

JOHN WATT BEATTIE AND THE BEATTIE COLLECTIONS

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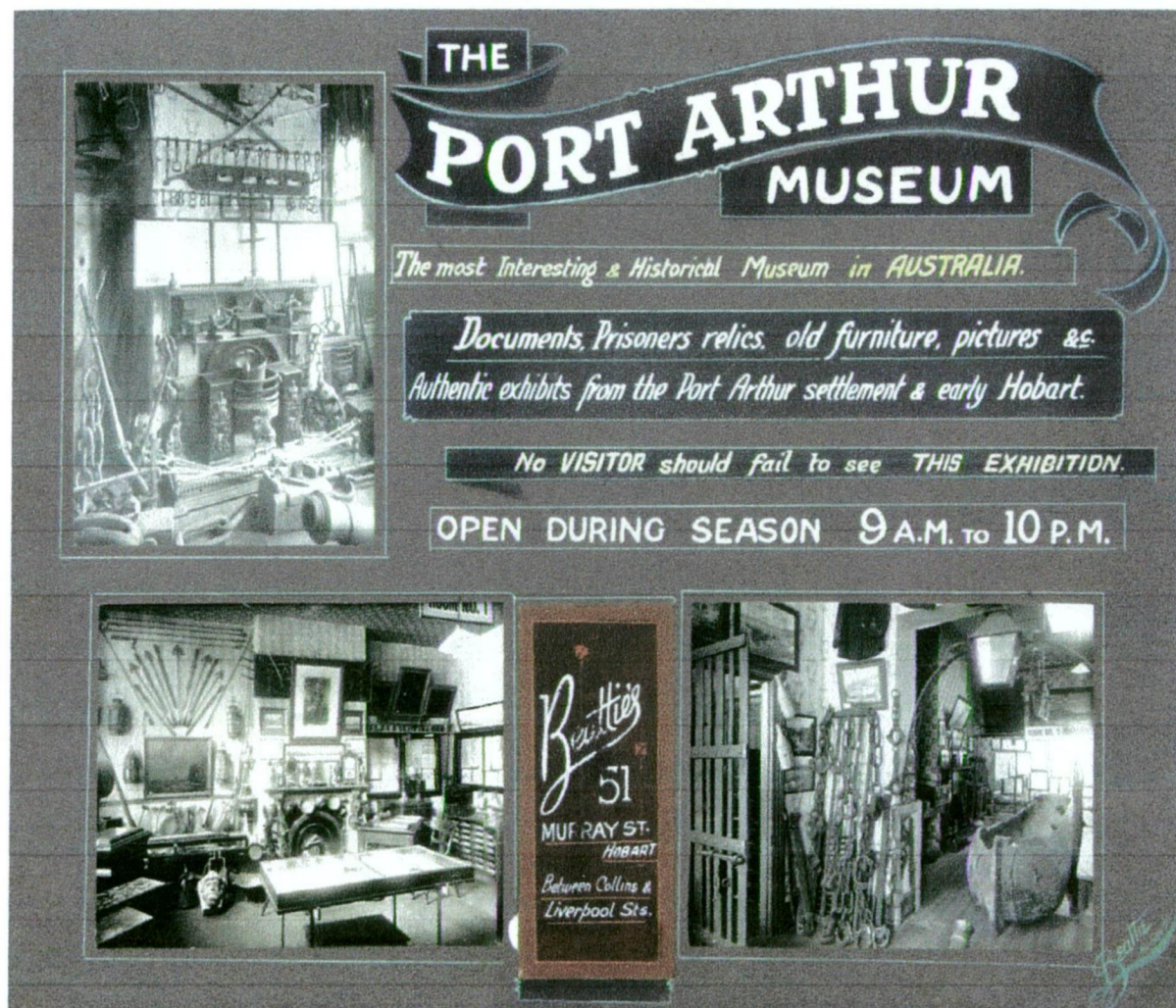
Ross Smith and Jon Addison at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art
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THE

PORT ARTHUR

MUSEUM

The most Interesting & Historical Museum in AUSTRALIA.

*Documents, Prisoners relics, old furniture, pictures &c.
Authentic exhibits from the Port Arthur settlement & early Hobart.*

No VISITOR should fail to see THIS EXHIBITION.

OPEN DURING SEASON 9 A.M. TO 10 P.M.

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MURRAY ST.
HOBART
Between Collins & Liverpool Sts.

Billboard for Beattie's Port Arthur Museum, Hobart
(Collection of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery,
Launceston, Tasmania)

Introduction

Literature Review

John Watt Beattie was a well known member of Hobart society who owned a successful photographic studio and travelled widely around Tasmania photographing not only scenery in the wilderness but also buildings, and people including Aborigines. His photographs became an important record of his times and are still reproduced in publications and available in museum records and institutions such as the National Library in Canberra. His competence as a photographer was recognised with his appointment as official state photographer, and his photographs were used as the basis for the design of a number of Tasmanian postage stamps. He mixed with the elite being a member of the Royal Society of Tasmania, the Field Naturalist's Club and the Minerva Club and was a founding member of the Tasmanian Tourism Board.

Beattie is still considered an important creator of images of Tasmania's past, but he also played a major role in providing significant contributions to the historic items in the possession of both the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart. His collections, which came into these two institutions in 1927 and 1933 respectively, involved combinations of disinterest, interest, acclaim and dissatisfaction in the processes involved in their purchase and exhibition.

The contribution of Beattie to photography of its early history in Tasmania as well as brief outlines of his career are provided in *Tasmanian Photographer - from the John Watt Beattie Collection* by Margaret Tassell and David Wood,¹ *Tasmanian Photographers* –

¹ M. Tassell and D. Wood, *Tasmania Photographer - from the John Watt Beattie Collection*, Launceston, (South Melbourne, 1981).

1840-1940 by Chris Long,² *Tasmanian Visions – Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photographs* by Roslynn Haynes³ and *The Story of the Camera* by Jack Cato,⁴ Beattie's cousin.

Acknowledgement of the significance of the Beattie collection is given by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in *Treasures of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery*⁵ - paintings, convict relics, documents, photographs and furniture. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in *Collection*⁶ refers to his photographs, which included the earliest photographs of the galleries in the museum. Beattie's contribution to collections, which became part of Australian exhibitions of the works of its artists since settlement, have been recognised in publications such as William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art*.⁷

An account of the offers, deliberations and acquisition of Beattie's two collections in 1927 and 1933 is given in David Young's *Making Crime Pay: The Evolution of Convict Tourism in Tasmania*,⁸ which he discusses as part of the long process of the recognition of the value of Port Arthur and other convict locations as historic sites and their attraction to tourists. Young discusses the continued desire of many people to bury the convict past and the attitude of the Hobart City Council and others to the opportunities to secure the Beattie collections for the community. Mark Hosking, in a recent University of Tasmania thesis, describes the emergence of the two principal museums in Tasmania, the museums' role in the growth of tourism, Beattie as a collector, the benefits of Launceston's purchase of the first Beattie collection and its impact on interest in Tasmanian history.⁹

² C. Long, *Tasmanian Photographers – 1840-1940*, (Hobart, 1995).

³ R. Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions – Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photographs*, (Sandy bay, 2006).

⁴ J. Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, (Melbourne, 1979).

⁵ Anon., Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, *Treasures of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston*, (Launceston, 2006).

⁶ PJ Hughes, JK Huxley, CD Judd, GK Walker-Smith, CA Hammond & AC Rozefelds (eds), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, *Collection*, (Hobart, 2007).

⁷ W. Moore, *The Story of Australian Art*, (Sydney 1934).

⁸ D. Young, *Making Crime Pay: The Evolution of Convict Tourism in Tasmania*, (Hobart, 1996).

⁹ M. Hosking, 'Displaying the Convict Era: the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and its Purchase of the Beattie Collection', unpublished Honours Thesis, School of History and Classics, University of Tasmania, June 2012.

Background to Young's description of the evolution of Port Arthur and other convict sites as tourist destinations were the attitudes of many in Tasmania to its convict past and what became known as the 'hated stain' of convictism. A number of papers have been written on this, and an event, only a year before Beattie's first collection was sold, which both stimulated the denial and the defence of the convict past, was the decision to produce a film of Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*¹⁰ in 1926. Michael Roe in 'Vandiemism Debated' in *For the Term of His Natural Life*¹¹, examined in detail the protagonists opposing and supporting the film's production and subsequent screening.

The attitude of the educated elite in Hobart, and in particular members of the Royal Society of Tasmania, to Tasmanian history including its convict past in the period preceding the sale of the first Beattie collection, are discussed by in Stefan Petrow's 'The Antiquarian Mind: Tasmanian History and the Royal Society of Tasmania 1899-1927'.¹²

¹⁰ M. Clarke, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, (Sydney, 2002) – first published in Australia in 1874.

¹¹ M. Roe, 'Vandiemism Debated', in *For the Term of His Natural Life*, (Port Arthur, 2001).

¹² S. Petrow, 'The Antiquarian Mind: Tasmanian History and the Royal Society of Tasmania 1899-1927', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, Volume 137, 2003, pp. 69-74.

Sources and Methodology

References to John Watt Beattie's life and career occur primarily in publications which include his photographs and items in his two historical collections. A comprehensive account, albeit brief, of his life is available in the entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, written by Michael Roe.¹³ Valuable background information was also available in such newspapers as the *Mercury* on various occasions, including his obituary.

The discussion of Beattie and his achievements in this thesis serves as an introduction to the primary objectives, which are to describe and seek conclusions from the processes and actions of the participants involved in the acquisitions of the two Beattie collections in 1927 and 1933. The issues to be examined include explanations as to why the Hobart community and its representatives were not interested in retaining Beattie's Port Arthur Museum. Consideration is also given as to whether lack of finance was the only reason and the extent to which a lack of interest in the state's past, and in particular its convict past, was a factor. By contrast, why was the Launceston City Council so enthusiastic about purchasing the museum, backed by community support; how did it provide the funds for not only its purchase but also for its eventual display; and to what extent did it have concerns regarding the portrayal of the state's convict history? Similar issues occurred a few years later with the availability of the second and smaller Beattie historical collection and its eventual purchase by a benefactor for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Galley with a contribution to the cost by the Hobart City Council.

As preliminary background to discussing the acquisition of the Beattie collections the history of the convict system in Van Diemen's Land is outlined. The sources include *A Visitor's Short History Guide to Port Arthur 1830-1877* by Graeme-Evans and Ross,¹⁴ which describes the history of the Port Arthur penal settlement and *Making Crime Pay* by

¹³ M. Roe, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 7, 1891-1939, (Melbourne, 1979), pp. 232-233.

¹⁴ A. Graeme-Evans and M. Ross, *A Visitor's Short History Guide to Port Arthur 1830-1877*, (Woodbridge, 1995).

David Young, which provides a comprehensive account of Port Arthur's eventual preservation and development as a tourist destination. The ongoing determination by many people to bury the convict past and the concept of the 'hated stain' has been examined in a number of papers including 'That Hated Stain: The Aftermath of Transportation in Tasmania' by Henry Reynolds¹⁵, 'Cults of Nature: Cults of History' by Kaye Daniels,¹⁶ 'Against the League: Fighting the 'Hated Stain'', by Anne McLaughlin¹⁷ and 'Portraying that Hated Stain: Convict Drama and Convict Audiences at the Theatre Royal, Hobart' by Gillian Winter.¹⁸

Michael Roe in *The State of Tasmania*¹⁹ discusses the unwillingness of Tasmanians to confront their state's past and in particular the response of the government and others to their centenary celebrations in 1903. This reluctance was not confined to Tasmania, with other states such as New South Wales wishing to forget their convict past, including pressure not to retain convict records and then restrictions on access to these records which continued into the 1970s as described in *Australia's Birthstain* by Babette Smith.²⁰ The sensitivity concerning Tasmania's convict origins became very public in 1926, a year before the sale of Beattie's museum, with the decision to film Marcus Clarke's novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* in Tasmania. Michael Roe's 'Vandiemism Debated' provides a comprehensive account of the reactions to this decision.²¹

The major participants in the negotiations involved in the acquisitions of the Beattie collections were the State Government, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the two local government corporations, the Hobart City Council and the Launceston City Council, and consequently much of the information has been sourced from documents

¹⁵ H. Reynolds, 'That Hated Stain: The Aftermath of Transportation in Tasmania', *Historical Studies*, Volume Fourteen, Number 53-56, October 1969-April 1971, pp. 19-31.

