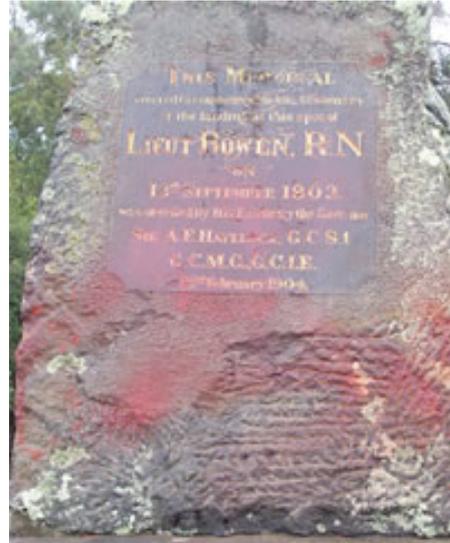


# RISDON COVE HISTORY Post 1803

By

Reg. A. Watson



**Some examples of vandalism including chipping of the inscription.  
*"And the Tasmanian Government does nothing!"***



**For Sale:**

DVD: "The disgrace of Risdon Cove"

Produced by the Bowen Association. (August 2008)

\$25 posted

This production will reveal the truth behind the sell out of Risdon Cove to Tasmanians.

**Sales & Inquiries: [reg@regwatson.com](mailto:reg@regwatson.com)**

Reg Watson talks about Risdon Cove - See it on [Youtube](#)

**In September 1803, the first British settlement in Tasmania, then called Van Diemen's Land, occurred. Forty nine settlers, made up of N.S.W. Corp personnel, administration, free settlers and convicts, were under the leadership of twenty three year old Lt John Bowen Royal Navy from Devon. Bowen settled at Risdon Cove, just north of what was to become Hobart.**

What should be a site of national historic and cultural significance and a place to celebrate dual heritage (Tasmanian Aboriginal and white) has become instead, a site of confrontation, neglect and vandalism. In December 1995, the Liberal Government under Premier Ray Groom handed the site over to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC), under the leadership of controversial and radical activist, Michael Mansell.

What has taken place between 1803 and 1995 and post 1995 needs to be recorded. To a great degree, much of this has already been done in my book, JOHN BOWEN AND THE FOUNDING OF TASMANIA (The Anglo-Keltic Society 2003) and Kaye McPherson of the Liapootah Aboriginal Community can (and has) dealt adequately with the pre1803 aboriginal history of the area. In this article I intend to give a synopsis of the whole affair, post 1803.

Sadly this site which has so much potential has not fulfilled its possibilities. Much of the blame has to be placed on Tasmanian Governments both Liberal and Labour. Their inability and unwillingness to tackle certain aspects and issues, emanating from the TAC management, is both unworthy and sycophantic.

But let us start at the very beginning in September 1803...

### **BOWEN'S ARRIVAL AND SETTLEMENT.**

It was the French which prompted British settlement of Van Diemen's Land (VDL). Sydney of course was settled in 1788 when the French were active in the Pacific Ocean. By 1803 Napoleon had become dictator and in

May that year, Great Britain and France were at war. The fear was to have a French military and naval settlement at the belly of Port Jackson. Hence, the urgency to settle VDL.

Chosen for the job was a young Devon man, by the name of John Bowen. The author has been unsuccessful in finding a birth date for Bowen, but he was at least 23 years of age, having been baptised in 1780. Bowen came from a distinguished naval family, son of Rear-Admiral James Bowen and brother to George and nephew to Richard, who served as naval officers.

Blame has been placed at Bowen for choosing the site of Risdon Cove, which ultimately proved to be unsuitable for settlement. Bowen should not be the scape-goat for this decision. The site had previously been selected and Bowen was under orders from Governor King in Sydney to sail for Risdon Cove, which was named after William Bellamy Risdon, second officer of the ship Duke of Clarence. Risdon\* served under Lt. John Hayes, who had mapped the area of Risdon Cove and river as early as 1793.

Two vessels set sail for Risdon Cove, the Albion and Lady Nelson. The Lady Nelson arrived ahead of the Albion, aboard on which was Lt. Bowen. On 12th September 1803 he anchored at Risdon Cove. On October 7, 1803 Governor King was able to write: "I have this Instant heard that Lt. Bowen has landed safely at Risdon Cove in the River Derwent on Van Diemen's Land - He speaks in high terms of the beneficial Settlement."

