



## TASMANIAN FIRSTS, INVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS

by

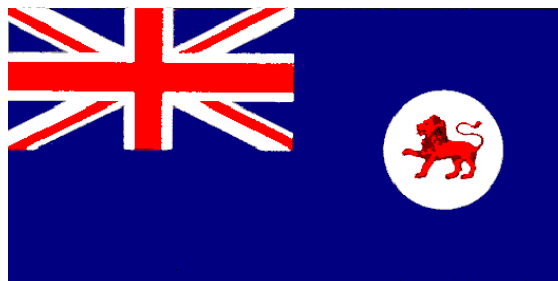
Reg. A. Watson

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**Please note:** if you have an authentic and documented Tasmanian first, innovation or invention and wish to have it added to the website contact Reg Watson [reg@regwason.com](mailto:reg@regwason.com) or [regawatson@gmail.com](mailto:regawatson@gmail.com)

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Amusingly, (and hopefully affectionately) mainlanders refer to their Tasmanian cousins as having ‘*two heads*’. This is because we are a fairly closely-knit society where everyone, if not knowing each other, knows ‘*of them*’. And if you are an old Tasmanian family, chances are you are related in some-way to half the population – or so it seems. The old saying is, “*two heads are better than one*”.

But worse was said by Sir Charles Dilke when visiting our island in 1869. He wrote of we Tasmanians: “The curse of the country was their lotus eating indolences, dreaming their lives away in drowsiness.” That from his book, “Greater Britain” which he describes in us “no lack of savagery”. Fortunately Tasmanian J.D.Bafle MLC was able to tear this work of fiction into shreds. (Tasmanian Times 10/March 1870 P.3) But I would not worry too much about Charles, his career was racked by controversy.

Tasmanians per head of population for Australia must lead the nation in being innovative and inventive, some of which, has affected the world. Innovations that the nation (and world) now takes for granted, have a Tasmanian origin. Many, many lives have been saved because of a Tasmanian and we start my assertions with perhaps the major one...The Black Box.

A scientist, Dr. David Warren, who grew up in Tasmania, invented the Black Box, the recording instrument that contains all the information about an aircraft’s flight. David was son of the popular Rev. Hubert (Bert) Warren <sup>1</sup>, Anglican priest who served in Tasmania. It is now mandatory for commercial airlines to carry the ‘box’; indeed Australia was the first country to make it so in 1961.

Amazingly, however, Australian authorities were in favour of an inferior American one and rejected Dr Warren’s original invention. Dr Warren, who was actually a Chemist, had lost his father in a plane crash on the Miss Hobart aircraft, travelling from Launceston to Melbourne in 1934\*. The loss of the British-built Comet in 1947 also had an effect on the industry recognising that a device should be contained on the craft to determine the cause of accident. In the end it was the British who saw merit in Dr Warren’s invention. He states, “*Australia fumbled and lost every opportunity to get in at the beginning of the world-wide business.*” The new industry is now worth millions and the ‘box’ plays a prominent role in aviation safety.

Another ‘Black Box’ developed by Tasmanians was one which enables recorded promotional announcements to play automatically, using a retail’s store’s existing amplifier system. This was innovated by Creative Workshop Pty Ltd in the early 1990s and allowed the system to work independently of the store’s existing background music.

On the subject of recordings, we should honour Eric Waterworth, who invented the automatic method of changing a record on the gramophone. This revolutionised the enjoyment of recorded sound. The late Eric some years ago stated to this author that when as a teen in the 1920s his self-playing, self-stopping and self-repeating apparatus was first displayed to a distinguished audience, which included the Premier of Tasmania and the Lord Mayor of Hobart. In 1927 the young Eric and his father, went to Sydney to present his invention. There was an enthusiastic response and its first public display was at the Royal Easter Sydney Show. It received international acclaim and the following year they went to the USA. Eric revealed the reason behind his invention: “*I was annoyed of having to get up and down all the time to change the record*”.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Hubert Warren went down in the airline Miss Hobart, October 19<sup>th</sup> 1934

While on communications, a local astronomer from Campbell Town, Alfred Barrett Biggs, invented the first ever phone in Australia. Biggs, born in London in 1825, was also headmaster of the local school and constructed three phones from Huon Pine. By the late 1870s his invention and development was well known. He placed a microphone alongside the telephone and on tapping the parchment lightly; booming sounds were heard at the other end. He then decided to experiment over a longer range and conducted brief conversations between Launceston and the Campbell Town Railway Station. It is claimed that this was the first telephone conversation in Australia, but sadly the exact date of the experiment in 1877 is not recorded. In 1874, with well-known astronomer, Dr. William Valentine, he prepared the equipment for the team of US astronomers who observed the transit of Venus from Campbell Town. Biggs made the lenses for his telescope and ended up as Government Astronomer.