¹⁶ K. Daniels, 'Cults of Nature: Cults of History', *Island Magazine*, 16 (1983), pp. 3-6.

¹⁷ A. McLaughlin, 'Against the League: Fighting the 'Hated Stain'', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Vol. 5.1, 1995-96, pp. 76-104.

¹⁸ G. Winter, 'Portraying 'That Hated Stain: Convict Drama and Convict Audiences at the Theatre Royal, Hobart', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 48, no. 36, September 2001, pp. 228-234.

¹⁹ M. Roe, *The State of Tasmania: Identity at Federation Time*, (Sandy Bay, 2001).

²⁰ B. Smith, *Australia's Birthstain: the startling legacy of the convict era*, (Crows Nest, 2008)

²¹ Roe, 'Vandiemism Debated', in *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

held by the Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office. Information was also obtained from the files and reports of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. Information on the extent and nature of the Royal Society's interest in Tasmanian history during the 1920s and 1930s was available from the annual papers and proceedings of the Royal Society and Stefan Petrow's paper in 2003.

A major source of information regarding the Beattie collections and the extent and nature of public opinion was available from the two principal newspapers in the two cities, the *Mercury* in Hobart and the *Examiner* in Launceston. Many of the newspaper accounts duplicated the recorded discussions at council meetings but also contributed comments and information relevant to the council deliberations. The detailed accounts of Hobart City Council meetings during the periods of major interest were recorded and printed for council by the *Mercury* newspaper. These two newspapers were also valuable not only as sources of information on comments and opinions by individuals and organisations but they also provided an indication of lack of interest by the absence of letters to the editors or comments by those who could have been expected to have been involved in some way.

Chapter One: John Watt Beattie Photographer, Conservationist and Collector

On 14 December 1911, Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian, and four companions won the race to be first to the South Pole. A similar attempt at the time by Captain Robert Scott failed and resulted in the deaths of Scott and the other four in his party. An iconic photograph was taken at the South Pole by one of the Norwegians of the others, their tent and the Norwegian flag. 'It is the ultimate image, the emblem of the proud, independent nation of Norwayand stamped, engraved, printed and reprinted in books, magazines and films, on posters, postcards and packaging.'²²

The only original print of this photo 'known to exist is held by the National Library of Australia',²³ and the photograph was developed in the Hobart studio of John Watt Beattie. Soon after the returning Norwegian expedition arrived in Hobart in March 1912 Amundsen and some of his crew turned up at Beattie's studio with a box of photographic plates to be developed.²⁴ Unfortunately Beattie's studio was destroyed by fire in 1933, 'not one negative was saved',²⁵ and consequently negatives produced by Beattie of this historic event were lost.

John Watt Beattie was born in Aberdeen in Scotland on 15 August 1859.²⁶ His father was a house painter and a portrait photographer who some years later wanted to migrate to Australia. Because of this desire, his son travelled to Melbourne in 1878 and then to Launceston to report back on the prospects for the family in the colonies. In a letter to his father in January 1879 Beattie was not complimentary of living standards and opportunities, although he considered that he would more likely find employment in

²² H. O. Lund, 'The South Pole in 'Tasmanian Views'', *The National Library Magazine*, National Library of Australia, September 2010, Volume 2, Number 3, (Canberra, 2010), p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, p. 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁶ Roe, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, pp. 232-233.

Melbourne than in Tasmania.²⁷ Despite Beattie reporting that he was 'a little sorry to have all our fine dreams of settlement and the fine idea of the place we had, knocked to atoms'²⁸ his father and the rest of the family arrived in Tasmania in 1879 settling on a property near New Norfolk.

Beattie soon found a much more enjoyable activity than farming, that of photography, an occupation in which he proved himself highly competent, earning considerable recognition particularly in Tasmania. Beattie joined the Hobart photographers, Anson Brothers, as a partner in 1882, buying the business from them in 1891²⁹ and opening a branch in Launceston in 1894.³⁰ The availability of dry plates, which did not require prompt development, provided opportunity for photographers such as Beattie to undertake expeditions into the more remote and scenic areas. These expeditions enabled him to record numerous examples of scenic beauty for commercial gain in the form of postcards and publications and the basis of lectures involving 'lantern shows'. Beattie did not confine himself to photographs of Tasmanian scenery but also photographed many buildings and scenes of people including the Aborigines and various activities taking place.

He was recognized as an authority on Tasmanian history; his lectures and writings 'were always tempered by his scholarly concern for historical accuracy.'³¹ He was elected to the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1890³² and was later vice president of its Historical Section.³³ In 1904 Beattie gave a series of lectures on 'the lives and times of early Tasmanian governors', a discussion of the state's history which made no mention of the convicts except to observe that 'thanks to the immigration of a large number of free settlers, it gradually freed itself of the penal environment.' Beattie was thanked for giving

²⁷ RS 29/2, Extract from Pocket Notebook of J. W. Beattie, Royal Society of Tasmania, MSS Collection.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Tassell and Wood, *Tasmanian Photographer—From the John Watt Beattie Collection*, p. 6.

³⁰ NS 308/1/55, J. W. Beattie, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office.

³¹ Tassell and Wood, *Tasmanian Photographer—From the John Watt Beattie Collection*, p. 11.

³² *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania for 1890*, Royal Society of Tasmania, (Hobart, 1891), p. viii.

³³ *Mercury*, 7 November 1899, p. 2.

the audience 'the facts of 100 years of progress.'³⁴ He had an interest in the occult, being the last surviving Charter member of the Hobart Lodge of the Theosophical Society on his death 44 years later,³⁵ and he was also an active member of the Minerva Club, a group of intellectuals and others who met to discuss contemporary issues. 'He took very seriously his role of promoting Tasmanian science, historic and industrial wealth especially after his appointment as Photographer to the Government of Tasmania on 21 December 1896.'³⁶

He was particularly interested in the penal past of Tasmania with numerous photographs of Port Arthur and Macquarie Harbour which he utilized in lantern lectures and publications such *Port Arthur, Van Diemen's Land*. This reproduction of David Burn's account of his visit to Port Arthur in 1842 included a foreword and illustrations by Beattie.³⁷ Port Arthur, begun as a penal establishment in 1833 and closed in 1877, became a subject in which he had a considerable interest and he regarded available information on Port Arthur as facts of the past not to be ignored or hidden. In his foreword to the publication on Port Arthur referred to above, he wrote that 'To the majority the past of Port Arthur is as a closed book, and, indeed, no complete history of the place has been, or ever can be, written.'³⁸ The book included details of prisoner transgressions and punishments prisoners had received based on Convict Department records.³⁹ Beattie during his life did everything he could to ensure that the past of Port Arthur was not a 'closed book'.

In 1899, at Beattie's suggestion that a 'series of pictorial stamps featuring scenic Tasmanian landscapes should be issued to promote the State'⁴⁰, eight stamps were produced, five of which were based on photographs by Beattie. The value of his photographs continued to be recognized by those promoting tourism in the state, as indicated by the request in 1904 from the Tasmanian Tourist Association, of which he

³⁴ *Mercury*, 22 February 1904, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 1 July 1930, p. 11.

³⁶ Tassell and Wood, *Tasmanian Photographer-From the John Watt Beattie Collection*, p. 7.

³⁷ J W Beattie, *Port Arthur, Van Diemen's Land*, (Hobart, n.d.).

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 55-92. Beattie did not include prisoners names 'for obvious reasons', (p. 9).

⁴⁰ Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions - Landscapes in Writing, Art and Photography*, p. 165.

was a member, for scenic prints from Beattie for publication in two newspapers, the *Queenslander* and the *Dunedin Times*.⁴¹

Not only was Beattie the official photographer for the government but he continued to accept commissions as a commercial photographer, including photographs for mining companies on the West Coast. These visits caused him concern as to the effects of various activities on the environment. In 1908 he delivered a paper to the Royal Society of Tasmania expressing the need to protect the land along the banks of the Gordon River.⁴² That Beattie subsequently successfully lobbied for protection of the banks of the Gordon River identified him as an environmental activist stemming from his enthusiasm for Tasmanian scenery and its value to the state as a tourist resource.⁴³ His activities urging conservation of the natural environment continued even though he supported and invested in the exploitation of minerals.⁴⁴ Beattie was also an active member of the Field Naturalist's Club.

Beattie's enthusiasm for history was also evident from his 'on going' activity of collecting photographs, art works, documents, artifacts and curios including firearms, furniture, the possessions of early governors, such as Sir John Franklin and items from penal establishments, particularly Port Arthur. His photographic expeditions to such places as Port Arthur provided opportunities for collecting as he 'always returned with some leg-irons, manacles, hand-cuffs, an original cat o'nine tails (for males and females)'⁴⁵ and other items of historical interest. His collection activities also importantly included documents, and in 1921 he criticised the destruction of records that had occurred and stated that 'their legislators had done a deal of wrong to the country in allowing those records to be pillaged and destroyed.'⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Mercury*, 4 March 1904, p. 3.

⁴² J. W. Beattie, 'Notes on the River Gordon and on the Need for Reservation of the Land along its Banks', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania for the year 1908*, p. 35.

⁴³ Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ Roe, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, p. 233.

⁴⁵ Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ *Mercury*, 11 October 1921, p. 6.

Watercolour paintings believed to be the work of Houghton Forrest were also commissioned by Beattie 'of scenes which only existed as written descriptions.'⁴⁷ Forrest arrived in Tasmania in 1876, moving to Hobart in 1881, and was one of the landscape painters who used photographs including those by Beattie, to paint wilderness scenes which he had not visited.⁴⁸ Beattie's collection activities continued when in Hobart and other towns, where he was always on the lookout for important items. On 21 June 1912 he wrote that he had purchased two paintings by William Buelow Gould, one of which he intended to keep and selling the other.⁴⁹ One of his many acquaintances was William Charles Piquenit, a well known Tasmanian artist.⁵⁰ Beattie also attended auctions, including those at Government House on the occasions of changes of governor.

Beattie had professed that, at an early stage of his life in Tasmania, 'my soul got soaked in the lore of Port Arthur'.⁵¹ Beattie's collection of historical items developed into the Port Arthur Museum located at his photographic studio in Murray Street, Hobart, and advertised as 'The most interesting Old-time Show in Australia.....Every Visitor to Hobart should see it.' On the list of its attractions the first listed was 'Relics of the GREAT BRITISH PENAL ESTABLISHMENT OF PORT ARTHUR.'⁵² Jack Cato, Beattie's cousin, wrote that the Port Arthur Museum was 'one of the sights of Hobart for the tourists.'⁵³ Cato recorded that Beattie's museum in Murray Street, having moved there from Elizabeth Street in 1921, attracted 'a stream of people' from the apple boats arriving in Hobart, paying a 'shilling a time' to view the exhibits in addition to purchasing photographs, cards and his publications.⁵⁴

In a letter to the editor of the *Mercury* in 1916, Edward Lucas, a member of the Legislative Council of South Australia, who had visited the museum, commented that the

⁴⁷ Long, *Tasmanian Photographers 1840-1940*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Haynes, *Tasmanian Visions*, p. 127.

