

# The most photographed of thylacines: Mary Roberts' Tyenna male – including a response to Freeman (2005) and a farewell to Laird (1968)

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ABSTRACT

Life-history details are provided for the male thylacine from Tyenna, exhibited in Mary Roberts' Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart, from 1911 to 1915. The fine specimen attracted the interests of scientists, photographers and the general public alike. A motion picture film was taken of the animal whilst eating, and a plethora of still photographs – making this the most photographed thylacine in captivity. Included among these are the sequence of five photographs taken by Harry Burrell involving this thylacine eating a chicken. Carol Freeman (2005), prompted by inconsistent, unpublished comment by Norman Laird, has suggested that these Burrell photographs probably involve a manipulated museum mount, and were likely taken at Burrell's property at Manilla, New South Wales. Freeman's suggestion is challenged through an analysis of the caged environment and the thylacine, as contained in these photographs, alongside recently discovered, unpublished comment by Burrell himself, indicating that the photographs were taken at Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart. While correcting some of Laird's comments on the Burrell photographs, the occasion is also taken to correct Laird's (1968) claim, that thylacine skins were sent to London to be made into waistcoats.

**Key words:** Thylacine, *Thylacinus cynocephalus*, Harry Burrell, photographs, zoological gardens, fur trade

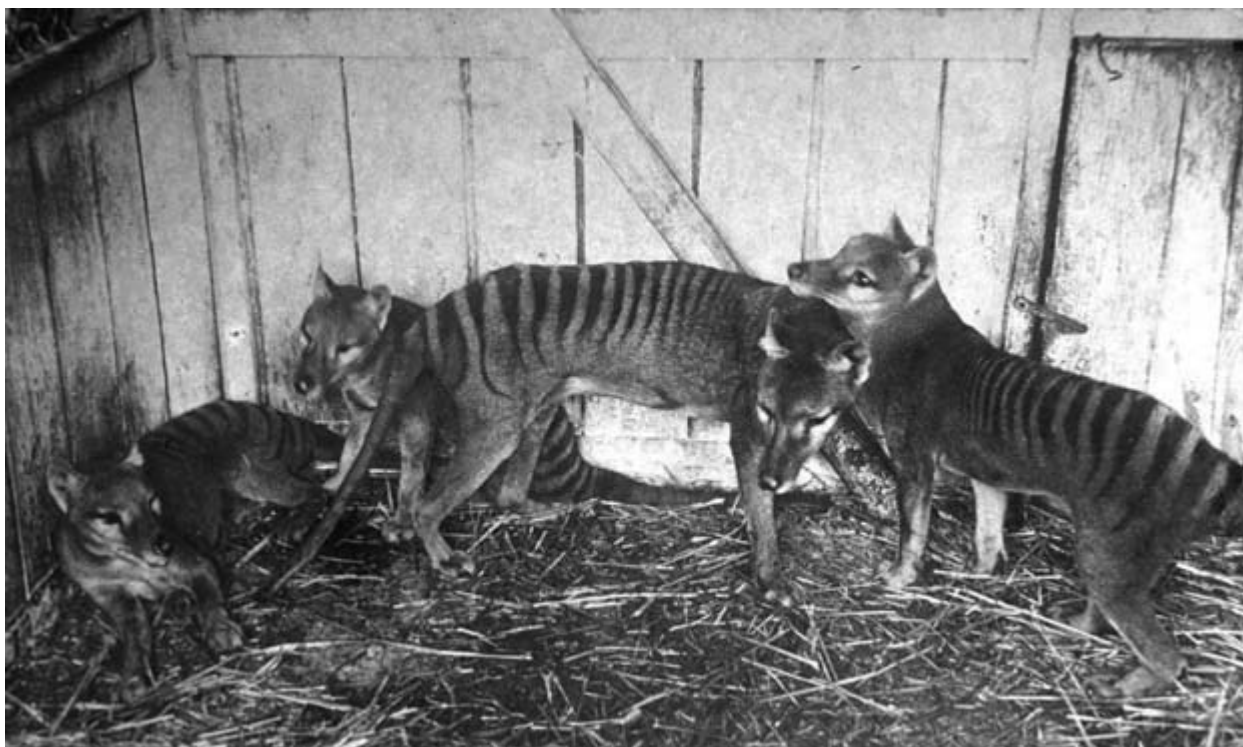
The remarkable Mary Roberts (née Lindsay), was born in Hobart on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1841, and married the well-established and wealthy businessman Henry Llewelyn Roberts on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1863. In 1877 they built their house, Beaumaris, in the fields at Sandy Bay, then on the outskirts of the city of Hobart (Bell 1967). It was here, on the two acres of grounds surrounding Beaumaris, that the eminently practical Mary, aided by Henry, a dedicated gardener and amateur wood and metal worker (Bell 1965), put together her private zoological collection. Mary's strong commitment to social justice and the public good (which extended well beyond a focus on just her own species – as witnessed by her commitment and contributions to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Anti-Plumage League, the Wild Game Preservation Society and the Avicultural Society) led her to open her zoo to the paying public, initially for select charitable concerns, commencing with an exhibition in aid of the District Nurses Association on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1904 (*Hobart Mercury* 16/11/1904, 19/11/1904). She later adopted regular opening hours for the general public, on Saturdays and one or two days of the working week, during the warmer months of the year. Interested parties could also arrange, initially through negotiation with the Tourist Bureau, to visit the Zoo outside these opening times.

