

# HSSA History

Newsletter of the Historical Society of South Australia

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January 1999

## 25 Years of History

This year the Historical Society of South Australia celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary --- our Silver Jubilee. A number of special functions are planned, including a garden party and an annual dinner that will be rather more lavish than usual.


Our activities begin on Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, with an evening entitled "Celebrating 25 years of history in the community", which will begin at 8 p.m. in the Prince Philip Theatre at Prince Alfred College, Kent Town. There will be four speakers, all of them foundation members of the Society, who will be delivering their own reminiscences and reflections on the last twenty-five years.

Dr. John Tregenza, former Reader in History at the University of Adelaide, was the person who moved the original motion to set up the HSSA at a meeting held at the Art Gallery on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1974. He believed that it was important to have a society that could act as an organised voice on matters of historical significance. He intends to deliver the very speech he made at the time and to look at the extent to which the Society has fulfilled its objectives.

Associate Professor Peter Howell, of the Flinders University History Department, will speak about the changing emphases in the subject matter of history. He recalls the talk given at that first meeting by Eric Richards on "History From Below" which described the growing trend towards investigating the lives of the general citizenry rather than just the well-known and powerful. He will look at how this has persisted in the recent explosion of oral history as a vital source of information.

Brian Samuels, Principal Heritage Officer of Heritage SA, will examine the last twenty-five years by looking at

history as a socially useful calling which provides both a sense of belonging in the present as well as insights into appropriate directions for the future.


And Ron Gibbs, who has worked for over twenty years as a history teacher and consultant in education, will talk about the teaching of history in schools and the historical differences between South Australia and the other states. 

## Silver, silver, silver!

Still in keeping with the theme of our Silver Jubilee, the March meeting will be entirely devoted to that noble metal. Richard Phillips, a Technical Officer with the Bureau of Meteorology, will speak on "A Celebration of Silver in South Australia" on Friday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, at 8 p.m. at our usual venue.

He has spent twenty-five years researching Australian silverware and the role played by silver in people's lives from the time of settlement until World War I. He will be talking about everyday domestic items, such as cutlery, napkin-rings and snuff-boxes, as well as high-profile silverware created as trophies or presentation pieces.

A fine example of the latter is the silver cup (*pictured left*) presented to Richard Schomburgk in 1865 by the residents of Gawler when he left to become the Director of the Botanic Gardens in Adelaide. (His great-granddaughter, Dr. Pauline Payne, is a member of our Council.) The photograph, which is reproduced here by kind permission of the Trustees of the Botanic Gardens, is one of over fifty slides that will be shown during the talk.

The development of silverware will be seen to reflect that of our society, its industries and its social norms. 



## The Historical Society of South Australia Inc.

Founded 1974

P.O. Box 519, Kent Town, S.A. 5071

Meetings are held on the first Friday of each month at 8 p.m. in the Prince Philip Theatre, Prince Alfred College, Kent Town. All welcome.

### THE OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY ARE:

- To promote the collection, preservation and classification of source material of all kinds relating to South Australian and Australian history.
- To publish historical records and articles.
- To promote the interchange of information among members of the Society by lectures, readings, discussions, field trips and exhibitions.
- To arouse interest in and promote the study of history, especially that of South Australia and Australia.
- To co-operate with similar societies throughout Australia.
- To do such things as are conducive or incidental to the attainment of any of the above objects.

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**History SA Editor:** Mr. J. Healey, 27 Germein St, Semaphore, 5019. Ph 8449 2268.

## Remarkable Tales

This year we are to be treated to a series of lectures describing a wide variety of remarkable experiences and dramatic events.

At our April meeting, the President, Dr. Rob Nicol, will regale us with the story of "That Old Heathen: The Extraordinary Life and Travels of Wilton Hack" --- a Baptist minister, turned Theosophist, who led an exotic life of travel and public addresses on his rather eccentric views.

In May, Michelle Cunningham, part-time tutor in History at Adelaide University, will speak to us about the experiences of her father, Tom Earley, in Borneo prisoner-of-war camps in World War II, and how the men used entertainment and educational activities to keep up their morale.

The June lecture, entitled "Femina Ludens: Women in South Australian Sport", will be delivered by sports historian, Dr. John Daly, who will critically review the development of S.A. women's increasing involvement in sport.


At the July meeting, Anne Herraman, post-graduate student in History at Flinders University, will give a talk with the rousing title of "Irish Girls Defend their Honour and their Rights!" She will show that Irish immigrant girls, usually portrayed as

victims, were in fact extremely strong-willed, feisty and quite capable of defending themselves.

In August, Dr. Judith Raftery, senior lecturer in History at Adelaide University, will speak on "Saving SA's Babies" --- an overview of the Mothers and Babies Health Association since 1909, focussing on the concept of "expert advice and instruction" as a strategy for infant welfare.

Dr. Roger Cross, senior lecturer in the Graduate School of Education at La Trobe University, will deliver a talk at our September meeting entitled "Fallout over Adelaide: Hedley Marston and the 1956 British Bomb Test" --- the dramatic story of one of the biggest cover-ups and controversies in Australian science. New evidence will be presented concerning the dangers posed to the people of Adelaide at the time.