The first trunk call in the nation was made on the December 1, 1888 when the Hobart Post Office called the Bush Inn at New Norfolk. Tasmania led the way! (The Mercury Dec 1. 1939). New Norfolk made history again in 1939 when the first Tasmanian overseas call to London was made from its Post Office. All this of course followed the telegraph when the first telegraph ever sent in Tasmania was on the 8th July 1857. . Mr. E.S. Chapman, a journalist who went under the pseudonym, ‘*Augur*’ who had connections with the newspaper *Australasian*, was to send the message on behalf of the first-ever editor and founder of The Mercury newspaper, Mr Davies. Not bad, after just five years of cessation of convict transportation and one year after the granting of Responsible Government and name change from Van Diemen’s Land to Tasmania.

Further on telephones: what is believed to be the first private telephone call from Hobart to England a distance of 12,500 miles was made by Frederick William Medhurst on Saturday August 22, 1936. The call was made to his ninety-years-old mother Helen, who lived in Chobham England. Frederick who was born in 1867 and came to Australia in 1891 was also involved in another ‘firsts’ with colleagues from the Post Master General’s Department, William Philpot Hallam and Frank Prosser Bowden in July 1901 during the visit to Hobart of the Duke and Duchess of York. A message was sent by the three to the warship the St George accompany the Royal Yacht, Ophir, with the words, “Tasmania greets the Royal Yacht Ophir and her consorts.” The signals received were perfect. This was the first communication with a shore station in the southern hemisphere. The message was sent from Blinking Point, Sandy Bay. When the ships were leaving, a message was sent “Good-bye and bon voyage.” The Duchess replied with “thank you.” (Mercury 25<sup>th</sup> September 1936. P.5)

The fiery tempered Clement Lindley Wragge was the first to set up up weather observations posts in the southern hemisphere, one on the summit of Mt Wellington and the other at the Springs, lower Mt. Wellington in 1895.



The Wragge story located in the Observatory, Mount Wellington.

It was a Tasmanian who started the supermarket Coles chain. George Coles opened his first shop at Wilmot, near Devonport. (1910-21). He then went on to Melbourne and continued his enterprise there. QANTAS was started by a Launceston man, Hudson-Fysh, who was a Gallipoli survivor then flew during WWI as a combat pilot. Tasmania is home to the oldest continuous brewery with Cascade commencing in 1824.

On medical matters the world's first ever infant respirator, better known as a Humidicrib was developed by Tasmania's Dr William McIntyre in 1941 at Launceston. Dr Jim Frost developed an early baby monitor in the fight against sudden infant death syndrome, while it was Dr William Pugh from Launceston who in 1847 performed the first operation in the southern hemisphere with the use of ether as an anaesthetic. The patient was a young female who for upwards of two years had been suffering from a tumour of the lower jaw. According to The Examiner newspaper at the time, the young girl walked home shortly afterwards. Dr Pugh's next operation using ether was on a man with cataracts of both eyes. The newspaper reported "*The patient remained in a state of insensibility for a few minutes, but after taking some wine and water awoke to consciousness.*" To the Launcestonians regret, Dr Pugh and his wife left the city to practise in Melbourne, where he died in 1897. The first deep therapy unit installed at the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) was the first in the southern hemisphere in 1937. One of the first pancreatic transplant operations in the world was carried out at the LGH.

Tasmania was the first State (and maybe the world) in Australia to have compulsory mass chest X-Rays to combat Tuberculosis, besides screening programmes for the detection of early cancers in the uterus. Let us not forget the *Alexander Technique*, formulated by Wynyard born Frederick Alexander (1869-1955), which has improved health through posture and well being world-wide.

Moving to the scientific world; while not born in Tasmania, astronomer, Grote Reber came to the State in the 1950s because of our unique location at high magnetic latitude in the southern hemisphere. He has been called "*the father of radio astronomy*" as he was the first person to build a 'big dish' antenna for the purpose of mapping the sky at radio frequencies. The museum just off the Richmond Road, Cambridge exhibits Reber's telescopes and is open to the public by arrangement.

