

History SA

Newsletter of the Historical Society of South Australia

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No. 144, September 1999


The scent of oranges .. & dust .. & rabbits

Fifty years ago this September, Thomas Playford officially opened the Loxton War Service Land Settlement scheme, designed to provide farm blocks to returned servicemen of World War II. This was to develop into the extensive citrus and stone fruit industry of today but the story of its beginnings is one of hard times, hard luck and very hard work, as Dr. Karen George, consultant historian, will show in our October lecture, "A Place of Their Own: War Service Land Settlement at Loxton 1948-1955". Her research began four years ago with an oral history project in which fifty people were interviewed, and portions of the tapes will be played during the talk so that we can hear the settlers' stories in their own words.

In all, 276 men, with their wives and children, came to Loxton. They were from a variety of backgrounds, though the first families, who arrived in 1948, tended to be people who had grown up on the land. Conditions were rough. Early settlers lived at the E&WS construction camp or in ex-internment camp huts. The land had been cleared completely and the resultant dust storms are apparently what people remember most. One lady, invited to tea by her neighbour, complimented her on her junket, delicately sprinkled with cinnamon, only to be told that the cinnamon was, in fact, simply the dust that had settled on the junket since it was made.

Rabbits were a constant enemy and devastated many a planting programme. There was no irrigation system so all watering had to be done by hand. This usually involved mounting a tank on the back of a tractor and lowering a hose to water each individual tree. One farmer remembers looking round one day

while on the tractor to find that the tree he had just watered had disappeared completely. It had vanished down a rabbit-hole!

The talk, accompanied by slides, will be given at the Prince Philip Theatre, Prince Alfred College, Kent Town, on Friday, October 1st, at 8.00 p.m. 


The women of '36

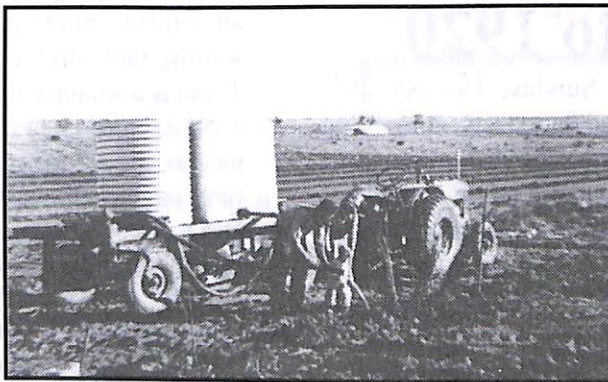
Between July and December of 1836, nine ships brought more than 500 emigrants to South Australia. Of these a third were women --- diverse in origin, age, status and skills. What they had in common, however, were the rites of birth, marriage and death, and by researching these in official and private records one can obtain intimate glimpses into the women's lives.

Dr. Leith MacGillivray, former education officer, will present us with some of their stories when she speaks on "A Worthy Sisterhood: the founding mothers of 1836", at our November meeting. Her material has been drawn from the women's own letters, diaries and reminiscences, as well as from newspaper

reports and official documents.

Birth and death, for some, were closely intertwined. Lucy Beare was pregnant when she arrived at Kangaroo Island on the *Duke of York* in July, 1836, with her husband and four children. She had a history of difficult labours and had lost other children in infancy. Within hours of her arrival on the isolated shore of Nepean Bay she gave birth to a daughter, who lived for two days. The following year Lucy bore another daughter who survived, but Lucy herself died during the birth.

Dr. MacGillivray will draw her examples from the high-born and the low-born, the well-known and the unknown, to bring us vignettes of these long-neglected lives. The talk will be given at our usual venue on Friday, November 5th, at 8.00 p.m. 



Hand-watering at Loxton, 1950.

The Historical Society of South Australia Inc.

Founded 1974

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

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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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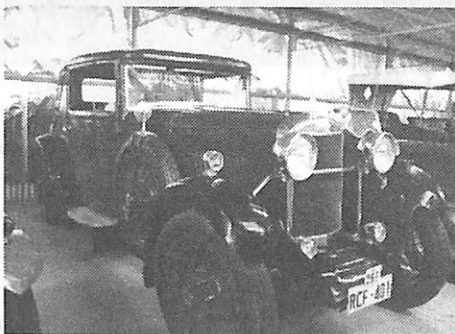
A bus-trip to 1920

The HSSA outing on Sunday, October 10th, promises to be a fascinating and varied day, comprising a coach trip through the heritage-rich district of Lenswood and Balhannah, a picnic lunch and a visit to the Wicks family museum and historic car collection.

We will leave from the War Memorial on North Terrace at 10.00 a.m. and residents of the hills may join the bus at the Uraidla Post Office at 10.30. On the way to Balhannah our tour leader, Dr. Geoffrey Bishop, will give a talk on the settlement of the area and the establishment of the Wicks Nursery.

Henry Wicks came to Adelaide in the late 1870s and obtained work at Pitt's Felixstow Nursery, one of the most comprehensive fruit-tree suppliers in the colony. In 1884 he married Emma Pitt and three years later purchased the business. In 1905 he bought the Balhannah property and since then four generations of Wicks have supplied fruit-trees to orchards all over Australia.


We will be visiting the original cottage on the property which has been converted into a museum. Four rooms have been recreated in the style of the 1920s, with most of the items deriving from the Wicks family. The sitting-room, for example, features



an Edison phonograph, a crystal set, a portable writing table and numerous portraits and post-cards. There is a wealth of paraphernalia on display, including a book-binding press, a blasting gun, apple-picking gauges and a rope-making machine, as well as various farm engines, including a horse-drawn orchard sprayer and a 1925 tractor.

After enjoying the picnic lunches (that we have brought with us), we will inspect the collection of veteran and vintage automobiles, immaculately restored over a period of forty years by Malcolm Wicks. Among these beautifully-crafted vehicles are a luxurious 1930 Sunbeam Coupé (left), imported from the U.K. by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, a 1924 Yellow Cab from Chicago and a 1926 South Australian Besst, a big, open tourer

which is the only known survivor of the ten assembled by May's Motor Works in Victoria Square.