While the site was a good one from a defensive point of view, against intrusion of the French and possible attacks by the natives, it proved far from being "beneficial" in that the soil was poor and water scarce. Nonetheless, being a very energetic young man, Bowen was busy from the start. With reluctant convicts and marines, he had the responsibility of organising the colony so that it would eventually survive and hopefully, prosper. With him was his lover, Martha Hayes, who was described by a visiting Irishman in late 1805, Joseph Holt, as the "prettiest violet that I saw growing at the Derwent." Eventually Martha would have two children to John, Henrietta and later Martha Charlotte.

The Sydney Gazette reported October 9, 1803, "Lt. Bowen with the settlers and etc., were all landed and in good health". A week later the Lady Nelson had returned to Sydney with further positive reports. Yet, in reality this was not the case. Right from the start there were personality clashes between the free settlers, with Bowen having a major problem with Lt. William Moore, who was in charge of the military. Bowen referred to him as "a mutinous rascal". Bowen eventually sent him to Sydney under arrest, but King dismissed the charge and Moore returned to the colony. Besides trying to feed everyone, Bowen had additional problems

with the convicts. Soon after arrival, one James Lewis (alias Druce Duce) together with several others, stole Dr Mountgarrett's boat and escaped. Despite this by the end of the year, Bowen had achieved much, including exploring the surrounding area and beyond, later exploring as far as the Huon River. Governor King, however, was having major concerns over Bowen's "private affairs" meaning his relationship with Martha Hayes. Partly because of this, when Bowen visited Sydney with the intention of resigning, Governor King ordered him to return to Risdon Cove, knowing full well that he had personal responsibility there.

By the time Bowen returned to Risdon in March 1804 on the Integrity, David Collins had already arrived in the River Derwent. David Collins of the Royal Marines had come to also settle VDL and with authority from Governor King to head both colonies. This Governor King had made known to Bowen. Collins arrived in the River Derwent February 11, 1804 and he inspected the Risdon Cove site four days later. He then decided to abandon the Risdon site and move the colony to Sullivan's Cove (Hobart).

Much to Bowen's surprise and frustration, he learnt upon arrival that Risdon Cove settlement was to be removed. Bowen refused to recognise Collins' authority and for a time there were two settlements in southern VDL under two commanders. It was during this period, that the first ugly confrontation with the aborigines occurred, May 3 1804, during which a number of natives were killed. Bowen was away exploring leaving Lt. Moore in charge. There is little documentation recording the event. The pioneer priest, Rev Knopwood recorded the affair in his diary with information obtained from Dr Mountgarrett. Moore gave a report to Collins, which undoubtedly would have been to his own favour. Collins in turn reported to King about the contact stating among other things, "Not having been present myself, I must take it for granted that the measures which were pursued were unavoidable."

It was inevitable that Bowen surrender his credentials to Collins, especially when an irate Governor King requested that young Bowen return to Sydney at once. Before doing so, Bowen arranged for Martha to be declared a settler, thus allowing her to obtain land grants to be supplied when possible from government stores and asked the Rev Knopwood to look after her. Bowen in Sydney gave his resignation to King and decided to leave the colony for good. He resumed his naval career and went on to enjoy a distinguished career.

Not bad for a 23 year old. He achieved much and had a lot against him. The failure of Risdon Cove as a settlement was not Bowen's fault.

## **RISDON COVE, POST BOWEN up to 1904.**

Collins abandoned the Risdon Cove settlement and John Bowen had gone forever. His lover, Martha Hayes, took up land on the western side of the River Derwent. She was to marry Andrew Whitehead in 1811 and have a third daughter by him. In 1812, Major Andrew Geils erected a brick dwelling, which he called Restdown. Geils left our shores and became an absentee landlord and in 1820 Alfred Thrupp and his wife, Sarah were living there. Then in 1825 William Lyttleton was placed in charge of Restdown and in July 1829 it was sold to Thomas Gregson. Gregson added on to Restdown and died there in 1874. By this time the colony was appreciating the Risdon Cove site for its historical significance and the area was developing, albeit slowly. Other settlers had moved in, such as Thomas Birch who had taken up 300 acres at Risdon Cove and William L'Anson. A road had been built leading to Richmond and a Mr Clebourne had become neighbours to Gregson. A halfway house named Saracen's Head was built in 1828 for travellers going to Richmond. Rev Knopwood visited the area more than once, recording for instance that he took Divine Service in the home of Gregson (1829).

