activity, it has become home to the CSIRO and to the University of Tasmania's IMAS, the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Science. Indeed it's often said that Hobart, as a principal gateway to the Southern Ocean and Antarctica has a greater concentration of marine scientists than any other city.

I note also the conference theme, "Future Directions from 40 [Degrees South] and Beyond", the specific reference being to gain, and I'm quoting from your website, "a deeper understanding of the frozen continent, Antarctica [which] will aid increasing knowledge about its influence on oceans and coasts around Australasia, Oceania and beyond."

With this in mind I thought I would tell you a little about a direct historical link between a Tasmanian governor and Antarctica – one that's not widely known today but played a crucial role in mid-nineteenth century understanding of the frozen continent.

Captain Sir John Franklin, already famous for his two overland expeditions across Canada to the Arctic Ocean, was appointed as Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land in 1837 and his presence there partly induced the British Government to include Hobart in a string of southern hemisphere observatories established to study terrestrial magnetism.

The reason for this was that it was becoming apparent that the vast southern oceans had magnetic characteristics unlike those of the Arctic regions. Clearly, to understand these would be of great importance to improving navigation.

Sir John was therefore instructed by the British Government to build an observatory, to await the arrival of a Naval Expedition commanded by Captain James Clark Ross, in the Royal navy ships the *Erebus* and the *Terror*.

The site chosen by Franklin is where Government House stands today, because the entire area is composed of quality sandstone to a considerable depth – that is, free of magnetic rock – which would mean minimal interference with the delicate readings of the magnetic instruments.

That too, incidentally, is why Government House itself is where it is, having been built of sandstone from the main quarry on that site.

The Ross expedition duly arrived in Hobart in August 1840, with an array of instruments including a declination magnetometer, a horizontal force magnetometer and a balance magnetometer.

Somewhat bizarrely, the substantial sandstone and wooden buildings in which they were housed had been erected by convicts in just nine days, a feat which impressed Ross sufficiently to write that it was, quote, “an instance of what may be done where the hearts and energies of all are united to promote the common object of their endeavours.”<sup>2</sup>

One wonders if the convicts really felt that way! – their working hours being from 6 am to ten pm!<sup>3</sup>

The Ross expedition then set off from Hobart in November 1840 on a related Antarctic voyage, the aim being to establish the whereabouts of the South Magnetic Pole. (Ross in his ship *Erebus* having been the first to discover the North Magnetic Pole.)

The expedition returned to Hobart in April the following year, having become the first expeditioners to navigate the pack ice of the Ross Sea, reaching McMurdo Sound, sailing along the Ross Ice Shelf and discovering the Ross Island group.

But they could not reach the South Magnetic Pole, behind the barrier of the mountains of Victoria Land. That achievement had to wait until the 1909 Shackleton expedition.

If you want to know more, I suggest you read Michael Palin's recently published book on the various Ross expeditions. The book is called *Erebus: the Story of a Ship*.

It now remains for me to wish you all a most successful and informative conference and, to those of you undertaking field trips, I know you will greatly enjoy them.

Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hunter Island, <http://www.visithobartaustralia.com.au/hunter-isld.html> accessed 9 September 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in "The History of Rosbank Observatory, Tasmania" by Ann Savours and Anita McConnell, page 532.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.