⁴⁹ J. Beattie Papers, Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart.

⁵⁰ RS 30/2, J. W. Beattie Papers, Royal Society of Tasmania

⁵¹ Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, p. 81.

⁵² J. W. Beattie, *Port Arthur-Glimpses of its Stirring History*, (Hobart, n.d.) back cover.

⁵³ Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, p. 84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

government should acquire such a valuable collection in order to 'secure it to the State.'⁵⁵

A few years later in a letter to the editor of the *Mercury* the writer praised Beattie for his service to the public in gathering the convict relics, expressing concern that the documents relating to the prison system were inadequately protected and that they should be acquired and located in the Museum.⁵⁶ Such letters indicate that the value Beattie placed on the state's convict history was shared by others, but there were many who believed that it should be buried forever and forgotten.

John Watt Beattie died on 24 June 1930.⁵⁷ He left not only a valuable legacy of Tasmania's past in the form of numerous photographs of its scenic beauty, buildings and people, but also his collections of paintings, records, artifacts and various other items from the early times of the colony, some of which reminded the present of a past which many wished to ignore. Beattie was survived by his wife, Emily, and two daughters.

At a meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania in Hobart in September 1937 the Society agreed to organise an appeal for subscriptions to a memorial to Beattie in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Galley.⁵⁸ In the following year the nature of the memorial to John Watt Beattie had changed to the purchase of 'modern books on Australian history, geography and anthropology.'⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Mercury*, 3 February 1916, p. 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 24 October 1922, p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 25 June 1930, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 14 September 1937, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 12 March 1938, p. 14.

Chapter Two: The 'Stain' That Would Not Go Away

In 1803 the British Government established an outpost of the Port Jackson settlement in Van Diemen's Land, originally at Risdon Cove, and soon after at Sullivan's Cove on the Derwent River, the settlement being named Hobart Town. John West, a leading anti-transportationist, had no doubts as to the reason for the settlement at Hobart Town – 'Van Diemen's Land was colonized as a place of exile for the more felonious of felons – the Botany Bay of Botany Bay.'⁶⁰ The settlement, originally comprising approximately 400 people, most of whom were convicts, increased in number in the early years, although few additional convicts were sent there until 1820 when convicts comprised 47% of the population of 5,468.⁶¹ From then on the number of convicts sent to Van Diemen's Land each year increased to almost 3800 in 1844.⁶²

Two major penal outposts were established by the government of Van Diemen's Land – one at Macquarie Harbour on the west coast, established in 1822 and operated until 1833, when it was closed down and the convicts transferred to the other, more accessible location, at Port Arthur on the Tasman Peninsula. It was the penal establishment at Port Arthur in particular which came to represent a past which generated strong views as to its removal from history, and at the same time recognition by others of its importance, particularly as a tourist attraction.

In 1838 a report by a House of Commons Select Committee on Transportation, chaired by Sir William Molesworth, found that 'the evil of convictism could not be quarantined.'⁶³ The Molesworth Committee recommended that the assignment system be abolished and replaced by a probation system which required convicts to serve a period of probation in government work gangs, located in lightly settled areas 'before becoming

⁶⁰ J. West, *The History of Tasmania*, (Melbourne, 1981), p. 30.

⁶¹ W. A. Townsley, *Tasmania From Colony To Statehood*, (Hobart, 1991), p. 8.

⁶² A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, (London, 1971), p. 368.

⁶³ J. Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, (Melbourne, 2008), p. 236.

“passholders” who competed in the labour market.’⁶⁴ The changes proposed to the transportation system were received with mixed opinions by settlers in the colonies affected. One report commented that recent settlements such as the one in South Australia, ‘presented to intending emigrants to Australasia the choice between a convict colony and one free from the convict stain’⁶⁵ - the ‘stain’ that remained in Van Diemen’s Land/Tasmania for over a century.

In Van Diemen’s Land a total of 73 probation stations were established, beginning with one at Salt Water Creek on the Tasman Peninsula in 1841. Port Arthur was retained as the major penal settlement for repeat offenders and convicts regarded as incorrigible. The implementation of the convict probation system in 1841 placed each convict in government service at government expense and ended the benefits of cheap labour previously available to settlers. The other issue of concern, which arose early on as a consequence of the new scheme, was the perceived connection between convict probation gangs in the less settled districts and homosexuality. This ‘moral degradation’ resulted in concern both in Britain and the colony as ‘the politically influential evangelicals claimed that the fate of the whole society, indeed possibly the whole empire, was at stake.’⁶⁶

Charles Latrobe, Administrator of Van Diemen’s Land for a few months in 1846, as requested, reported back to the British Government in May 1847 on the probation system. Amongst a number of criticisms he reported that ‘vice of every description is to be met with on every hand, not as isolated spots, but as a pervading stain.’⁶⁷ During this time there was also strong opposition in other alternative destinations in the British Empire such as Table Cape, Port Phillip and New South Wales to transported British convicts, particularly when labour was not in short supply.

As a consequence of this opposition the only remaining destination considered for transported convicts from Britain was Van Diemen’s Land, which received increased

⁶⁴ Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 229.

⁶⁵ *Courier*, 13 October, 1840, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, p. 237.

⁶⁷ I. Brand, *The Convict Probation System: Van Diemen’s Land, 1839-1854*, (Hobart, 1990), p. 117.

numbers in 1848 and almost 3000 in 1850. This resumption, contrary to expectations in the colony, stirred the anti-transportationists into greater activity and the Anti-Transportation League was formed in Launceston early in 1849. The rhetoric of the anti-transportationists strongly condemned the moral character of convicts, ex-convicts and their descendants, claiming that the consequence of transportation was 'a country in moral ruin.'⁶⁸ The campaign directed at convicts and ex-convicts resulted in strong opposition from some in all levels of society who defended those targeted by the anti-transportationists and objected to their 'degraded and brutal language.'⁶⁹ Resentment against some of those active in the League also stemmed from the view that they had benefited substantially from convict labour provided during the period of the assignment system. McLaughlin concluded that 'as the end of transportation was being celebrated in 1853 by the Anti-transportation League, 'the image of the 'hated stain' was, at the same time, sealed into the history of the colony.'⁷⁰

The first step to bury the convict past was for Van Diemen's Land to be renamed Tasmania in 1855. Port Arthur became, with the cessation of transportation, the major penitentiary containing the remnants of the convict system with the conversion of the granary and treadmill complex into a penitentiary building, which was completed in 1857. Many of the ex-convicts were elderly and housed in the Pauper's or Invalid's Mess Hall and of these many were considered to be mentally insane.⁷¹ The last major building to be constructed at Port Arthur was the Lunatic Asylum in 1869.

Because of declining numbers in the penitentiary, the authorities decided to close the facility in 1877, 47 years after it was established. Just prior to its closure a correspondent of the *Mercury* visited the site and wrote that 'it will be found the most utterly wretched portion of the colony, unless, indeed it be proved to contain mineral wealth as many persons believe', concluding 'and now Port Arthur.....farewell forever'.⁷²

⁶⁸ West, *The History of Tasmania*, p. 229.

⁶⁹ *Hobart Guardian*, 12 October 1850, p. 2.

⁷⁰ McLaughlin, 'Against the League: Fighting the 'Hated Stain'', p. 97.

⁷¹ Graeme-Evans & Ross, *A Visitor's Short History Guide to Port Arthur*, p. 54.

⁷² *Mercury*, 27 February 1877, p. 3.

Presumably this 'farewell' to Port Arthur was to have begun with the decision to change its name to Carnarvon in 1878.⁷³ Subsequently the names of other convict outstations on the Tasman Peninsula were renamed in 1887.⁷⁴ From its closure the Port Arthur site became a subject of extreme differences between those, particularly the conservative part of society, who wanted it demolished and others, including the tourist operators, who wanted it developed and some who believed it to represent an important part of the colony's history. Oscillating between these opposing views were a series of governments also faced with decisions to be made on the priorities of the colony's finances. Kay Daniels, in commenting on Port Arthur, wrote that 'To Tasmanians it is the main symbol of convictism, the major reminder of "that hated stain."⁷⁵ David Young in *Making Crime Pay* discusses the sequence of events which followed the closure of Port Arthur, commenting that 'the abandoned Port Arthur became, entirely against the wishes of the Tasmanian establishment, the seed from which the island's historical tourism industry grew.'⁷⁶

During the 1880's the tourist guide books generally praised the recreational and scenic attractions of Tasmania and 'the majority made no reference whatsoever to the penal past let alone its continuation into the present.'⁷⁷ The *Mercury* continued to express the views of the conservatives, commenting on the occasion of the sale of the old buildings at Port Arthur by the government - 'it is quite time that the colony was freed from the last vestiges of a system which was got rid of with some trouble, but with the hearty assent of all right-thinking persons.'⁷⁸ Later that year James Backhouse Walker, one of Beattie's fellow members of the Minerva Club, presented the views of liberal thinkers in a serialised history of Tasmania, writing that 'we cannot afford to ignore our history or to neglect the study of the circumstances which our Australian institutions had their birth and the conditions under which they have grown.'⁷⁹ Porter, after his visit to Tasmania in

⁷³ Graeme-Evans & Ross, *A Visitor's Short History Guide to Port Arthur*, p. 57.

⁷⁴ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 43. At the same time Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour became Settlement Island.

⁷⁵ Daniels, 'Cults of Nature: Cults of History', p. 3.

⁷⁶ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 33.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁷⁸ *Mercury*, 11 March 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁹ *Tasmanian Mail*, 26 October 1889, p. 5.

1927, commented that 'Serious historians do not attach much weight to the early convict era of the island's history as an influence on the development of the modern State of Tasmania.'⁸⁰ Clive Lord, Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, wrote an article on the buildings at Port Arthur in 1926, commenting that 'popular history books' on the penal establishments had created a wrong impression and 'it is doubtful if this will ever entirely disappear.'⁸¹

The desire of many to remove convict sites and the selective writing of some historians were not the only attempts to ignore the state's convict past. There were also examples of deliberately ignoring the convict origins of some of its leading citizens⁸² and even destroying convict records. The frequent example given of the excision of a convict record is that of Henry Propsting, for a time an alderman of the Hobart City Council, and who was described in his obituary as 'a worthy and an honourable citizen', but no reference was made to his convict origin.⁸³ Efforts to suppress convict pasts were not confined to the pillars of society as others also had their convict origins hidden by their descendants at the time of their death. This occurred not only in Tasmania but also in other states of Australia.⁸⁴

Not only were convict records destroyed or convict pasts conveniently ignored but those responsible for government records including archival institutions were sensitive to the issue of the 'convict stain'. Archival guardians, not only in Tasmania but also other states, were reluctant to allow access to convict records. Gradually this attitude changed, initially by allowing access to approved researchers. Beattie in 1900, requesting successfully for access to archives relating to Port Macquarie, had stressed that the information would not be used 'in any way detrimental to the interests of the colony'.⁸⁵ Later on these restrictions were eased as community attitudes changed and younger

⁸⁰ G. Porter, *Wanderings in Tasmania*, (London, 1934), p. 106.

⁸¹ *Annual Courier*, November 1926, p. 23.

⁸² Roe, *The State of Tasmania*, p. 228.

⁸³ *Mercury*, 17 December 1901, p. 3.

⁸⁴ L. Frost, *Abandoned Women*, (Crows Nest 2012), p. 118.