The fifty years since Bowen's settlement (1853) was celebrated in Hobart which coincided with the cessation of convict transportation.

## **THE 1904 MONUMENT UNVEILING.**

By the time of the centenary celebrations, Hobart was suffering from a small-pox epidemic, so it was considered better if celebrations of Bowen's landing coincided with that of the arrival of Collins. Contrary to what is said, the 100th anniversary was not ignored. Any reading of the media reports of the time will reveal the extent of celebrations as observed and organised by the Tasmanian State Government.

A highlight of the event was the unveiling of an obelisk to Bowen and the settlement. Made up of stone quarried from Proctor's Road, it has a 5ft base square and is built of blue stone asher and the cavity is filled with cement concrete. The obelisk stands upon this base and is in one solid piece. The contractors were Messrs. Watson Bros. The stone bore the words, `

This Memorial erected to commemorate the Centenary of the landing at this spot of Lieut. Bowen. R.N., on September 1803, was unveiled by His Excellency, the Governor, Sir A.E. Havelock. G.C.S.I. G.C.M.G. G.C.I.E; 22nd February 1904.

We are told by the Tasmanian Mail (Feb 27, 1904) that there were "several thousand interested spectators around the enclosure" witnessing the ceremony. When the Governor landed to do the honours, 17 guns were fired from H.M.S.S. Mutine and Torch which were anchored off

Risdon Cove. Contemporary photographs testify to this. At this time the land on which the monument was built was owned by Mr. Albury who made the decision to formally hand over the deeds to the property to "the people of Tasmania" and as Mr. Albury stated publicly at that time and is formally recorded, "I am sure I need hardly say that it is with the greatest possible satisfaction that I find myself able to dedicate this land to the PUBLIC OF TASMANIA FOR EVER." The Governor in response said, "I accept from you this title deed conveying the property to the State Government and I hand it over to my friend the Premier for safekeeping."

Mr Albury was George Albury who operated lime kilns in the area. The Premier was William Propsting.

The Ray Groom Liberal Government and the following Labour Governments did not keep this promise given in good faith and a belief that succeeding Tasmanian Governments and politicians would honour the deal. Indeed, one must question whether the action of the Groom Liberal Government was illegal.

The Premier, in responding to the Governor said, "Allow me on behalf of the people of Tasmania to welcome you to this historic spot. It was here, just a century ago, that the first settlement on this island under the British Crown took place."

His Excellency also said at the unveiling, "I am fain to believe that our astonishment and delight would be at least equal to theirs if we, who now stand here could in prophetic vision see the Hobart and Tasmania of a hundred years hence." A hundred years 'hence' (2003-04) saw the Tasmanian Government, under Jim Bacon, totally ignore the 200th celebrations of the founding of Tasmania for their fear of upsetting the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) under the leadership of radical activist, Michael Mansell. Virtually every politician, except for the very few, said nothing over this deplorable state of affairs, but we will come to that episode soon.

## **1904-1995**

The site at Risdon Cove was farmed until 1948. By the 150th anniversary celebrations (Sept 1954) land had been acquired by the State Government to add to the reserve. The Governor of Tasmania, Sir Ronald Cox, paid an official visit to the Bowen Memorial with The Mercury newspaper reporting "Sir Ronald said, 'this park and memorial records for us and other generations ahead the starting point of British settlement in Tasmania. It calls to mind the very small beginnings from which so much has grown and from which so much will yet grow. It makes us think that was best and bravest in those who mastered this untamed land'." (September 14th 1954). Obviously later Tasmanian Governments would not agree with Sir Ronald's statement.

Sea cadets formed a guard of honour at the monument, which was adorned by poles from which fluttered the Union Jack and the Tasmanian Flag. Churches celebrated the event with special services, with the President of the Tasmanian Council of Churches, Archdeacon Barrett stating, "We might have been Dutch or French – that would not be a shame – but we are British...."

