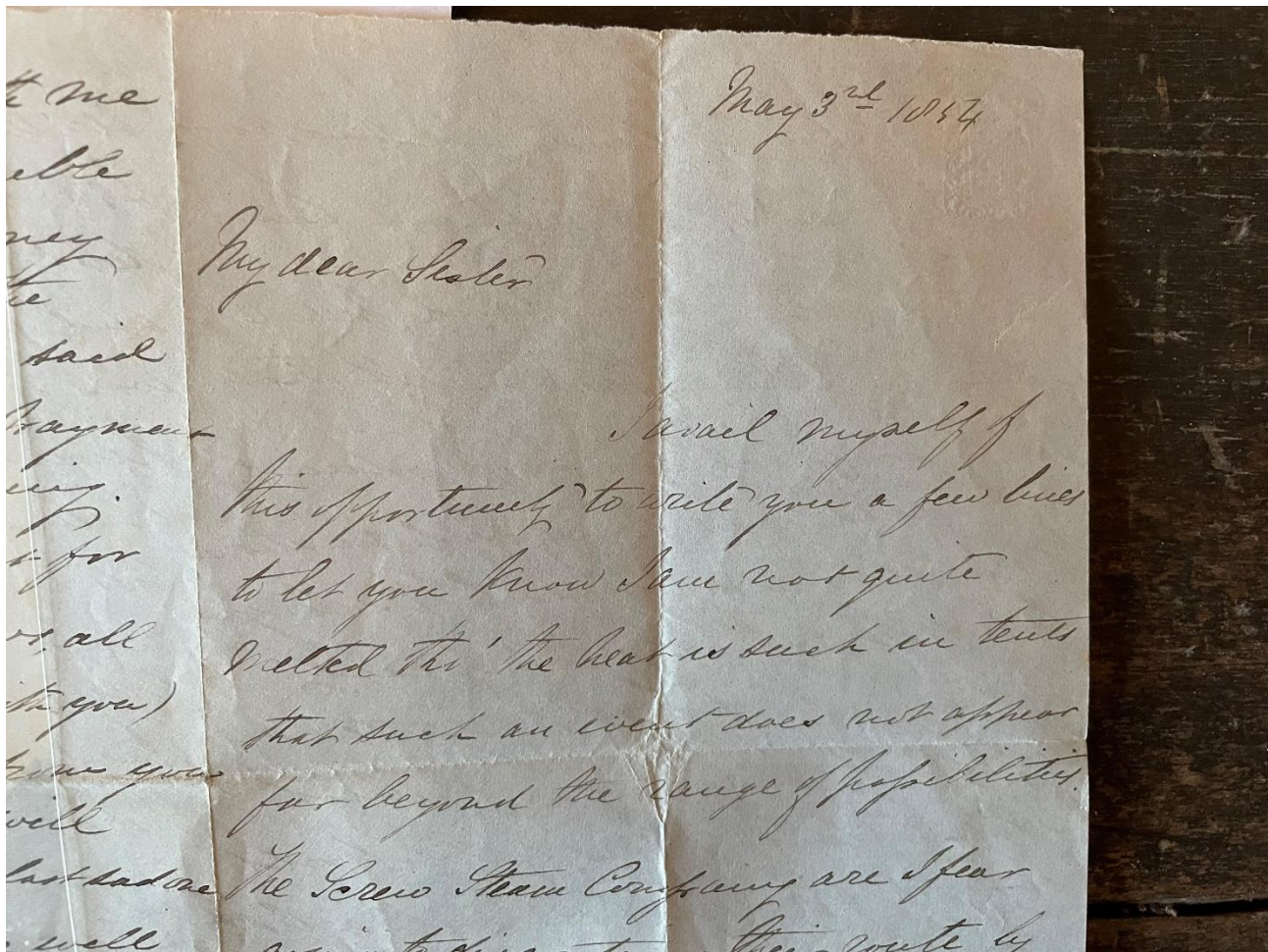


Letter 13: Steam ships, Royal Society and Aussie idiom



May 3rd 1854

My dear Sister,

I avail myself this opportunity to write you a few lines to let you know I am not quite melted tho the heat is such in tents that such an event does not appear far beyond the range of possibilities.