We were the first colony to adopt a Constitution (1856), drawn up by, later to be Premier. Thomas G. Gregson, and we were the first State to proclaim its own State Flag (1975). The first Session of the Federal Council of Australia to promote federation was held in Tasmania in 1886. In 1837 Sir John Franklin passed Australia's

first laws in regards to cruelty to animals. The rising sun used in Australia such as the emblem on our army's slouch hat was first designed and used in Tasmania. It appeared on the transport (convict) cessation medallion produced in 1853, as with the early Australian Coat of Arms, which is also on the medallion.

Sadly, Tasmania can claim to be home to one of the worse civilian aviation disasters in Australia's history when on March 10, 1946 a DC3 aircraft of the ANA fleet plunged into the waters off Seven Mile Beach killing all 25 passengers and crew.

On military matters, we were the first State to organise an annual Boer War Commemorative Day (2002).



Boer War Day Hobart.

We were the first State in Australia to erect a memorial to World War I. The RSL Launceston is the oldest one in the nation. The highest decorated soldier in the British Empire is Colonel Harry Murray. (WWI) from Evandale. The sad distinction of the first Australian believed to be killed at Gallipoli was a Tasmanian, Harry Hodgman and the last man to leave was a Tasmanian, Captain Charles Littler. The first reported Australian to be killed in World War II, was a Tasmanian, Flying Officer, John Tulloch Sadler from the north west coast. Another Tasmanian soldier, highly decorated from WWI including the Legion of Honour (French) was Louis Charles Bernacchi who had already made history in 1899 when as a physicist he was the first Australian to set foot on Antarctic ice...and on the matter of ice, it was Tasmanian Malcolm Wallhead who invented the Igloo Satellite or "apple hut", suitable to live in freezing conditions and now used extensively for accommodation in Antarctica. There is also a claim that the first ever non-government produced Antarctic magazine focussing on business activities was produced and edited by Malcolm and wife Anthea. Named "Ice-Breaker" it circulated from 1997 until 2012.

Another Tasmanian innovation is from Brian Stafford with his patented, Wheelie Bin Handling System, which is an Australia first. The trolley is stopped about a foot before the bin handle bar (s) then tilted forward until the hooks on the trolley shafts are under the bin handle bars. By moving the trolley a little further, applying the brakes and pulling backwards the trolley will load the bin or bins. Release the brake and away you go.

General Sir John Gellibrand, the highest ranking Tasmanian in World War One was the originator of what was to become Legacy, an Australian wide charity organisation.

Of the 100 Victorian Crosses awarded to Australians, fourteen have been awarded to Tasmanians, thus making the percentage fourteen per cent, three times higher than our

relative population. Bisdee and Wylly, both Tasmanians, who were recipients of the VC during The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) while not the first Australian recipients were the first **Australian-born** recipients.

The mother of well known WWI history, C.E. Bean was a Tasmanian Lucy Butler who married Edwin Bean. The commander of the Australian forces during the battle of Long Tan during the Vietnam War was a Tasmanian from Glenorchy, Harry Smith.



John Hutton Bisdee being awarded his Victoria Cross.

We are the only State which honours annually the Battle of Britain on September 15<sup>th</sup>.

The oldest continuous military establishment is in Hobart, Anglesea Barracks, founded by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1811.



Entrance Anglesea Barracks. (Reg Watson photo)

Tasmania has the only memorial in the nation to the Maori Wars of the 1840s located at Anglesea Barracks dedicated to the 99<sup>th</sup> Foot who were stationed there.



99<sup>th</sup> Foot memorial.

We were the first to legalise casinos (1968) while the year previously (1967) we were the first in Australia to abolish 6 o'clock closing. Back in 1895 Tasmania attracted a resident who starved off State bankruptcy. In that year, George Adams arrived after having his lottery enterprises banned on the mainland colonies. Our Premier, Edward Braddon, invited him to set up his business in Tasmania, thus becoming the first State in federated Australia to legalise lotteries. Adams operated his nation-wide business from Hobart and by the 1930s the government's share amounted to almost 50 per cent of its revenue. Sadly, in 1954 without reference to the then Premier Crosgrove, his fellow Labour Victorian colleagues enticed the enterprise to that State. By then, the amiable and kind Adams had long since died.

The Theatre Royal in Campbell Street is the oldest continuously operating theatre in Australia. (1837).