In October, Dr. Karen George, a consultant historian, will tell the story of the Loxton post-war soldier settlement, looking at the childhood of the settlers, their war experiences and what they brought to their new life in South Australia.

And finally, in November, Dr. Leith MacGillivray, a former education officer, will deliver a talk on "The Worthy Sisterhood" --- stories of the "founding mothers" of 1836 drawn from their letters, diaries and reminiscences. 

## Poltalloch: historic lakeside settlement

The Society's first field trip of the year will be to Poltalloch Station, near Narrung, on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, and will take place on Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup>.

The settlement was first established in 1839 by the Malcolm family from Poltalloch estate in Argyllshire, Scotland, and there are still a few buildings dating from their era. The Malcolm's ran cattle on 4,000 acres for many years until the property was bought in 1873 by the Bowman brothers.


The Bowman family had come out to Tasmania in 1829 and three of the sons, Edmund, John and William, made their way to South Australia in 1838-39, bringing sheep with them, to set up as pastoral pioneers in the mid-North. When they took over Poltalloch, John Bowman had the central homestead complex and the shearing shed built by 1876. Both are still in use and members will be shown over them by Beth Cowan, whose husband, Chris, is the great-great-grandson of John Bowman. She will give a background history of the estate as she escorts us around.

The settlement was like a little village, and a very isolated one. Everything had to come and go by paddle-steamer, the wharf for which can still be seen. We will be able to inspect the general store, the carpenter's and blacksmith's workshops, the village green, the meat store, the groom's room and the buggy room.

There are also displays of old farm tools and machinery, including the rope and trolley which featured in the rather spectacular salvage operation carried out on the *Dora Basset* in the 1930's. The boat went aground on the beach of Younghusband's Peninsula on the edge of the Southern Ocean. The people of Poltalloch, led by Keith Bowman, the son of John, set up a camp on the beach and proceeded to lay railway tracks across the sandhills. The boat was then hauled on a trolley all the way across the dunes and into the Coorong.

The tour of the property will conclude in the front gardens of the homestead, overlooking Lake Alexandrina.

Members are advised that numbers are limited for this trip and booking is essential. Please ring either Patricia Sumerling, on 8362 8262, or Gaye Brown, on 8278 5370, if you would like to go. The cost will be approximately \$25, all inclusive.

It is suggested that everyone bring a picnic basket, preferably full of food, and that you wear sensible footwear and use sunscreen. 

## S.A. in the 60's

Classic country scenes of South Australia in the 1960's will feature in an exhibition at the State Library from February to April. "Captured by Cork" will present the photography of Gawler-born Frank Cork, 1911-1993, whose collection is preserved in the archives of the Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

Cork was always a country boy at heart, as is evident in photo titles such as "You Can Have the City, Mate", and he loved Yorke Peninsula especially. His images comprise landscapes, seascapes, sensitive portraits and beautifully caught moments. His studies of Port Vincent show the play of light upon the water, the dramatic skies and the fascination of children for the sea.

Cork entered his large-format, black and white prints in many competitions around Australia from the 1950's through to the 1970's and won numerous awards. A first-rate collection of his exhibition photographs was donated to the State Library shortly before his death and this has been recently enhanced by further donations, from his nieces, of photos, trophies, medallions and commercial art work.

"Captured by Cork" will be on display at the State Library from February 6<sup>th</sup> to April 18<sup>th</sup>.



## New members

The Society is pleased to welcome the following new members: Mrs. S. Burley, Ms. S. Richards, and Mrs. M. and Mr. H. Carter.




## History SA deadline

The deadline for all material for the March 1999 issue is Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup>. It should be addressed to John Healey, Editor, *History SA*, 27 Germein St., Semaphore, SA 5019.

The material may be hand-written, typed or submitted on floppy disc using Microsoft Word. Discs will, of course, be returned.

The editor will be especially pleased to receive articles on historical subjects relating to South Australia. If you are doing research, or if you simply like turning things up, and you have something of interest to share, whether it be short snippets of information or longer articles of up to 1200 words, please forward them for consideration.

Inexperience in writing articles should not be considered a barrier. I will be happy to assist anyone in preparing their material. --- Editor. 



# Mortlock database now on the Net

Almost fifty thousand historical images of South Australia and its people are now available to anyone with Internet access. They form a significant part of the Mortlock Library South Australiana Database which was launched recently by State Historian, Dr. Rob Nicol.

The wide-ranging pictorial collections include photographs of city streets and buildings, country landscapes, events of the day, portraits of people from all walks of life, industrial and farming scenes, grand public occasions, gatherings such as picnics and sporting events, shipping, the arts, fashion and many, many more. There is also a host of quirky, off-beat images, totally characteristic of their time and serving to illustrate the maxim, "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there."

The original images exist in many forms --- glass negatives, daguerreotypes, lantern slides, photoprints, ambrotypes, opatypes and tintypes --- and are carefully stored for permanent preservation. Since 1991 visitors to the Mortlock Library have had access to originals or copies of all these in the Mortlock Reading Room and have also been able to view the photos on videodisc. The new website is a great improvement on the videodisc. The Internet address of the database is <http://143.216.21.3:84/screens/opacmenu.html>.

