

ADAMS SAVED TASMAIA FROM BANKRUPTY – THE STORY OF GEORGE ADAMS

by
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Upon entering Federation, Tasmania suffered substantial financial loss. Perhaps without the enterprise of one man, George Adams, Tasmania would have gone bankrupt.

Adams was an Englishman, being born March 14 1839 at Sandon, Herfordshire. In May 1855 he immigrated to Australia. He first worked on a sheep station, then as a butcher at Goulburn and at Kiama, NSW. At Kiama he held the licence of the Steam Packet Inn. In 1878 he took over the Tattersall's hotel. Here was the start of his gambling empire. He began sweepstakes for his regular patrons on the more important race meetings. By the time of the Sydney Cup of 1881, Tattersall's Sweep was well known throughout the community.

Lotteries had been outlawed in N.S.W. in 1844 and by the turn of the century, the N.S.W. Premier, Sir Henry Parkes had no intention of reversing that decision. It was still very much the Victorian era and under the power of the Church it was also outlawed in Queensland. Adams had, however, operated for a time in Townsville.

Soon a "ticket in Tatts" was a by-word and the enterprise became enormously popular, but under pressure from the NSW Government all such sweeps were declared illegal. Consequently, George Adams took his business elsewhere to Queensland.

There he survived for two years, but the Queensland Government served notice of eviction to the business. Finally, he arrived in Tasmania.

It may not be wholly palatable to recognise the fact that after a license was granted in 1897 by the Tasmanian Premier, Sir Edward Braddon, to George Adams to set up his operation in Tasmania, the government was recipient of thousands of pounds, which allowed the economy of the State not only to survive, but to prosper.

George Adams had been originally invited to come to Tasmania to dispose of the assets of the Bank of Van Diemen' Land which went into liquidation in 1893. To do so he held the State's (then colony) first ever lottery by selling 300,000 tickets at

one pound each. First prize was the bank itself together with land, with the second prize being Hadley's Hotel, which the bank owned.

Tattersalls, the name of his lottery institution, had been the lifeblood of the State and because of the revenue the State Government received, it survived.

Braddon gave the distinction to Tasmania of being the first State (then colony) in Australia to legalise lotteries.

An opponent called the decision, "Braddon's blot" but Braddon was an able and shrewd administrator, who could see the financial chaos if a solution was not found to the economic gloom. Braddon was one of the most colourful Premiers of the colonial period. He was a man of the world and while he persuaded Parliament to accept Adam's lotteries, it was to be under stringent conditions for its operation with the payment of a substantial tax. He was of course, under great criticism for his stance and felt vindicated with the island's finances were materially assisted in a most difficult economic climate.

Still the issue was a heated one, based on moral principles, similar to the controversy that raged over the granting of the Casino licence by the Bethune Liberal Government in the late 1960s. Again, Tasmania was the first to legalise a casino.

It was not until 1954 that the Victorian Government, under Labor Premier Cain, allowed Tattersalls to operate in their state. That was to the detriment of Tasmania, as operations were transferred to Melbourne from Hobart. The last lottery in Tasmania was drawn in May 1954.

The then Premier of Tasmania, Albert Crosgrove, was infuriated with the Cain Government of Victoria, stating that he had been "stabbed in the back", as the Victorian Government did not have the courtesy to let the Tasmanian Government know what was happening.

The other States, S.A. and W.A. did much to suppress the introduction of Tattersalls, but many of its citizens of those States patronised the business of George Adams. Indeed the greatest percentage of buyers of tickets was mainlanders.

Adam's benefit to Tasmania was not only direct financial advantage, but also he employed a considerable number of staff and early on, he went on a minor building boom within Hobart.

He erected the Tasmanian Brewery at the corner of Warwick and Elizabeth Street, Tattersall's offices and warehouse at the rear, Collins Street, Fitzgerald's warehouse in Collins street later destroyed by fire, Wellington Chambers, Beattie's property (later purchased by Charles Davis long before the second world war) and the hotels, Theatre Royal, Old Commodore Hotel and Highfield Hotel where he died on September 23, 1904 at the age of 65 years.

The Sydney Morning Herald described his funeral as the largest and most representatives ever seen in Hobart. He is buried at Cornelian Bay.

The list of charities is impressive. Even today there is a large list, which receive help from the gambling institution first given birth by Adams. Adams himself directed funds to the Salvation Army, City Mission, Central Hobart Mission and St Joseph's Orphanage to name a few.

Yet if it weren't for the fact that he had been literally kicked out of the other States, Tasmania would not have received such financial benefit.

Indeed it was with great foresight that our own colonial government invited him to come to the island colony.

The invitation was extended so that he could dispose of the assets of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land, which had collapsed.

Adams took to Tasmania and to Tasmanians and they in turn took to him.

His offices were situated in Elizabeth Street and he offered 25,000 tickets at five shillings a ticket.

The opposition, however, had not finished their work. After federation, the Post Office decided that it should carry no mail addressed to Tattersalls or George Adams. The Federal Government in Melbourne passed the legislation.

The effect was disastrous, but by re-organising its communication lines, business returned to normal. It was not until 1930 the legislation was repealed. The selection of winning tickets was always done under strict control and completely open to the public. Selection was under the supervision of a government official besides up to 400 people from the public.

Marbles for the major prizes were drawn singly from a barrel by a gripping device, which held one marble at one time. Later radio description was allowed of each drawing.

In 1939 a bronze barrel with a push-button electric control, containing 20,000 marbles was put into operation. The barrel was revolved and at the conclusion the government supervisor, broke the seals on the door of the barrel.

After 1954 when Tattersalls moved from Hobart to Melbourne there was substantial business growth. Towards the end of the 60s and in to the early 70s radical trends had originated overseas. Sweeps and lotteries, even football pools were lagging behind an exciting innovation called Lotto.

Administration personnel went to Europe and brought back Tattslotto with the first draw taking place June 22, 1972

Early drawings were not a success, but after a selling campaign, it was to become enormously popular. Gambling has moved with the times, much of it now being controlled by computers.

Adams's imposing burial monument lies in the "Independent" section of the Cornelian Bay Cemetery, Hobart (see below). It is clear that it is rarely visited. The inscription is simple. Even though Adams was married twice, both wives predeceasing him; the tombstone carries neither of their names. He died without children.



The inscription reads:

“In Memory of
GEORGE ADAMS
Tattersall.
Born at Sandon Hertfordshire
England 14 March 1839
Died at Hobart 23 Sept 1904
Aged 65 years.

Beloved by all who knew him
The poor, the needy and the
Suffering, ever found in him
A true friend”

On November 27th 2004, a life size bronze sculpture of George Adams was unveiled at the National Rose Garden, Longford, Tasmania (below). Well known Tasmanian artist, Stephen Walker AM (1927-2014), designed it.



Reg Watson with George Adam's bust Rose Garden Woolmers.

A similar bust of Adams has been erected in front of his tombstone, Cornelian Bay