



HISTORY·SA

Newsletter of the Historical Society of South Australia Incorporated

No. 210
May
2011

From the President

By the time you receive this edition of the newsletter, About Time: SA's History Festival will have concluded. It was an amazing month with around 500 events on offer. A now retired secondary school teacher commented to me on going through the programme booklet, 'I can't imagine how people can't be interested in history with such a wide range of activities to investigate.' The programme could have kept one away from home every day of the month. Well done to History SA for organising the event.

Discovering SA's History, our lecture series, will once again present two very different topics in June and July. In June, Iris Iwanicki will tell the story of the town of Woomera and its people, a development in our arid lands that came out of the cold war.

In July we are very pleased to have Dr Justin Beilby as our guest speaker. His topic is 125 years of medical excellence at the University of Adelaide and some of the notable medical scientists who have graced the Medical Faculty over that time.

Our only full-day tour in Visiting SA's History—to the former river port of Mannum—takes place on Sunday 5 June, and a part-day visit to the John McDouall Stuart Museum on North Terrace is on Wednesday 10 August. The visit is especially apt as next year marks the sesquicentenary of the epic crossing of the Australian continent from south to north and return. The expedition departed from Adelaide on 5 December 1861.

The May meeting was our Annual General Meeting. Congratulations (and thanks) to the following office bearers who were elected for the coming year:

President—Dr Geoffrey Bishop

Vice-president—Dr Adrian Brown

Secretary—Terry Saunderson

Treasurer—Anne Bowman

Council Members—Margaret Cliff, Colin Deed, Sylvia Fanning, Dr Christine Garnaut, Avis Huckel, Patricia Sumerling and Margaret Young.

Our sincere thanks to Peter Adamson, and Janet Callen who retired at this election from the Council. Our special thanks to Janet for her years as an excellent editor for our Newsletter.

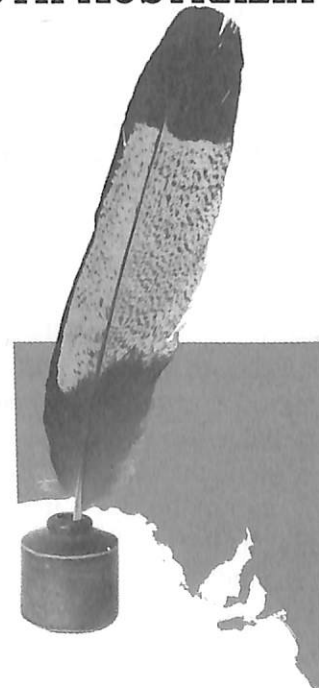
There is still room for additional Council members so please give consideration to nominating and discuss your interest with me or any other of the office bearers.

At the March meeting we unveiled the first of our two new banners. The second banner that depicts aspects of South Australian history will be ready for use at the History Conference, if not earlier. The old banner that has served us well for many years will now become a heritage item!

The Council and I look forward to seeing you (and friends) at the forthcoming lecture meetings.

Geoffrey Bishop, President.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC



Please note: the July Meeting will be held
on Friday 1 July NOT Friday 8 July

Garden Fashion: the palms of Robe Terrace

by Patricia Sumerling

The road widening scheme and the relocation of the Canary Island Palms on Robe Terrace in the early 2000s was not without public protest. The Robe Terrace plantation, before it was remodelled, was a significant avenue of more than 70-year old Canary Island Palms that were planted as part of community initiative undertaken by a group of well-to-do Robe Terrace residents in the spring of 1927. Calling themselves the Robe Terrace Improvement Committee, they raised funds amongst themselves and other interested Medindie residents for their tree scheme to beautify the street in which they lived. The committee then requested and received from the Walkerville Council, £250 towards the buying and planting about 70 palms along a 1200-yard strip.

The committee, which was headed by solicitor Richard Homburg, employed surveyors Packard and Seddon in February 1927 to draw up appropriate plans of their proposed plantation. The committee then sought advice to ascertain what species of trees would be the most suitable for Robe Terrace.