⁸⁵ Roe, *The State of Tasmania*, p. 230.

generations became increasingly interested in family history. Even so progress was slow. In 1976 the Library Board in Tasmania agreed to remove the 'needless censorship.'⁸⁶

In 1886 the public had been confronted by its convict past with the staging at the Theatre Royal in Hobart of a play *His Natural Life*, based on the book by Marcus Clarke.⁸⁷ The 'genuinely appreciative' audience of this play⁸⁸ contrasts with the vocal opposition to the filming of *For the Term of His Natural Life* in Tasmania 40 years later. In 1926 those who wished to bury the convict past were given a severe shock with the decision by an American film company to film *For the Term of His Natural Life* on location in Tasmania. On arriving in Hobart the principals of the company producing the film 'particularly thanked Mr J. Beattie for his help in making available his museum of Port Arthur relics and loaning costumes of the period, from which duplicates would be made.'⁸⁹ The proposed film aroused strong objections by those determined that Tasmania's convict past should not be on display to the current generation but, just as importantly, to others around the world.⁹⁰ Initially the *Mercury* was positive about the decision commenting that it would be the forerunner to other pictures based on Tasmania, it would contribute financially to the state and serve to show the 'unsurpassable beauty of the background.'⁹¹

On 23 July the Southern and Northern Sections of the Royal Society of Tasmania met in Launceston and a few days later Clive Lord, Secretary to the Southern Section, wrote to the acting Premier regarding the filming of *For the Term of His Natural Life*.⁹² His letter stated that the 'Members present expressed very strongly disapproval of the proposal' and

⁸⁶ Smith, *Australia's Birthstain: the startling legacy of the convict era*, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Clarke, *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

⁸⁸ Winter, 'Portraying 'That Hated Stain': Convict Drama and Convict Audiences at the Theatre Royal', p. 233.

⁸⁹ *Mercury*, 24 July 1926, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Roe, 'Vandiemism Debated' in *For the Term of His Natural Life* provides a detailed account of the reaction to the production of the film.

⁹¹ *Mercury*, 23 July 1926, p. 11.

⁹² On 15 July the Premier of Tasmania, J A Lyons and others were injured in a collision between their car and a goods train at a level crossing at Perth in the north of the state, (*Mercury*, 16 July 1926, p. 7). As a consequence the Chief Secretary, J A Guy, was acting Premier for some months..

'the Royal Society trusts that the Government may see fit to take such action in the matter that that will prevent the proposal being carried out.'⁹³

At the same time as the Royal Society made its views known the *Mercury* had a change of mind on 27 July, commencing a series of long editorials stating that 'For our part, had we the power, we would sweep away every relic of those bad old times', trumpeting the consequences, including serious harm, which would 'weaken the Empire' and the need to 'prevent a most dangerous and far-reaching crime.'⁹⁴ The *Examiner* in Launceston described opposition to the film as short-sighted commenting that 'The good name of Tasmania is not in danger.'⁹⁵ Questions were raised in both the Senate⁹⁶ and State Parliament⁹⁷ as to whether its production could be stopped, and if not whether its export could be prevented, but no action was taken in either place. Those opposing the making of the film included church leaders and an organisation representing ex-servicemen, but letters were also received by the *Mercury* supporting its production.⁹⁸

On 27 July the day after receiving the letter from the Royal Society the acting Premier asked the Attorney-General for advice and in turn the Solicitor-General's opinion was sought. His advice was that although the 'preparation of the film' could not be prevented, the Censor Board could refuse the registration of the film and hence prevent its exhibition in the State. His advice included 'It is almost inconceivable that the Board would grant registration of the proposed film,' and referred to the 'desired prohibition.' This advice was forwarded to the acting Premier on 5 August for consideration by Cabinet the following day. A note on the file records that the 'Attorney-General cannot attend Cabinet' – the Attorney-General at the time was A G Ogilvie who later claimed that he supported the making of the film.⁹⁹ On the day after the cabinet meeting the acting Premier wrote to Clive Lord at the Tasmanian Museum in response to the Royal Society's letter, stating that cabinet had given consideration to their letter and other

⁹³ PD1/421/165/3/26, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 26 July 1926.

⁹⁴ *Mercury*, 27 July 1926, p. 6 and 5 August 1926, p. 6.

⁹⁵ *Examiner*, 29 July 1926, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Mercury*, 24 July 1926, p. 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 28 July 1926, p. 7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 3 August 1926, p. 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 23 September 1926, p. 8.

representations and 'the Government decided not to take any action on the matter.'¹⁰⁰ The nature and origins of the 'other representations' is not known.

This decision did not halt the objections to the film, with the Royal Society on 9 August passing by a small majority, a motion opposing the making of the film on the grounds that 'the book does not represent true history.'¹⁰¹ Clive Lord, Curator of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Secretary of the Society, claimed that the film 'would harm British prestige.' Dr W Crowther, perhaps one of David Young's 'bourgeois intellectual elite,'¹⁰² supported the motion, remarking that the days which the film was to depict 'were brutal and degrading', and 'he did not see why Tasmanians to-day should allow the record-or an alleged record-to go on in perpetuity.' Others such as the President of the Hobart Chamber of Commerce thought that the consequences were being overstated and that 'the outlook of the whole world had changed since the days of Port Arthur.' The *Mercury* continued to represent conservative views with another editorial expressing concern that the film would be seen by 'countless millions of un-critical people like Chinese, Indians,.....South African Hottentots,' and others 'to create ill feeling against the defenders of our own Empire.'¹⁰³

The film premiered in Newcastle, New South Wales, in June 1927 and this was followed by considerable success in Newcastle and Sydney.¹⁰⁴ After a private screening of the film on 24 August, Premier Lyons described it as 'a picture that every Tasmanian should see if only to see what changes have taken place in our whole outlook on life'¹⁰⁵ – publicly on this occasion he had no qualms about revisiting the state's past. Both Roe and Young, on reflection, commented that Lyons may have opposed the showing, if not the making, of the film had he been Premier when Cabinet discussed it in July the previous year.¹⁰⁶ Screening of *For the Term of His Natural Life* began in Hobart on 29 August 1927. The

¹⁰⁰ PD1/421/165/3/26. Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 27 July to 6 August 1926.

¹⁰¹ *Mercury*, 10 August 1926, p. 5. In its Annual Report for 1927 the Society re-affirmed its position opposing the making of the film.

¹⁰² Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 96.

¹⁰³ *Mercury*, 11 August 1926, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Mercury*, 25 August 1927, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Roe, 'Vandiemism Debated', p. 17 and Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 94.

Mercury soon after returned to its concern about the consequences of its production and screening, asking, 'why subject any State in the world to this unwarrantable reflection?'¹⁰⁷ A leading cleric again expressed concern that it would negatively affect 'primitive peoples', and Beattie said 'I liked it. Historically of course, it was rotten.....but as a picture it was good and quite above the ordinary run of stupid imported films which are inflicted upon us.'¹⁰⁸ Overseas the film was shown briefly in America and not in Britain – its impact on Tasmania's image internationally would have been negligible.¹⁰⁹

David Young commented that the production and screening of the film *For the Term of His Natural Life* was the first of two events which 'took the islanders a step closer towards acceptance of their ancestry.'¹¹⁰ The other event was the sale of Beattie's Port Arthur Museum, a process which showed that for some in the community physical reminders of the State's past were still not considered of value to the present generation or to future generations.

¹⁰⁷ *Mercury*, 5 September 1927, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Tasmanian Mail*, 21 September 1927, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Roe, 'Vandiemism Debated', p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 94.

Chapter Three: The First Beattie Collection

'When Tasmania was a Paradise for Collectors and Connoisseurs' was the title given to an article by Jack Cato, J W Beattie's cousin, in the *Age Literary Supplement* on 9 July 1960.¹¹¹ In the article Cato describes some of his experiences with his cousin's collection activities and the family treasures brought to Tasmania by governors, officers, officials and wealthier free settlers. Beattie was one of the most dedicated and knowledgeable collectors of china, paintings, documents, weapons, furniture and other items regarded in recent times as antiques.

Beattie was not the only collector of note; a Mr W Williamson with his Old Curiosity Shop at Brown's River, near Kingston Beach, south of Hobart, was another. In 1916 this small collection was commented on favourably by an interstate visitor, who believed that it and the valuable items in Beattie's Port Arthur Museum should both be in the possession of the government.¹¹² After an early life as a seaman, Williamson had been an avid collector for 'himself and for museums and learned societies all over the world'. His collection included convict garb and leg irons from Port Arthur.¹¹³

The other collector who came to notice was Mr W Radcliffe who operated a museum in conjunction with his store at Port Arthur. His museum included convict relics which had been dug up on his property. During the filming of *For the Term of His Natural Life* in 1926, he did 'a roaring trade at his shop and museum as the hungry tourists and visitors poured through the town looking for the filming location'.¹¹⁴ Later on in 1939 when the government was taking belated action to secure the buildings at Port Arthur, consideration was given to purchasing Radcliffe's museum and locating it in one of the buildings to be acquired.¹¹⁵ Amidst opposition to the purchase of the buildings, the

¹¹¹ *The Age Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1960, p. 1.

¹¹² *Mercury*, 3 February 1916, p. 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 11 January 1930, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ B. Rieusset, 'Filming 'The Term'' in *For the Term of His Natural Life*, (Port Arthur, 2001), p. 45.

¹¹⁵ *Mercury*, 21 July 1939, p. 9.

allocation of £4250 for the purchase of the museum and historic relics was deleted by the Legislative Council but £2500 for the purchase of buildings was agreed to.¹¹⁶

By the 1920s all notable historical collections were in private hands and 'the largest and most significant in Tasmania'¹¹⁷ was Beattie's Port Arthur Museum which had been open to the public since about 1912.¹¹⁸ His billboard proclaimed it to be 'The most Interesting & Historical Museum in AUSTRALIA.'¹¹⁹ 'Beattie's selections for his museum would have been shaped by the enthusiasm of the visiting public, his donors and his own fascination with Tasmania's convict past,'¹²⁰ and included the works of various artists including prints, drawings and paintings. Beattie was more than a collector as in his role as an historian he 'diligently notated interviews with people he came across during his travels.'¹²¹

As the 1920s progressed Beattie was giving thought to a public destination for his Port Arthur Museum – he was in his 60's and the collection had grown substantially. One option was for it to pass into public hands and have a permanent home in the Lady Franklin Museum building at Lenah Valley.¹²² The Lady Franklin Museum, completed in 1843 on Lady Franklin's property 'Ancanthe', had been built as a classic temple intended as a repository for national history collections and a library. Subsequently the collections it contained were damaged and then removed and the museum had various uses,¹²³ including, in December 1925, an apple packing shed.¹²⁴ Public concern at its condition and the need for its restoration resulted in a deputation led by the Mayor of Hobart meeting the Minister for Lands at the end of March 1926. A letter explaining the objectives of the deputation was sent to the Premier by the Mayor.¹²⁵ Premier Joseph

¹¹⁶ *Mercury*, 14 December 1939, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ *Mercury*, 24 September 1927, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Billboard 'THE PORT ARTHUR MUSEUM', displayed at the Tasmanian Connections Exhibition at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 2012.

¹²⁰ Anon, *Treasures of the Queen Victoria and Art Gallery*, p. 48.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²² *Mercury*, 25 June 1930, p. 7.

¹²³ C. Tassell, 'Ancanthe- a romantic ideal', *Trust News Australia*, Volume 5, No.9, May 2012, p. 28.

¹²⁴ *Mercury*, 15 December 1925, p. 7.

¹²⁵ PD1/4/19/114/3/26, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 7 April 1926.