Roberts initially had a strong, personal penchant for birds, both native and exotic, displaying over 120 species, with Tasmanian and Australian mainland species accompanied by specimens imported from Africa, Europe, India, South America and south-east

Asia. But once she started seriously collecting and displaying native mammals, she readily established interactive relationships with favoured charges, particularly the wombats, thylacines and devils. She exhibited 34 species of mammals, including virtually all of Tasmania's indigenous terrestrial species – missing from the collection were the eight species of bats, both species of native mouse (*Pseudomys* sp.), the white-footed dunnart (*Sminthopsis leucopus*), the broad-toothed rat (*Mastacomys fuscus*), and one species of *Antechinus* – again, accompanied by African, European, North American and Asian mammalian exotics.

All told, Roberts exhibited 16 different thylacine specimens in the zoo, her first, an adult female, arriving on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1908. In her early collection her most significant thylacine exhibit was an almost complete thylacine family from Woolnorth, a mother and three cubs, that arrived at the zoo in the first weeks of July 1909. (The rest of the family, the adult male and a fourth cub had also been snared, but died in the snare or were accidentally killed during the attempt at live capture.) To identify this adult female in other zoo photographs, her most diagnostic feature of striping on the right side of the body, is found at the rear of the hind leg, where a long, thin stripe, tapering forwards, is followed by a medium length bifurcate stripe, angled backwards (see the Williamson photograph, Figure 1).

This consideration of one of the thylacines exhibited in Beaumaris Zoo is primarily based on Roberts' diary entries, visitor's book, account book and letters. (In this article, reference dates cited without indication of source, are to



**Figure 1.** The Woolnorth mother with her three captive cubs, photographed by Williamson, ca January 1910. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

be understood as emanating from the diary entries.) The class system operating in Roberts' invitation to selected visitors that they sign her *Visitors' Book*, while providing valuable insight into colonial sociology, markedly affects its use as a tool for understanding colonial zoology. Snarers, trappers and prospectors who personally brought thylacines and other significant specimens to the zoo were not signatories to the event. Until quite late in the zoo's history (visitors' book 11/3/1916), artists who came to sketch or paint her animals were invited to sign the book (28/9/1910; visitors' book 30/9/1910); but photographers who specifically came to photograph the animals were not so invited (7/11/1910, 27/9/1911, 28/9/1911, 27/11/1911). Sometimes Roberts specifically identified by name in her diary photographers who came to Beaumaris. On other occasions she merely noted that a "Man" called in and took photographs, and later "Man brought up proofs of photos" (20/8/1913, 21/8/1913). Occasionally, she failed to bother to note their presence in the Zoo at all. Hindsightedly significant events, such as the visits by Arthur Reid and his daughter Alison, later to be the curators of the zoological collection in its Hobart City Council days after Roberts' death, are also unrecorded.

Assisting Roberts in the daily running of the zoo, and charged with taking care of the zoo during her absences, was the keeper Charlie Newman. On occasions, however, Newman's care left a lot to be desired. Figure 1 shows the family of thylacines on the straw-covered floor in the wooden den built for protection from the elements at the back of their open cage. "I keep my tigers and devils on straw and their fur keeps in beautiful condition" (letter 25/2/1910). However, the constant raking and replacement of straw, saw Newman devise some cleaning short-cuts in

November 1909, without consulting Roberts, which had varying effects upon the recently arrived thylacine family and the Tasmanian devil display, due to the different captive behaviours shown by each species.

*I had two pairs [of devils] lately but unfortunately lost a young male, thus spoiling a pair, through the man [Newman] putting lime under the straw. They are fond of splashing in water, and thus two of them got burnt, before I discovered the mischief that had caused it. The second recovered well. He did the same, in with the Tasmanian tigers, but these creatures, not upsetting nor splashing in the water escaped unhurt. (letter 19/11/1909)*

With the end of the summer opening season in 1911, from Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March, Roberts went on holiday to Ellendale and Russell Falls, the site of Tasmania's soon-to-be-proclaimed, first National Park. Here she "met Mr Power of Tyenna and Mr Rumney all of whom promised to do their best to get me tigers and devils" (15/3/1911). Tyenna is located approximately 60 km west-north-west of Hobart. Power was good to his word, visiting Beaumaris Zoo on 1<sup>st</sup> July, and arranging the sale of his captive devil for 15/- (1/7/1911, 4/7/1911).

In the meantime, James and Wil Bryant, from whom Roberts had the previous year declined to purchase a three-legged thylacine, came good with a four-legged specimen, which Mary eagerly agreed to purchase. Unfortunately, it did not survive the journey to Hobart. "In afternoon two live devils, two small Wallaby and one dead tiger (female) arrived from Mr Wil Bryant, went at once to Mr Flynn about taking the insides etc" (6/6/1911). At this stage the relationship between Prof. Flynn and Mary Roberts was still on a sound and cordial basis. Flynn was a welcomed

visitor, occasionally (22/5/1913) providing first-aid to injured specimens. Roberts provided Flynn with departed zoo specimens, either whole or selected organs thereof; and Flynn, in kind, acknowledged Roberts' assistance in publication (Flynn 1911, p144). It was only when Flynn borrowed mounted specimens, skeletons and preserved skins from Roberts' personal collection, and refused to give them back; and agreed to buy dead zoo specimens from her, but after collection refused to pay for them, that their professional relationship soured. After providing Flynn with his desired organs, Roberts set about cleaning the skeleton of this dead-on-arrival Bryant thylacine (letter 11/3/1915). This skeleton, together with those from deaths the following month of a much-loved pet wombat (20/7/1911) and devil (28/7/1911), entered her own private museum collection.