On the way home we will tour through Lenswood and Stony Creek (site of a gold-rush in 1854) and be back to Uraidla by 2.30 p.m. and in the city by 3.30. The cost of the outing is \$20, payable on the day, which includes bus fare and admission charge. Numbers will be limited, so, to ensure a place, please book as soon as possible by phoning the Treasurer, Mrs. Avis Huckel, on 8277 2953. 

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I am writing about a news item that appeared in the July issue of *History SA*, namely, "Good news for authors".

Back in January 1996, I raised the matter of the fees charged by the State Library of South Australia for the published reproduction of some of its materials. The matter continued in subsequent issues of our Newsletter, but appeared to terminate with the July 1996 issue. I thumped the top of my office desk and regretted the passing of another valuable piece of our cultural heritage --- the availability of such material to all the members of our community, not just those who could afford to pay.

But I was wrong. The Friends of South Australia's Archives and its President, Mr. Gerald Fischer, have been working away quietly behind the scenes and have achieved a breakthrough: the Director of the State Library has conceded that "the Library generally does waive the fees in the case of South Australian family, local, church and non-profit organisational history authors".

However, as an author who has written about South Australian history but who no longer resides in South Australia, and as a university academic who wonders whether his organisation is regarded as "non-profit", I am still unclear about the meaning of the new policy. Perhaps the Director might enlighten the readers of *History SA*?

In the meantime, we should warmly congratulate and thank the Friends and their President. From one point of view it is perhaps a trivial victory, but I see it as an important one: a victory for the belief that people are as important as money, and that the people can have their voice heard if they are prepared to persist and persist and persist.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. John Jenkin

La Trobe University



Has anyone seen Daisy?

Ayers House Museum is looking for people to participate in an oral history project revolving around the life of anthropologist and Aboriginal welfare worker, Daisy Bates. Anyone who has seen or met her, or who has photographs, letters or other memorabilia relating to her, is asked to contact Leigh Summers on 8223 1234.

The project is being conducted in conjunction with an exhibition entitled "We Remember Daisy Bates" which will open at Ayers House on November 2nd. This will include many of Bates' personal possessions, such as shoes, clothing, spectacles, hats and handbags as well as a number of unpublished letters and photographs and an exhibition of paintings by Adelaide artist Judith Brooks.



'Dost thou think . . . there shall be no more cakes?'

--- Twelfth Night

After seventeen years of creating delicious suppers for the Society's meetings, Enid Ulbrich and Ila Hollands have regrettably decided to hang up their baking tins. They will continue to provide us with their feasts of cakes, biscuits, scones and slices until the end of the year, but will then need to hand over the duties to others.

Enid and Ila were both granted honorary life membership in 1997 for their long-term contribution to the success of our monthly meetings and the Council of the Historical Society would like once again to express its gratitude to them for their efficient and unstinting work.

We now need to find a handful of members who could share the responsibilities of providing supper once a month. All costs are, of course, reimbursed. If you are able to offer assistance, please ring Robert Nicol on 8297 9844.



New members

The Historical Society would like to welcome the following new members: Mr. Ian Bates, Mrs. Lesley Beresford, Mr. John Daly, Mr. Theodore Ellenbroek, Ms. Kathryn Gargett, Mrs. Elizabeth Guster and Mr. Max Millowick.



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

Missing Persons: Help Wanted!

by Peter Howell

Most members of the Historical Society will be familiar with that indispensable reference work, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. The result of a great national co-operative effort, it has been in production since the 1950s and many hundreds of people have contributed to it without payment. The fourteen volumes published to date contain lives of over 8,500 people, from all walks of life, who have made some mark in Australian history. A further two volumes, now in preparation, will contain another 1,300 lives of individuals who died before 1980.

Yet as the project has progressed, the researches of amateur, professional and academic historians of all kinds have brought to light knowledge of people who would certainly have been included in earlier volumes if only their significance had been understood at the time. Many of the lectures given at HSSA meetings over the last twenty-five years provide evidence of that.

It is now forty years since the subjects were chosen for the first two volumes of the *Dictionary*, that is, the entries on people who did their most important work in the period 1788-1850. Likewise, volumes 3-6, containing the lives of people who flourished in the period 1851-1890, were compiled in the early to mid-1960s. Our collective understanding of our past has grown enormously since those days and the South Australian Working Party of the *ADB* has been lobbying, for more than twenty years now, for the preparation of a supplementary volume.

The compilers of the *British Dictionary of National Biography*, which has been in progress since the 1880s, have had a similar experience and recently produced a supplementary volume to the *DNB*, with the sub-title *Missing Persons*. Its success has helped the cause of those of us who have long been calling for a supplement to the *ADB*.

A notable example of a South Australian "missing person" is the architect Edmund Wright, who had a hand in the design and erection of many now-cherished Adelaide buildings. In the 1960s, our architectural historians were still focusing their energies almost exclusively on studying Australia's heritage of Georgian, Regency and early-Victorian buildings, admired for their elegance, symmetry and relative simplicity. They scorned mid and late-Victorian architecture as heavy and vulgar, if not grotesque.


It was only in the 1970s, when developers proposed to demolish the remarkable King William Street building that had been erected in 1875-78 as the head office of the Bank of South Australia (a banking business founded in 1836 by George Fife

Angas), that significant numbers of people suddenly took an interest in that old structure, joined a movement for its preservation and began to ask who had designed it and what else he had contributed to our environment. The building was saved, cleaned and splendidly restored, and ever since has been known as Edmund Wright House. Its architect must have a high claim to be included in any supplement to the *ADB*. So must those marvellous letter-writers, Audrey Tennyson and Masie Smith, whose revealing accounts of the Federation era only came to public attention in our own day.