The website is well-organised and easily searched. However some may need a guide to explore it fully. The State Library is running training sessions for the public on how to use the database. They are fully booked for January and February but more will follow. To reserve a place, phone James McDonald on 8207 7215.

The database currently contains over 87,000 references to material held in the Mortlock Library. Most of the references are


to photographs and artworks, and of these 54,000 have images attached to the reference. That is, they can be viewed directly on the computer screen. (Approximately 10% of them may only be viewed in the Library, for copyright or cultural reasons.) The two photos on this page are drawn from the database and are reproduced by kind permission of the Mortlock Library of South Australiana.

There are currently about 28,000 pictorial references which do not have the images attached on the database. Indexing of this collection is almost complete, though it is not certain when the images will be added to the website. There are also the 11,000 photos and artworks which have been received since 1991. Digitisation of these is under way and the images will be progressively loaded onto the database from early this year.

But the Mortlock Database is not just a set of pretty pictures. It also contains 5,000 references to items (such as articles, illustrations and extracts) in printed sources (newspapers, periodicals, books and pamphlets) held in the Library. Indexing of more than 30 current South Australian periodicals was recommenced in May, 1998, and much retrospective work has been done since. Additional titles are added to the list each month.

The main subject emphases are South Australian biography and genealogy, and various aspects of South Australian history and geography --- e.g. places, regions, events, organisations, buildings, gardens, transportation and disasters.

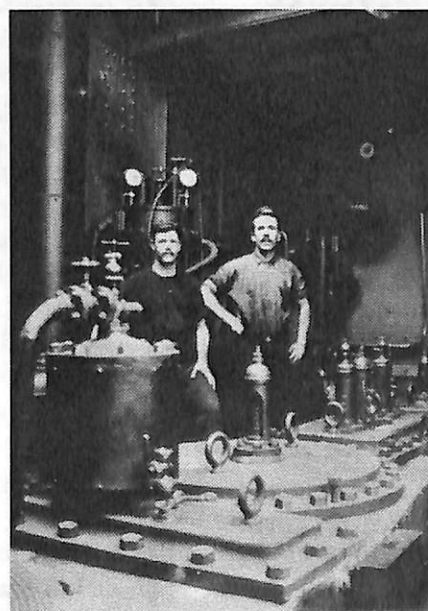
About 3,000 of these references were converted from the Subject and Place card index and funding has been allocated for another 30,000 records to be transferred to the database over the next two years.

As someone who has only recently been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the computer age, the editor can recommend this website not only to the casual browser but also to the researcher seeking relevant illustrations which are themselves historical documents. 



*Above: Adelaide ice-cream vendor, Leslie Ivo Norton. Circa 1912. Mortlock Ref. No. B 33932*

*Below: Workers in the engine-room of the S.S. "Moonta". Circa 1912. Mortlock Ref. No. B 36168*



## Spencer Gulf shipwreck survey

Work has begun on the seventh in the series of eight shipwreck surveys of South Australia conducted as part of the Maritime Heritage Programme of Heritage South Australia. The appointment was announced recently of Mr. Nathan Richards as Project Officer for the shipwreck survey of Spencer Gulf. He will be assisted by Maritime Heritage Officer, Mr. Terry Arnott, who has been doing preliminary work on the Spencer Gulf database and has already added 30 more wrecks to the previous total of 130.

There are approximately eight hundred known shipwrecks scattered along South Australia's coastline and the figure is increasing all the time. This is due in part to more wrecks being found but a great deal of information has been gained from the thorough researching of archival shipping documents and from oral sources, the recollections of local families and fishing people.

This has been an important part of the six surveys already completed. Project officers work personally with the local communities who often have a close association with their shipwrecks and valuable knowledge of the folklore attached to them and the roles that their ancestors played at the time. Information also comes from recreational divers and from professional fishermen.

These sources are vital because the wrecks of fishing boats, for example, were often not recorded in the newspapers, which tended to concentrate on the sinking of passenger ships, preferably involving loss of life or heroic rescues. But the smaller vessels are equally important. They tell us much about the fishing industry and the everyday lives of the people involved in it. In addition, they often provide the only surviving evidence of construction details and particular styles of naval architecture.


Spencer Gulf has seen many memorable wrecks. The first to be recorded was that of the cutter from Matthew Flinders' *H.M.S. Investigator*, which went down in 1802, at Memory Cove on the south-eastern tip of Eyre Peninsula. The eight men on board were lost and Flinders named the headland Cape Catastrophe. There was an ebb tide at the time so the wreckage would have been washed out to sea. Almost certainly, nothing remains.

Another cutter, the *Frances*, was wrecked on the rocks of South Neptune Island in 1840 while on a sealing trip. The crew of five subsisted for fifty days on a diet of penguins, catching in all 120 of the creatures, which they referred to as "geese". There was no freshwater on the island and they

were forced to collect rainwater from the rockpools. Eventually the master and one crewman set off in a dinghy patched together with pieces of wreckage and made for Port Lincoln, where the Government Resident was alerted and a whaleboat despatched to rescue the others.