Then came 12<sup>th</sup> August 1911, and the arrival of her eighth thylacine specimen to be displayed.

*Most exciting day as Power from Tyenna arrived in the morning to say that he had captured a large male tiger which he had in town. He later brought it round and I paid him £12/18/- (12/8/1911)*

Mr West, of Burnie, was present when Ted Power snared the male thylacine in the bush near Tyenna. Because of its large size it was trussed to a pole and carried back to camp by two persons, where West helped feed it (interview ca1970). Word soon spread about this large and impressive addition, and people came to the zoo specifically to see it (12/8/1911, 13/8/1911), encouraged by the following newspaper report:

*On Saturday forenoon there was some excitement caused at the Shamrock Hotel by the exhibition*

*of a Tasmanian tiger, which had been captured at Tyenna ... The animal was subsequently added to the Beaumaris Zoo (Hobart Mercury 14/8/1911)*

While the new arrival was tame, used to humans, and used to being treated as if it were a dog, nevertheless, the sheer size of the animal, and the antiquity of the existing thylacine cage, were of some concern. On arrival, the male was housed separately in an unused, grassed and over-grown enclosure, and Roberts' existing thylacines, the Woolnorth adult female and her remaining three year old cub were removed from their cage while a complete renovation took place in two stages. The wooden den at the southern, rear end of the cage was substantially reinforced (28/8/1911, 29/8/1911) and the outer yard was doubly reinforced with "a roll of specially strong wire netting" (28/8/1911), attached to the wooden supports and lattice on the inside of the cage. The smaller-gauge wire, attached to the outside of the supports on the sides and roof of the cage, was largely left in place, except at the northern end of the western wall where the top half of the small-gauge wire was removed to improve the visitor's view of the animals. When the work was finished, on 1<sup>st</sup> September all three thylacines were introduced to each other and the renovated cage: "Had very busy morning trying to make tigers comfortable after the change"; and later, "Had a visit from Professor Flynn about devils and to see the Tasmanian tiger which he much admired" (1/9/1911).

The male was photographed in its temporary enclosure by an unrecorded photographer, and Roberts was so impressed with the result that she had copies run off and available for sale as a post-card from the zoo (Figure 2). Of particular interest in this photograph are the marks



Figure 2. The newly arrived Tyenna male, unknown photographer, August 1911. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)



on the fur of the neck, after the removal of the dog collar it had worn since its initial capture. In the off-season, or on days when the zoo was closed to general public access, when Roberts entertained individually-arranged zoo visitors, she would allow her guests to enter the thylacine cage (16/2/1910), and sometimes she would collar and leash the male, along with the adult female, and walk her visitors around the collection accompanied by her thylacines (Vaughan 1946; visitors' book 22/1/1913). During major cage cleaning, or prior to being walked around the zoo, the male was sometimes released from the cage and held in a low-fenced enclosure, over which it could easily have jumped (Colbron-Pearse 1968).

Some of the unique features of the left side of this specimen are shown in Figure 2: the very prominent white blaze beneath the eye running its entire length, but only a diffuse white patch at the front above the eye, and the darker, somewhat cup-shaped patch between eye and snout, positioned closer to the eye. The most diagnostic features of the unique banding pattern on the body are that the broadest stripe on the backbone is at the top of the hind leg, and of medium length. It is followed by the longest stripe on the body, angled forwards at its end, followed by a medium length bifurcate stripe, pointing downwards. These are followed by a distinct stripe at the rear, and a fainter one at the base of the tail.

The size and condition of the animal attracted the interests of further photographers: H.D. Baker (19/11/1911 and 24/11/1911), John Bradford (27/11/1911), and Mr. Tucker,

who visited the zoo on at least four occasions (14/9/1911, 27/9/1911, 10/11/1911 and 27/11/1911) taking a series of photographs of all three animals in the refurbished cage, copies of which he gave to Roberts (29/12/1911).

The presence of a new large male re-called the photographer Williamson to the zoo, but this time as a cinematographer. Williamson arranged the filming with Mary on 26<sup>th</sup> September, and took the short sequence of movie film of the adult male chewing on a joint of meat in the back, southern corner of the cage, on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1911. (The Williamson film may be conveniently found in the 48<sup>th</sup> minute of Wellington 1996.) Williamson returned the following morning to continue cinematography, "but the mg [morning] was unfavourable" (28/9/1911). Tucker was also present on 27<sup>th</sup>, and took a number of still photographs of the adult male (with and without its dinner) and sometimes in the company of its cage companions. Of these, one (Figure 3) has become one of the more widely replicated thylacine photographs, for unfortunately the wrong reasons.