Lyons apparently did not consider it important, writing 'Seen 9.4.26' on the letter, and nothing came of this attempt to restore the Lady Franklin Museum. Clive Lord commented at the time that 'public spirit that neglects the past will also neglect thought of the future.' Whether he was aware of Beattie's intention to sell his collection is not known but Lord was concerned that Tasmania could lose 'Mr Beattie's famous historical collection'.¹²⁶

Faced with failing health and the future of his large and comprehensive collection, Beattie decided to sell it in a way in which it would remain in Tasmania and preferably in Hobart. To facilitate this he gave the responsibility for its disposal to Hobart agents, Freeman, Duff & Co, who as a result wrote to Clive Lord, Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, on 15 February 1926, offering the complete collection for £6000. In the letter Freeman explained that Beattie's ill-health compelled him to retire from business, and described the collection as 'the most wonderful of its kind in the world,' urging the Board of Trustees of the Museum to acquire it.¹²⁷ Both Lord and the Board were very interested in the collection, but, as the financial contribution by the government to the Tasmanian Museum was only £1225 in 1926-27¹²⁸ it was not surprising that the Director passed the offer on to the Premier.

Lord's letter to the Premier a few days later, together with Freeman's letter, strongly recommended that the valuable collection should become the property of the State and so remain in Tasmania. Lord was careful to point out that, although called the Port Arthur Museum, many of the exhibits related to the early days of the settlement. He emphasised that the value of the collection if split up would greatly exceed the price being asked, and offered to provide a detailed report on the collection. Early in March Lord forwarded a detailed catalogue of the exhibits in the collection to the Premier's office.

¹²⁶ *Mercury*, 16 December 1925, p. 4.

¹²⁷ PD1/419/114/26, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office contains the correspondence in respect of the offer of the first Beattie collection to the State Government.

¹²⁸ *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac for 1927*, (Hobart), p. 255-256.

In mid-April, apparently frustrated by the lack of response from the government, Beattie wrote a letter to Freeman outlining his career and collection activities. In his letter Beattie emphasised that his collection, photographic travels, lantern slides, lectures and items for newspapers and journals promoting the state had been done at his expense and with no assistance from government. At the age of 68, suffering from varicose veins, he was 'very thankful to dispose of the collection as it represents the whole of my effort in the interests of my wife and family.'¹²⁹ Freeman forwarded this letter to Clive Lord who in turn forwarded it on to the Premier's office, receiving a response stating that 'Mr Lyons will give attention to this matter as soon as a suitable opportunity arises.'¹³⁰

Pressure on the government continued with Freeman interviewing Parkes, the secretary to the Premier, who in a memorandum to the Premier, enclosed another copy of the offer made the previous February. Observing that it would be regrettable if the collection was disposed of outside Tasmania, the Secretary informed the Premier that a decision was required so that, if necessary, they could offer the collection elsewhere. Finally on 18 June 1926, the Premier wrote to Freeman Duff & Co stating that the 'provision of the necessary funds presents many difficulties.....it is not likely that Parliament would appropriate the amount required' and that other prospective buyers should be contacted.¹³¹

In the light of the circumstances of the sale of the Beattie collection a few months later the government's response to the offer raises some questions. Apart from the time taken to respond, there appears to have been no request for more information or advice from Clive Lord as Director of the Museum or from any other expert, no counter-offer as to a lower price for the collection or avenues by which the funds could be obtained. Although the Premier indicated in his letter declining the offer that he had discussed it with ministers, the offer was apparently not discussed in cabinet. This lack of interest in Tasmania's past could be considered consistent with the many years of reluctance at

¹²⁹ PD1/419/114/3/26, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 16 April 1926.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 26 April 1926.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 18 June 1926.

government level to act to preserve Port Arthur and other convict sites and the premier's apparent lack of interest in the Lady Franklin Museum at about the same time.

Recurring current account deficits, the cost of servicing increased public debt and the limited taxable capacity of Tasmania resulted in a review of the state's financial situation by A G Ogilvie and Tasman Shields M.L.C.¹³² This review, *The Case for Tasmania*, dated 19 February 1926, assessed the state's financial situation and made a claim for financial assistance from the Commonwealth. As this claim for financial assistance coincided with the offer of the Beattie's Museum the government could have had concerns about acceptance of the offer at the same time as it was pleading for special financial assistance for Tasmania. There was some improvement in the state's finances for the next few years, with budget surpluses in 1927 and 1928,¹³³ and the Commonwealth did agree to extra assistance albeit less than the state government requested.

Beattie subsequently reduced the price on his Port Arthur Museum from £6000 to £5000, but the issue of lack of funds remained the following year as evidenced by the Chief Secretary's response in August 1927 to a request by Henry Allport, a well-known solicitor and collector, that the government purchase Beattie's museum. In his letter the Chief Secretary stated that the housing of the museum would be difficult given the lack of funds to enable the construction of a new wing for the Art Gallery. He suggested that 'Next year may provide a more favourable opportunity of dealing with this matter'¹³⁴ – that opportunity for the state government had gone by then.

With the prospects exhausted for a buyer for the whole of his collection in the south of the state, Beattie turned to the north for a satisfactory result. On 12 August 1927 Freeman Duff & Co wrote to the Mayor of Launceston confirming their verbal offer of the whole of Beattie's Port Arthur Museum for the sum of £5000 – the collection being described as comprising 'approximately two thousand two hundred exhibits'. Attached were five

¹³² Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood*, p. 311.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 314.

¹³⁴ CSD22/1/323/108/2/27, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 17 August 1927.

pages listing the items, which included pictures, furniture, old brass and copper items, china, crystal, Sheffield plate, firearms and other weapons.¹³⁵ It is interesting to note that there were no convict items listed on these five pages – as the objective was to sell the collection promoting its tourism value this omission is curious if it was deliberate.

Beattie's *Port Arthur Museum Catalogue of Exhibits*, on sale at his premises for 'threepence', listed all the items on exhibition in the three rooms including a number of leg irons and other convict items.¹³⁶ A few days later Freeman Duff & Co acknowledged receipt of one shilling from Launceston Council to place the Port Arthur Museum under offer of sale until 30 September.¹³⁷

The Victoria Museum and Art Gallery established in 1891 with funds provided by act of parliament in 1895, was managed by the Launceston City Council. It was partly funded by the state government – in 1927 the state government grant was £500.¹³⁸ Mr H Scott, Curator of the museum, was very enthusiastic about the collection and described it as 'of the most historical interest to Tasmania'. In a note to the Mayor on 20 August, he described it as absolutely unique, worth the £5000 asked for it. He also stated that a mainland collector had offered £3000 for approximately one third of it and 'a movement is on foot, in Hobart to purchase the collection.' Whether there was such a move or it was pressure from the agent is not known. Scott also recommended that they should not seek 'a reduction in the purchase price at the moment.'¹³⁹ In the meantime arrangements were made for some of the aldermen from the Launceston City Council to inspect the Port Arthur Museum in Hobart.¹⁴⁰

Council arranged for Mr A J Ridge, a well-known Launceston collector and antique dealer, to visit Hobart, for the sum of £10 out of pocket expenses, to value Beattie's collection and report back to council. Ridge spent three days inspecting the exhibits and

¹³⁵ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 12 August 1927.

¹³⁶ J W Beattie, *Port Arthur Museum Catalogue of Exhibits*, (Hobart n.d.).

¹³⁷ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 17 August 1927.

¹³⁸ *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac for 1927*, (Hobart), p. 256. The name of the museum was changed to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in 1926 to avoid confusion with the Victorian State Museum in Melbourne.

¹³⁹ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 20 August 1927.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 31 August 1927.

asked Freeman if Beattie would accept £4100. He was informed that this was too low, but the agent was confident that if the council offered £4500 then Beattie would accept that offer. Ridge advised the council that he estimated the value of Beattie's Port Arthur Museum at £5000, worth twice that 'for the good it would do for Launceston', and that he had been informed that if council turned down the offer then the Commonwealth would be given an option on it for £6000.¹⁴¹

On 20 September Beattie accepted the council's offer of £4500.¹⁴² At that time Scott, the Victoria Museum Curator, commented to the Mayor that the museum vote 'would not run to the sum required', and he could not see how Beattie's museum could be paid for. At the Whole of Council Committee meeting on 21 September, Scott and Ridge were asked to attend when the offer of the Beattie Port Arthur Museum would be considered. The committee unanimously decided to authorize the purchase for the sum of £4500. Almost with glee the *Examiner* commented that 'not everyone in Hobart realised the worth and attraction of the collection' which 'was at one time offered to the Tasmanian Museum, but the offer was not accepted and now it is too late.'¹⁴³ The news that the council was likely to proceed with the purchase was greeted by support expressed to the Mayor, Alderman Barber, 'from a large number of citizens, complimenting the council upon the action taken',¹⁴⁴ including the 50,000 League.¹⁴⁵ The League, established by a group of business men in Launceston in 1926 with the objective of promoting the prosperity of Launceston in particular and Tasmania generally, wrote on 26 September congratulating the Mayor on securing an option on the collection and 'sincerely trusts that the purchase will be completed.'¹⁴⁶ Clive Lord, Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart, was complimentary about 'the enterprising citizens of Launceston.'¹⁴⁷ The acquisition of Beattie's museum was seen as an asset that would be

¹⁴¹ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 19 September 1927.

¹⁴² One method of calculating the current value of this amount is to use the Reserve Bank of Australia Pre Decimal Inflation Calculator. This results in a 2012 estimate of approximately \$330,000.

¹⁴³ *Examiner*, 23 September 1927, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 24 September 1927, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ The League's name was based on its objective of increasing Launceston's population to that figure.

¹⁴⁶ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 26 September 1927.

¹⁴⁷ *Examiner*, 24 September 1927, p. 9.

‘a great attraction to tourists’, as Beattie’s Port Arthur Museum had been ‘visited by thousands of people from every state in the Commonwealth and countries overseas.’¹⁴⁸

The recommendation by the Committee that the Beattie collection be purchased for £4500 was unanimously passed by the Launceston City Council on 27 September. In council there was obviously some sensitivity concerning perceptions about the nature of the purchase, with the Mayor stating that ‘The collection did not represent a “chamber of horrors” as some might be prone to believe.’ Specific reference was made to the fact that although it was called the Port Arthur Museum, it was ‘more than a collection of Port Arthur relics, it was really a very fine gathering of pieces connected with the early history of Tasmania.’ At the meeting Alderman James, whilst supporting the motion, suggested that the cost should be written off ‘over say, a period of ten years’ and this was supported by another alderman.¹⁴⁹ The Launceston branch of the Australian Natives Association also congratulated the council on its decision.¹⁵⁰ In the 1927 *Papers and Proceedings* the Northern Branch of the Royal Society expressed interest in the papers and documents in the collection but made no reference to other items including convict relics.¹⁵¹ Public concern in Hobart was reported after the sale to the Launceston City Council¹⁵² – there is little or no evidence of interest prior to that time.

The decision of the Launceston City Council to purchase Beattie’s Port Arthur Museum contrasts with the lack of interest in Hobart with the exception of Clive Lord and Henry Allport. The Royal Society, while it had opposed the filming of *The Term of His Natural Life* because it did not portray history, could have been expected to be in favour of his historical collection remaining in the city, as would Beattie’s fellow members of the Minerva Society.¹⁵³ Dr William Crowther, a member of the Royal Society, had commented at the time of debate concerning the future of the Lady Franklin Museum less than two years earlier, that while ‘the acquisition of Mr Beattie’s collection should be

¹⁴⁸ *Examiner*, 24 September, 1927, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 27 September 1927, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 29 September 1927.

¹⁵¹ Royal Society of Tasmania, *Papers and Proceedings for 1927*, p. 230.

¹⁵² *Mercury*, 18 October 1927, p. 8.