Further north, on the eastern side of the gulf, Wardang Island has nine known shipwrecks around its coast. For the benefit of recreational divers, Heritage SA has set up an underwater trail with markers on the sea-bed. Next to each wreck is a concrete block with a glass plaque attached, giving a brief history of the vessel.

The most extensive of the island's shipwrecks is that of the *Songvaar*, which sank on the same day as the *Titanic*, having the misfortune to settle on its own anchor while berthed at the outer anchorage. It went down with a pierced hull and a full cargo of grain but stayed upright for eight years until finally demolished with explosives.

The survey of Spencer Gulf is expected to reveal many more wrecks as well as producing a wealth of information, vital to the management of the sites, and of lasting value to maritime historians, shipwreck enthusiasts and archaeologists. 



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*The owner, Helen Dickeson, is Curator of  
the Clare Regional History Collection.*

## An extraordinary restlessness

On February 18<sup>th</sup>, the Royal Geographical Society of S.A. will screen *Home of the Blizzard*, Frank Hurley's film of Douglas Mawson's 1911-1914 Australasian Antarctic Expedition.


Hurley, born in Sydney in 1885, was already an experienced and diligent professional when he joined Mawson, but his work on the expedition established his reputation as one of Australia's most important photographers and cinematographers.

Mawson wrote of him "his enthusiasm and resourcefulness knew no bounds" and praised his "artistic taste and perseverance" that produced beautiful photographs under conditions of exceptional difficulty. On one occasion he fell through the ice into freezing water but managed to extricate himself and his gear unaided. On another he was picked up by the winds and dumped, still holding his camera, several feet away.

*Home of the Blizzard* was a landmark in Australian cinema and was largely responsible for the financial success of Mawson's venture. Among other things the film records the team leaving Hobart, the wildlife on Macquarie Island and the expeditioners in the Antarctic.

Frank Hurley's life was crammed with events and journeyings. His "extraordinary restlessness", noted by a press reporter, was to take him to every continent of the world. He joined Shackleton on his Antarctic expedition of 1914-1917 when their ship *Endurance* was crushed by the compacted ice-floes of the Weddell Sea. Hurley was on hand to take one of the most evocative photographs of all time -- a shot of *Endurance* as "a spectre ship set in a world of rime crystals". He also managed to film the final moments of the ship as she was crushed, ignoring the crow's nest as it fell within ten feet of where he stood turning the handle of his camera.

In 1917-18 he was in Flanders and the Middle East and produced both striking still shots and stirring patriotic films. Other exploits followed. He joined Ross and Keith Smith in Darwin for the last leg of their historic flight from England, sailed up the little-known reaches of the Fly River in New Guinea, and criss-crossed Australia producing photographic books of its natural glories. He died in 1962 from a heart attack suffered when descending into Weebubbie Cave on the Nullarbor.

*Home of the Blizzard* will be screened at 5.30 p.m. on February 18<sup>th</sup> at the Institute Building, cnr. Kintore Ave. It is a 67-minute silent movie and will be introduced and narrated by Valerie Sitters, the Geographical Society Librarian. 

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## New address for HSSA

The attention of members is drawn to the Society's new postal address. All correspondence should be directed to the Secretary, HSSA, P.O. Box 519, Kent Town, SA 5071.




## Honorary auditor sought

The Historical Society is in urgent need of an auditor and would like to hear from anyone interested in assisting us. The position is a voluntary one but the work is not onerous. If you can help, please phone the Treasurer, Mrs. Avis Huckel, on 8277 2953.



## Advertising in *History SA*

*History SA* accepts advertising for goods and services appropriate to its readership. The rates are: Full page \$100, Half page \$65, Quarter page \$35.

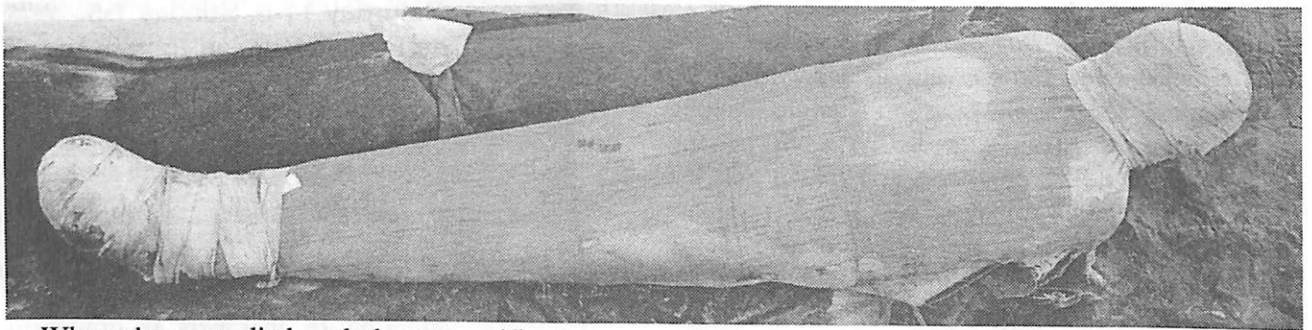
Copy or finished art work, together with a cheque for the appropriate amount, (made payable to the Historical Society of SA Inc.) should be sent to the Editor, *History SA*, 27 Germein St., Semaphore, 5019. Enquiries, phone 8449 2268. 