Incidentally it was Arthur Cruttenden Mace, Tasmanian born and from Buckland, who was with Howard Carter when he re-discovered Tutankhamen's tomb in 1923 and was there when he entered it for the first time

Tasmania was the first to have a trout hatchery at Salmon Ponds, Plenty and the first in Australia to introduce daylight saving. Tasmania has the oldest golf club (Bothwell- 1839) and was the first to play lawn bowls (1846). Hobart was the first Royal Tennis Club in Australia and the Royal Society of Tasmania was the first Royal Society to be established in the world outside the United Kingdom. Wood Chopping had its beginnings in Ulverstone in 1870.

Our crayfish are reputed to be the biggest in the world.

The Risdon Punt (from east Risdon to the western side later to where the E.Z. Company was located), was the oldest continuous ferry service in Australia from 1836-1978, one hundred and forty two years. The first steam river ferry in Australia, "Surprise" sailed on the River Derwent in 1832.



Interestingly, the name given to the wild Australian horse, “Brumby” was named after James Brumby. He has a memorial in Christ Church graveyard, Longford, dated 1838.

Tasmania is the home of the longest continuous newspaper in the nation, The Examiner (1842) and Andrew Bent published the first literary work in 1818. Evan Henry Thomas from Launceston was the first in Australia to publish a drama in 1835 and home to the nation’s first novelist, Henry Savery, who wrote *Quintus Servinton*. It was a Tasmanian, Edward Abbott who published the nation’s first cook book, “*The English and Australian Cookery Book*” in 1864. The oldest book shop operating in Australia was Birchalls Launceston (1844) until it ceased in 2015.

Tasmania has the oldest operational navigation canal at Egg Island Canal, Huon River. It consists of two main areas of low lying land in the Huon River that stretched a little over seven miles down the river from just below the township of Huonville. First built in 1858, a new one following the line of the old, was constructed in 1883.

Launceston was the first city to open a Mall (1974) and was the first city to have an urban land use plan (1835) and was also the first city in the southern hemisphere to be illuminated by hydro power. It also elected the first female mayor of a major Australian city, Dorothy Edwards (1956). Mrs Isabella Mead was the first woman appointed as Director of an Australian museum when she became Director of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. Launceston also had the first underground sewage system in Australia. The Brindley Water Pipe Organ at the Albert Hall is the only working model in the southern hemisphere. It was built (circa) 1825 and came from Scotland.

The formation of the Tasmanian Turf Club at Mowbray is Australia’s oldest continuously running turf club. In 1891 the Launceston Art Society was founded the first art society in Australia. In 1849 the Launceston Chamber of Commerce was founded, the first city Chamber of Commerce in Australia. In 1984 Seasol was the first to commercialise liquid organic seaweed fertiliser in the country.

In Hobart, the earliest of libraries in Australia was the Wesleyan Library (1825). Hobart was the first city to have parking meters in Australia in 1955. Regarding transport; Hobart was the only city in Australia to have double-decker trams and the first complete electrified tram system in the southern hemisphere (Sept 1893).

The oldest continuous Jewish synagogue exists in Hobart (1843) with Launceston having the second oldest (1846) and the oldest continuous Catholic Church in Australia is St John’s Richmond (1835) and the old Wesleyan church in New Norfolk is possibly the oldest Methodist church in the country (1837). The oldest Seventh Day Adventist Church building is at Colinsvale. The church was built in 1889 and was originally known as the Bismarck Adventist Church. Once the oldest continuous Congregational Church in Australia was Hestercombe Chapel, Granton (1833).





St John Church, Richmond and bridge.

Near New Norfolk, the claimant to be the first white woman in Australia (Betty King) setting foot in Australia January 26<sup>th</sup> 1788) is buried at Back River just outside New Norfolk.



Reg placing flowers at Betty King's Memorial, Australia Day January 26<sup>th</sup>.

The Richmond Bridge is the oldest in Australia (1825) and the convict built Tunbridge Bridge spanning the Blackman River is the oldest single span bridge in Australia (1848)

More on Methodism...when it was forbidden for women to preach, it is believed the first occasion in Australia for a woman to do so was at Kingston, then referred to as Brown's River. Harriet Pullen from Kent England had settled in Van Diemen's Land and had a desire to bring Christian influence to the convict colony. In the late 1830s she conducted services in her home, many attending it is said by a curiosity to see a woman preach. By all accounts she was well received and her efforts was well rewarded with converts.<sup>2</sup>

In 1868 Tasmania became the first Australian colony to have a compulsory state education system to be administered by local school boards and the first to establish area schools and matriculation colleges. The Launceston Grammar School in Launceston and Hutchins<sup>3</sup> in the south, opened in 1846 becoming the oldest continuously functioning private school in Australia.

