Good morning and thank you for inviting me to launch *Convict Lives at the Cascades Female Factory* Volume 2, the new title from Convict Women’s Press, edited by Alison Alexander and Alice Meredith Hodgson.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land— the Mouheneener people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

This volume is a continuation of the title *Convict Lives: Women at Cascades Female Factory* first published in 2009 and with a second edition in 2012 and currently out of print.

And it was just 18 months ago that we were here to launch the stand-alone title *Repression, Reform & Resilience: a History of the Cascades Female Factory* – which tells me that you are busy authors and that there’s no shortage of material to write about!

Back in 2016 at that launch I said: “The story of the Cascades Female Factory, whilst tragic and depressing, is also uplifting – because so many of those individual convict women refused to be broken by a cruel system; and because they were literally the birth mothers of who we are today.”

And this second volume reinforces that fact, and does so with clarity, elegance and originality of research.

At this point I also can’t help but recall the memorable day in October last year when, in the presence of His Excellency Michael D Higgins and Mrs Sabina Higgins, the Footsteps Towards Freedom Sculptures were unveiled at the MAC01 Forecourt. And among my words then were, and I quote:
“The bland facts of female transportation from Ireland and elsewhere to Van Diemen’s Land – some 12,500 women and 2,500 children between 1803 and 1853 – do not and cannot tell their story with any kind of empathy. But on this site of disembarkation, Irish sculptor Rowan Gillespie has gone a long way towards rectifying that. His sculptures dramatically and poignantly mark the exact site of their arrival and now also stand as a powerful marker to where the story is told, the World Heritage Cascades Female Factory Historic Site.”

So this book is in itself another part of the important journey being taken to recognise and honour those thousands of individuals and children who struggled and suffered here in Tasmania.

In the digital reproduction of a page of an 1840 Hobart newspaper, the Colonial Times – in Lucy Frost’s chapter “Standing up to a postcard” – is a description of female assigned servants as, and I quote, “annoying and intractable” animals”. iii

Today, how casually brutal that description is. It contrasts so markedly with the sympathetic treatment given to the 29 female convicts whose lives are described in the book.

Therese Sayers’s chapter “Isabella Buckley: a dark abyss”, writes of her great-great grandmother, as follows: “She was imprisoned in England and transported as a convict to Van Diemen’s Land. On becoming a free woman, Isabella repeatedly faced courts as a vagrant, a prostitute and a foul-mouthed drunk. Her life in the colonies sank into a dark abyss – a bottomless pit of misery that ended only when her heart gave out in her mid-fifties in a cold damp cell in Launceston gaol.”

Therese writes: “I grew up in the city where she died, not even knowing her name – oblivious of her suffering in the very streets I walked. The morsels of information assembled from official records, paired with my research-based assumptions, can only provide an incomplete picture of her struggle. But finally she is emerging from the mists of history.” iv

This brings me to a parallel with a lecture given at Government House just three evenings ago by Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, Flinders University academic and historian, on Australian women in war.
Professor Oppenheimer – author of numerous books on subjects around women and conflict – has gone a long way towards reclaiming those women, just as you are doing. In her lecture she noted the rightful publicity and gravitas associated with the passing of Australia’s last remaining Gallipoli veterans, one of whom was Tasmania’s Alec Campbell, the funeral for whom required numbers of Hobart CBD streets to be closed as the cortege moved from Anglesea Barracks to St David’s Cathedral.

And yet when Melanie tried to identify the last remaining World War One female veteran, she couldn’t – well, she showed us images of a smiling 103-year-old lady who Melanie says may have been. And so that lady is now taking her rightful place in Australian history, albeit very modestly.

The 29 women in Convict Lives, volume 2 are also taking their rightful part in history. And I was intrigued to read Lucy Frost’s refreshing portrayal of the Flash Mob and her debunking of the 300 flashing bottoms story, exposing instead as the a figment of the “twisted imagining of a bitter clergyman, Robert Crooke”. Rather than ugly leering women as the postcarded suggests, the Flash Mob were devotees of fashion and displayed dignified rather than crude resistance. I would like to know more about Robert Crooke and the scandal that drove him out of Tasmania? At least it seems he remained defrocked and was not merely moved on to another parish.

My background in criminology attracted me to the story of Sarah Wallace and the punishments at the Female Factory, including wearing an iron collar, which Sarah was required to do. Certainly this is cruel and inhuman punishment but one of the newspapers of the day, the Tasmanian, called for more use of it. Clamouring for heavier sentences and the criticism that the authorities are soft on crime is clearly not new.

The stories are such a catalogue of misery and suffering it was some relief to get to three stories of prosperous matriarchs towards the end of the book. Tom Dunbabin’s story of Ann Eccles is one of these. Ann was fortunate in being at the Female Factory very briefly and not returning. She was assigned to Government House as a servant of Lady Franklin. Six months or so later she ‘had a liason’ with John Dunbabin, a ticket of leave convict, and in 1839 with John and baby Elizabeth, moved to Bream Creek, to work on land Henry Bilton had acquired, in a place that it is spectacularly beautiful, but at that time so remote and vulnerable to confrontation with escaped convicts as Ann was to learn.
Ann had five children, and died aged 33. Her family remained in the district and became large land owners. My daughter Meg, lives at Bream Creek, and for some years occupied the old Dunbabin farm house at Marchwiel with her family. I am intrigued to think her children quite possibly slept in the same room as those of Ann and John. I am looking forward to telling them story of Ann and her children.

Congratulations to all contributors; to the editors; and to everyone associated with the Convict Women’s Press, and I am very happy to declare launched *Convict Lives at the Cascades Female Factory* Volume 2.

Thank you.

---

1 Although the Publisher’s Preface in Volume 2 (p. viii) refers to “Convict Lives at the Cascades female Factory” as the first volume, the LINC Tasmania record is “Convict Lives: Women at Cascades Female Factory”. I am inclined to think the LINC record is correct. See [https://linctas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/all/search/results?qu=convict&qu=lives](https://linctas.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/all/search/results?qu=convict&qu=lives)

2 ‘untractable’ in the original which is archaic for ‘intractable’

3 Page 87.

4 Page 182.