The choice of trees was made carefully with advice from the Adelaide City Gardener, August W Pelzer, and the director of the Botanic Gardens, John Frederick Bailey, in 1927. The Canary Island Palm was chosen for its hardiness in a difficult soil but which 'in time will make a magnificent avenue'. Influencing their choice were the 'many Canary Island palms to be seen in Medindie gardens'. While there were avenues of trees in many places, there was not an avenue of Canary Island palms. Further, their minds were made up when inspecting individual palms in private gardens around Medindie, for in every instance 'they seem to have grown to perfection.' Even after visiting the Botanical Gardens with Mr Bailey to look at other palm varieties, the committee 'could find nothing to even approach the beauty of this class of palm'.

Armed with advice, prices and information about planting 70 palms, four of the Robe Terrace Committee made a deputation to the Walkerville Council in June where they outlined their scheme and announced that if it went ahead it would be 'a credit to the district'. They were empowered to proceed with their scheme at a meeting of the Walkerville Council on 1 August. It was stated, from information supplied by the Robe Terrace Committee, that the ground at Robe Terrace had been ploughed, levelled and fenced and 'that Canary Island palms would be planted shortly'.



Avenues, small plantations and single specimens of palms were part of a fashion that was in vogue from the late 1870s that extended into the 1930s. Other significant avenues of palms have been planted in South Australia: along the Port Road—believed to have been planted during the depression years of the late 1920s and early 1930s; at Seppeltsfield from the late 1920s; some at Cobdogla dating from around 1916; and at Barmera. The avenue of palms at Barmera was part of Charles Read's 1918 design for the Lake Bonney Garden City (Garnaut 2003).

In the far north of South Australia at Lake Harry, 40 kilometres north-east of Marree, attempts were made to provide for the fashion of eating dates by the planting of an extensive date palm plantation around the 1890s, from which less than half a dozen palms still survive.

The growing of palms in and around Adelaide began in the late 1870s and early 1880s that came with the trend for beautifying and ornamenting the city of Adelaide as well as an increasing trend in eating dates. Jones and Payne (1998) state that the Victorian garden between the 1870s and 1890s was 'heavily focussed upon plant exhibition and display, often with a strong use of ferns, palms and 'architectural' plant forms'.

Contributing SA's History

At this time eucalypts were being condemned for not submitting to cultivation and civilisation which Morton (1997), in his history of the Adelaide Council, states was 'a synecdoche for Australian nature itself; the gums were "decaying and dying" like the human Aboriginal inhabitants were supposed to be doing at the time...' An article in The South Australian Register for early 1909 that was quoted in the Adelaide City Council Annual Reports for the same year stated that 'the cultivation of Parks and Gardens although it has a commercial and an aesthetic value, might also be placed in association with disease preventatives, for modern psychology has revealed distinctly a profound relationship between a keen appreciation of the beautiful and pure and physical well-being'.

During the city's speculative building boom period that took place from the late 1870s and extended through the early 1880s, several ambitious projects were undertaken to beautify the city streets, squares and Park Lands. The Adelaide City Council's Annual Reports for 1877-8 record that 'the time has now arrived when some general plan should be adopted, delineating, by ornamental designs of landscape character, the planting of the inner or central portion of the Park Lands.' It was as well that the council was considering the future of the Park Lands, for during 1879-80 many complaints were received from the public who contrasted the ravages of the Park Lands to the rapid and successful development of the Botanical Gardens.

The Council's most ambitious plan was the beautification of the River Torrens by the creation of a lake through the construction of a weir in 1881. For the landscaping of the river valley, as well as for the Park Lands and squares, plans were drawn up by the Conservator of Forests, J Ednie Brown, who wanted trees that provided 'harmony, variety and agreeableness, combined with intricity' (sic). Such trees that suited his plan were elms, planes, ash and oak, but when he resigned over ongoing conflicts, his scheme did not go ahead and much of the tree planting was by three gardeners, William Pengilly until 1883, Richard Patterson until his death in 1885 and the renowned August W Pelzer from 1899.

However, between the death of Richard Patterson and the appointment of August Pelzer there was a 14-year period that coincided with a severe economic depression. During this time an influential government architect, Charles Edward Owen Smyth, played a major role in the beautification of the city by planting palms around the South Australian Museum and the parade ground.



