

No. 223 January 2014

## From the President

Welcome to our first newsletter for our 40<sup>th</sup> year. This notable milestone will be marked by a number of events during the year. The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration will take place at an afternoon event at Burnside on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014, so do put that date in your diary.

Once again, we have an exciting and varied list of speakers lined up for our lecture series and we will be holding two part-day visits and one full day excursion during the year. One of our speakers, Emeritus Professor Eric Richards, gave the Society's very first lecture back in July 1974, and it is excellent to be able to invite him back to reflect on changes in how our society perceives its history 40 years on. We look forward to your participation in our events and please feel free to invite friends who may be interested to attend and even join the Society.

Our end-of-year / Christmas event on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November was a visit to the famous Penfold's

Magill Estate Vineyard and Winery at Magill. It was the first time many of our members had visited this property, now one of Adelaide's last vineyards. The magnificent bluestone buildings clearly reflected how successful the Penfold family's business had become by the 1890s. It was also good to be able to inspect The Grange cottage (it is not included on their usual winery tour) where the first generation of the family in South Australia lived. The original section of the cottage pre-dates the Penfolds' ownership (1844) and its age is evidenced by the low ceilings and doorways. One member on the tour recalled staying at The Grange in the late 1950s when her uncle was the caretaker; she instantly recognised what had been her bedroom, a room just big enough to fit a single bed and a washstand. The event concluded with afternoon tea served at Clayton-Wesley Uniting Church, a short drive down The Parade from Penfold's. Members of the East Torrens Historical Society, once again, provided a fine afternoon tea.

# From the President

At our final lecture meeting for the year in November we were addressed by Robert Kimber who spoke about Edward Cairns, a remarkable country lad from Yorke Peninsula who served in the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance, AIF. He was killed at Gallipoli. Robert read extracts from Eddie's writings, including letters written home during World War I.

The 2013 round of our Grants Scheme closed at the end of October and the assessment panel has evaluated the applications. The number of applications received was down on last year's high level of interest. The applications covered a wide range of topics. The list of recipients will appear in the next newsletter.

The Society received a personalised Season's Greetings from our Patron, the Governor of South Australia, and Mrs Scarce. His involvement with a large diversity of groups is heartening and, depending on his commitments, we hope to involve him in some way in this year's anniversary events. I wish you well for the New Year and hope you will be able to attend and enjoy the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> year of bringing South Australian history to you.

*Geoffrey Bishop*



Front verandah of The Grange; the older section of the house is on the left and to the rear.



Part of the kitchen in the old section of The Grange.



A few hogsheads of Grange Hermitage which we did not get to taste; our tour guide Brittany, a University of Adelaide winemaking student, is at right.

# From the President



The speaker Robert Kimber sharing Eddie Cairns' original diary at the November meeting.  
Photograph by Adrian Brown.



Some of our members at Bungala House during the Yankalilla field trip 13 October.  
Photograph by Colin Deed.

## Speakers in 2014

The process of finding speakers for each year's program means that I have sometimes committed someone to give a presentation to the historical society more than a year in advance. A lot happens in a year - the unexpected and the unplanned - so I need to contact speakers a few weeks before their lecture to make sure they haven't gone overseas or fallen off the perch.

As in other years I have scouted for new, unusual and absorbing histories that I think our members will appreciate. This being the fortieth year since the society's establishment, it was important to celebrate the special year by including some speakers who gave presentations way back then or who were foundation members.

It is very pleasing to be able to announce that Emeritus Professor Eric Richards, who spoke at the society's very first meeting in mid 1974, is our first one for this year, on 7 February. Forty years ago his topic 'History from below' was part of a new trend in history. He is going to speak to us about this form of history '40 years on'.

On 7 March Dr Peter Bell's presentation is about an era of heritage not much known about. When he recently undertook a heritage survey of twentieth

century places, he and his colleague, Susan Marsden, came across some very unusual structures built around the state during the Second World War. This talk is sure to interest our many older members, especially those who, while having had association to the defence forces in some way, would have had little idea about what was being built around the state for defence purposes.

By the time Peter Christopher gives his presentation on 4 April, he should be able to report the good news of the arrival at Port Adelaide of the 150 year old ship *The City of Adelaide*. He is very keen to inform us in his talk that she is 'more than just an old ship'.

By way of an encore, we have invited Dr Daniela Cosmini-Rose to speak again on 2 May. Her last talk about three years ago was so well received that members asked when was she coming back. This time she is presenting 'Italian Civil Aliens Corps in SA: the forgotten enemy aliens'. This talk will provide an insight into the harsh experiences of this group of Italian migrants during the Second World War.