The Editorial Board of the *ADB* has now invited all its regional working parties to produce lists of individuals who flourished prior to the 1950s and who, it could be argued, ought to have been included in the *Dictionary*. To attract enough interest to be commercially viable, a supplementary volume would need to contain articles on perhaps 500 or 600 individuals. On a population basis, fifty or sixty of these ought to be South Australians.

This is where help is needed. May I appeal to members of the Society to suggest names of South Australians they think should be considered for inclusion in the possible supplementary volume? The *Dictionary's* early volumes, edited by the late Professor Douglas Pike, did ample justice to those who held high public office and to parliamentarians, and reasonably ample justice to leading churchmen, journalists, philanthropists, trade union leaders, sportsmen and businessmen. But there was a serious gender imbalance. It would be wonderful if S.A. could nominate at least another thirty women. There should also have been more entries on Aboriginal people, artists and thinkers, charity workers, eccentrics and villains, and more examples of those farmers, tradesmen and unskilled workers (such as Benjamin Boyce, discussed by Professor Richards in the first number of our Society's *Journal*) who left illuminating records of their lives and experiences in South Australia.

Suggestions may be sent to the Secretary of the S.A. Working Party of the *ADB*, Mr. John Love, of 17 Lascelles Avenue, Beaumont, S.A. 5066, by mid-October. Each nomination should indicate, if possible, the birth and death dates of its subject, and be accompanied by a summary, in about 100 words, explaining why the subject is considered significant. It should also indicate what the principal available sources of information are and their location.

All suggestions will be acknowledged. At this stage no guarantee can be given that the proposed volume will go ahead. There is clearly a good case for it but we shall need to come up with a substantial list of suitable candidates if we are to persuade the Federal authorities to help fund the necessary editorial work, and also persuade the *Dictionary's* publisher, Melbourne University Press, to invest in the costs of printing and marketing the volume. 

Life at the Torpedo Station

by John Healey

A hundred years ago, on the edge of the Port River, at its junction with the North Arm, there stood a small cluster of wood and corrugated-iron buildings, mounted on piles on an embankment raised above the mangrove swamp. For almost thirty years they supposedly constituted one of South Australia's main lines of defence against sea-borne invasion --- the invasion that never came. The site was the Port Adelaide Torpedo Station, and in three small rooms attached to the end of the main shed lived its Caretaker, Chief Petty Officer Henry Perry, with his wife Harriet and their six children. There was a feeling of total isolation at the Station, built as it was on a narrow strip of reclaimed land in the middle of a swamp, with the only access being by boat. The family led a rather spartan existence there for some twenty years, but stories passed on to their descendants reveal little in the way of regrets.

Henry Perry was born in Kent, England, in 1860 and migrated here in 1883. He joined the South Australian Naval Force shortly after it was formed in 1884 and the following year married Harriet Hibbs. In 1895 he was appointed Caretaker of the Torpedo Station.

The Station had been established in the late 1880s in response to a series of Russian war scares, and a recognition of Britain's declining ability to defend her far-off colony. Originally chosen as a strategic site from which to deploy submarine mines on cables across the Port River, it was developed during the 1890s into a naval depot comprising a main hall and lecture room, a magazine (housing warheads and ammunition), a torpedo room, gunners' storeroom, carpenter's and blacksmith's workshops, oil store, water tank and detonator shed (*see plan opposite*). The main buildings were linked by a tramway which led to a small jetty extending into the Port River. Later a 6" EOC/Armstrong breech-loading naval gun was mounted on the embankment

and a torpedo boat shed and slipway erected on the shore of the North Arm. The Station also boasted a steam boiler, an engine for driving machine tools, two air compressors and a telephone. It had also possessed, since 1887, ten Whitehead/Fiume torpedoes.

Several different forms of torpedoes were developed in the latter years of the nineteenth century. The spar or McEvoy torpedo consisted of an explosive charge on the end of a 40-foot pole attached to the bow of a small boat. The boat would approach the target warship, ram the charge up against the hull and detonate it. The subsequent recoil of the torpedo boat was said to aid its escape. The Whitehead/Fiume torpedoes, on the other hand, were self-propelled, being powered by a compressed air engine, and were capable of a speed of over 20 knots, with a range of 600 yards. They were usually slung in cradles on either side of a torpedo boat's bow, and had to be lowered into the water and pointed at their target.

The ten torpedoes at Port Adelaide, however, remained packed in their crates for many years and were something of an embarrassment to the Government for the simple reason that there was no torpedo boat to carry them. Questions were raised in parliament concerning their cost of £6,000 and the Naval Commandant, Captain J.C.P. Walcot, made repeated mention of their uselessness in his reports of the early 1890s. The situation was

resolved in 1905 with the arrival of TB 191.

This was a 63-foot, galvanised steel, 2nd class torpedo boat (*shown on page 8*) which had been acquired by the Tasmanian Government in 1884 from John Thornycroft and Co. of London and was based for ten years at the Domain wharf in Hobart. It was never officially named but became known by its original builder's yard number. The boat was of lightweight construction, with a hull made of 1/16" plate, and was powered by two compound steam engines. It had a maximum speed of 17 knots and was driven from a conning tower located amidships. When supplied, it was equipped with a spar torpedo but this was replaced in 1887 with Whitehead torpedoes and their dropping cradles. (The cradles can be seen on the right of the photograph, immediately behind the funnel.) The boat was designed to carry a crew of 7-10 men, including an engineer, a coxswain,



*The Caretaker and his family at the Torpedo Station, c. 1911.
From left: C.P.O. Henry Perry, Edith, Mary, Mrs. Harriet Perry,
Eliza with her son Henry, Hilda, Chief Stoker George Stuart,
unknown, Harry Perry, unknown.*

Photograph courtesy of the Perry family.

a forehand boatman, a stoker and an electrician, in addition to torpedo officers and gunners. It was intended mainly for the defence of harbours and coastal waters.