In honour of Bowen the State Government issued a special medallion which the author has in his collection. The State Government in 2003 did absolutely nothing! There were many other celebrations across the State in 1954, including a major publication.

In the 1970s the Labour Premier of Tasmania, William (Bill) Neilson made plans to develop the historical site for the better enjoyment of all. Before any changes were to be made, however, a major archaeological investigation was to be conducted, which occurred between 1978-1980, the results of which was published by the National Parks & Wildlife Service entitled, "Archaeological Investigations at Risdon Cove Historic Site 1978-1980" by Angelia McGowan. Quite obviously the government department recognised the site clearly as an historic one; later governments would eventually declare that it is not.

On September 8 1979, an official ceremony took place, attended by His Excellency, Sir Stanley Burbury, to open the new development at Bowen Park. The following day the site was opened to the public. At the time the park cost \$1.2million. The cost became a public controversy because it was originally estimated at only \$500,000. Most of the cost went on the two pyramid-shaped buildings. In his address, Sir Stanley said, "The site is unique to Australia because it is the only foundation site of any colony, which still bore resemblance to the original site." Mr. Polly MHA on behalf of the State Labour Government said, "It has taken over 100 years for the Government to get around to honouring the British settlers." Yet Mr. Michael Polly was to eventually approve of this historic site to be passed over to Mr. Mansell's TAC without, it seems, any regret.

However, at least Mr. Albury's intentions were originally honoured and that the site was available to all Tasmanians and it would seem at least in 1980 'for ever'. That was not to be the case. The State Government of Ray Groom would renege on that promise and obligation.

Until the hand-over (and we will not use the incorrect term 'hand-back') in 1995, the land was poorly mis-managed by State Governments in that it became a 'white elephant' and it was quite obviously by even as early as 1981 there were plans to sell it. The Deputy Leader, Mr. Robin Gray proposed selling the pyramids and incidentally the Derwent Bridge (Mercury May 30 1981) which presumably he meant the Bowen Bridge.

Nonetheless, the site, although rarely visited by people, was readily accessible. With barbecue facilities and open semi-bush quite apart from the historic content it was a wonderful setting. The author had visited the site as a boy, crossing the River Derwent on the old punt, then later by car. Often it was a setting for Australian Day activities and barbecues. One always felt a part of the environment and welcomed. That, sadly, was to change dramatically.

### **THE HAND OVER BY RAY GROOM AND HIS GOVERNMENT.**

The hand-over of the Risdon Cove site by Liberal Premier Ray Groom, on the advice of radical lawyer and government adviser, Greg Barnes, which includes the Bowen Memorial, was part of the Aboriginal Lands Bill. The transfer occurred Dec 11, 1995, when most if not all Members of Parliament was present. On that day the Memorial was badly vandalised. The Memorial was in sight of all who attended, including the Parliamentarians. Not one lodged an official complaint; nothing was said. It took a resident to phone me re the vandalism. The following day I did inspect the Memorial and reported the crime to the police, who investigated it. Nothing was done and this was to be not the last time that no action was taken against the perpetrators of the vandalism, members who supported the TAC.

Over the years the barbecue facilities have been let go and the Memorial has been vandalised four times. On the second occasion I again reported the crime to the Police, but nothing was done. A visit to me by a policeman at the time stated that after investigating the attack, it was because the TAC was upset about the white invasion, so it was decided not to take any further action. Politically correctness gone mad!

Around the memorial have been placed provocative and historically inaccurate signs and along the track to the memorial are a number of equally provocative and historically inaccurate signs. The land was given in an act of "reconciliation" so said Ray Groom; it hardly has lived up to that intention.

The Legislation, which was passed unanimously by the Parliament of Tasmania, contains nothing about the buildings. As a result the buildings which existed on the Risdon Cove site, replicas of settlers' cottages and the accompany signs fell into disrepair or (again) were vandalised. They were later burnt down.

Section 18 (2) states that "The Council (Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council) must perform its functions for the benefit of all Aboriginal persons and in the interest of reconciliation with the broader Tasmanian community". This has not happened. Several prominent aboriginal groups are excluded from participation and vandalising, neglecting and being provocative is not "in the interest of reconciliation".

