

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Unconventional woman the star of historian's prize-winning biography

A University of Tasmania historian's biography of a pioneering Victorian woman has won the \$25,000 National Biography Award.

Historian Dr Alison Alexander, Adjunct Researcher in the University Humanities Faculty, received the accolade for her book *The Ambitions of Jane Franklin: Victorian Lady Adventurer*.

The British Lady Franklin was the wife of Sir John Franklin, an arctic explorer who became the Governor of Tasmania in 1837.

In the 1980s Dr Alexander wrote a book about the wives of early Tasmanian governors and always thought she would like to devote a whole biography to Jane Franklin, because she was such an interesting and unique woman.

Dr Alexander said she was "absolutely astounded" by the news of her win.

"I'm usually just working away at home, so to suddenly win a national prize is absolutely wonderful."

Dr Alexander said Jane Franklin left behind a huge amount of diaries and letters, providing a wealth of material and the opportunity to "really get to know her."

"She climbed mountains, she walked to the West Coast; nothing stopped her. It's wonderful to write about a woman who was so adventurous and courageous- she dared to be herself. When women were expected to stay at home, she didn't."

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen congratulated Dr Alexander on her achievement.

"The University is fortunate indeed to have such a respected historian as part of our History and Classics program. Dr Alexander's latest publication is a fascinating account of a woman whose courage and compassion still serve as an inspiration today.

"The University is also proud to have a close relationship with Jane Franklin Hall, named in honour of Lady Franklin, the residential college where so many of our students stay during their time studying with us."

The award-winning publication is available at Fullers and Just Tassie Books.

Dr Alexander is now working on her next book, which tells the story of Maria Riseley, Edward Lord and Hobart's first 20 years.

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