Foundation member Ron Gibbs, who has recently published his huge history of colonial South Australian titled *Under the Burning Sun*, is speaking to us on

# Discovering SA's History

6 June. With the title of 'A Fine Place to Live In? South Australia in the 1880s', he will give us an insight into the colony's history and citizens' experiences in that decade.

Another foundation member, Brian Samuels, is presenting the society on 4 July with his account, 'The evolution of Adelaide's North Terrace cultural institutions and their buildings'. He will be conveying the history of the many institutions, their long-lived buildings and the graceful streetscape they helped to create.

To coincide with a forthcoming publication about West Lakes, on 1 August Dr Susan Marsden will be presenting an illustrated history of the transformation of a swamp into a prestigious subdivision.

There are many stories about the renowned artist Hans Heysen, his family and the wonderful Heysen property at Hahndorf called The Cedars, which is regularly open to the public. On 5 September Allison Reynolds' talk is titled, 'Cake - more than still life: Sallie Heysen's story'. She will speak on yet another facet, that of the Heysen family's legendary hospitality at The Cedars.

'And now for something different', as the saying goes. If you like to hear about the lives of common,

criminals, murderers and their ilk, then Associate Professor Peter Howell's talk ensures we are in for a real treat on 3 October. Some of our members may remember the wonderful series of articles Peter wrote years ago about lesser known stories of South Australia's governors. Knowing Peter's propensity for 'picking scabs' off well-known, but thankfully long dead, notable people, the title of his talk says it all: 'Ward McNally: The life and times of a journalist and author haunted by his criminal past'.

Our last speaker for the year will be giving a different slant on South Australian history. On 7 November, Emeritus Professor Norman Etherington's topic is 'South Australia from the perspective of British Empire history'. He will be giving a reflection on how an imperial viewpoint on South Australia differs from that of the local or Australian historian.

We are always looking for interesting speakers and I look forward to suggestions by members of whom they would like as speakers, or subjects they want to know more about.

*Patricia Sumerling*

**Friday 7 February 7:30pm**

**Emeritus Professor Eric Richards**

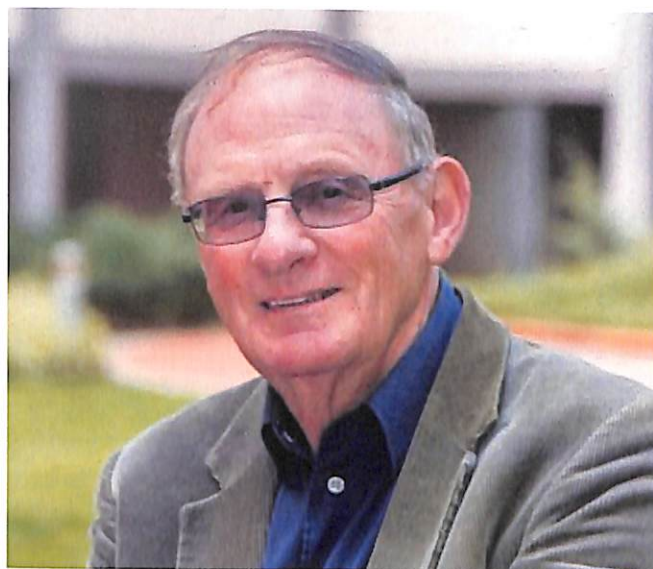
**'History from Below Revisited: Forty Years On'**

Four decades ago Dr Eric Richards gave the very first address to the Historical Society of South Australia, on the topic 'History from Below'. This is an update on that lecture.

Forty years ago 'History from Below' was an influential new direction for historians wanting to incorporate the 95% of the population missing in many historical accounts. It looked to investigate history from the 'grassroots'. It tried to democratise social history and had many followers in Europe, North America and Australia.

Eric Richards was an enthusiast in 1974 and now looks back over the progress and challenges that have marked the career of History from Below since that time. He surveys some of the achievements of History from Below and refers to South Australian examples. He suggests that History has not stood still.

Eric Richards has had a distinguished and highly productive career as a historian



based at Flinders University. He officially retired from that institution in 2012 and was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus, but he continues to research and publish. This year he will take up a position at the new University of the Highlands and Islands in Scotland.

His many interests include international migration, British emigration, Australian immigration, and the Scottish Highland Clearances. His many publications include *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (2008). His honours include being named SA's first-ever Historian of the Year, by the History Council of SA in 2012.