Some Tasmanians of note were Enid Lyons the first woman in Federal Parliament, composer Peter Sculthorpe, cricketer Max Walker, wood-chopper David Foster, Mary

<sup>2</sup> Source: Nicole Starling, abstracted from her academic work.

<sup>3</sup> It was first situated at Ingle Hall, Macquarie Street, the building still stands.

Donaldson, Princess of Denmark and numerous Australian Rules footballers . Then of course there was Erol Flynn.

Defender Snail-Killer pellets were developed by Tasmanian Les Vaughan, after he discovered that a chemical called metaldehyde used by doctors to sterilised hypodermic needs also killed snails and slugs.

The Northern Tasmanian Permanent Building and Investment Society was established in 1858 and was the nation's first.

Sir Richard Dry from the north west was the first Australian-born to be Knighted and we haven't really broken the 'ice' as yet (so to speak) not touching on our distinctions in the fields of sport, parliament, legal and many other areas. Certainly we should be proud of our achievements. And who can deny that Tasmania gave birth to Melbourne when John Batman and Faulkner founded that city in 1835.

Andrew Inglis Clark from Hobart has been dubbed "The Father of Federation" and is the instigator of the Hare-Clark system which is peculiar to Tasmania for voting for the Lower House introduced in 1909.



Andrew Inglis Clark.

Joseph Cocker of Barrington invented a potato digger which was patented to an American manufacturer and marketed successfully in the 1890s in the USA.

Tasmania was the first State to be declared free of hydatids in 1996 and the first time an authentic Scottish tartan was produced in Australia was at Waverley Woollen Mills at Launceston.

Tasmania is the only State to have its own National Anthem penned by Frederick Packer Tasmanian composer in 1892.



Packer who sadly died in poverty in Parramatta NSW

The words of the  
**TASMANIAN ANTHEM**

1. All hail the land we love so well,  
 Bright jewel of the sea,  
 Fair home of England's stalwart sons,  
 The brave, the bold and free !  
 Where bright-eyed maidens gaily sing,  
 And peace and plenty reign,  
 And beauty smiles on ev'ry side,  
 O'er mountain, vale and plain.  
 Tasmania ! land of joy and peace,  
 whose sons are true and brave,  
 No scornful foe shall lay thee low,  
 While England rules the wave !
2. May love and joy around thee watch,  
 And God thy ways defend,  
 Thy children walk in honour's paths,  
 Until their journey's end.  
 May right prevail and might assist,  
 When foes assail thy cause,  
 And rulers true with wisdom frame  
 Thy people's ways and laws.  
 Tasmania ! land of joy and peace,  
 whose sons are true and brave,  
 No scornful foe shall lay thee low,  
 While England rules the wave !

Premier Will Hodgman, holds the record for being the leader of the Opposition for the longest period ever (16 years) in Australia, if not in the world.

The Tasmanian Government was the first State Government to be on the internet. (1996).

The Robson Rotation whereby through rotation each candidate gets a share of the position at the top of a particular column on the ballot paper is a unique Tasmanian

feature. Introduced by Neil Robson MHA, it was the brain child of Dr George Howatt.

The Rev George Carruthers has been Australian's only Social Credit Parliamentarian. He was elected to the Tasmanian Parliament in 1935 while Dr. Reginald 'Spot' Turnbull of Tasmania was the first Independent Senator elected to Federal Parliament in 1962.

Waxed paper for storage of apples for export was a Tasmanian innovation. The Wright family of Glenorchy in competition with the Shoobridge family had to find a way to export their apples to England without half of them arriving rotten. Wrapping each apple individually proved to be successful as wax paper is waterproof.

A way of preserving "reduced fat cream" was undoubtedly invented by a Tasmanian, Miss I.M. Lowther. The development was eventually sold by Nestles in a tin. The method was successful in keeping cream fresh without preservatives for as long as six months. Miss Lowther worked as a tester and grader at a Devonport butter factory. Her concept was patented.<sup>4</sup>

Finally on not a Tasmanian 'first' but a Tasmanian 'last'; The last man to be gibbeted in English history was that of John McKey, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1837. His body was on display just north of Perth, about 450 yards off the main road.

\* See the author's work, "*Strange Happenings over the Skies of Tasmania and Bass Strait*" (State Library of Tasmania).

- Acknowledge the invaluable help of Sir Guy Green.



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Reg. A. Watson is a 6<sup>th</sup> generation Tasmania, calling himself a "Tasmanian Australian". He is an established writer of 48 years experience. He hopes a website such as this will heighten Tasmanians pride in themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article24906931>