¹⁵³ Clive Lord stated that he had done all he could and the Royal Society tried to keep the collection in Hobart (*Examiner*, 24 September 1927, p. 9.). There is no information on the Royal Society’s efforts.

greatly appreciated by the people of Southern Tasmania.....The Port Arthur relics might be discarded in their entirety, or otherwise disposed of, as in any case they are a small and the least interesting part of the collection.'¹⁵⁴ This view, shared apparently by others, knowing that the greater part would provide knowledge of 'splendid ancestors', does not explain the lack of interest in Beattie's historical collection.

When George Porter visited Beattie's Port Arthur Museum in 1927 he spoke to Beattie at the time his collection was in the process of being packed prior to its transport to its new owners, the Launceston City Council. Beattie told Porter that 'I am not popular in Hobart, people think that I have secured the lion's share of the curiosities of the district.'¹⁵⁵

Beattie did not elaborate on who those people were and it is not clear whether this 'unpopularity' contributed to his decision to sell his museum – ill-health and the desire to retire had been given as the reasons. His relationship with other collectors does not explain the lack of action by potential purchasers of his museum to ensure that it remained in the city. Reasons for the apparent lack of interest lie in areas other than his popularity – he was a high profile person in the community, a member of the Royal Society and active in tourist promotion.

Although the Royal Society was primarily interested in discussions, lectures and literature on scientific matters, it had a History Section and on occasions had lectures on the early history of Tasmania, for example in August 1927.¹⁵⁶ Petrow in his paper on the Royal Society and its Historical Section observed that 'it did have one obvious blind spot. Tasmania's convict taint received little attention',¹⁵⁷ and the 'convict taint still preoccupied the minds of many citizens and historians had to handle the subject with care.'¹⁵⁸

There had been a view by some, including prospective donors such as William Walker, that there was a lack of appreciation of Tasmanian and Australian heritage as shown by

¹⁵⁴ *Mercury*, 23 December 1925, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ Porter, *Wanderings in Tasmania*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁶ *Mercury*, 9 August 1927, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Petrow, 'The Antiquarian Mind', p. 71.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 68.

the level of funds for the Tasmanian Public Library in Hobart, jointly funded by the State Government and the Hobart City Council. Walker's life-long habit was browsing in second-hand bookshops and auction houses and he accumulated a large number of books, mainly by Australian authors.¹⁵⁹ In 1923 when Walker decided to donate his collection of Australian books his initial preference was the library of the University of Tasmania as he did not consider that the trustees of the Tasmanian Public Library had 'demonstrated an appreciation of Tasmaniana and other important books.'¹⁶⁰ Edmund Morris Miller, a Trustee of the Public Library as well as a senior staff member of the University, convinced Walker that the Public Library was the appropriate recipient of his gift. His donations of books to the Tasmanian Public Library resulted in the William Walker Collection, a large collection of Australian literature, although, because of lack of resources the Library struggled to catalogue and display the collection.¹⁶¹

Some enterprise was shown by the Launceston aldermen both in respect of the method of paying for the collection and for facilities in which it could be displayed. Council paid the deposit of £100 on 22 September and the balance of the purchase price, £4400, by cheque to Freeman Duff & Co on 29 October 1927 but the purchase price of £4500 does not appear as an expense in the General Accounts for the year ended 30 June 1928. However an expense of £1000 for 'Historical Museum (written down)' is there.¹⁶² The amount of £1000 occurs as an expense again in General Accounts for the next four financial years.¹⁶³ The amount of £1000 for the purchase of the Beattie Collection was given as one of the reasons why the city rates could not be reduced again for the 1928/29 financial year.¹⁶⁴ The final annual amount written down as an expense was £514, seven shillings

¹⁵⁹ H. Gaunt, 'Mr Walker's books, or how the Tasmanian Public Library founded a collection and forgot a donor', *Tasmania Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol.54, No.3, December 2007, p. 109.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 119.

¹⁶¹ *Mercury*, 28 October 1925, p. 9.

¹⁶² City of Launceston Valedictory Address of Mayor and Heads of Departments for the Years 1927-1934, Year Ended 30 June 1928, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, p. 14.

¹⁶³ It is not obvious how the balance of the £4500 was accounted for each year— it is likely that it was included in a sinking fund.

¹⁶⁴ *Examiner*, 25 June 1928, p. 6.

and nine pence in 1932/33.¹⁶⁵ The total amount written down of just over £5500 would appear to include the cost of displaying the collection, as the estimates for the council for 1928-29 described the written down item as 'Payment off new Museum building and historical collection.'¹⁶⁶ For the financial year 1928-29 the Balance Sheet recorded an item in Assets, Historical Museum Collection, with a value of £5514 seven shillings and nine pence, an asset value which remained constant for some years.¹⁶⁷

Not only was Launceston City Council enthusiastic about the Port Arthur Museum and was prepared to offer a lower purchase price but they also had a clear idea as to how the collection could be displayed to the public – secure the museum and work out how to use it later. On the same day that the purchase was approved the council surveyor was requested to investigate the housing of the collection and could 'appoint if necessary a temporary draughtsman to assist.....for a fortnight.'¹⁶⁸ By the end of October council was involved in discussions with the State Government on acquiring the adjacent Technical College Building and thereby extending the Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. In October 1927 Council had decided to offer the Government £2500 for a section of the technical college which the government accepted the following month.¹⁶⁹ Plans for altering the school rooms and to provide access from the Victoria Museum were made public in November.¹⁷⁰ Tenders were let for the necessary work in January 1928 and the first room displaying some of the items in the recently purchased historical collection was opened in May.¹⁷¹

According to reports at the time of his sale of the Port Arthur Museum to the Launceston City Council in September 1927, Beattie had offered it to the Hobart City Council earlier

¹⁶⁵ City of Launceston Valedictory Address of Mayor, Year Ended 30 June 1933, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, p. 11.

¹⁶⁶ *Examiner*, 26 June 1928, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ City of Launceston Valedictory Address of Mayor, Year Ended 30 June 1929, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, p. 19.

¹⁶⁸ Launceston City Council Minutes Book, Whole of Council Committee, 9 Jan 1924 - 12 Dec 1931, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 26 September 1927.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 31 October 1927 and 21 November 1927.

¹⁷⁰ *Examiner*, 11 November 1927, p. 11.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 14 May 1928, p. 9.

in the year but the council let the opportunity 'slip'.¹⁷² The news that the Launceston City Council had purchased the Museum was not well received by some in Hobart and as a consequence the Hobart City Council Mayor, Alderman Wignall, felt obliged on 3 October 1927 to make a statement on the council's role in the failure to secure it for the city. The Mayor stated that 'as far as I know.....this council was never given the opportunity of purchasing the Museum.' He went on to say that he believed that 'it was suggested to certain individual aldermen at different times that it would be desirable to purchase the Museum, but.....no definite proposition was ever made to this Council.'¹⁷³ This statement, although appearing word for word in the *Mercury* the next day,¹⁷⁴ did not prevent the Hobart City Council continuing to be criticised for not purchasing Beattie's collection in 1927. It would seem that there was little enthusiasm amongst aldermen for involvement in the purchase of the museum as they would have been aware of the negotiations between Beattie's agent and others in Hobart. At a weekly luncheon of the 50,000 League in Launceston in July 1928, Mr Scott, Curator of the Launceston Museum, stated that Beattie had offered his collection to the Hobart City Council 'some six to eight months before its sale.'¹⁷⁵

This apparent lack of interest by Hobart City Council continued with the offer of the Williamson collection, and when a similar opportunity occurred in 1930 and again in 1933, the council was reminded that they had been 'subjected to a storm of criticism when they allowed the Beattie collection of Tasmanian relics to go to Launceston.'¹⁷⁶ It would seem that the Hobart City Council was seen as representing 'civic pride'. However the council as a potential purchaser of Beattie's museum is interesting as the council has no direct role with respect to museum activity, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery having become the property of the Government of Tasmania by act of parliament in

¹⁷² *Examiner*, 24 September 1927, p. 8.

¹⁷³ MCC/16/129/28 – Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 3 October 1927.

¹⁷⁴ *Mercury*, 4 October 1927, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ *Examiner*, 31 July 1928, p. 9.

¹⁷⁶ *Mercury*, 13 June 1933, p. 6.

1885.¹⁷⁷ By comparison the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery was owned and operated by the Launceston City Council.

As a result of the view that 'public spirit in the South had been aroused', the Hobart City Council received a letter on 17 October 1927 from Messrs. Peter Facey and Sons offering the museum and collection of relics owned by Mr Williamson of Kingston Beach. The price was £5500 and the offer stood until 26 October. The Town Clerk, some aldermen and Clive Lord visited and examined the collection on 24 October. A week later council decided not to purchase the museum. The reasons given included the absence of both a detailed catalogue and opinions of experts and the large expenditure required to house the collection.¹⁷⁸ It is not known what Clive Lord, presumably an 'expert', thought of the collection. On this occasion the council had received a direct offer but its response was one which was to occur again when a similar opportunity arose. No such offer seems to have been made to the Tasmanian Museum or the State Government. Undeterred by this rejection, Facey and Sons offered the Williamson Museum to the Launceston City Council a few days later. The Town Clerk replied, saying that 'Council cannot see their way clear to entertain it at the present time.'¹⁷⁹ Such a response should not have come as a surprise as the council had paid for the Beattie collection only a few days before. It seems that Williamson's museum was still in his possession at the time of his death in 1931¹⁸⁰ and was subsequently acquired by Radcliffe at Port Arthur.¹⁸¹

An important consideration for the Launceston City Council's decision was the Beattie collection's value as an attraction to tourists to the city. Its attraction in Hobart was that it provided tourists the opportunity to obtain information and some understanding of Tasmania's convict past and in particular of Port Arthur. The museum collection purchased from Beattie only contained a small proportion of relics from the convict penal system, but it might have been expected that aspect would have been promoted as the

¹⁷⁷ Hughes, *Collection*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ MCC/16/129/28, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 31 October 1927.

¹⁷⁹ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victorian Museum and Art Gallery, 9 November 1927.

¹⁸⁰ *Mercury*, 15 May 1931, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Young, *Making Crime Pay*, p. 121.

collection was gradually provided for the public to see. Scott, the Curator, stated that 'the morbid aspect of the early history of Tasmania has been kept in the foreground, but this is quite unnecessary and undesirable.'¹⁸² He later gave an assurance to the Mayor that 'Properly classified and shown, there would be nothing in the collection to jar upon the most sensitive mind.'¹⁸³ At the opening of the first section of the 'Historical Collection', as it was now called, Scott commented that 'penal settlement.... has been, unfortunately, made the centre around which all the bulk of all tradition has gathered.'¹⁸⁴ At a talk he gave to a meeting of the 50,000 League in Launceston in July 1928 on the Beattie collection, Scott stated that the free settlers had a hard time and seemed to him to have been 'heroes' and 'Partly to do them justice, the title "Port Arthur Collection" would be replaced by the name, Historical Collection.'¹⁸⁵ On a later occasion Scott was reported as saying that 'The history of Tasmania is one thing, and the story of the convicts is another.'¹⁸⁶ This represented one of two differing views of Tasmania's past, those that believed that its convict past had been ignored and others who believed that its importance to state development had been exaggerated.

On 14 December the Mayor of Launceston City Council agreed to Clive Lord's request that the Port Arthur Museum remain intact in Hobart until after the meeting of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science,¹⁸⁷ which was held between the 16 and 21 January 1928. Scott and some assistants then spent two weeks packing all the exhibits which in total weighed an estimated 20 tons. The Mayor, after negotiating with the railways, obtained approval from the Minister in January 1928 for the collection to be transported free of charge. As discussions with the State Government continued and the space in the Technical College gradually became available, rooms were modified and sections of the collection displayed in the 'historical wing'. The first section of this wing at the Queen Victoria Museum was opened by the Mayor on 11 May 1928. Present at the opening were Clive Lord, who 'congratulated Launceston upon having secured such a

¹⁸² Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 20 August 1927.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5 September 1927.