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

Friday 7 March 7:30pm

Dr Peter Bell

## 'South Australia's Role in the Second World War and its Physical Heritage Around Us'

Peter Bell is an historian and heritage consultant. He has a PhD in Australian history from James Cook University, and from 1983 to 1994 was on the staff of the South Australian Heritage Branch. His recent consulting projects have included conservation management plans, heritage surveys and environmental impact assessments. He is an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Archaeology Department at Flinders University and has taught architectural history at the University of Adelaide. His particular interests are the history of industrial technology, settlements and building materials.

The subject matter of this paper arose from a heritage study of South Australia in the period 1928-1945, essentially the Depression and the Second World War. In the course of the study it became apparent that South Australia has a rich material heritage surviving from the events of the Second World War, but that it is very little known. Local histories and heritage studies usually neglect that period,



Aviation fuel tanks at Wolseley.

sometimes ignoring it entirely. There are probably some good reasons for this, which the paper will briefly consider.

South Australia's geographical position determined its wartime role. Centrally located, roughly equidistant from west, north and east coasts, it was a logical place to manufacture, store and distribute munitions, fuel and material. It was also furthest from the most likely place for Japanese aggression, the north coast. This did not mean that South Australia was safe from wartime attack; it is little known that the first Australian servicemen killed by enemy action on Australian soil died in South Australia, on a beach near Beachport.

This paper looks at the little-known physical legacy which the Second World War left us.

# Visiting SA's History

## Yankalilla Trip Sunday 13 October 2013

The weather was threatening as 44 people gathered at Burnside to board a coach for Yankalilla. Even before we got on the bus, we had to shelter from a very heavy shower of rain. When we stopped at Myponga for morning tea, hail fell on the group. We had four seasons in one day! But the variable weather did not spoil a brilliant day! Our driver, Roger Pfeiffer from Woodside Coaches, looked after our comfort and safety. We welcomed his provision of morning tea! Roger has been driving buses for 39 years and started with Graeber's at Woodside. Has anyone investigated the history of bus services in SA? Woodside Coaches continues to provide a very good service to the HSSA.

On the journey Colin Deed gave a running commentary on Noarlunga and other towns along the way. Once at Yankalilla, we were met by Margaret Morgan, our guide for the day from the Yankalilla Historical Society. Margaret told us that the area had been surveyed by Colonel William Light before Adelaide was surveyed! I didn't know that! We drove to view Robert Norman's house in Normanville. Apart from having the town named after him, Robert Norman was also the first dentist in the area and promoted a keen

interest in growing vines for making wine. His house was originally surrounded by vines. Apparently he placed his wife in his cellar, among the wines, after she died! Another point of interest was the fact that Bishop Augustus Short, the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, visited in the 1860s. At Normanville the racehorse Comic Court was bred and stabled before winning the Melbourne Cup in 1950.

In the early days of the colony the Yankalilla/Normanville area provided excellent conditions for wheat growing and supported three flourmills. Farmers mainly worked small 80 acre blocks. Grain was exported from one of three jetties. Storms damaged the first two. At one time there were train tracks out onto the jetty to get grain as close to the ketches as possible. There's also a track like this at Milang.

We saw Butterworth's 1863 house and the Bungala River where the first wharf was built for loading grain. It seemed remarkable that ships sailed up the river in the early days.

Before the establishment of Normanville and the colony of South Australia, Captain Collet Barker visited on a quest to determine the outlet of the River Murray. He examined the eastern shore of Gulf St Vincent from Cape Jervis northward. From Yankalilla Bay he walked

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overland with a party to Encounter Bay where he swam the Murray mouth and was speared to death by Aborigines in 1831. The thought of walking from Normanville to Goolwa now seems daunting.

We drove past the one remaining mill, Ferguson's Mill, built in 1851. After wheat farming diminished due to competition from the mid north, this mill became a place for bark grinding instead of wheat milling. The sale of bark for the tanning industry kept the area going as wheat farming declined.

As we drove past the Catholic Church we heard of Yankalilla's connection with St Mary MacKillop. We stopped at the Wesleyan cemetery, a place worth visiting as it is the oldest cemetery in the area. The oldest grave dated from 1856 and contained the remains of Elizabeth Leak.

By this time our party was ready to consume the delicious lunch provided at the Anglican church hall, by the Anglican Church guild. We were entertained by a talk by Lorraine McLoughlin, a guest speaker at one of our meetings last year, about the paintings by Barbara Robertson in the church hall. After the generous lunch, we visited the church to see the famous apparition, discovered about 20 years ago. Many overseas pilgrims visit the church and it seems

wealthier than many country churches. They have a baptismal font, donated from Salisbury Cathedral, at Artlab currently. The cost of restoration is \$8,000.