Freeman notes that "Photographs are seductive" (2005, p1). Expanding this, probably it should be noted that photographs of large, extinct, carnivores are particularly seductive. Freeman valuably suggests the need for the semiotic analysis of photographs, those signs inherent in visual images, the complex associations they generate, and of "how particular readings construct ideas about an image" (p5). Figure 3 stands as a grand illustration of Freeman's thesis.



Figure 3. Two thylacines, Beaumaris Zoo, most probably taken by Tucker, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1911. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

Some sexual dimorphism was present in the species, with the adult female smaller in overall size (Gunn 1852), with smaller dental and mandibular morphologies (Ride 1964), and having a slightly different head conformation (Allport 1868). Reflecting this, the indigenous Tasmanians often had two different names for the animal (Milligan 1859), and the colonists often referred to them as “greyhound” and “bulldog” tigers (Allport 1868). Interestingly, from the Pilbara, western Australia, Wright (1972, p18) reproduces a rock engraving of a pair of thylacines touching at their tail tips, one with a pointed nose, the other with a rounded head. Krefft went so far as to describe the different sexes as separate species, designating thylacine specimens with shorter, broader heads and thicker teeth as *Thylacinus breviceps* (1868a, 1868b, 1871), but his suggestion was none too gently treated by his professional colleagues (Allport 1868; Thomas 1888). Amongst non-professionals, however, some supposedly experienced bushmen were still claiming there were two different species of thylacine in existence, as late as 1919 (Stewart 1919).

While Allport (1868) designated the greyhound head as the male, and the bulldog as the female, a distinction that has been widely replicated in the literature, note that the experienced bushman Archie Wilson (ca1922) in his unpublished *Notes on the Tiger* writes: “The thick set Bulldog head one is the male and the lighter built greyhound head one is the Female”. From my observations of photographs of known-sex specimens, I tend to favour the Wilson position. For example, compare the long thin face of the Woolnorth female (Figure 1), with the thick broad head of the Tyenna male (Figure 2). Note, however, that the developmental change from a fox-like face in young animals, to a wolf- or dog-like face in adults, as identified by Dixon (1989), confounds the easy designation of sex from skull shape in photographs alone.

The photograph (Figure 3) shows thylacines of two different sizes in Beaumaris Zoo. They are standing at the southern end of the enclosure, with the entrance door to the cage beside them, and the covered den (largely out of the photograph, but partially observable through the door) behind them. Note the large, thick, wire-netting newly placed on the inside of the cage, and the smaller gauged wire on the outside. The appearance of this doubled wire netting dates to 28<sup>th</sup> August 1911, and is a useful diagnostic feature in dating and identifying thylacine photographs from the Beaumaris Zoo.

The photograph’s signalling of two dissimilarly sized thylacines was enough to generate, in the minds of some observers, the idea of sexual dimorphism, and without recourse to any further evidence, the photograph has frequently been reproduced and described as illustrating the differences in size between the sexes (for example, Bailey 2001, p126; Guiler 1991, p3; Moeller 1997, p21). The larger specimen at the rear is the adult male from Tyenna with its characteristic left-side striping: the broadest stripe of medium length atop the hind leg, then the largest stripe pointing forwards, followed by a medium-length bifurcate stripe pointing downwards.

Note also that mid-way down the neck one can still see on the fur the ruffed marks of recent collarisation, plus, on this photograph, a darker band of fur where the base of the neck meets the shoulder, a commonly expressed and early recognised feature (see the foreground thylacine in the Richter illustration accompanying Gould 1851).

The two thylacines with which the adult male was caged after 1<sup>st</sup> September 1911, consisted of the old adult female, plus her remaining, three-year-old male cub, shortly destined for dispatch to the Zoological Society of London (on 28/9/1911). The most significant diagnostic feature of striping on the left side of the body of the cub, is the unequal bifurcate stripe on the rump, with the forward bifurcation almost twice the length of the hinder bifurcation. This is clearly seen on the cub at front left in Figure 1, and on the foreground thylacine in Figure 3. In a delightful illustration of Freeman’s thesis (2005), the sexual dimorphism associated with the species has constructed recent interpretations of the photograph as if it were of an adult male and female thylacine (Bailey 2001, p126; Guiler 1991, p3; Moeller 1997, p21). In reality, as a little research has demonstrated, both specimens in the photograph are male, the disparity in size resulting from the disparity in age.

From its arrival in August 1911, to the end of that year as recorded above, the Tyenna male attracted at least nine visits to the zoo from still photographers, and three from a cinematographer. This practice continued. The thylacine was also photographed by Henry Patten (14/3/1912), Sydney Cloman (12/11/1913) and O’Neil Sevier (12/11/1913). Williamson visited the zoo specifically for photography on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1913 and 10<sup>th</sup> December 1914, and John Bradford also revisited Beaumaris (27/9/1912, 25/2/1914). The wealth of photographs taken and the movie film, make this male the most photographed of thylacine specimens, exceeding the smaller number of still photographs, along with a movie film, of the last known thylacine that died in captivity in Hobart Zoo on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1936. One of these photographs was taken before the young male cub left for London Zoo on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1911 and is included here (Figure 4), not just for the presence of all three thylacines, but also to illustrate the northern, latticed end of the thylacine cage, now internally two-thirds covered in large-gauge chicken wire, and the end of the western wall of the cage, with the top half of the externally attached, small-gauge wire removed. Interestingly, during the last weeks of 1911, Power revisited the zoo and met up with his former pet (11/11/1911).

