

PROPOSED EXCURSION FOR 2016

At the last committee meeting it was decided to invite expressions of interest in the Alexander Laing Fiddle Trail Excursion. See below for the proposed timetable. It may be necessary to make some adjustments closer to the date.

Could those interested please contact secretary@hobart.tasfhs.org.

Although the excursion is not until November the Tasmanian Family History Society would like to have an indication of the number of their members who would like to participate, as members of the *Friends of Alexander Laing* and the *Sorell Historical Society* will be asked to join the excursion if numbers permit. First preference will be given to Tasmanian Family History Society members.

ALEXANDER LAING FIDDLE TRAIL EXCURSION Organised by Peter MacFie

Sunday 13 November 2016

DURATION

9:30 am – 4:00 pm

GROUP LEADER & MUSICIANS

Peter MacFie - historian/guitarist

Hamish Pike - fiddler

Billy Moore - guitarist/concertina player

Excursion outline based on the 2012 excursion

6-hour excursion from Sorell and return via:

Old Sorell Town

Alexander Laing's home site

Former Sorell goal site

Valleyfield

Rose and Crown

Forcett Cemetery

Lower Ferry

Copping Hall (byo lunch)

Greenhills

Nonesuch

TRANSPORT

- **30 seater bus + 3 cars with four people in each**

BREAKS

- **Stop One - Meet at old Sorell Council Chambers**
 - **Morning tea + music at Peta Kelly's house**
- **Stop Two - Copping Hall + BYO lunch + music**
- **Stop Three - Nonesuch + afternoon tea + music**

COST

\$60 single

\$110 double

Background information on Alexander Laing Scottish Convict, Constable, Fiddler and Composer 1792-1868

Alexander Laing is notable in our history for a 48 page music manuscript which includes original tunes with local dedications, plus a 112 page hand written memoir. However, Laing's early history is shrouded in mystery. From his writings we are told that he was born in Scotland near Banff to 'healthy and sober parents'. In 1813, when he was recruiting for his regiment the 92nd of Foot, he was charged in the Perth Assize with stealing money, while on a drunken spree, and sentenced to 7 years transportation. Transported to Sydney on the *Marquis of Wellington* in 1814 (arriving January 1815) his convict record says he was an attorney's clerk, aged 23. He was assigned to John Drummond, and later embarked with Drummond, his family, and other convict servants including Esther Robertson on the *Emu* to Hobart Town. After Drummond's disgrace (see Alison Alexander's book *Corruption and Skulduggery* pages 146, 183-7, 196-7) he was assigned to Thomas Lascelles at Pittwater before working at Orielton, Edward Lord's property. After his 1816 marriage to Esther Robertson, they raised nine children: John, Alexander, James, Susannah Sorell, Ellen, Georgina Jane, William Henty Gordon, Emily Mary and Arthur. Esther died in 1842 and is buried at St Johns, Richmond.

In 1820 Alexander became District Constable at Sorell and was involved in the 1825 Matthew Brady raid on the town. Following his resignation in 1839 he worked on the Tasman Peninsula, Richmond and New Norfolk before returning to Sorell. While in the Port Arthur district he married Susan Giles Boucher (1848) and they had three children: Esther, who died shortly after birth, Victoria and Albert.

As well as writing his reminiscences he also hand wrote a manuscript of 242 tunes for the fiddle, including at least 60 original compositions named after his family and well-known identities such as Jane Franklin and James Gordon. After discovering this photocopied manuscript in the State Archives, Peter MacFie painstakingly researched the origin and historical significance of these tunes, while musicians Steve and Marjorie Gadd re-transcribed the tunes, making them accessible to the public when they co-published '*On the Fiddle From Scotland to Tasmania 1815-1863.*' describing Alexander's life and his tunes.

On the excursion Peter and fellow musicians will play tunes related to the places visited, talk about the people in the tunes and give a historical background of the times.

This is the second Alexander Laing Fiddle Excursion. The first was highly enjoyable.