Our next destination was Bungala House, the first sections of which were built in 1856. Many later additions make it the largest historic home in the area. Initially the Butterworth and Graham families lived here, having made their fortunes from copper. Mark Pearse, the current owner of Bungala, enthusiastically showed us around the house and property. Mark and his wife have undertaken extensive renovations and restoration and have filled the house with pottery and art. Many of the pieces were the work of Mark Pearse. The property was to be auctioned in the near future.

At last we set off home, trying to travel over the dam wall at Myponga Reservoir until we realised the weight of the bus exceeded the wall limit. Two of our members Bob Swarbrick and Peter Skellon, contributed to the building of the Myponga Dam. Both gave us interesting detail about the building works in the 1960s. Glen Woodward with Colin Deed added details about other historical features on the way home. It was a very interesting outing. Thank you to Colin Deed, Margaret Cliff and committee for organising it.

*Margaret Ford-Feckner*

## Dancing Under the Stars - Lawn Dances



'Obanooka', Orroroo in the 1920s. The area on the verandah, under the arch, is where the orchestra sat. Lighting visible.

### Introduction

On a hot summer evening, in the mid-north town of Orroroo, parents with their children began to arrive through the front gate of 'Obanooka', the new Ford home. The annual Christmas Tree gathering on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1925, given for the kindergarten children of St Paul's Anglican Sunday school, was about to begin, as reported in the *Orroroo Enterprise* of 8 January 1926:

*Much interest was centred in the Tree, which looked very gay*

*with toys and balloons. The lawns which were hung with Chinese lanterns and balloons presented a festive appearance. Refreshments were handed around to the children after Father [Christmas] had dispensed the gifts from the Tree with a glad word for each little recipient. The children had a good time till 9.30 when the lawn was given over to the adults for dancing spaces and popular Miss Gladys Arthur with her equally popular orchestra supplied the music most of the time, with interludes by various performers on the Pianola. The Rev Mr Dunn took advantage of a lull in proceedings to thank Mr Ford for so kindly lending his grounds for the occasion, and the able assistance rendered by him and Mrs Ford towards making the evening a success. Mr Dunn also thanked the Orchestra, the convenors of the entertainment and all who ably assisted and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year. Dancing with an interval for supper (of which there was plenty) continued until well after midnight and there were many of the younger set loathe to stop tireless feet at that hour, but were reluctantly compelled homeward after the music ceased.*

Many happy dances were held on the Ford front lawn from 1926 until 1930. It seemed as if most of the clubs and organisations in Orroroo arranged a summer lawn dance to raise money for

# Contributing to SA's History

community needs. Richard Charles Ford remembered:<sup>1</sup>

*We used to have dances on the front lawn about once a month. If it was for the hospital, they would do the organising. We had lots of dances and big crowds used to come. There would be up to one hundred couples dancing on the lawn at a time. It looked really lovely on a hot summer's night. Someone got the idea of lawn dances and they were such a great success. [The night-time scene] looked really lovely<sup>1</sup>.*

Another Orroroo family, the Dowlings<sup>2</sup>, built a new home in the same style as the Ford home in the 1920s and used their front lawn for lawn dances too<sup>3</sup>.

*Dowlings used to have dances at [their] home too. There were dances either at the hall or Dowlings or at our place.<sup>4</sup>*

## Admission prices

An admission charge was collected at the gate for a range of Orroroo organisations including the refectory fund of St Paul's Anglican Church, the tennis club, the croquet club, the band, the hospital or the Orroroo Branch of the R S A (Returned Services Association):

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<sup>1</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford (1915-2001), father of author.

<sup>2</sup> Dowling family owned Orroroo and then Imperial Hotels in Orroroo.

<sup>3</sup> Oral history from Richard Ford, Edna Ford, Vivian Pitman. No articles found to describe these dances.

<sup>4</sup> Oral History Richard Charles Ford.

*Mr R C Ford's lawn and garden was again a busy scene on Thursday evening when the RSA held a dance in aid of sports funds. Things went with a swing and the big crowd had a good time. The evening [was] in aid of the diggers Sports Day. The branch pay out nearly £80 in prizes and the dance proceeds will go towards that amount<sup>5</sup>.*

The average gate receipts seemed to be around £9 - £12.