The Screw Steam Company are I fear going to discontinue their route by which at present we are enabled to hear from each other within two or three months. I send this via England.

Your last kind communication was in the shape of a newspaper after the 10th of Feb last in which **I was pleased to see the efforts the 'Royal Society of Van Diemens Land' are making. They say plants and seeds have been interchanged with England, India, China etc.** I have often thought that great benefits might be produced by this kind of exchange and mentioned about seeds in my former letter to you but it seems the Royal Society have already taken the matter in hand. The mango fruit which I think about the best in the world, ought to grow in VDL with a little care while the common grains would one would think, give no trouble. The Royal Society had better make me their Agent.

I have spoken to Mr Weeding in my letter to him, about the £500 outstanding. With the amount that I have already sent and intend sending shortly to Mr Weeding the £500 would about clear off my direct debt to him which is at once desirable and the object for which the money was left by poor Mother. I do not know the name of the person who holds it but should Mr Weeding instruct

his agent to receive it and that person have no objection to immediate payment – I shall be glad of it being paid over to Mr Weeding's agent.

It will then only remain for James to pay off the debt due to Mr Weeding on the estate and for which purpose he will be able to make use of all the produce of the estate until the debt is paid and then it will remain to make any new arrangements that may seem best. For I take it for granted that James has hardly been able to fulfil his intention of paying the whole of the debt by January last, as was stated in your former letter. Mr Weeding agrees with me that it would be very undesirable that James should borrow money to pay the debt. With regard to the interest on the £500 I have before said that it had better go towards payment of the main debt to Mr Weeding.

I hope you will give me credit for having little or no local news, **all alone in the jungle (bush with you)** but I shall be happy to hear from you and trust your next letter will bring better news than your last sad one.

I hope all our relations are well and prospering as it is a long while since I heard of them.

I leave this open as Mr Weeding wish to enclose a line or two.

With kind love to Fanny, James and Yourself

Believe me

Your affectionate brother

TWeeding

The Screw Steam Company are I fear going to discontinue their route by which at present we are enabled to hear from each other within two or three months

Thomas is talking about the General Screw Steam Shipping Company, which in 1852 secured mail contracts for the England / Madras and Calcutta service. The same company also stepped in to the Australian mail run in April 1853. In May 1853, the Company's steamer *SS Argo* sailed from Southampton and reached Melbourne in a fairly brisk 64 days. With a cargo including 103,700 ounces of gold fresh from the diggings, she returned via Cape Horn and gained a lot of press coverage as the first steam powered vessel to circumnavigate the world.

Despite this, the company ran into all sorts of difficulties and eventually sank without trace in October 1854. Thomas, as always, was right on the money.