It was little used in Tasmania, however, and in 1905 the decision was taken to transfer it to South Australian control. It was to be towed to Port Adelaide by the *Protector*, which left Hobart on April 28th. On the following day the seas were so rough that the torpedo boat turned turtle and shelter had to be sought in Port Arthur and the boat righted before the voyage could be resumed. On May 3rd it arrived at the Torpedo Station and came under the charge of C.P.O. Perry.

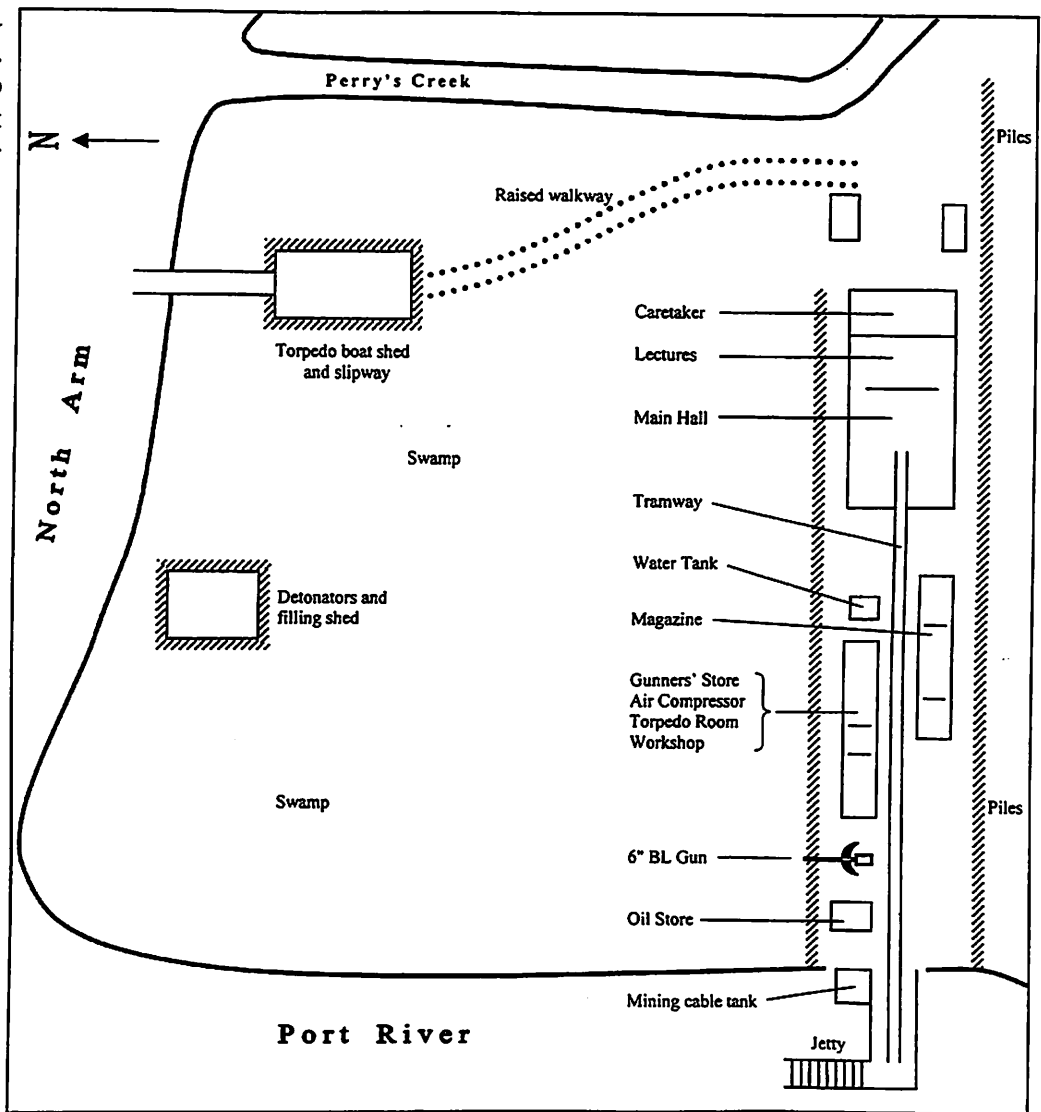
The Caretaker and his family were the only people permanently on the site. A naval report of 1911 stated:

A Caretaker, together with a stoker, the latter to look after the machinery, is essential. Owing to the Caretaker having to go to the Port at least once a week for supplies and as the place cannot be left without someone, he is relieved by (at the present time) a Chief Stoker (G. Stuart).

Henry Perry is not only Caretaker but he carries out all major repairs to boats and is kept employed during the day.

Engineers and mechanics carried out regular maintenance on the equipment and the other naval crewmen did occasional training and exercises, often with the *Protector*, which would stage mock landings using the Station as their target.

Chief Petty Officer Perry was Caretaker of the Torpedo Station from 1895 until the end of the First World War. He and his family lived in what was little more than a lean-to, but his wife Harriet is remembered as having provided very well for the children. Up to 1911 C.P.O. Perry's annual salary was a little over £170, less 10% as rent. Following a pay reorganisation, this was reduced to £150, but, after lodging a complaint, which was supported by the District Naval Officer, he was allowed, as a



Site-plan of the Port Adelaide Torpedo Station, c. 1911.
After Australian Archives file MP 472, item 18/11/2562.

special case, to live there rent-free. He was obliged to provide his own boat to transport himself and his family across the river or to Port Adelaide, a regular necessity as the children went to Le Fevre Primary School on Semaphore Road.

Henry and Harriet Perry had six children: Eliza (born 1886), Mabel (1888), Harry (1893), Hilda (1897), Edith (1902) and Mary (1905). The photograph opposite shows the family, with the exception of Mabel, gathered around the naval gun in front of the workshop. The infant seen in the arms of Eliza at the back is her son, Henry Reginald, born November, 1909, who appears to be about two years old. This, together with the apparent ages of the other children, enables the photo to be dated to 1911-12. On the right Harry Perry (wearing a hat) can be seen with Chief Stoker George Stuart and two unknown children, possibly Stuart's.