# The Adventures of the Man in Red

by John Healey

The mummy wrapped in red, which lies in an hermetically sealed glass case in the Egyptian Room of the South Australian Museum lay quietly at rest for some two thousand years on the banks of the River Nile. Its subsequent progress to Adelaide, however, in the twentieth century, was to prove somewhat more eventful.

The mummy is that of a man from Nubia who lived in the area around Egypt's present border with Sudan. It dates from the Ptolemaic era, 332 BCE - 30 BCE (Before Common Era), when the descendants of the Macedonian Greeks, the Ptolemies, ruled Egypt after its conquest by Alexander the Great.



When the man died and the mummification procedure --- involving evisceration, dehydration and embalmment --- had been carried out, the body was wrapped in several layers of coarse white linen bandage about 100 mm wide, and then encased in a fine red cotton shroud. Red was commonly used for males at this time. Lastly, a few turns of the coarser bandage were wound around the head and feet.

The mummy was placed in a small, undecorated chamber at the bottom of a vertical shaft. It was one of several hundred graves in a cemetery situated at Awam on the western bank of the Nile, about half-way between Aswan and the ancient temple of Abu-Simbel. And this cemetery was one of over a hundred spread out along the large alluvial mud-banks of the river in that area.

## Flooding threatens the tomb

In the early years of this century the building of the Aswan Dam necessitated the urgent survey and excavation of archaeological sites in the Nubian region that was to be flooded. The Harvard Exploration Society undertook this project with the support of the Egyptian government. The work commenced in 1906 under the direction of

Professor George Reisner, a world-famous archaeologist, and continued for four years. One of the senior anthropologists on the team was Dr. Frederick Wood Jones, a well-known Adelaide medical man who contributed much to the early anthropological studies of Australian aboriginals.

The burial chamber of our mummy is catalogued in *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1908-1909* as Grave No. 794 of Cemetery 89. There is a photograph in the Report of the mummy lying on the floor of the chamber before being disturbed, and another showing the bricked-up doorway to the tomb. We are fortunate that, out of all the mummies that were excavated, ours was one of the few chosen to be illustrated in this volume.

The mummies of the wealthy were usually enclosed in coffins or sarcophagi, often with rich decoration and opulent goods to accompany them in the after-life. If the dead were less wealthy, their plain, wrapped mummies were simply

laid on stones on the floor of the tomb and the door to the chamber closed with large sandstone slabs or mud bricks. Such was the case with our Nubian who was excavated early in 1909 and removed to a safe place.

A few years later World War I broke out and Australian forces were sent to Egypt. Among them was Dr. Archibald Watson, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Adelaide Medical School. (Pictured below). He was an eminent surgeon with an extensive knowledge of anatomy, as well as being a very colourful and eccentric character.



From 1915 to 1916 Watson served as Chief Pathologist, with the rank of Major, at the 1st Australian Stationary Hospital, which was based on the outskirts of Cairo. Watson was an avid collector of anatomical specimens. (He was also responsible for the

skeleton of Max Dreyssig in the Mammal Gallery of the Museum.) At some point in 1915 he acquired the mummy from James Quibell, another well-known archaeologist who was at the time Keeper of the Cairo Museum. Apparently Watson kept the mummy with him in camp and thereby hangs a tale.

### Injured in inaction

One night the mummy was stolen by a soldier and propped up against the wall of Watson's tent. A sentry, thinking it to be an unauthorised intruder, challenged it and, receiving no reply, stabbed it in the side with his bayonet. The "wound" was not properly treated until 1985 when careful conservation work was done on the mummy. Traces of the repair can be seen on the right side of the body, in the neighbourhood of the wrist. The tear in the fabric was found to match the dimensions of a military bayonet. This story came, via Paul Lawson, from Jack Conroy, a formator at the Museum, who knew most of the staff well and may be regarded as a reliable source.

When Watson returned to Australia early in 1916 he brought the mummy with him. We know from his personal diary that he had it prepared for travel while in Cairo. His entry, for December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915, reads:

*Mortuary man, for mummy packing 10/-.*

On his return to Adelaide he handed it over to Edward Stirling, then the Honorary Curator of Ethnology at the Museum. Stirling in turn presented it to the Museum with Watson's approval.