¹⁸⁴ *Mercury*, 12 May 1928, p. 11.

¹⁸⁵ *Examiner*, 31 July 1928, p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Correspondence File 5/6.1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 14 December 1927.

valuable historical Museum' and Mr Beattie who was sure that 'the people of Launceston.....would thoroughly endorse the wisdom of the Council in securing it.'¹⁸⁸

The Curator of the Queen Victoria Museum, Scott, on more than one occasion had expressed his concern about what he considered to be the overemphasis in Tasmanian history of the 'convict era'. The order in which he made available the exhibits from the historical collection suggests an attempt to redress the situation. During a period of approximately six months, rooms in the historical wing were opened to the public displaying various sections of the collection. The *Examiner* published reviews of these sections commencing with 'Priceless Relics, Historical Collection, A Tour Round the Cases' beginning No.1 on 14 May 1928 and finishing with two numbered 12 on 30 January and 2 February 1929.¹⁸⁹ These sections displayed a wide range of items including possessions of early governors such as Sir John Franklin, ceramics, china, pewter, paintings, scrimshaw items, weapons and handicrafts made by convicts. However, leg irons and other penal institution items were not displayed in these rooms. . On 26 January 1929, the review in the *Examiner*, presumably based on a discussion with Scott, included the comment that 'The much gloated over chains and metal hand and leg clogs that Governors of prison life thought essential to the prison system.....are quite another story, and should be shown as a separate and distinct exhibit and cannot in any circumstances be mixed up with the historical relics left us by early colonists of any thing but the criminal type.'¹⁹⁰ This view is consistent with Scott's earlier comments that the history of Tasmania and that of convicts were distinctly separate, suggesting a lingering of concern for the "hated stain" in the north of the state.

By October 1931, because of lack of space, it was estimated that 'a full half' of the Beattie historical collection was still in storage¹⁹¹ i.e. four years after the collection was purchased. Midway through the following year the council was still negotiating with the

¹⁸⁸ *Mercury*, 12 May 1928, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ *Examiner*, various issues - there were 13 'Priceless Relics' articles, the last two both numbered No.12.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 26 January 1929, p. 11.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 13 October 1931, p. 9.

government to obtain possession of the building which they had bought.¹⁹² The convict relics on show were described in 1933 as having 'a particular, even morbid appeal,' to mainland visitors viewing the 'magnificent Beattie collection'¹⁹³ - at some stage space had become available to enable convict relics to be displayed. The *Examiner* published a number of articles featuring visitors from interstate who visited the museum and in particular were interested in the Beattie collection convict items on display. Despite Scott's views of the convict past, tourists continued their interest in it - the Council's investment in the collection in 1927 was seen to be paying off.

Attracting more visitors to Launceston was a benefit expected from the purchase of the Beattie collection, but as the number of visitors to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery were not recorded, it is not possible to ascertain whether this objective was achieved. Certainly the Curator was confident that this would be the result, with the museum closed for renovations in August 1928 in anticipation of it being 'the centre of attraction for a large number of tourists this season.'¹⁹⁴ In September and October 1928 the council had asked the Tasmanian Government Tourist and Information Bureau for assistance in publicity for the Beattie collection in pamphlets on Launceston and in the Government Tourist Directory.¹⁹⁵ A few years later, in 1934, when the Historical Section was completed and available to the public,¹⁹⁶ the Curator reported that the museum attendant was making at least two conducted tours with visitors each day.¹⁹⁷ In December 1936 the *Examiner* published a special supplement which promoted Launceston and Tasmania as tourist destinations. Places to visit included the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in which there was a section 'devoted entirely to the penal settlement at Port Arthur showing work accomplished by prisoners in metal, wood, leather and pottery.'¹⁹⁸ Apparently it was not 'a chamber of horrors'.

¹⁹² *Examiner*, 28 July 1932, p. 6.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 28 December 1933, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 9 August 1928, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ Correspondence File 5/6.2, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 20 September 1928 and 3 October 1928.

¹⁹⁶ City of Launceston Valedictory Address of Mayor for Year ended 30 June 1934, Curator's Report, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

¹⁹⁷ *Examiner*, 2 October 1934, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 8 December 1936, p. 2S.

Chapter Four: The Second Beattie Collection

One of the reasons John Watt Beattie gave for selling his Port Arthur museum in 1927 was his wish to retire. The first indication that this did not happen came at the time of the opening of the first section of the historical collection in Launceston in May the following year with an account of his establishment of 'another museum in conjunction with his studio.'¹⁹⁹ Later in the year a letter to the editor of the *Examiner*, in September 1928, stated that the Government Tourist Directory contained an advertisement for 'Beattie's 'Old-time Port Arthur Museum' in Murray Street, Hobart.' Beattie's comment at the time was that what he was showing now 'is in no way competing with the museum which I disposed of to Launceston' and its objective was to attract visitors to his shop.²⁰⁰ The Launceston City Council may have been quick to rename it the Beattie Collection or the Historical Collection but they had no doubts that they had purchased the Port Arthur Museum. The Mayor was not impressed by Beattie calling his new collection 'The Port Arthur Museum' and in response asked the Tourist Advisory Board not to accept further advertisements for Beattie's Port Arthur Museum and this it agreed to unless it first consulted the Launceston City Council.²⁰¹ As the council was advised that it would not succeed in an action against Beattie, it requested that the advertisement be modified to acknowledge that Beattie's Port Arthur Museum had been purchased by Launceston Council. The advertisement in the new edition of *Tasmania for the Tourist* was modified to include this acknowledgment and the heading changed to 'Old Time Museum – Relics of Old Hobart Town and Port Arthur', and agreed to by the Launceston City Council on 16 July 1929.²⁰²

Two major public institutions in Hobart were the Tasmanian Public Library, which received annual funding from both the State Government and the Hobart City Council, and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery funded entirely by the State Government.

¹⁹⁹ *Examiner*, 10 May 1928, p. 7.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 22 September 1928, p. 6.

²⁰¹ Correspondence File 5/6.2, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 15 November 1928.

²⁰² Correspondence File, 32/1, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 13 and 16 July 1929.

The trustees of both the museum and the library frequently expressed concern as to the level of funding being inadequate for them to operate effectively. Based on coverage in the *Mercury* public interest in the library was greater than the attention given to the museum. The issue of access to the Tasmanian Museum during the Easter holidays was raised by the *Mercury* in 1928, commenting that 'While city people were very blasé as far as visiting the Museum was concerned, there is no doubt that it is a very great attraction to the country visitors.'²⁰³ Clive Lord, Director of the Museum, responded, stating that 'it was only by arousing public interest in it that funds could be obtained for the purpose of opening the Museum during holiday periods.'²⁰⁴

It appears that later on in 1929 or early in 1930 Beattie decided to retire again. In May 1930 the Finance Committee of the Hobart City Council reported that 'it has for some time past been giving very special consideration to the question of purchasing the historical collection of Mr J W Beattie for the citizens.'²⁰⁵ The Finance Committee gave no details of any offer, the price or steps that it had taken in respect of its 'very special considerations' concerning the collection. The committee reluctantly recommended that the 'Council would not be justified in incurring the expenditure at this juncture', and this recommendation was adopted by Council. No information could be found in previous council minutes as to when or how an offer was made by Beattie, and Clive Lord does not seem to have been involved. Less than a month later Beattie died at the age of 70 and his estate, including his historical collection, became the responsibility of his executors.

In February 1932 the Hobart City Council were again perceived as the appropriate purchaser of Beattie's Historical Collection. In discussions with Clive Lord, Lord stated that the collection was very valuable and 'if the offer was refused by the City Council it would probably be the last opportunity that Hobart would have of acquiring it.'²⁰⁶ He also gave an assurance that should council purchase the collection the Trustees of the Tasmanian Museum would accommodate it at the museum. At a meeting of the council

²⁰³ *Mercury*, 11 April 1928, p. 6.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 12 April 1928, p. 5.

²⁰⁵ MCC16/127/28, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 26 May 1930.

²⁰⁶ *Mercury*, 20 February 1932, p. 8.

two days later the offer was discussed. The executors were asking £2000 for the collection which had to be disposed of by the end of March. The council had obtained a valuation of £1700 and the Committee recommended that an offer of £1250 be made, subject to the sanction of parliament and payment by corporate debentures. The decision was similar to that made on previous occasions – ‘After discussion Council decided not to accept the offer.’²⁰⁷

The efforts to sell the second Beattie collection did not involve approaches to the State government. The failure to generate interest from the government in the first collection when state finances were comparatively better, with surpluses in 1927 and 1928,²⁰⁸ did not encourage further attempts as state finances deteriorated from then on with the onset of the ‘Great Depression’, the budget deficit reaching 24% of state revenue in 1931.²⁰⁹ The only alternative would seem to have been the Hobart City Council, and its initial response at least gave an indication of some initiative on the part of its Finance Committee recommending offering a lower price and seeking loan moneys to enable its purchase. However the council made no effort to act on its Finance Committee’s recommendations.

Representatives of the Carnegie Trust, based in America, visited Tasmania early in 1933, looking at assistance that it might consider appropriate to institutions such as museums. Those in Hobart were not pleased to be informed that, as the policy of the trust was to help those ‘who were helping themselves’, Launceston was in ‘a much more favoured position, largely because of the amount of civic pride evinced by the Parliamentary and civic representatives.’²¹⁰ This stirred the trustees of the museum in Hobart into a deputation to the Hobart City Council deploring ‘the apathy of the citizens so far as the museum was concerned, and stressed the need for an awakening of civic pride.’ The trustees were looking to the council for financial assistance because the State government’s annual contribution to the museum had been reduced by 10% to £1350 in

²⁰⁷ MCC 16/129/28, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 23 February 1932.

²⁰⁸ Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood*, p. 314.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 316.

²¹⁰ *Mercury*, 1 March 1933, p. 10.

the 1930-31 budget and then reduced again to £960. The aldermen of the Hobart City Council expressed sympathy but were unable to assist as 'all its money had been allocated.' As events were to show later in the year, not all the council's money had been 'allocated.' Council had been pressured by the Chamber of Commerce to cut expenditure 'to come into line with other governing bodies'.²¹¹

In respect of the attempts to retain both the first and second Beattie collections in Hobart there was an absence of public interest with no representation by letters to the editor or editorials in papers such as the *Mercury*. This contrasts with the reaction of the *Mercury* and amongst the educated establishment against the proposal to produce the film *For the Term of His Natural Life* in 1926. The Royal Society members had been concerned that the film misrepresented history but apparently made no representations supporting the acquisition of substantial historical collections for the state. No reference was made to either of the Beattie collections in the Society's annual reports in the period 1928 to 1933 - in this period the History Section was inactive, holding no meetings.

Fortunately, a well-known citizen and benefactor, initially not identified, came to the fore and the opportunity of retaining the second Beattie collection was revived. In May 1933 the Hobart City Council was informed by the Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery that a citizen, who wished to remain anonymous, had secured an option over the collection and would hand it over to the Museum provided that the City Council provided £250 towards the cost.²¹² After discussion in council on 8 May the matter was referred to the Finance Committee.²¹³

Pressure was put on the council on 20 May when Clive Lord revealed that the collection had been 'housed in the museum for the last 15 months.'²¹⁴ The anonymous benefactor was identified as the late Mr William Walker, who had died on 17 May,²¹⁵ and who had come to an arrangement with the Beattie family to obtain the collection, which would

²¹¹ *Mercury*, 24 July 1931, p. 8.

²¹² IS File 5512, Walker Bequest-Beattie Collection, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 8 May 1933.

²¹³ MCC 16/129/31, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 8 May 1933.