To get to school, the children were usually rowed across the river to Snowden's Beach, from where they walked the remaining two-and-a-half miles. Young Harry, however, would sail himself to school in an eight-foot dinghy that he built himself at the age of

ten. Only in very rough weather would he go with the others in his father's boat. Recalling his schooldays in his later years, he said: "I enjoyed life at the Torpedo Station --- there were always plenty of cockles, crabs and fish. Though the only visitors we got were people with boats." Harry served in the Navy from 1911 to 1919, then became a hard-hat diver working on the wharves in Port Adelaide, a diver with the Commonwealth Salvage Board during World War II, and later a shipwright.

In 1900 the *Protector* sailed for China as part of the joint force that was sent to suppress the Boxer rebellion. On board were Chief Petty Officer Perry and Chief Stoker Stuart. As the ship left, Henry Perry's family gathered at a vantage point on the sandhills and signalled "We love you" to him with semaphore flags.

Little Hilda, aged 3 at the time, became quite excited and began brandishing the flags with some abandon. Whereupon Henry Perry, attempting to signal back, dropped both the ship's flags overboard! Whether this had any effect on the subsequent performance of our warship is not recorded.

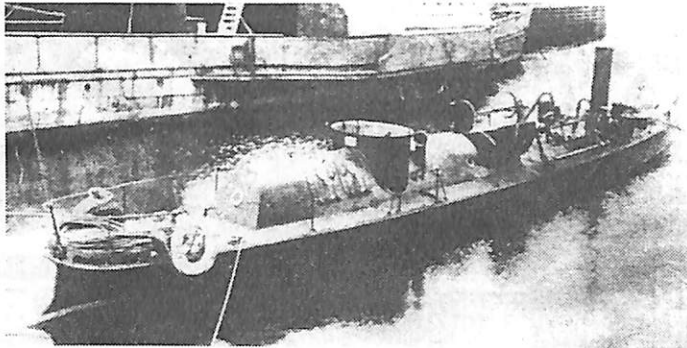
He was commended in January, 1911, for his prompt response when fire broke out on the S.S. *Flinders*, moored near Garden Island. The crew of a motor launch alerted the Torpedo Station and C.P.O. Perry immediately telephoned for the fire float which was stationed at Birkenhead. He then proceeded on board the burning vessel to slacken its mooring ropes so as to prevent the fire from spreading to the *Bullarra* alongside. With four other men, he fought the fire for half an hour until the *Fire Queen* arrived. As the *Register* reported:

Mr. Perry got to work to extinguish the fire which was raging with great fierceness amidships in the officers' quarters and in the lamproom. Buckets of water were poured onto the flames but this took little or no effect and the fire spread rapidly.

When the fire float arrived, "flames were bursting through the bridge deck to a height of nearly twenty feet", but were soon brought under control with three hoses. The ship, however, was so thoroughly burnt out that thereafter it was used only as a grain hulk, eventually being scuttled in 1931 at the Ship's Graveyard on the shores of Garden Island, where it rests to this day.

Torpedo Boat 191 was not destined to spend long at the Port Adelaide Station. Developments in the technology of naval warfare were already making it obsolete and it was sold out of service in about

1911. It may have been broken up, but the discovery in 1983 of its sister ship, the *Lonsdale*, under a metre of sand in Port Phillip Bay, Victoria, has fuelled hopes that TB 191, an equally shallow vessel, may still lie buried somewhere near the Station. This was the fate of the naval gun that appears in the photograph. It was recovered, lacking its shield, from the mud on the riverbank when reclamation work was done on the site in 1961 and was displayed for a time in a reserve near the Birkenhead Naval



Torpedo Boat 191 at the Domain wharf, Hobart, prior to its transfer to South Australia in 1905.

Depot. It is now standing in a yard on Cruickshank's Corner, at the northern end of the Birkenhead Bridge, and it is the intention of the Port Adelaide-Enfield Council to have it mounted permanently on that corner.

The Torpedo Station remained operational until about 1916 when plans were made for the 13-acre site to be transferred

from the Commonwealth to the State Government in exchange for land on Torrens Island. During these war years, C.P.O. Perry was placed in charge of the watch on the German vessels interned at Port Adelaide. He was still listed as a "general workman" at the Station in 1920 but by 1922 all naval stores and equipment had been removed and the buildings dismantled, most of them to be re-used elsewhere. The site passed to the South Australian Government in 1924.

Henry Perry died in 1939 and his wife Harriet ten years later. They are buried together in Cheltenham Cemetery.

Today the only visible traces of the Station are the remains of the jetty piles on the edge of the Port River and, just discernible, the lines of the embankments on which the buildings stood. All else has been covered with landfill, including the mangroves, and the site is now waste ground.

Acknowledgements: The editor would particularly like to thank Harry Perry and Eric Simmons (both grandsons of Henry Perry) for providing information for this article. Thanks are also due to Errol Chinner, Frank Garie, Jim Gillespie, Ron Parsons, Lee Rodda, Brian Samuels and Commander Robin Pennock for their helpful advice and contributions.


Note: Documentary evidence suggests that Henry Perry was born in 1860, though his headstone says 1859. He definitely died in 1939 whereas the headstone says 1938.

References:

Australian Archives file MP 472, item 18/11/2562.

Register, 30 January 1911.