**It is clear, however, that the TALC has no intention of any kind of reconciliation, as testified by TALC spokesperson Heather Sculthorpe. Listen to her comments aired ABC radio Friday morning 20th Feb 2015. .**

### [Sculthorpe.mp3](#)

Section 27(5) does guarantee public access to the Memorial and other land in day-light hours and this is confirmed to me by a letter from Ray Groom (15th Feb 1996), but one feels unwelcome when visiting the site and on occasions are asked, 'why are you here?' which has happened not only to me, but to many others. The problem with the legislation is that the site can be closed, when "a significant Aboriginal cultural event is being held on that land" which means it can actually be closed off to the public at any time. The Legislation also requires the TAC to formulate a "Management Plan" (Section 32) for the site and as far as I am aware this has not happened. This is clearly in breach of the legislation. That no plan has been undertaken is confirmed by a report from C.M. Rowe, Registered Land Surveyor (8 August 2006). The problem is the Act does not require the TAC to make any plan public.

In April 2006, the State Government went on step further in an unbelievable act of ridiculousness, when it declared (to quote) "Risdon Cove is no longer a Historic Site". In the same letter, the Co-Ordinator Tourism Signs and Infrastructure (sic) Vin Gerasimenok added, "Accordingly the Secretary requested the Department remove the up graded signs installed last year. I therefore advise that removal of all signposts and fittings should be completed by 12 May 2006" The Secretary referred to was his 'boss' Scott Gadd, Secretary Tourism, Arts and Environment. The signs were indeed removed early one morning before peak-hour traffic by a private contractor.

I, with Mr. Tony Hope and John Salmon, had approached Mr. Gadd some months before; however, the meeting proved to be unfruitful. Our motivation was to ensure the repair of the stricken Memorial and request protection of it. We then went to the Tasmania Heritage Council and met with Mr. Peter James (since taken a position in Queensland). We awaited his response. We also met with Labour Federal Member, Harry Quick, MHR who was sympathetic. It was while we were in his office, that Mr. James' Office rang through and said that \$1200 had been authorised to repair the monument. This was confirmed in a letter to Mr. Salmon from the then Attorney-General, Judy Jackson who wrote (to quote) "In relation to funding the site, the Chair of the Tasmanian Heritage Council, Mr. Peter James, has advised me funding will be made available to support the conservation of the Bowen Monument." (24th June 2005). Yet, when we approached Mr. James's successor, Mr. Lynch, we were told that no funding had been approved, let along recorded.

Even the then Shadow Attorney General, the late Hon Michael Hodgman QC, MHA in letters to Scott Gadd and to the appropriate Government Minister, Paula Wreidt received no satisfaction. Mr. Lennon refused to act let alone talk about the matter. Ex-Local Pembroke Member, Allison Ritchie LC was active in being a liaison between the Government and me and colleagues. The Premier succeeding Lennon, Lara Giddings will not even meet to discuss the issue neither will her appropriate minister on the matter, Cassy O'Connor. To date (March 2014) nothing, at least on a Government level, has been achieved.

The trials, tribulation and efforts listed above are just a small part of what has gone on behind the scenes, in an effort to simply:

- Repair the monument
- Protect the monument
- Promote the monument

**Is this too much to ask?**

**If you feel moved to put your point of view then please email The Tasmanian Heritage Commissioner. Email address is: [enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au). A short note expressing your concerns and requesting a response.**

## **SHAME TASMANIAN GOVERNMENTS**



**Bowen's Monument August 2011. Forlorn and neglected. Notice the illegal seating at its front and side besides the placing of intrusive propaganda facing the monument.**



**Important archaeological sites vandalised and neglected. August 2011**



**For some bizarre reason copper plating on the existing buildings is being stripped.**

It is my firm opinion that the land was handed-over illegally by the Groom Government. Mr. Albury gave the land\*\* to all Tasmanian People 'forever'. The Governor in 1904 accepted this as the deal and handed the actual title deeds to the then Premier, who accepted it (again) with those two provisos -1) to be given to all Tasmanians 2) forever.

What would Mr. Albury think if the government said, "Ok thanks, but we have no intention of keeping it forever, for in 91 years' time, we will give the land over to a very small, but vocal group and so, it will not be for all Tasmanians."