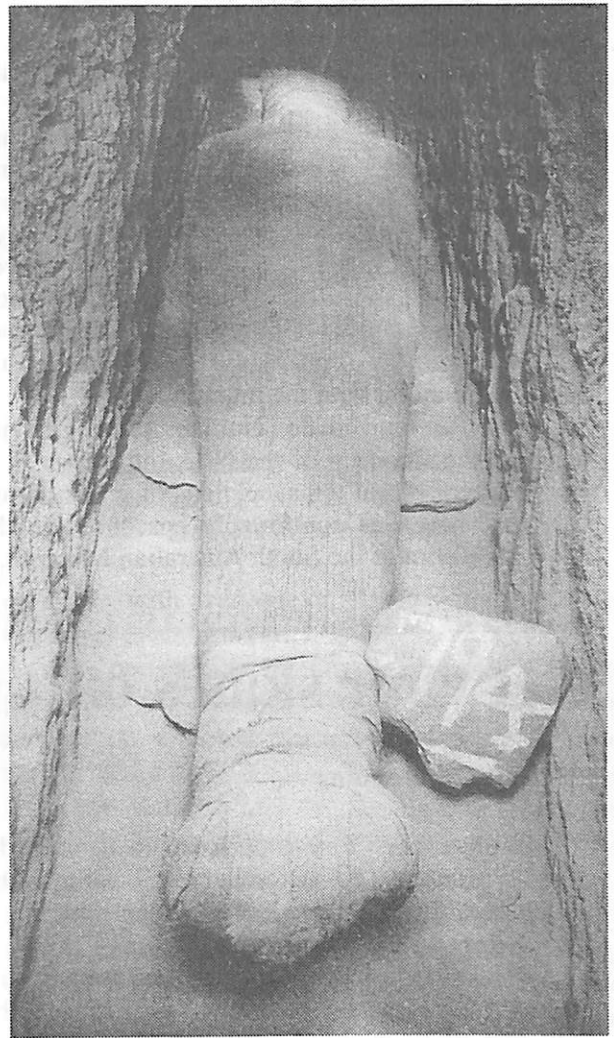
### Detained for questioning

On the 21st March, 1916, the Director, Edgar Waite, supervised the arrival and installation of the Nubian mummy. The entry in his diary reads:

*21 Tues. Fitted up a case for Watson's mummy. I had two men carrying it to the Museum & one of the Staff-Sergeants came along and said to me, 'Looks as tho' you have a body there.' 'Yes,' I said, holding my nose, 'but it's been dead a long time.' He went closer to have a sniff. When the men told him it was a mummy his realisation of the joke was audible.*

Waite announced the acquisition of the mummy more formally in his report to the Museum Committee, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1916:

*Returning from Egypt, Prof. Watson brought with him a Mummy (from the Soudan) . . . . It has been suitably cased and placed alongside the mummy of the lady of high rank which has been exhibited for many years.*



*The Nubian mummy lying in its tomb at Awam, Egypt, prior to removal, in 1909.*

### Another small piece to the puzzle

A search of the Museum's correspondence files at State Records, Netley, has unearthed one further item of information which does not seem to have been previously noted. In April, 1920, when the collection of Egyptian antiquities was being described and prepared for exhibition, the Acting General Secretary of the Museum wrote to Professor Watson requesting "any particulars concerning the mummy which may be in your possession". In his reply, dated 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1920, Watson says:

*Regarding your courteous note of 8<sup>th</sup> inst, the said mummy was procured from Dr.[Reisner] a German-American of the Harvard Exploration Society together with nearly a hundred others in the Sudan in 1915. . . . The mummy is that of a Priest.*

The word "Priest" is written in large letters and underlined three times as if Watson was quite ⇒

definite about it. The fact does not seem to be mentioned in any of the Museum's other records or descriptions of the mummy. Although the statement is unconfirmed there is no reason to doubt its accuracy. Watson was a constant and meticulous recorder of information. His personal diaries (held in the National Library, Canberra) and his surgical notebooks (held in the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Archives, Melbourne) are a testament to that. He is not likely to have made this statement unless he had good authority for it. Presumably he acquired the information along with the mummy.

And so our male Nubian priest, having survived the flooding of the Nile, the thrust of an Aussie bayonet and the suspicions of a nosy Staff-Sergeant, now lies comfortably ensconced in the Egyptian Room of the South Australian Museum.

It would be nice to think that he converses on occasion with Renpit Nefert, the lady of high rank in the next case. Though it must be observed, she can be a little stiff at times.

#### References:

- C.M. Firth: *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1908-1909*, Cairo, 1912.  
 Alan Rowe: *A guide to the Egyptian Antiquities in the South Australian Museum* (1921)  
 Typescript held in S.A.M. Archives.  
 E.R. Waite: *The Diaries of Edgar Ravenswood Waite*.  
 Transcriptions held in S.A.M. Archives.  
 Archibald Watson: *Personal Diaries*. Held in National Library, Canberra.  
 S.A.M. Files held at State Records, Netley. Ref. Nos.  
 GRG 19/5/29904, GRG 19/15/1223,  
 GRG 19/398/1

## Get your skates on!

by Geoffrey Manning

In the French Patent Office there is recorded under the date of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1819, and credited to one Pettibled, a device involving the principle of the roller skate. About the same time an Englishman named Tyers invented a skate with five narrow wheels in a single row, so arranged that only two of them were on the floor at the same time.

The next skate was patented in France in 1828 and another exhibited at the Paris Opera in 1849.

However it was reserved for an American, James L. Plimpton, to perfect the roller-skate, to develop a system of rinks and to obtain the patronage of the best classes of society. He patented his invention in the USA in 1863 and in England two years later. The sport, in the course of time, came to be known as "rinking".

