

**HOP KILNS OF TASMANIA  
BOOK LAUNCH SPEECH BY  
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Good evening everyone. My name is Dick Warner and it is my great pleasure to be here to launch *Hop Kilns of Tasmania*, Pen Tayler's wonderful book, which beautifully describes these unique buildings on twelve Tasmanian properties. *Hop Kilns of Tasmania*, published by Forty South Publishing, presents a vibrant history of a small but important industry which made and continues to make a valuable contribution to the social and economic wellbeing of Tasmania.

The story of hops in Australia commences almost immediately following the arrival of the first fleet in 1788. Governors Phillip, Hunter, King, Collins and Davey all sought unsuccessfully to ban or restrict the production and sale of spirits in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land and all encouraged local growing of hops and the

production of a more benign alcoholic drink called beer.

By 1894, the thirst in the colony for spirits was unquenchable despite efforts by the Governors to ban the production and sale of spirits of all descriptions. Spirits were even used as payment of wages and as barter in trade.

It is said Australia's first beer was brewed by John Boston in the late 1790s. It was brewed from "Indian corn, properly malted and bittered with the leaves and stalks of the love apple". The tomato was sometimes known as the love apple at that time.

Governor King sought support from England for the introduction of beer into the Colony and in 1802, Lord Hobart, the British Secretary of Colonies, wrote:

"The introduction of beer into general use among the inhabitants would certainly tend in a great degree to lessen the consumption of spirituous liquors: I have therefore, in conformity with your

suggestion taken measures for furnishing the colony with a supply of ten tons of Porter, six bags of hops and two complete sets of brewing utensils”.

It is generally accepted that James Squire successfully grew the first hops in New South Wales which were harvested in 1806 from a farm near Parramatta. He is also considered to be the first to produce beer of good quality. However, production of hops in New South Wales was not successful and Van Diemen’s Land became the centre for production.

Records indicate that the first hops to be grown in Tasmania were by Lieutenant-Governor Paterson in his garden at Port Dalrymple in 1804 and by Richard Clarke in Launceston in 1810.

Hop growing however, became serious with the arrival of William Shoobridge in Van Diemen’s Land in 1822, the same year that James Squire died. Shoobridge was a farmer from Tenderden in Kent and he brought with him hop sets which he planted on his land in what was then called

Providence Valley, now Newdegate Street, North Hobart. The Shoobridge family's contribution to the development of the hop industry cannot be overstated, with pioneering projects in irrigation, building design including the revolving kiln, which is featured in Pen's book, and assisting to develop the industry in Richmond, Maria Island, New Norfolk, Bushy Park and Glenora.

Providence Valley did not prove to be a reliable site owing to the dry summers and a lack of understanding of the importance of irrigation. Hop growing was tried widely in Tasmania, attempting to build an industry capable of providing reliability of supply. But it was not entirely successful until the early 1850s, when Shoobridge and others moved operations to the Derwent Valley where fertile soils were found and the River Derwent and its tributaries supplied the water and the art of irrigation was learned.

By 1855, a stable industry had emerged in Tasmania consisting of 55 acres with a total yield of 27 tons in that year. By 1870 there were 70 hop growers in the New Norfolk district alone with

447 acres under cultivation. Production of hops continued to expand to the Huon Valley, Lachlan Valley, Back River, Westerway, Ellendale, Russell Falls, Plenty, Molesworth, Kingston, Margate, Hamilton and Glenorchy. Hops were also grown along the Tamar, and the Mersey rivers as well as in the Westbury area and all locations would have had hop kilns in various shapes and sizes.

Optimism and profits led to continued expansion of the industry and by 1883 the area under hop production had risen to 730 acres. Despite a temporary decline in 1890s, the area under cultivation increased to over 1800 acres by 1925.

The point of oversupply had then been reached, with many growers forced from the industry and total production halved by 1934. Of course the inevitable happened and by 1940 there were not enough hops to meet demand.

Following the war, production again increased and by 1975 hops were again flourishing, not only in the established areas but also in the north-east and north-west of Tasmania.

It wasn't long before over-production again wrought havoc on the industry and this time, most growers ceasing production permanently. By the early 1990's very few growers remained.

Today, the industry continues to evolve but with very few growers. We are left with just a few but important reminders of the past. Pen's book describes in wonderful detail, both in words and pictures, some of the remaining unique buildings we know as hop kilns or oast-houses. I can recall lighting the eight coal fires and doing the night shift in the Valleyfield oast-house and can still hear the comforting sound of the belt clicking as the fan drove warm air through the hops during drying.

Pen's book is a vital record of an important part of our history, a reminder of the significant number of people who have connections to the industry and of the challenges and rewards of the owners of the properties described.

The hop kilns which remain are a small number of what was; it's important that every effort be made to conserve and protect those that remain. One wonderful example of this conservation is the successful conversion and re-use of the Strathayr oast near Richmond, now a family home, which is also described in Pen's book.

I want to mention the work of Dr Kathryn Evans, who in 1993 completed the Hop Industry Historical Research Project, comprising three volumes prepared for the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service. Her work describes the social and economic history, site histories and a collection of oral histories from people in the industry. This work is invaluable.

Finally, thank you Pen for coming to Valleyfield, for the wonderful photographs and congratulations on this wonderful book. Thank you also to the publisher, Forty South Publishing. I have much pleasure now in declaring *Hop Kilns of Tasmania* launched.

Thank you.