The Tasmanian Government has reneged on its original promise, pledge and obligation. Roger Groom's Government was devious in its intention to the extreme. It did not live up to the promises that the Tasmanian Government originally gave to Mr. Albury. Mr. Albury gave the title deeds with those two obligations. There were thousands of witnesses at the time and it is duly recorded in the media of the day.

In the year 2010 focus was again placed on Bowen's Memorial and Risdon Cove. In May of that year, deep trenches were made behind the memorial disturbing important and significant archaeological material dating back to 1803. The TAC also planned a school (although their Council planning application stated Health Care Centre to be erected on the site, obstructing public access to the Memorial. Objections were lodged and the original plans were withdrawn by the TAC's developer. They are reapplying. A letter to the new Heritage Minister, David O'Byrne, was sent expressing concern over the latest developments at Risdon Cove. Mr O'Byrne said that he is aware of the situation and of the vandalism which has occurred with the Bowen Memorial. We shall see what eventuates in this very sorry tale.

#### **UP-DATE.**

In May 2010, the site surrounding the Bowen Memorial was shockingly disturbed by a bull-dozer, unearthing valuable archaeological material dating from colonial times. Despite approaches to Mr Michael Lynch, Chairman of the Tasmanian Heritage Commission (THC) and to Mr David O'Byrne, State Minister for Heritage about this matter, they chose to ignore the concerns and did nothing. In the year 2014 dialogue is still taking place with the THC. Minutes of the THC clearly show that they have been aware of the diggings and admit they were illegal, but the THC has chosen to do nothing and not to act against the TAC.

Approval for a school to be erected on the historical site was given by the Clarence City Council, with three Councilmen opposing, Doug Chipman, Richard James, Don Cuisick. The school could have been built on land overlooking the site. In its present location it will impinge upon the visual view of the Bowen Monument, quite apart from invading territory when one walks to the monument. Fencing arrangements of the school and drainage are also a concern. Despite these objections the Clarence City Council chose to ignore them.

In August 2011 Reg Watson has once again asked the Tasmanian Government to at least place a sign on public property indicating that the

historical site of Risdon Cove and Bowen's Monument exists. They have ignored this plea. They have had, however, further dialog with the TAC as they have requested that the name of Risdon Cove be changed.

Personally speaking the blame lays solely at the feet of Premier Ray Groom who was the architect of this whole mess. The State Labour Government in 2009, for the mess he has caused, gave him an Award. The Premier which followed Groom, Mr Tony Rundle, endorsed his fellow colleague in regards to Risdon Cove.

The Tasmanian State Government should immediately take back the parcel of land illegally given to the TAC and manage as it was intended for all Tasmanians and forever for the purpose of celebrating dual heritage.

In the year 2014 further examination was undertaken by Dr. Colin Perdoe on a skeleton unearthed by a farmer at Risdon Cove in 1914. It has been in storage at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The examination confirmed that the skeleton was that of a white man. It is believed he was one of three who died after arriving with Gov David Collins in February 1804 from Port Phillip. They became dreadfully ill during the voyage to Risdon Cove. There they died and were buried there. No memorial or historical recognition is given to those first white people who died in Tasmania at Risdon Cove.

\*Captain William Bellamy Risdon had a very distinguished naval career. Risdon, Risdon Vale and Risdon Cove were named after this fine officer. Captain Risdon together with Hayes, spent time in the Dutch East Indies having many adventures. In 1794 Risdon took command of the Duke of Clarence. Holland the British were at war soon afterwards and Risdon captured a Dutch cruiser, taking her as a prize to Calcutta, arriving September 2nd, 1798. In December, taking the command of the Anna, he returned to England

\*\* The name of the land as filed in the Tasmanian Title's Office is known as the "Obelisk site". It was "exercised" by Mr Albury in 1904. In other words, it was taken from a larger portion of land. The "Obelisk site" encompasses the immediate area around the Bowen Monument. Provocative signs as erected by the TAC should be immediately removed and in the least, the "Obelisk site" should be placed once again back in the Tasmanian Government control for all Tasmanians. Access to the site should not be determined by the TAC in anyway whatsoever.

The Bowen Lecture delivered by Reg A Watson on the 210th Anniversary (2013) of the Bowen Settlement at Risdon Cove is available and provides a concise history of the founding of Tasmania.