

**INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS CONFERENCE
PRESENTED BY THE
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC WORKS ENGINEERING AUSTRALASIA
OPENING SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOTEL GRAND CHANCELLOR, HOBART, MONDAY 26 AUGUST 2019**

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to open the 2019 International Public Works Conference “Vibrant Futures Solid Foundations” for the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia.

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.

Welcome to Hobart.

Being unable to add to the contemporary engineering content of your conference in a useful way, I have fallen back instead on some relevant historical information.

I noticed that there are quite a few sessions devoted to wastewater, stormwater and floods in your conference program. You will probably not be surprised to know that these issues have played a role in the history of Government House – which, for those of you not familiar with Hobart, is on the Domain overlooking the river less than a kilometre from here, a neo-gothic 70-room sandstone house built on three levels, with an enormous roof space effectively being a fourth level.

To give you a little bit of background to the construction of the house: William Porden Kay was appointed as Van Diemen’s Land’s Director of Public Works in June 1842 and eighteen months later he was also appointed as Colonial Architect and Surveyor. He was both an architect, engineer and surveyor which seems to have been common in those days.

His appointment was not without some controversy because he was the nephew of the then Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Franklin. The Franklins, it seems, objected to the fact that the most highly qualified engineers/architects in Van Diemen's Land, James Blackburn and James Thomson, were emancipated convicts.

Blackburn, when working on wastewater projects in London, had been convicted of forging a cheque for 600 pounds and was transported for life to Van Diemen's Land. When he arrived in 1833 he was immediately employed in the Department of Roads and Bridges – not as a labourer but as an engineer and architect. His work included the Red Bridge at Campbelltown and the Bridgewater Bridge, both of which have received National Engineering Heritage Markers and plans for Government House.

Blackburn was pardoned in 1841 but the convict stigma remained and as a result, Porden Kay, as Colonial Architect, became the principal architect of Government House, with a brief to submit new plans. The house was built to Porden Kay's design and first occupied in January 1858.

It's very well built but does have an unusual upper design, comprising two large pyramid Welsh slate roofs with a flat roof space between them, the original downpipes of which are quite narrow.

Bearing this in mind, here is a quote from an event early in 1883:

“The severe thunderstorm which burst over Hobart on the last day of the old year did a great deal of damage to Government House. Owing to the peculiar structure of the roof, the gutters were so blocked up by the tremendous hail-stones, that they were unable to perform their proper functions. Hence, when the hail-storm, which lasted from about 7 p.m. to about 8 p.m., was over, and was succeeded by heavy rain, the upper part of the Governor's residence was deluged, and every room in that part of the house was considerably damaged ... The Governor's bedroom was one of the worst treated in this respect, the ceiling and carpets being perfectly saturated. The spot most damaged in the whole building was the vestibule leading to the principal rooms, where not only did the carpet look as if it had served as an

outer covering to Noah's Ark, but the ceiling itself had partially fallen down. ... Mr. John Shield, Inspector of Public Works, was at once communicated with, and paid, a visit to Government House early on Monday morning.¹

Water presented a different kind of structural problem when, some one hundred years later in the early 1950s, the original piping became an issue, to be solved by the Secretary for Public Works when he received this letter from the Government House Official Secretary and I quote:

“I have to inform you that in Summer considerable difficulty is experienced in watering the gardens at Government House owing to the low water pressure available. At present Government House grounds are served with water through a small reservoir at the rear of the old zoo. It is recommended that the Public Works Department be asked to carry out an investigation as to whether Government House and grounds could be provided with a high pressure service direct from the [city] main ...”²

But the reply to the Official Secretary from the PWD was: “I have to advise that a report received from the Hydraulic Engineer states that the small reservoir from which the water supply at Government House is derived was installed to keep the water at a low pressure owing to the fact that the whole of the internal piping at Government House is of lead and is built into the walls. It is considered that a high pressure would cause leaks to develop and these would be difficult to overcome ...”³

So, clearly this was a problem for Government House, and I’m not sure they went about a solution the right way, because three months later the Hobart City Council wrote this letter, with this opening paragraph and I quote:

“The Council has had reason to complain of interference by Government House officials with the Council’s water valves near the Government House reservoir ...”⁴

I have to say that the roof problems have continued. Last year on 10 May, hail and rain caused the gutters to block and water to pour through the ceilings. The Governor’s bedroom was again to suffer, and in fact Dick and I moved bedrooms three times that night and used garbage bins to collect the

water. I see from your program that there is a presentation later today on this very same flood: the 10 May 2018 Hobart flash flood.

Your program is an impressive one – I am sure it will be stimulating and rewarding. It has been a great pleasure to speak at your first plenary session to open the conference.

Thank you.

¹ Tasmanian (Launceston), Saturday 6 January 1883, page 21.

² Government House document.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.