Within twelve months, there was another departure from the collection. Despite her significance to Roberts as the mother of the family of thylacines, the Woolnorth female is the only thylacine in the first Beaumaris display of the species, between October 1908 and March 1915, whose date of death or departure fails to be recorded in her diaries. Herbert Vaughan visited the zoo in the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1913 (visitors’ book 22/1/1913), and to show how tame the pair of thylacines were, Roberts released them from their cage and walked the grounds with them. Vaughan twice published comment upon the thylacine display (1914, 1946):





**Figure 4.** Three thylacines in Beaumaris Zoo. The Tyenna male at the rear; Woolnorth female centre, and head of male cub at the right. Unknown photographer, September 1911. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

*I saw a pair of these creatures in 1913 that were kept in the small private zoo of Mrs. Roberts, of Beaumaris, a villa in a suburb of Hobart, Tasmania. They were a male and female, the former a fine young specimen. They seemed quite friendly and tractable and were not in a cage. Mrs Roberts told me she was hoping to breed from them, a pious hope that seemed doubtful to me at the time, as the female tiger looked rather old and feeble. (Vaughan 1946).*

The next reference in the diaries to the thylacine display, four months later, is singular: “Went into town late this morning principally to get meat for tiger” (14/5/1913). The lack of diary reference to the female’s death merely reflects a significant hiatus in Roberts’ record-keeping around this time. Between 24<sup>th</sup> November 1912 and 27<sup>th</sup> April 1913, there is just a single diary entry: “Have been busy of late and not kept up diary” (26/12/1912).

The thylacine diet was principally beef or, less frequently, lamb, obtained as portions from the butcher, or from whole calves, delivered either alive or freshly killed to Beaumaris. Rabbits were introduced into the thylacine diet from 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1913, and a whole goat, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1915.

The thylacine display ceased shortly afterwards. On 9<sup>th</sup> March 1915 Roberts recorded “Only tiger found dead in morning” and provided a few further details the next day: “Newman found tiger dead, the only one which had been got from Tyenna” (10/3/1915).

The adult male had always been a significant specimen, because of its size, and Roberts was keen to see the specimen preserved, and thought, first of all, of

the Australian Museum in Sydney. “Wrote to Sect’y Australian Museum to see if they needed the body of the Marsupial Wolf I have had placed in cold storage” (10/3/1915), but the Australian Museum had to decline the offer, “on account of war expenses, we have no funds available this year for purchase of specimens” (Grant letter 16/3/1915). She also wrote to the National Museum of Victoria, offering them the body of this “fine specimen of Marsupial Wolf (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*)” whose “remains are in cool storage”. Additionally,

*Beside this I have skeletons (I conclude in the rough) of an adult pair, and also those of a pair of cubs. The animals were handed to Professor Flynn for him to make observations upon. (letter 11/3/1915)*

The Curator of Zoology, Kershaw, replied in the affirmative (letter 17/3/1915), offering “£10 the lot”, but Roberts was unable to take up the offer, because Flynn refused to return the four borrowed thylacine skeletons. How long she waited for Flynn to come good is unknown, and what transpired with the skin is not recorded by Roberts. But eventually she recovered the specimen from cold storage and set about preserving the thylacine’s skeleton for her own (thanks to Flynn, somewhat depleted) museum collection. This specimen undoubtedly held significant emotional, as well as scientific, meaning for Roberts, and she refused an impressive offer of £10 for the skeletal remains alone from a “Mr Hardy” (19/5/1915).

For the record, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1915 Roberts wrote formally to Prof. Flynn, requesting the return of all the skeletal and specimen material, including the four thylacine skeletons,

that he had borrowed from her private collection the previous year. Four days later, Flynn deigned to return to Roberts a solitary, borrowed specimen of an eagle (9/7/1915). Flynn's treatment of Roberts was not unique. The following year the Trustees of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery terminated Flynn's appointment as Honorary Curator because of his removal of specimens from the collection, and his persistent refusal to return them (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1917, minutes 27/11/1916).

The above represent the core details of the known life of Mary Roberts' male thylacine from Tyenna, with particular emphasis on its photography. After Roberts' death on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1921 her private museum collection was donated to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The loose skeletal remains of the Tyenna male which formed part of the donation (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 1928, minutes 13/2/1922), were sent to T.F. Moore, articulator and osteologist at the National Museum of Victoria in Melbourne, for mounting (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 1928, minutes 6/3/1922). The articulated specimen of the Tyenna male remains in the Tasmanian Museum collection (see Figure 5). A few additional details



**Figure 5.** The mounted skeleton of the Tyenna male. (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

of the life and photography of the Tyenna male are also included in the following section.

### A Response to Freeman (2005)

Freeman's central argument, about the seductive nature of photographs of zoological specimens, and the demand on the observer to understand and interpret a photograph in terms of its contemporary context, as well as later historical significance, are valuable and exciting constructs. It is truly unfortunate that the choice of photographs used in the article to illustrate the argument appears so flawed.

Prompted by two comments found in Norman Laird's papers, Freeman has constructed a scenario whereby the set of five Burrell photographs of a thylacine eating a chicken, are suggested to be an elaborate hoax. Freeman posits the photographs were probably taken by Burrell at his Namoi property, near Manilla, NSW; that the photographs are of a dead, mounted thylacine; and then suggests reasons why Burrell set out to foist this hoax upon the zoological community.

