

Digging up the colonial society of Northern Tasmania

When Tasmanian Premier David Bartlett announced last month that the State Government would contribute \$15,000 towards research into the colonial society of Northern Tasmania, the matching funds were almost in hand.

Business and tourism associations, councils and individuals had already contributed over \$11,000 to the project. So the next working day after Premier Bartlett's announcement, UTAS researchers started working on the project, titled *The assigned convicts of the Norfolk Plains*.

The project is being commissioned by a heritage sector partnership called REASSIGN, which was established in December as an initiative of the UTAS Community, Place and Heritage Unit (CPHRU).

It is focusing initially on the colonial police district of the Norfolk Plains in the period 1830–1853. This encompasses Woolmers and Brickendon estates, which are two of the five Tasmanian sites being assessed for World Heritage listing.

Unit director Professor Henry Reynolds said attracting regional attention to the opportunity for discovery and industry that lies in the heritage of the northern plains, and in positioning UTAS for the research opportunities this presents, was important work.

"We are working across campuses as we aim to meet the research needs of the heritage sector," he said.



The Launch of REASSIGN – The Northern Cultural Heritage Partnership. Attending were Len Langan, manager of Clarendon House; Anne Fitzgerald, coordinator of the UTAS Community, Place and Heritage Unit; Premier David Bartlett; Minister Michelle O'Byrne; and Louise Archer, manager of Brickendon Estate.

The research team includes Dr Murray Johnson (supervising historian) and Dr Kristyn Harman. The project also involves a collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, which will optimise synergies with his ARC-funded national collaborative research project *Founders and survivors*, a partnership between historians, genealogists, demographers and population health researchers. This collaboration will enable the northern project to hit the ground running.

Lorraine Green, Northern Midlands Business Association Executive Officer and Northern Midlands Council Economic and Community Development

Manager, is impressed by the CPHRU's record on quality outcomes.

"This exploration is long overdue and there is no reason to delay. Communities, business and visitors have much to gain and UTAS's quick response time is critical to the opportunities the north is now facing in the heritage sector," she said.

"This is an intensely community-engaged project. It has to be. This is our community's heritage and its discovery is an important part of the development of our community, as well as a potential source of enormous social capital and economic development.

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The Premier undertook to support and promote REASSIGN's plans to raise a further \$399,000 in research and development funding via a 'system of thirds': one-third state, one-third federal and one-third community and business funding.