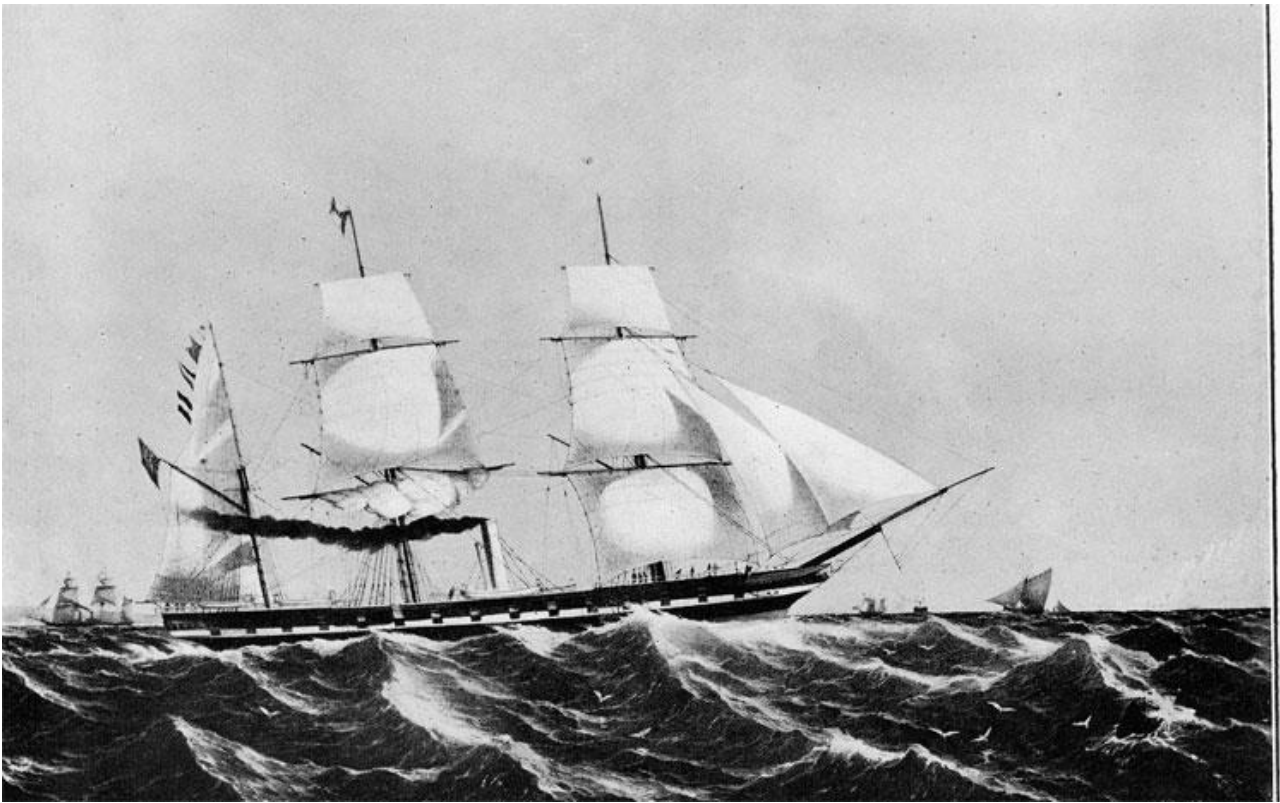


Figure 1 The SS Argo under full steam

I was pleased to see the efforts the 'Royal Society of Van Diemens Land' are making. They say plants and seeds have been interchanged with England, India, China etc.

The Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land, founded in 1843, aimed to 'develop the physical character of the Island and illustrate its natural history and productions'. It is best remembered today as founders of the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and progenitors of what is now TMAG. But they also had a role which is less well known: promoting the 'naturalisation' of various plants and animals into Tasmania. In practice, this meant bringing in the flora and fauna which Society members thought would benefit Tasmania. For example, the Society played a role in introducing trout into Tasmanian waters. More locally, the Society played a leading role in the introduction of tench, a rather unpalatable fish, into purpose built ponds on the Shene estate near Mangalore. The Royal Society also introduced many of the garden plants we now revere such as dahlias from India and agapanthus from South Africa. Interest in 'naturalisation' also led to such unfortunate introductions as rabbits, foxes and gorse. Curiously, in 1850, the Royal Society (with Mr Gunn and Dr James Grant) sent two healthy Thylacines to London. They arrived safe and sound and found a home at the London Zoological Gardens (London Zoo).



