PORT ARTHUR TALKS

Hearts of iron? Lawyers in Van Diemen's Land, 1824-1836

presented by Associate Professor Stefan Petrow

Between 1824 when the Supreme Court of Van Diemen's Land was established and 1836 when Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur left office, public opinion as reflected in the newspapers typically wrote in unflattering terms about lawyers. They were often called 'the sharp practicing gentry', sharks who, often in league with the reviled banks, fed on the distress of struggling colonists. Their fees added to the high cost of living and led many colonists to bankruptcy and destitution. While many colonists felt the pinch of a vulnerable economy, lawyers prospered and many accumulated substantial fortunes not least by lending money at high interest rates. But was this negative image the only way lawyers were portrayed in the press? Did lawyers have no redeeming features in this volatile penal colony, where abuse was a popular hobby? What attempts were made to limit the fees charged by lawyers or did any lower their fees voluntarily? To answer these and other questions this paper will analyse the evidence that has survived about how lawyers were perceived, mainly in the newspapers but also in private letters and literary works.

Stefan Petrow teaches Australian, British and European history in the School of History and Classics at the University of Tasmania. His research interests include the legal history of Tasmania.

ALL WELCOME!

Thursday 11 April, 2013 at 5.30 p.m.

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