²¹⁴ *Mercury*, 20 May 1933, p. 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 18 May 1933, p. 9.

become the property of the people of Hobart provided that the Council contributed £250.²¹⁶ At the meeting of council on 22 May, the Finance Committee was given authority to discuss the matter with the trustees of the museum.²¹⁷ On the same day the *Mercury* supported the purchase, reminding its readers that the Launceston City Council with 'characteristic enterprise had paid £5000' on an earlier occasion, and referred to the current proposition as one involving a 'small amount of money.'²¹⁸ Eventually the Finance Committee reported back to Council, assured that the Tasmanian Museum would take responsibility for 'the future display, exhibition and storage of the collection', and recommended that Council accept the offer. After a brief debate council agreed on 12 June, by a majority vote, to make the necessary £250 available towards the cost of the second Beattie collection. The decision was seen by some as recognition of the contributions made by both Beattie and Walker, but others opposed the proposition or wanted it deferred for further consideration. One alderman said that he would not give 'tuppence' for the collection and at least two others also voted against, it including one who opposed the motion because the council 'had decided there was no money for the library.'²¹⁹

In April 1935, heralding the first public showing of items from the second Beattie collection, the *Mercury* produced an article entitled 'Tasmanian Museum – Needs and Changes.'²²⁰ It identified afflictions from which the museum had suffered - a traditional view of it housing curios, a general lack of interest on the part of the public and lack of financial resources. The article went on to outline changes that were taking place including the formation of the 'Friends of the Museum' as being 'one of the recently established movements to arouse more general interest.' Clive Lord, who had died in 1933 aged 43, would have applauded such a positive discussion of the institution in which he had been involved for many years.

²¹⁶ *Mercury*, 20 May 1933, p. 3.

²¹⁷ MCC 16/129/31, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 22 May 1933.

²¹⁸ *Mercury*, 22 May 1933, p. 6.

²¹⁹ MCC 16/129/31, Hobart City Council Minutes, Tasmanian Archive & Heritage Office, 13 June 1933.

²²⁰ *Mercury*, 11 April 1935, p. 8.

In May 1935 it was announced that the Governor would open a new section in the Tasmanian Museum, the Port Arthur Room, in which most of the exhibits would be historical relics from Port Arthur, including portraits of Captain O'Hara Booth and his wife and 'the Franklin relics.' Comment was made that 'it is felt by some persons that the relics are not the type to be shown in a museum' but others considered that they were associated with the state's history and should be shown.²²¹ Most of the items were from the second Beattie collection which had been purchased for the museum two years earlier. At the opening the governor said that 'The Port Arthur room was an historical record of a time in the history of the State which happily passed into very distant memory.'²²² The items on display included dog lamps, leg irons and weights, harrows used by convicts at Port Arthur, convict clothing and documents and sketches. The Director of the Museum, Dr. Pearson, in pleading for more funds and stressing the lack of space, said that 'in order to house the Port Arthur collection they had to scrap the geological collection, much to his disgust.' Dr. Pearson apparently was not enthusiastic about Beattie's Port Arthur Collection, but it would seem there had been pressure for the Port Arthur Room to be created.

It had been a long process for the Tasmanian Museum in Hobart to obtain such a major collection as represented by the second Beattie collection, and there were still some in the community who were opposed to physical reminders of the state's convict past being on display. The *Mercury* took a very positive view of the opening of the Port Arthur room, commenting that although there were still differing views on 'the bad old days', 'The real thing of importance is the indication of new life in the Museum and the promise of an institution whose value and use will become increasingly greater.'²²³ Whereas the Northern Branch of the Royal Society had reported favourably on the Launceston City Council's acquisition of the first Beattie collection in the 1927 and 1928 *Papers and Proceedings*,²²⁴ no reference was made in the society's papers subsequent to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery obtaining the second Beattie collection in 1933.

²²¹ *Mercury*, 24 May 1935, p. 12.

²²² *Ibid*, 25 May 1935, p. 3.

²²³ *Ibid*, 27 May 1935, p. 6.

²²⁴ Royal Society of Tasmania, *Papers and Proceedings for 1927*, p. 230 and *for 1928*, p. 182.

Attracting more visitors to Launceston had been given by the council and others as an important reason for purchasing the first Beattie collection – that it represented a valuable collection of the state’s cultural heritage was not given any emphasis. The purchase of the second collection for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery was not seen as providing a tourist attraction or as a collection of cultural value. It was more a consequence of the Hobart City Council reluctantly agreeing to make a modest contribution to its cost after being subject to criticism of its earlier ‘failure’, and a response to the condition imposed on it as a result of the positive efforts of William Walker, who considered that there was a lack of interest by the citizens of Hobart in their public institutions. His concern had already been evident in the negotiations concerning his donation of books to the public library in 1923. The ‘lack of civic pride’ compared to the ‘enlightened citizens of Launceston’ was frequently commented on.

Conclusion

The two Beattie collections, their availability and their acquisition, occurred during a period when there were still some for whom Tasmanian history was a 'two-headed monster',²²⁵ and there were different attitudes to the convict past by members and representatives of two communities, those in Hobart and those in Launceston. The creator of these two historical collections, now regarded as a very valuable contributor to Tasmania's cultural heritage, was John Watt Beattie.

Beattie, an active participant in both Hobart and other Tasmanian communities, became a highly regarded early photographer and was a dedicated and effective advocate for tourism in the state and conservation of the natural environment. His photographs became a very important record of early Tasmania, but it was his success as a collector and the consequent trove of historical items which eventually came into public hands and highly valued by the two eventual custodians, the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Fortunately Beattie was a fastidious and persistent collector with an interest in the early governors, documents, art works and, importantly, items from convict sites particularly Port Arthur.

Although Beattie was obviously aware of the sensitivities of the convict past, as shown by his assurance when requesting access to Port Macquarie convict records in 1900, he took a special interest in convict relics such as leg irons and everyday items produced by convicts. His intense interest, which he believed was shared by some others, particularly visitors from interstate and overseas, was evident by his establishment of his Port Arthur Museum at his photographic premises in Hobart and the publicity he gave to the convict items on exhibition. This contrasts with some of his peers such as William Crowther who were dismissive of convict relics as not representing part of Tasmania's history.

²²⁵ P. Bolger, *Hobart Town*, (Canberra, 1973), p. 1.

Van Diemen's Land ceased to be a destination for British convicts in 1853 and two years later it was renamed Tasmania. The campaign by the Anti-Transportation League and the emancipists who considered themselves unfairly maligned in the campaign contributed to the view of many that the state's convict past should be forgotten and so erase the 'hated stain.' From the time of the closure of the Port Arthur penal site in 1877, there was an ongoing struggle between those, including governments, who wanted the buildings on the site demolished and those who wanted them preserved and maintained, particularly as an attraction to tourists. The saga continued well into the twentieth century with the government, despite strong opposition in the Legislative Council, deciding to acquire all the remaining privately owned buildings at Port Arthur in 1939.²²⁶ It was not only the existence of Port Arthur which presented a challenge to those who wished to bury the convict past. The decision to film Marcus Clarke's novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* in Tasmania in 1926 revived images of an unpleasant past and stirred up strong opposition from leading citizens and institutions such as the Royal Society of Tasmania.

The failure of Hobart to secure the first Beattie collection and its acquisition by the Launceston City Council resulted in dismay in Hobart and glee in Launceston. The reason given by the government for Hobart not retaining the collection was lack of financial resources, but while this could have been a consideration it is difficult to believe it was the principal concern given the enthusiasm and financial initiative demonstrated by the Launceston City Council in providing for both the purchase and accommodation of the collection. The state government when offered the Beattie collection showed absolutely no interest at a time when public finances were difficult but not such as to prevent some initiative by government. In Hobart it would seem that there was no interest in the community with the exception of Clive Lord, Director of the Museum, who however made no public representation or comment as he had done in a letter to the *Mercury* in respect of the Lady Franklin Museum and the Beattie collection less than two years before the sale of the first Beattie collection to Launceston. The Royal Society's concern for 'history' the previous year when the filming of *For the Term of His Natural*

²²⁶ *Mercury*, 14 December 1939, p. 7.

Life was proposed was not evident in 1927 when Beattie's collection could have been sold piecemeal or acquired by a buyer outside Tasmania.

The lack of interest in Hobart in the first Beattie collection can only be explained by the negative attitude to the state's convict past. Even though the Launceston City Council enthusiastically acquired the collection, and had public support, it shared these concerns, although to a lesser extent. The council was concerned that the collection would be seen as 'a chamber of horrors' and gave re-assurances that it was not. Scott, the Curator of the museum, by his comments and the order in which the collection was displayed to the public, emphatically downplayed the importance of convict past – a view which appears to conflict with the objective of providing a greater attraction to tourists.

The Hobart City Council, regarded as representing the citizens of Hobart, but with no direct responsibility for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, was blamed for its failure to purchase the Beattie collection in 1927. Despite the Mayor's denial that council had not been offered the collection, comments concerning the lack of civic pride continued, being made again at the time of the opportunity of securing Beattie's second collection in 1933.²²⁷ Even then there was no obvious interest in it, except by William Walker, and council's contribution of £250 towards its cost was done so reluctantly and without the full support of the aldermen.

The reluctance, if not lack of interest, in retaining the Beattie collections, even though convict items were a small component, was consistent with other examples that 'The convict taint still preoccupied the minds of many citizens'.²²⁸ These concerns resulted in government reluctance and continued opposition by some to the acquisition and maintenance of convict sites, the destruction of convict records, the concealment of convict pasts and a reluctance to provide access to records which could identify convict origins. Such fears of the 'convict stain' remained in the 1920s and 1930s and gradually faded with generations both interested in family history and proud of convict ancestry –

²²⁷ *Mercury*, 22 May 1933, p. 6.

²²⁸ Petrow, 'The Antiquarian Mind', p. 68.

'in the 1970s, it became acceptable, even a subject for pride, to have convict ancestors.'²²⁹

While the acquisitions of the two Beattie collections occurred in situations of apathy, disappointment and pride, they also resulted in issues for those responsible for the operation of the two museums. Both Scott and Lord devoted most of their energy to their scientific collections and related research. Lord's successor at the Tasmanian Museum, Dr Pearson, had not been impressed at the pushing aside of his geological exhibition to make way for the Port Arthur Room in 1935. Although the purchase of the Beattie collection by Launceston assisted Scott, the Curator, in securing an assistant, his son Eric, both spent most of their time on scientific matters.

The availability of the two Beattie collections came at an opportune time for the historical sections of the museums and increased community interest in the history of their region and state. Eric Scott, who succeeded his father, in reporting on his overseas visit in 1938 to study museums, applauded the establishment of the historical section at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. He praised the section's contribution 'to a thoroughly representative collection illustrating all phases of the story of our own State.'²³⁰ At the same time he regretted Beattie's lack of interest in 'furniture, costumes, agricultural implements, old vehicles.'²³¹ More recently the museum recorded that the 'Beattie collection is now represented in almost all the Museum's collections including paintings in Fine Art, leg irons in History, photographs in Community History and furniture in the Decorative Arts and Design collection.'²³²

²²⁹ A. Alexander, 'The Legacy of the Convict System', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Volume 6, No. 1, p. 56.

²³⁰ E. Scott, *Report on the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery* – arising out of visit overseas in connection with a grant provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to study Modern Museum and Art Gallery Method and Development abroad (February – September, 1938), Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, (unpublished), 14 October 1939, p. 49.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

²³² Anon., *Treasures of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery*, p. 46.

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CSD 22 Chief Secretary's Department Files

LCC Launceston City Council Minutes Book

MCC/16 Hobart City Council Minutes

NS 308/1/55 J. W. Beattie File

PD1 Premier's Department Files

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