Realistically, Norman Laird was in two minds about the "several exposures ... on glass half plates" taken by Burrell (ca1978). Certainly, at times suggesting it was a stuffed specimen against a bush background and not in a zoological garden. Freeman additionally notes (p7) his comments on a sketch derived from one of the photographs as to their being "taken by Burrell on his Namoi property about 1921". But equally, at other times in his collected notes and papers on thylacines, made during the last 38 years of his life while resident in Tasmania, Laird appears to have taken the photos at face value and accepted them as being of a live animal eating a chicken in a zoo. On two separate occasions Laird describes one of the Burrell photos as being a "Rare and Precious Photograph", rather unlikely labels for a photograph of a supposedly stuffed and mounted specimen. Laird also indicated that this particular thylacine photographed by Burrell was the subject of the Williamson movie film, noting that "at the same time as the still photographs were taken so was a 16mm black and white reversal motion picture taken, which I once saw, but of which the whereabouts is now unknown" (Laird, ca1978). All this distinction, description, still and moving photography over a stuffed specimen? At best, it may be said that Laird expresses some obvious cognitive dissonance in his preserved comments on the subject of the Burrell photographs.

Assumptions made by Freeman, Laird, Paddle and Pink, that the photographs were taken in 1921, or close to the date of its initial publication, have led to inappropriate and inaccurate identification of the Burrell photograph location. Pink (1972) identified the photographs as being taken in the 1920s in captivity in a private zoo – and the only known privately held Tasmanian menagerie containing thylacines at this time was James Harrison's in Wynyard. For the most part Harrison "kept the Tigers in heavy wooden cages with iron bars, and drop doors" (Blackwell interview 27/11/1951), obviously not the setting for the Burrell photographs. But there is a photograph held by the State Library of Tasmania of Harrison standing outside one of his outdoor cages in a significantly vegetated environment, that was enough to suggest to Paddle (2000) that Pink (1972) was correct, and that Harrison's was the likely location for the Burrell photographs in 1920 or 1921.

Freeman's call upon observers of photographs to understand and interpret them in their contemporary context, has forced a new-found focus upon the cage support structures and wiring. All five Burrell photographs (Figures 6-10 this article; corresponding to Freeman [2005] Figures 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8) clearly show, above and behind the hessian backdrop, an internally attached large-gauge wire-netting along the side and latticed end of the enclosure. Additionally, Figure 7 quite clearly shows this internally attached large-gauge wire reaching to the top of the cage, where it meets the roof, which is covered by an externally attached smaller-gauge chicken wire. Such wire and latticed structures directly correspond with the thylacine cage in Beaumaris Zoo after the renovation of 28<sup>th</sup> August 1911 (see Figure 4).





**Figure 6.** Thylacine with chicken in mouth, photographed by Burrell. (Freeman, 2005, Figure 2)



**Figure 7.** Thylacine prior to being given chicken, photographed by Burrell. (Freeman, 2005, Figure 4)



**Figure 8.** Thylacine about to be given chicken, photographed by Burrell. (Freeman, 2005, Figure 6)



**Figure 9.** Thylacine having released chicken from mouth, photographed by Burrell. (Freeman, 2005, Figure 7)

The locality of the photographs being clearly identified as the thylacine cage in Mary Roberts' Beaumaris Zoo, the interesting question arose as to whether it was possible to identify which of the 11 thylacine specimens Roberts exhibited after 28<sup>th</sup> August 1911 is featured in the photograph. Freeman notes considerable retouching has been done to the Burrell photographs of the animal, particularly around the head and to the conformation and striping at the base of the tail, and these realities are accepted by the present author. But Freeman also points out, that such retouching was not unusual photographic practice at the time (p2), and that Burrell certainly retouched his photographs of very-much-alive platypuses (p11). Despite the retouching, however, in the left hand profile in Figure 7, note the large head, with its white blaze running underneath the full length of the eye, and the darker cup-shaped patch between eye and snout. Also note the thickest stripe of medium length at the top of the leg followed by the longest stripe, and then a bifurcate pointing downwards, followed by a shorter stripe, and fainter stripe at the base of the tail. The animal in the Burrell photograph (Figure 7) is quite clearly the much-photographed Tyenna male of Figure 2.

So many of Freeman's concerns with the Burrell photographs, over the "classic profile position" (p6) and their appearance as "'staged' rather than the result of hours



**Figure 10.** Thylacine with chicken moved from the place of its original deposition, photographed by Burrell. (Freeman, 2005, Figure 8)

of patient watching and waiting for the right moment" (p7), that push Freeman towards the position that it was a dead, manipulated, mounted thylacine specimen, are answered by its identification as the Tyenna male. For this particular thylacine was not only used to strangers walking by its cage, it was used to strangers entering its cage, and being walked on a leash around the Beaumaris grounds in the company of strangers. More so than any other thylacine before or since, it was particularly used



to photographers carrying a “large, cumbersome camera” (p7) inside its cage, and had even been subject before to being photographed and filmed whilst eating. Freeman’s suggestion that the left-hand profile of the animal “shows evidence of a join or crack in the taxidermy near the base of the tail” (p7) is simply the sharp demarcation between the cloacal mound and tail proper at the point of the last faint stripe, that is clearly seen in photographs of this Tyenna male (see Figures 2 and 3).