Coppin's skating rink, the first in Adelaide, was opened in Hines Assembly Room on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1868, where "a moderately good attendance" had to undergo the fixing of a pair of false soles which had under them two pairs of wooden wheels. The scene was described as "decidedly a novel one" and most participants agreed that it was "a capital exercise".

Such was the popularity of this new pastime in some quarters that in July, 1868, a dozen gentlemen met to discuss the formation of a skating rink at the Town Hall. They were debarred the use of it because "upon trial the floor was unsuited for the purpose". They then applied for a lease of the Exhibition Building but were denied that also following government intervention. A reminiscent report in 1888 said:

*The facilities then afforded for the exercise were not good, and there existed a sentiment that such skating was only a parlour game, well enough perhaps in its way, but something to be considered as effeminate by the lover of genuine sports. The idea of hobbling and shuffling around a small dark hall on a set of little wheels was an object of ridicule for the paragaphers of the time.*

By 1878 a new wave of enthusiasm hit Adelaide when Peter Bastard, son of the enterprising lessee of the city baths, had the northern side of his premises floored with kauri pine. When completed it measured 75 by 25 feet, with space around the rink for interested spectators.

In June 1878, "the craze for skating on wheels" having taken a firm hold on many Adelaideans, Mr. H.J. Rice opened a rink in Bent Street. The floor was made of white cement and covered over 2,000



*The Exhibition Building, North Terrace, in 1890, a popular venue for roller-skating for many years.  
 Mortlock Ref. No B 40565*

square feet. Two neat and comfortable dressing rooms were provided, between which was a boarded promenade for onlookers. The walls were decorated with paintings representing skating and kindred sports in other countries, and football matches were played on the ice.

By mid-1888, an enterprising American, A.N. Ridgley, had opened the Columbia Elite Roller Skating Rink in the Exhibition Building on North Terrace, with seating for 3,000 patrons and a rink measuring 195 by 95 feet. The rental for the premises was £30 a week.

Its opening prompted some of the local wowsers to raise objections to ladies being permitted entry without a male escort and it was suggested that, if this practice was prohibited, "the objectionable female element would be excluded", thereby conveying "a very wholesome and much needed lesson to the daughters of South Australia."

One aggrieved "daughter of S.A." took umbrage and said:

*Would it not be more reasonable, instead of chastising us with whips for our misfortune, to chastise with scorpions those of his own sex who so selfishly ignore the claims of their female friends and leave them to go out unescorted or stay at home?*

The Columbia Rink took fifty carpenters to lay the floor and upon completion was described as "a masterpiece of joiners' skills". The skate room boasted 2,000 pairs of American skates, with sixteen varieties to choose from. Twenty youths were employed to attend to the skaters while a large corps of "gentlemanly attaches" instructed beginners and a band supplied music.

The next revival of rinking came in August 1893 when Messrs. Syme and Sison (lessees) and Messrs. Hamilton and Morris (managers) transformed the premises of 190 Pirie Street into a spacious rink measuring 110 by 35 feet. This venue was still being used in 1922 when attendances were almost as large as in the pre-war days.

In 1904 E.G. Webb leased the Exhibition Building and advised the public that over 3,000 pairs of skates had been acquired and that expert roller skaters from Melbourne were to be engaged to act as instructors. This venue, known as "Webb's Olympia" was opened by the Lord Mayor, Lewis Cohen, on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1904.

Fun was the keynote and the management had a slick slogan: "Why live and be miserable when you can live and be happy by visiting Olympia? Two hours fun for sixpence!" On a Saturday night, spectators could watch 300 to 400 skaters moving on whirring wheels in an unending procession. The promoters would also organise monster masquerade



*A 'four-in-hand' at the opening of the Mt. Gambier Skating Rinks, 1908.*

*Mortlock Ref. No. B 39806*

carnivals, with everyone on the floor in fancy dress or formal evening wear.

For one carnival the Olympia brought a unique attraction to Adelaide. Billed as "Five Baby Incubators. Greatest scientific advancement for saving infant life", it came direct from the World's Fair, St Louis, U.S.A. A leading Adelaide maternity home supplied three babies and two attendant nurses to demonstrate these machines.

The demise of the skating rink was hastened by the coming of silent movies when a company erected a canvas theatre opposite the Exhibition Building to seat 3,000 people. Its American projecting machine was the best in the city. The new movies quickly captured the enthusiasm of the public and, although other skating rinks operated for a few years longer, the Olympia had to close down permanently.

By 1949 Our Boys' Institute in Wakefield Street conducted Adelaide's only roller skating rink. Its floor of the latest style granilific cement eliminated dust and noise, contrasting strongly with the floors of the 1880's.

*But youngsters still go through the same paces as their grandparents as they learn to master the wheels. Their tunes are different, and so are the skates, but they waltz in the same old way.*

#### References:

*Register*, 23 May 1868, 4 July 1868, 25 July 1868, 27 April 1888, 1 & 3 May 1888, 4 September 1888, 24 August 1893. *Chronicle*, 10 August 1878. *Observer*, 20 April 1878, 22 & 29 June 1878. *Express*, 1 August 1878, 10 April 1879, 29 June 1887, 26 March 1888, 3 July 1888, 8 & 14 April 1904. *Pictorial Australian*, March 1888. *Advertiser*, 6 May 1922. *The Mail*, 3 December 1949.