Ross Gillett: *Australia's Colonial Navies* (Naval Historical Society of Australia, Sydney, 1982)

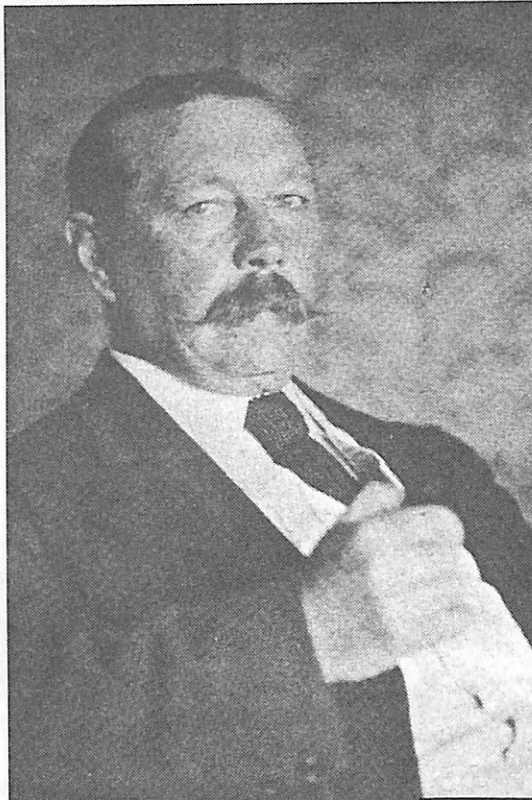
Commander R. Pennock: "The Port River Torpedo Station", *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, vol. 24, no. 3, July/September, 1997. 

The wanderings of a novelist

by John Healey

Many famous authors have visited Adelaide since its foundation, but perhaps none better known than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the world's greatest fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle (*pictured below*) came to Australia in 1920 on a tour to promote the cause of spiritualism. Most of the Holmes stories had been published by then so there was considerable interest aroused by his visit.

In fact, Adelaide had already appeared twice, albeit fictionally, in the Sherlock Holmes stories. In "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange", published in the *Strand Magazine* in 1904, the detective investigates the murder of Sir Eustace Brackenstall, a confirmed drunkard and wife-beater. His widow, Lady Brackenstall, is the former Mary Fraser of Adelaide, who was brought up "in the freer, less conventional atmosphere of South Australia". And in "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" (*Strand*, 1911) the villain is a confidence trickster who specialises in swindling lonely women and is recognized by Holmes as Holy Peters, "one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved". He is identified by his disfigured left ear, having been "badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89".



Conan Doyle arrived at Port Adelaide on Tuesday, September 21st, 1920, with his wife, their three children, a maid and Conan Doyle's friend and secretary, Major Wood. The party took rooms at the Grand Central Hotel, Adelaide's posh hotel at the time, on the south-east corner of Rundle Street and Pulteney Street. This impressive, five-storey, bay-windowed building later became Foy and Gibson's department store but was demolished in 1975 to make way for a monstrously ugly car park. A plaque fixed to a steel post on the corner commemorates Conan Doyle's stay there.

His book *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, published in 1921, gives a full account of the Australian tour. He delivered four public lectures at the Adelaide Town Hall, but his other activities in the

ten days that he spent here are of rather more interest. He visited Hamilton's Ewell Winery and vineyards (situated on Morphett Road, in what was then Glenelg) and was most complimentary about our champagnes. "We only know the Australian wines at present by the rough article sold in flasks, but when the supply has increased the world will learn that this country has some very different stuff in its cellars."

Conan Doyle seems to have found several kindred spirits in Adelaide who shared his love of learning, his fascination with the natural world and his romantic spirit. On the Thursday evening after his arrival he came face to face with our real-life, antipodean Dr. Watson --- Professor Archibald Watson, recently retired from the Chair of Anatomy at the University of Adelaide Medical School, whose own life was as adventurous as anything in Doyle's fiction. The occasion was a dinner at the home of Henry Simpson Newland, the prominent surgeon, and Conan Doyle found himself in the company of a fellow raconteur.

The Adelaide doctors entertained me to dinner, and I was pleased to meet more than one who had been of my time in Edinburgh. They seemed to be a very prosperous body of men. There was much interesting conversation, especially from one elderly professor named Watson, who had known Bully Hayes and other South Sea celebrities in the semi-piratical, black-birding days. He told me one pretty story. They landed upon some outlying island in Carpentaria, peopled by real primitive blacks, who were rounded up by the ship's crew

on one of the peninsulas which formed the end of the island. These creatures, the lowest of the human race, huddled together in consternation while the white men trained a large camera upon them. Suddenly three males advanced and made a speech in their own tongue which, when interpreted, proved to be an offer that those three should die in exchange for the lives of the tribe. What could the very highest do more than this, and yet it came from the lowest savages.

Conan Doyle had earlier called on the editor of the *Register* and had expressed a particular desire to meet one Thomas Paine Bellchambers who, he understood, "lived among the wild creatures in the back country, and was on such terms with our humble brothers as few men are ever privileged to attain".

In 1905 Bellchambers (*shown below*) had, at the age of 47, established a native wildlife sanctuary at Humbug Scrub and lived there with his wife, Eliza, and their ten children. His house (four rooms of which still survive) was situated not far from the abandoned shafts of the Lady Alice gold mine in Hamlin's Gully and the Government had given Bellchambers permission to fence in the dam of the old mine to protect the native mammals and wild-fowl from foxes.



(Gold was first discovered at the Lady Alice in 1871 and a company was formed two years later to work it. A steam-engine, boiler, winding and pumping machinery and a 20-head stamp battery were installed and before long a township was established on the site, comprising two hotels, a chapel, a school-house and about thirty miners' cottages. In 1874 it became the first gold mine in South Australia to declare a dividend and by the time it closed in 1879 had produced 6,000 ounces of gold and 200 tons of copper. Today a handful of stone ruins remain in the gully, including the school-house, the foundations of the boiler-house and batteries, and a forbidding-looking shaft.)

Conan Doyle and his two sons made the 25-mile journey to the Bellchambers sanctuary on September 29th, 1920, with Mr. Evan Kyffin Thomas, proprietor of the *Register*, and his wife. Also in the party were Mr. Edgar Waite, Director of the South Australian Museum, (*pictured right*) and Dr. W. M. Anderson, as well as a reporter from the *Register*. The party was welcomed by Bellchambers whom Doyle describes as "a rudely dressed, tangle-haired man, collarless and unkempt, with kind, irregular features and clear blue eyes – the eyes of a child." After lunch, which included a delicious native currant pie, the group toured the property and Conan Doyle was introduced to grey kangaroos, possums, wallabies, lizards, bronze-wing pigeons, kookaburras, eagles, Cape Barren geese, and mallee fowl. He was much amused by the diligence of the latter in maintaining the mound in which it incubates its eggs and defending it against any interference.