Having established the locality of the Burrell photographs, and the particular thylacine specimen involved therein, the question arose as to exactly when, in the display life of this animal, from 12<sup>th</sup> August 1911 to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1915, did Burrell visit Beaumaris Zoo and take the photographs? I could find no mention of Burrell in Roberts’ surviving diaries, visitors’ book, account book and letters, so if written support were to be found for these thylacine photographs being taken at Beaumaris Zoo, they would need to come from a Burrell archive unsourced by Freeman. A brief note in the Gilbert Whitley papers held in the Australian Museum Library, Sydney, made while putting together his 1973 article on the thylacine, made mention of various Burrell manuscript notes being held in the Institute of Anatomy, Canberra. Some of the Institute’s archives are now held in the Library of the National Museum, Canberra, and it was here, over the course of two visits, that I located Harry Burrell’s own manuscript notes referring to the photography of the thylacine and other Australian animals at Mary Roberts’ Zoo.

With regards to his visit to Beaumaris Burrell notes the following:

*On one occasion at Hobart, Tasmania (Mount Wellington was capped with snow at the time) I spent eight days at Mrs Roberts Private Zoo, photographing local and Mainland fauna. Each day, while there, I handled and examined no less than three adult Doormouse phalangers, Dromica nana, that were presumably hibernating together, but never once did any of them make the slightest attempt to unfold themselves from their bowl-shape positions even though I bowled them along the grass for several feet to try them out. The keeper informed me that they had been in this condition for some time prior to my visit, in fact he said they were procured in this condition from a dead spout, by a Wood getter, who presented them to Mrs Roberts. (Burrell 1935)*

Three features of this manuscript comment may be used to suggest the date of Burrell’s visit. Two of these are simple and direct. The recent arrival of three torpid pygmy-possums, and Mt Wellington topped with snow suggest Burrell’s visit took place during the winter. The third is more complex, and relates to a significant omission from Burrell’s text, and to the comparative quality of relationship and care shown by Roberts and Newman to their charges. Granted Roberts’ tendency to make slight mention of photographers, nevertheless, it is amazing to find that Burrell spent eight days photographing animals in the zoo, a presence and time frame that must have seen him interfere with the management of the zoo, and yet his visit received no reference whatsoever in her diary.

This suggests that Roberts may well have been absent during his visit. Certainly, in his manuscript, Burrell only makes mention of the presence of the keeper, Charlie Newman. A further intimation of Roberts’ absence is that Newman, on a daily basis, allowed Burrell to handle, attempt to wake-up and bowl the hibernating possums along the ground. While the acceptance of this behaviour is somewhat typical of Newman’s attitude towards the animals, realistically it would hardly have been tolerated even once, let alone eight times, if Roberts had been present. During the display time of the Tyenna male, Mary absented herself from the zoo during winter on only one occasion, spending 6½ weeks on holiday in Melbourne and Sydney between 19<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1912. Burrell’s visit most likely took place during this time, and, from the physical condition of the thylacine, probably closer to September.

In criticising the Burrell photographs, Freeman comments: “the appearance of the hindquarters and back legs ... suggest wasted flesh, while ... there are flat and abruptly concave areas on the body that are characteristic of taxidermy” (p7). But marked leanness is also characteristic of late winter, early spring thylacines (and their photographs), when fat-reserves are often low, or non-existent. Respecting this, when commenting upon the early spring appearance of the Tyenna male and the Woolnorth female in the photograph taken the previous September (Figure 4), Roberts herself cautioned that “in the photo they look thin especially about the flanks” (letter 27/3/1919).

Freeman suggests (pp11, 12) that the reason behind Burrell’s attempt to foist these supposedly faked photographs on the zoological community, related to his treatment by elements of that community. Burrell was no doubt shunned by some insecure, professional academics, who felt affronted by knowledge without qualifications. At times, he may even have been treated with the same contempt shown by Prof. Flynn towards Mary Roberts; but to Australian mammalogists as a whole, his status as a pre-eminent researcher was rock solid. His work with, and publications on, the platypus are well known and impressive (1927); but he is surely most acclaimed for his joint authorship with A.S. Le Souëf of *The Wild Animals of Australasia* (1926). Not since Ogilby (1892) had there been an attempt to individually list and describe all Australian mammal species – as distinct from a selectively described species approach, offered, for example, by Krefft in *Mammals of Australia* (1871), or a geographically restricted monograph, as in Lord and Scott’s *A Synopsis of the Vertebrate Animals of Tasmania* (1924). But whereas Ogilby’s catalogue was essentially for the purposes of specimen identification and classification, Le Souëf and Burrell for the first time wrote for an expanded professional and popular audience, accompanying identificatory characteristics with notes on the known behaviour of each species, both as observed in the wild, and while cared for in captivity.

Burrell wrote at a time when it was mistakenly believed that the best way to ensure the conservation and preservation of Australia’s mammals was to encourage

ordinary Australians to look out for them, and look after them; to countenance the keeping of them as pets in captivity. We now know how wrong this was; and can only applaud the regulations, restrictions and financial disincentives placed in the way of curious Australians wishing to keep local indigenous species in captivity. It is apposite to freely acknowledge how important this discouragement-of-interest has been in achieving the envious conservation status enjoyed by Australia's mammalian species today.