In harmony with each other, the palms on North Terrace are landscaped within a North African style setting that comprises the 'Moorish' architecture of the Museum buildings and the Egyptian obelisk. Owen Smith planted these palms shortly after he designed and supervised the construction of the red brick wing of the museum in 1894. When he used the 3000 year old Egyptian obelisk as a centre piece to emphasise the museum's role, he stated that he planted palms to 'make the old Egyptian ghosts who may haunt the column feel more at home, and incidentally to add to the beauty of the little green spot, so restful to the eyes on a blazing hot Australian summer day'. To make additions to the museum, Owen Smyth relocated the unsightly drill shed and parade ground dating from 1868, then on North Terrace, to the old quarry that appeared to be the ideal spot at the time.

With only meagre funds available to him, he believed in giving what he thought the people of Adelaide ought to have and not what they wanted. By wasting nothing, he used what materials were at hand for beautifying Adelaide. And palms, as it happened, were close to hand and cost practically nothing.

When he was first appointed Superintendent of Public Works, it was only one year before the Adelaide Exhibition of 1887, and one of his tasks was to make improvements to the North Terrace boulevard. From one Adelaide citizen he was able to procure a number of 40-year old date palms for this scheme and 22 men were needed to excavate each palm from holes 12 feet square and six feet deep. Each weighed between four and five tons and was lifted onto waiting horse drawn carts by pulleys and tackles. The first palms were planted opposite the Adelaide Club.

Contributing SA's History

The reason for choosing palms for the parade ground lay in the rubbish that was tipped daily into it when used as a rubbish dump between the late 1840s and 1886. It did not go past Owen Smyth's astute observation that the numerous date pips thrown into the gutters by customers outside the Theatre Royal in Hindley Street, and then dumped into the old quarry, had germinated into a thick crop of juvenile date palms. When large enough, the young plants were transplanted into two rows of palms running east and west. Those planted north and south were planted by Smyth from a job lot of six-year old stunted palms that he bought from Sewell's Nursery on Payneham Road.

The surviving palms, that are almost 130 years, play an important role in the beautification of Adelaide and contribute to the character of the city. These and the several palm plantations around South Australia are part of a 50-year period in which the palm was the height of garden fashion. The Canary Island Palm plantation on Robe Terrace was part of that trend.

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Acknowledgements: Mark Draper (Walkerville City Council), Geoffrey H Manning, Robert Martin, Brian Samuels, Paul Stark, Robert Thornton.

In perspective: rethinking South Australia's history

The Twentieth State History Conference will be held on 5 to 7 August 2011 at the National Wine Centre, Hackney Road, Adelaide. A diverse range of proposals for papers was submitted and it promises to be a very interesting conference.

The Historical Society of South Australia is sponsoring a session at the conference—*Who are we? South Australian identity*. Papers in this session will be presented by Dr Peter Bell, Glenda Couch-Keen and a panel from the Migration Museum (Christine Finnimore, Catherine Manning and Elspeth Grant).

Further details and enquiries:

Email—statehistoryconference@history.sa.gov.au
or visit HistorySA's website for the programme and booking details

Mail—State History Conference,
GPO Box 1836, Adelaide SA 5001

Telephone—Mandy Paul (08) 8203 9808

Karen Blackwood (08) 8203 9807

Bound for South Australia 1836

History SA launched its blog Bound for South Australia on 22 February 2011—the date in 1836 that the first ships set sail for South Australia. Entries to the blog are updated weekly so that readers can follow the voyage.

Website: <http://boundforsouthaustralia.net.au>.

As the site says, this was the journey of a lifetime for those first settlers.

Membership renewals now due

Membership fees for 2011 are continuing to come in. If you have not as yet renewed please complete your membership form and send it to the Treasurer or make payment at a lecture meeting. Most categories of membership remain unaltered from last year.

Additional Programmes and Membership Forms will be available at Lecture Meetings. Please take copies for anyone you think may be interested or to put in your local library, shopping centre, etcetera.