Bellchambers had made an especial study of the mallee fowl and was the first person to breed them in captivity. He was a determined environmentalist and was outspoken in his condemnation of the widespread destruction of native animals and plants. He was a regular correspondent of the *Saturday Journal* and a selection of his contributions was published in 1918 as a booklet entitled *Nature: Our Mother*, a thousand copies of which were distributed to schoolchildren by the Education Department.

Bellchambers' son, Ray, later recalled that when Conan Doyle left he patted him on the head but gave his older brother a ten-bob note. "As soon as he was gone," he said gleefully, "Mother had it off him!"

Thomas Bellchambers died in 1929 and is buried, as he wished, in a grove of trees on the property. The Humbug Scrub Wildlife Sanctuary is still maintained by his descendants.

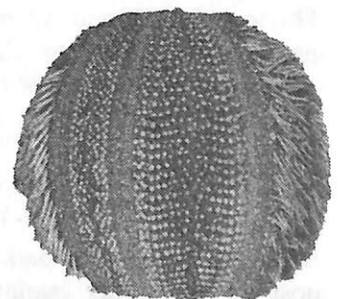
Conan Doyle was no less impressed by Edgar Waite, to whom he later paid tribute in a press report:

No account of my day could be complete which did not acknowledge the company and teaching of Mr. E. R. Waite, the Director of the Museum, who placed his stores of knowledge at my disposal.

I admire learning but I admire still more a man who is a man; and when I learned that this gentle naturalist had gone down sixty feet in Sydney Harbour to steal the egg of a shark I took off my hat to him.

Conan Doyle's tour of Australia was, of course, primarily devoted to lecturing on spiritualism and it may seem odd that a man of his intelligence and erudition should believe in the after-life, seances and ectoplasmic materialisations. But believe he did and pursued his somewhat uncritical investigations for over forty years. Nevertheless he maintained an enthusiastic interest in many aspects of genuine science, as is evidenced in his novels and short stories, though of course the science was always subordinated to his phantastic imagination.

One story, entitled "When The World Screamed", owes its inspiration to a visit that Conan Doyle made to the South Australian Museum a few days after his arrival here. On Friday, September 24th, he was taken on a tour of the exhibit halls by Edgar Waite and showed a particular interest in some of the larger echinoderms, those commonly known as sea-urchins (*illustrated right*). Readers will be familiar with their spherical shells cast up on local beaches. He asked a number of questions regarding their structure and presumably tucked this information away in his encyclopaedic mind for future reference.



Eight years later, in 1928, "When The World Screamed" was published in serial form in the *Strand Magazine*. It was printed in book form the following year in *The Maracot Deep and Other Stories*. It features the irascible and irrepressible Professor Challenger who also appears in Conan Doyle's well-known novel, *The Lost World*.

In the short story Challenger summons an engineer, Mr. Peerless Jones, to assist him in a massive drilling operation on the Sussex Downs. In presenting this project to him, Challenger shows him a sea-urchin and explains:

Nature repeats itself in many forms regardless of the size. This echinus is a model, a prototype, of the world. You perceive that it is roughly circular, but flattened at the poles. Let us then regard the world as a huge echinus.

He goes on to compare the water through which the sea-urchin moves to the "ether" surrounding the earth, and draws an analogy between the microscopic insects that crawl upon the surface of the echinoid and the animal life that moves about on the surface of the planet. He then argues that just as the sea-urchin has a soft, sentient body beneath its shell, so too must the earth. In other words, beneath its crust, the planet is a living organism.

Challenger then reveals that he has already sunk a shaft eight miles deep into the earth's crust and he now needs Mr. Peerless Jones to prepare a sharp drill to penetrate the living body beneath. Jones descends the shaft and inspects the soft surface of the internal organs which "consisted of

some greyish material, glazed and shiny, which rose and fell in slow palpitation".

The necessary machinery is prepared and on the appointed day a vast crowd congregates around the site, including many scientists, politicians and members of the Royal Family. Jones again descends, sets the drill in motion and escapes up the lift shaft. The story climaxes with the final penetration, which is far more cataclysmic than Challenger ever envisaged. The earth emits

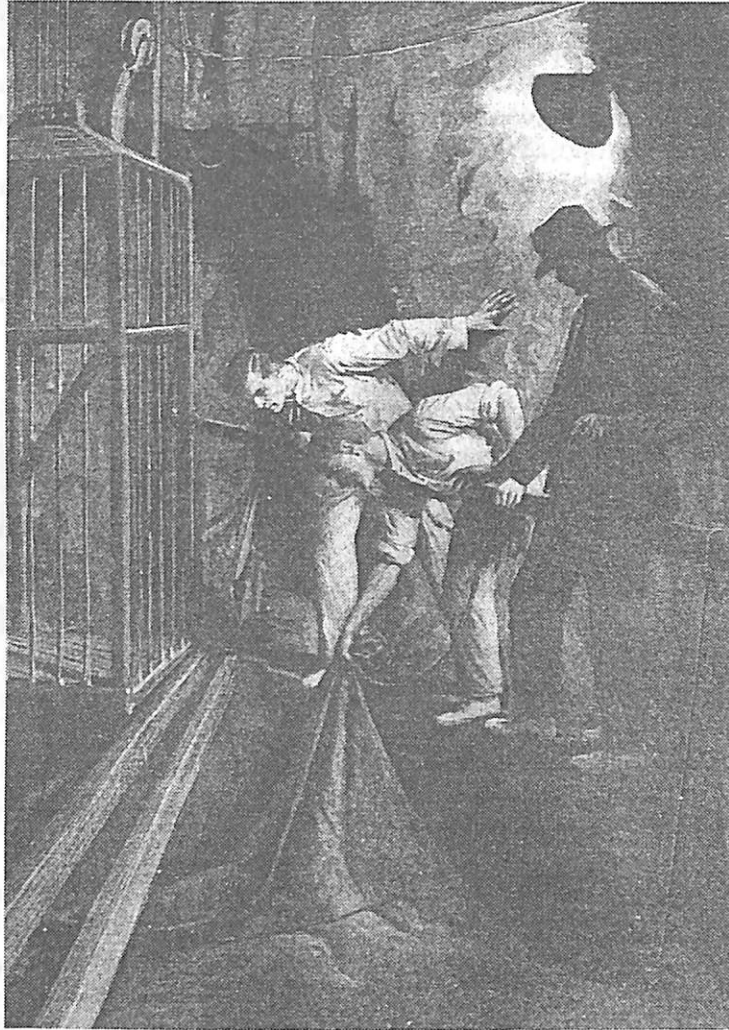
the most horrible yell that ever yet was heard. It was a howl in which pain, anger, menace and the outraged majesty of Nature all blended into one hideous shriek.