Le Souëf and Burrell's book, with its numerous reprintings, became the central, core text in Australian mammalogy, only replaced with the first edition of Troughton's *Furred Animals of Australia* when it was published in 1941. This was no small achievement. The debt mammalogists owe to Burrell was widely recognised, both then and now.

When Burrell first published one of his photographs of the thylacine with a chicken in its mouth (a cropped copy of Figure 6), he described it as a "photo from life" (1921, p62). I can find no reason, in Laird or Freeman, to doubt his words on the subject.

## A Farewell to Laird (1968)

Within the thylacine literature there is a set of stories so extravagant in their claims as to appear irresistible to some authors, leading to their replication ad nauseam. The outrageous claims of the numbers of thylacines supposedly killed by the French brothers, or the number of sheep supposedly killed by thylacines according to the rural-rump politician Lyne, are cases in point. Great stories, but nothing more than fantasies in the minds of their creators and perpetrators, as consideration of the government bounty record data for these individuals shows (Paddle 2000).

Given the importance of Laird to Freeman (2005), and the use made in this article on Laird's dissonant perceptions on the Burrell photographs, the opportunity is taken to comment on another construction of Lairds on the thylacine. For Laird was responsible for another extravagant thylacine claim, that many recent researchers have found too irresistible, not to quote. Laird wrote:

*I have the records of a bygone tannery. From 1878 to 1896, 3,482 Tiger skins were dispatched from this firm to London where they were made into waistcoats. (Laird 1968)*

The potential in adornment for the thylacine's striped skin was early recognised.

*The skins are certainly beautiful, being well adapted for saddle cloths, and ... our military in Van Diemen's land will doubtless adopt them and add to their warlike appearance on field days. (Hobart Town Courier 28/2/1829)*

Thylacine skins were, however, not taken up by the military, and although the occasional shepherd, trapper and snarer made the occasional hat (Binks 1980), or occasional waistcoat out of a pelt (Cambrian 1855;

Mollison interview 25/11/1951), there is no evidence of any full scale, commercial production of thylacine jackets in Tasmania.

Eric Guiler, based on his reading of Laird's thylacine papers, and his own research on Australian fur-trade records was unable to find any evidence to support Laird's claim, but nevertheless, chose to persistently repeat it, noting on occasions, however, that there appeared to be no good reason to accept such claim.

*Unfortunately I have not been able to trace Laird's sources. He died some years ago and his papers do not contain details of this interesting material. (Guiler 1985, p25)*

*No record of this [export] has been found, nor is there any corroborating evidence in the Laird papers in the State Archives. ... All things considered, 3,842 is however a huge number to be taken over a couple of decades and therefore this figure cannot be substantiated nor accepted. (Guiler and Godard 1998, p133)*

It also needs to be recognized that, rather than a "huge number", from a fur-trade perspective, Laird's figures, suggesting an average annual export of only 183 skins per year is, at best, only modest.

Having extended the research focus from Australian fur-trade records to include British records of the trade, without finding significant thylacines, I believe I have a reasonable explanation to account for Laird's mistaken claim. As an example of potential Tasmanian produce and trade, a thylacine skin was part of the Tasmanian display at the International Exhibition held in London, in 1862 (*Hobart Mercury* 21/9/1861). No doubt the occasional thylacine skin arrived in Europe as part of the "sundries" sent with fur shipments from Australia; but I have yet to find, in either my British or Australian-based research, any record of the arrival of thylacine skins in numbers in London. It was dog-skins that, in the London sale rooms, were sold for waistcoats, preferably skins of the red Chinese chow, of which "about 50,000 to 100,000 skins are imported annually into London ... used for the manufacture of men's coats" (Poland 1892, pp74, 75). By comparison, "very few" dingo skins were annually imported from Australia, as they were of "small value" (Poland 1892, p65), but as dog-skins, their likely fate was to be waistcoated. The most likely explanation for Laird's tannery claim, given the common marketing of dingo pelts in the fur trade as "Australian wolf", is that Laird mistakenly read this label as referring to the marsupial wolf, and thus concocted his story about thylacine skins, rather than dingo skins, being sent to London for waistcoats. Like the French and Lyne fantasies, it is time to give this one a rest, and stop its idle replication in the thylacine literature, until better and more careful researchers than Eric Guiler and the present author can uncover any genuine indication of significant international thylacine-skin trading.



## Postscript.

Freeman includes in a postscript to her paper (pp15, 16) a photograph of a thylacine in a zoo enclosure found in the Burrell collection of the Australian Museum archives. As it is neither the thylacine enclosure at Taronga Park Zoo, Sydney, nor that Zoo's manxed specimen, the only thylacine exhibited at Taronga, Freeman raises questions as to the photograph's location.

Burrell took extensive photographs at Moore Park Zoo, Sydney (Taronga's predecessor) and used them significantly in publication (Burrell 1923; Le Souëf and Burrell 1926). The cement-walled cage in this thylacine photograph is typical of many of the published photographs of the Moore Park enclosures housing the marsupial collection. The animal captured in this photograph is most likely the second thylacine known to have been exhibited at Moore Park Zoo, between September 1903 and September 1905 (Paddle 1993).

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