Figure 2: One of the two thylacines at the London Zoo

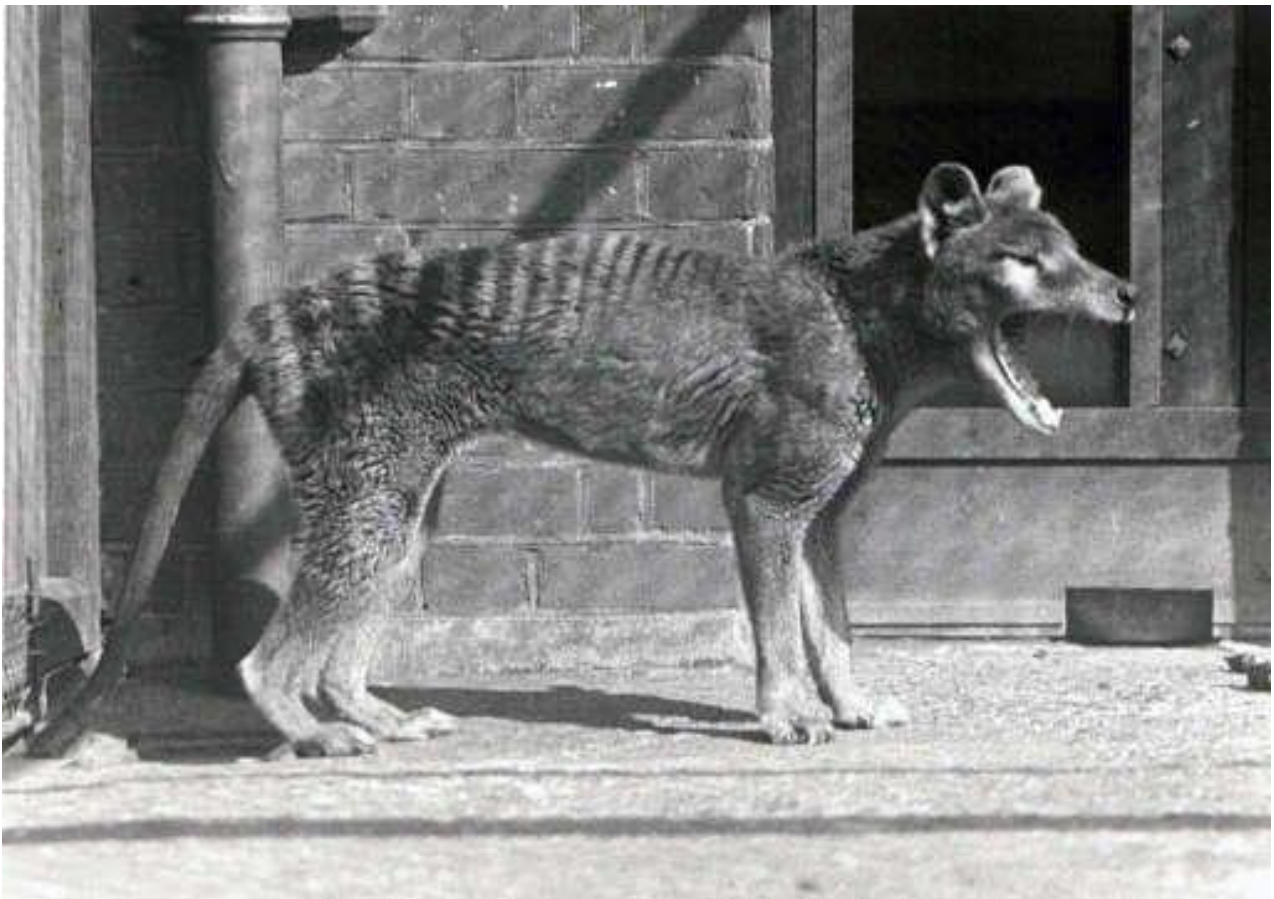


Figure 3 Over the years there were 20 different thylacines at the London Zoo. The last died in 1931

Sadly, the Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land is also associated with the appalling treatment of the mortal remains of Truganini, which the Society exhumed and placed on display. The Society (in

conjunction with TMAG) formally apologised to the Aboriginal people of Tasmania earlier this year.

all alone in the jungle (bush with you)

This is highlighted simply to note how entrenched Australian idiom was becoming by this stage. Interestingly, the word itself probably derives from a Dutch word for forest, and 'bush' has a similar meaning in South Africa (ie uncleared, wilderness land). This is perhaps not surprising given that there were many links between colonial Australia and South Africa (former Cape Colony), both colonies of the British Empire,