At the same time a geyser of a vile treacly substance erupts to a height of two thousand feet and saturates the entire crowd of onlookers. World-wide consequences ensue. Vesuvius, Hecla, Etna and Stromboli all erupt as the planet voices its indignation through every vent and volcano. The narrator concludes:

It has been the common ambition of mankind to set the whole world talking. To set the whole world screaming was the privilege of Challenger alone.

The concept of the Earth as a living organism,


vulnerable to rape, would accord well with Thomas Bellchambers' philosophy and will strike a familiar chord with modern ecologists. Although Conan Doyle's story is slight in comparison with his major achievements, we may take some pride in the fact that the germ of his idea originated with an exhibit in the South Australian Museum and the explanatory comments of the Director, Edgar Waite, in 1920.



*Mr. Peerless Jones inspecting the soft body of the Earth, eight miles below the surface.
From the Strand Magazine, May 1928.*

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- Phillip Bellchambers: *The Wizard of Humbug Forest: The Story of Thomas Paine Bellchambers 1858-1929* (Adelaide, 1998)
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- Register*, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30 September, 1 October, 1920.

- Herbert Hale: *The First Hundred Years of the Museum 1856-1956*, Records of the S.A. Museum, Vol. XII, (Adelaide, 1956)
- Lady Alice Goldmine*, anonymous unpublished manuscript held at the Tea Tree Gully Library, Modbury.
- Personal communications from Phillip Bellchambers (Humbug Scrub Wildlife Sanctuary) and Alan Olding (Sherlock Holmes Society of Australia). 

Reviews

The New Federalist: The Journal of Australian Federation History, No. 3, June 1999.

This journal is to be published twice-yearly from 1998 to 2001 and has already proved to be a mine of information on matters relating to the history of Federation, whether it be the politics, the personalities, the propaganda or the sheer pushiness of many of the lobby groups. In the 1890's everyone wanted a say on the many aspects of the proposed constitution and the more vigorous campaigners pursued their causes relentlessly.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the search for the nation's capital city and the current issue of *The New Federalist* contains a number of articles describing the aspirations and the concerted attempts of many cities and communities around Australia to be selected for the honour. Among these were Adelaide, Port Augusta and Mount Gambier and the arguments of their champions (often surprisingly persuasive) and the tactics they employed (which usually involved playing Melbourne and Sydney off against each other) are well detailed in an article by John Bannon.

Other articles deal with a variety of proposals ranging from James Drake's plan for an inland capital at the junction of South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, intended to promote the development of a physically and mentally superior race, to F. Oliver Jones' vision of a classical Arcadian city of culture, featuring castles, waterfalls, forests, universities and sports stadia. There is a particularly interesting article by Ken Taylor showing how the concept of the Australian capital, which eventually found form in the Burley Griffin design, evolved from contemporary ideas on national identity, landscape, the tradition of the picturesque and the emerging iconography of a country characterised by freedom and open spaces.

The journal may be bought by single issue, at \$18, or by annual or series subscription from The Editors, *The New Federalist*, Law School, University of Adelaide, S.A. 5005. -- J.H.

Neville S. Smith: *The Northern Lines: Nth. Adelaide, Prospect, Enfield, Walkerville (Australian Electric Tramway Museum, Adelaide, 1999)*

This is the fourth in a series of well-presented booklets on the history of Adelaide's early tram services. It contains a brief introduction on the development of omnibuses, horse-trams and the electric system, followed by a detailed account of the various routes, branch lines, turntables and terminuses that made up the northern lines. The author describes the different types of vehicles used at each stage and provides some interesting observations on the numerous changes that were made to the system in response to both public demands and mechanical necessities.

The publication features over fifty photographs and is enlivened by some entertaining anecdotes, including the one about the runaway tram that made it all the way from the Prospect terminus to the Children's Hospital before the conductor realised that the driver had fallen off shortly after leaving.

The booklet is priced at \$5.00 and will be released at a special day devoted to the northern lines at the St. Kilda Tramway Museum on Sunday, October 17th, when convoys of tramcars displaying the featured destinations will be running continuously from 11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. The museum, situated on St. Kilda Road, also has an informative display of historical photographs, numerous pieces of tramway equipment, a bookstall and a cosy tea-room. -- J.H.

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HSSA 2000 programme

The Society's calendar of events for next year is currently being organised and Council would welcome the input of members. If you have suggestions for speakers, topics or field trips, please forward them to the Programme Co-ordinator, John Healey, at the address below, by September 30th. ☞

History SA deadline

The deadline for all material for the November 1999 issue of the Newsletter is Friday, October 15th. It should be addressed to John Healey, Editor, *History SA*, 27 Germein St., Semaphore, S.A. 5019. ☞

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