

Michael Piggott, *Commonwealth Government Records About Tasmania*, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2013, 215pp, ISBN 978-1-920807-97-9 available free online <http://guides.naa.gov.au/records-about-tasmania/index.aspx>

Michael Piggott has worked at the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia and the University of Melbourne Archives. Now an archives consultant and independent scholar, he has published widely on archival history and education, including scholarly guides to collections, personal papers and diaries. Michael was commissioned to write this guide to Tasmanian Commonwealth records by the National Archives of Australia.

As a long term friend and colleague of Michael's it is a privilege to review this guide but I was also keen to do it as my partner has Tasmanian ancestors. In the age of the internet and online archival catalogues, is there still a need for a compiled guide like this? Can we simply not do a keyword search on Tasmania and bring up every reference in RecordSearch, the National Archives of Australia's online catalogue?

The short answer is yes we can but then we have no context around those search results and no framework in which to view them. Michael has done all the hard work for us. After a brief introduction, Part 1 is Chapter 1 The Setting and it looks at the Commonwealth and Tasmania between 1901 to 2000. It gives us an historical overview decade by decade.

Part 2 is all about themes and consists of four chapters on financial relations, disasters, the environment and lighthouses. Although this is a compiled guide to sources, it is not dry reading with selected stories based on the records held. For example, disasters looks at the North Mount Lyell mine disaster of 1912, Briseis Tin Mine flood in 1929, the *Miss Hobart* plane crash in 1934, the Hobart airport disaster in 1946, the loss of the *Blythe Star* in 1959, the 1960 floods, the 1967 bushfires and the collapse of the Tasman Bridge in 1975 to mention just a few.

Part 3 with three chapters looks at people including Tasmanian Aboriginal people, finding Tasmanians and Tasmanian Commonwealth persons. In this section I found the chapter on finding Tasmanians useful as it looks at Commonwealth occupations and what records might be available for them. But not just those who worked for the Commonwealth, it also looks at recipients of Commonwealth services including immigrants.

Part 4 is a single chapter looking at an A-Z of places and topics. This was another fascinating chapter where I found myself reading interesting paragraphs rather than just a list of potential record series and items. Under the letter D was Dutch immigrants to Tasmania, the letter F had the 40th Battalion, AIF, the letter I with influenza and the 1919 outbreak, under L is lavender and the production of lavender oil, under N the National Theatre and Fine Arts Society, and under T Thylacines or the Tasmanian tiger or wolf. As you can see some very diverse topics and not things that you would

automatically think of looking in the National Archives of Australia for. A Guide like this truly broadens our knowledge of what the Archives has in its holdings.

There are seven appendices including:

- timeline of key events in 20th century Tasmania
- Tasmanian based Commonwealth agencies
- Tasmanian railways
- Tasmanians in federal Cabinet, 1901-2000
- Military records
- Antarctica records
- Addresses of archives and libraries

Finally there is a select bibliography and a comprehensive index (I am reviewing the print publication). As well as the bibliography there are references at the end of each chapter.

This was definitely not the dry collation of records relating to Tasmania held by the National Archives of Australia that I was expecting. Yes there are lists of records throughout the guide, but there are also fascinating little stories written from and about the records. Anyone wanting to know more about Tasmania could easily read this and know more about the State's history.

Researchers wanting to know what is available will also find it useful in identifying what can be discovered and the index helps to narrow it down if you are looking for quick references. It was easy for me to note down record series that I want to follow up in the future.

Anyone with Tasmanian ancestors should definitely have a look at this guide to what is held by the National Archives of Australia. But best of all it is available online free and it can be keyword searched online.

It is worth noting that the National Archives of Australia has similar guides on the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and collections held in Perth and Melbourne. In addition there are a range of subject guides that are of interest to family historians. All listed at <http://guides.naa.gov.au/>.

A great way to learn more about the National Archives of Australia and its collections.

Shauna Hicks

[www.shaunahicks.com.au](http://www.shaunahicks.com.au)

<http://diaryofanaustraliangenealogist.blogspot.com.au>