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## Rammers, jawbones & artificial horizons

When the South Australian Literary and Scientific Association was formed in London in 1834, one of its initiatives was the establishment of a library to accompany settlers to the new colony. This was the nucleus for an archival collection that also came to include art works and historical artifacts. Of its several sections perhaps the most fascinating is the Historical Relics Collection which was begun in the 1880's by the Art Gallery and, in 1986, came under the aegis of the History Trust, with the Migration Museum being responsible for its management and conservation.

The Historical Relics Collection of South Australia is a diverse accumulation of artifacts of notable significance to the social history of our state since colonization. It comprises approximately four hundred items, most of them associated with the early settlement of the province and many donated by descendants of the first settlers.

For example, there are pieces of grass picked by Elizabeth (Bessie) Fisher near the Old Gum Tree shortly after she disembarked from the Buffalo! (Her father, James Hurtle Fisher, became the first Mayor of Adelaide.)

There is the jawbone of Burke and Wills' camel, "Linda", and the hoof of Burke's horse, "Billy", both from the 1860-61 expedition. There are the rammer and the mallet used to drive the last spike of the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin in 1872. And a beam of wood from the steam-driven flour-mill set up in the 1840's in Hindmarsh by John Ridley, the inventor of the "stripper".

The collection contains items that belonged to Governors, explorers, soldiers, surveyors, printers, policemen, brewers and bank managers. Industries such as mining, whaling, communications, and transport are represented and there are also many personal items such as medals, clogs, uniforms, indenture papers, ink bottles and walking sticks.

There is Charles Sturt's paint-box, John McKinlay's rabbit-skin hunting bag, and George Goyder's set of drawing and surveying tools. One especially delicate piece is a christening handkerchief of Queen Adelaide's with her initials embroidered in the corner.

The bottom of a whisky pot-still is a relic of the first recorded brewery in South Australia. When John Warren, senior, obtained a grant of land at Mt. Crawford in 1838, it had not yet been surveyed and so he was forced to earn a living for a time by other means. With the permission of Governor Hindmarsh, he set up a brewery on the banks of the River Torrens somewhere in Adelaide. The exact site is not known, but a letter from Sturt to Grey at the time mentions it. Warren sold it two years later and shortly afterwards it was flooded out.

John McDouall Stuart is well represented with a smoking-cap and pipe, an exquisite scarf-ring carved from coral into the shape of a dragon, and two artificial horizons. (An artificial horizon was an apparatus used by explorers and surveyors, in conjunction with a sextant, to measure the angular altitudes of celestial bodies when on land --- that is, where there was no visible horizon. It consisted of

a tray filled with mercury in which the object was viewed by reflection. From the measurements taken, the observer's latitude could be calculated.)


One puzzling item is a silver-plated set comprising a sugar bowl, a pair of tongs and a cream jug, all in a presentation box. There is an inscription on the band of the sugar bowl which reads:

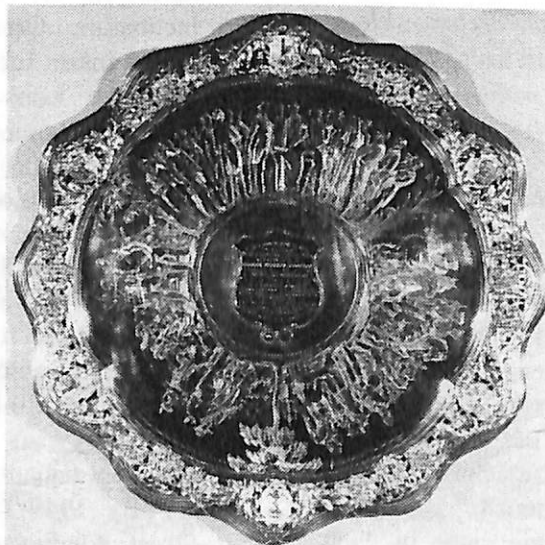
*R.F.T. from Kintore 1891*

The Earl of Kintore was the Governor of South Australia at the time but investigations

have not so far discovered the identity of "R.F.T."

But the centrepiece of the Historical Relics Collection must be the magnificent Tinline Salver (pictured above) which was fashioned in 1853 by London craftsmen, with engravings based on original sketches by the South Australian artist, S.T. Gill. Made of sterling silver and measuring 75 cms. across, it was presented to George Tinline, Acting Manager of the S.A. Banking Company, in recognition of his role in rescuing the state from the currency crisis and critical labour shortage resulting from the rush to the Victorian gold-fields.

The salver is one of the more pricey items in the Collection but, in terms of their heritage value, every one of these historical relics is priceless. 



*The editor is indebted for the above information to Jan Mudge, post-graduate student in History at Adelaide University. The photo of the Tinline salver is reproduced by kind permission of the Migration Museum.*