All meetings commence at 7.30 pm on the first Friday in the month at Burnside Community Centre, corner of Portrush Road and Greenhill Road, Tasmore.

Discovering SA's History

3 June

Iris Iwanicki (BA, GDTP, FPIA, Master of Environmental Law), planner and historian:
Reflections of the Cold War; Woomera and its people.



Iris Iwanicki has extensive experience in town planning and heritage conservation work. As a private consultant, she has advised and still represents local government and other clients in strategic policy, catchment, heritage conservation and statutory planning, and tutors part time in related subjects at Adelaide University. Her past experience includes work as Register Historian for the former State Heritage Branch, Chief Planner of development assessment with the City of Adelaide, Manager of Environmental Services for the former District Council of Willunga, involvement in the Metropolitan Planning Review in the early 1990s and membership on the now defunct Heritage Authority, and current South Australian Pastoral Board.

Iris managed a process to provide a strategic plan for the future protection of rural production and landscape values of the Willunga Basin during the 1990s and has a commitment to integrated community involvement in the planning process. She has also worked on a number of conservation studies and plans for significant heritage places. More recently she is a PhD candidate for the thesis 'the role of Cultural Heritage in the sustainability of remote planned communities'. Her focus has been on the Cold War town of Woomera, the topic of her talk.

During the early post-war period between 1945 and 1960 a number of remote planned towns were built in the outback for specific Cold War purposes. Their historical



Brigadier Neylan, Superintendent of Woomera in the 1950s, planting a tree.

significance is linked with post war recovery, international, national and state alliances in a nuclear age, modernist design and the emergence of a town planning profession as it developed in the post-World War 2 period.

This presentation focusses on the earliest post-war, remote modernist settlement of Woomera village, planned and built for the Woomera Rocket Range as part of a Joint United Kingdom/Australian Long Range Weapons project. Its genesis and fortunes, as it continued to operate throughout and beyond the Cold War period into the twenty-first century, represents a unique form of Australian heritage.

The presentation will discuss the cultural heritage of the more recent past and the difficulties of managing modernist, remote cultural assets in conditions of an outback environment and social transience.

Discovering SA's History

1 July

Professor Justin Beilby:

125 years of medical excellence at the University of Adelaide

Justin Beilby is the Executive Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences and was Professor the Head of the Department of General Practice from 2002-2005. He has been involved in research and evaluation with workforce planning, primary care financing, chronic illness and the Quality Use of Medicines for over twenty years, in both urban and rural settings. He has published widely in asthma, diabetes, point of care testing and primary care financing. He has been intimately involved in National and State health policy research having Chair the General Practice Item Restructuring Working Group and evaluated the Medical Benefits Scheme asthma item numbers. He is currently a member of the Medical Services Advisory Committee, Economic Sub-committee. Professor Beilby has been a member of the Strategic Research Initiatives Working Group of the NHMRC. He was a Commissioner in National Hospital and Health Reform Commission in 2008-9. He has extensive experience in the health system reform having been a member of the Clinical Senate and SA Health Performance Council. He has worked across both urban and rural settings. As Executive Dean, he oversees all undergraduate training in medicine, nursing, dentistry, health sciences, psychology and public health at the University of Adelaide.

In September 2010, The University of Adelaide celebrated 125 years since the opening of the Medical School. This historic event was a perfect opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding medical talent to come out of South Australia since 1885. The University of Adelaide is immensely proud of its 125-year history and its part in helping to shape the future of medicine here in South Australia as well as internationally.

'This special anniversary provided the perfect opportunity to look back on our history, reflect on our incredible journey of success and celebrate the significant people who have contributed to the diverse achievements of the University of Adelaide's Medical Program. Our Medical Program is a product of incessant time, energy and resources; an outstanding accomplishment and celebration of extraordinary endeavours and achievements. Thank you for joining us in 2010 to celebrate our past and to experience our present; I would like to invite you to stay engaged with us as we step forward into medical future and the continuation of the excellence of medical training, clinical practice, technology and research innovation. With your help we can develop and sustain a world-class research and education facility in an increasingly competitive Global environment.'

Deadline for articles for the July issue of the newsletter is 17 June 2011



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