*The Kelly Gang [Cricket Club] who held a dance last week on Mr R C Ford's lawn cleared over twelve notes [pounds]. We were forced to admire the gatekeeper, who collected the admission fee during the evening. Funds were badly needed for the purpose of purchasing matting [for the pitch] and from the netting of the first £1 he carried on a lively conversation with those around and at the same time was able to give an accurate reply as to "how much more do we want?" At 8.30 he reckoned £4 wasn't bad, at 9.30 he had enough to buy the matting and at 11 o'clock he announced the sum of £12 and his voice, as it drifted over the Ford's garden, betrayed his very great pleasure. Rather crook luck that the pilot on the beer wagon wasn't included in the vote of thanks.<sup>6</sup>*

## Electric light

The lawn dances at Fords were lit by a relatively new phenomenon in Orroroo, electric light, available when

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<sup>5</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 1 March 1928.

<sup>6</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 15 January 1926.

the Orroroo power house opened in 1923<sup>7</sup>. Richard Charles Ford<sup>8</sup> remembered, 'There were three big flood lights strung along the top of the lawn. It was beautiful, all lit up'<sup>9</sup>.

*The Orroroo Tennis Club held a dance in aid of funds on Mr. R. C. Ford's lawn. The grounds were brilliantly lit by electric light, and the evening was a great success. The club during the past 12 months has spent about £200 on three new courts, and only £40 remains as a debit.*<sup>10</sup>

## The dancers

Visitors from other towns in the district joined the locals at Orroroo dances, whether they were held in the Institute or on Ford's lawn.

*Carloads made the trip from Booleroo Centre, Willowie, Eurelia, "... Jamestown, Peterborough, Appila, Carrieton and the crowd had a good time*<sup>12</sup>.

Others came from Black Rock, Pekina, Wilmington, Morchard, Yatina and Johnburgh. When dances were held in other towns the Orroroo people would go there too. Travelling from Orroroo to Bruce or Hammond or any town for a dance was common. Mrs Vivian

Pitman<sup>13</sup>, recalled riding a horse to dances held in the hotel in Craddock from her place of employment on a station property. She carried her ball gown in a saddle bag and changed at the hotel.

Today we might drive through Black Rock, Pekina, Johnburgh, Eurelia, Hammond, Carrieton and other places in the mid-north and wonder at the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s the population was numbered in the hundreds in each community<sup>14</sup>. Indeed in 1923 the District Council of Orroroo had a population of 1,963.

## The orchestra

Live music at any dance was taken for granted. One person always played the piano, usually Miss Gladys Arthur or Miss M. Ackland. Other musicians may be present and the live music was always called 'the orchestra'. Other regular members of the Orroroo orchestra were the Misses Pfitzner and Messrs Opperman, Jones and Schedlich. In 1929 the dance music was supplied by the Orroroo Brass Band (including Bun Ford, son of R C Ford). These local people always:

*rendered good service in the musical department*<sup>15</sup>. ... *Things went with a swing and the big crowd had a good time*<sup>16</sup>.

The orchestra would sit under the great arch of the new Ford front verandah. This arch was a special feature of the new home and caused comment as to how such a wide arch was engineered

<sup>7</sup> On the 24th August 1923 the electric power house was declared open in Orroroo and the lights were switched on for the town. The plant installed was secured from Western Australia and consisted of 230 voltage. The power house engines were shut down on 4th July 1962 to change to AC power which gave the houses 240 voltage.

<sup>8</sup> Oral History Richard Charles Ford.

<sup>9</sup> Oral History Richard Charles Ford.

<sup>10</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 12 February 1926.

<sup>11</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 12 February 1926

<sup>12</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 19 January 1928.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs Vivian Pitman (nee Taylor) 1908-2000.

<sup>14</sup> Population 1923: Black Rock 326; Carrieton 864; Eurelia 338; Hammond 319; Johnburgh 51; Pekina 471. Source: *Sands and MacDougall's Directories of SA*.

<sup>15</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 19 January 1928.

<sup>16</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 1 March 1928.

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and constructed for a domestic dwelling.

Mrs Vivian Pitman<sup>17</sup> remembered the beautiful moonlight nights, the music, and the great fun. She added, 'We did the Lancers and the Alberts that were both square dances, with four couples.'<sup>18</sup>

The Ford front lawn was described as 'spacious' and it was. The area still exists today, although the lawn has been replaced by more water-wise plants. Today the high concrete surround would, in our terms, be declared an occupational health and safety issue. The danger of a dancer falling over the edge onto the path about 30 cms below the level of the lawn didn't seem to be a concern then!

## Dress Code

The dress code for these dances was 'informal', but not in the sense we understand today.

*Gents please note collar, ties and heavy suits may be stowed away and flannels will be the order<sup>19</sup>.*

The women did not have to be encouraged to dress up! Richard Charles Ford said, 'Instead of having navy blue suits the [men] would come in white tennis trousers and a navy coat and ordinary tie. The men looked really good. The girls used to come in light kinds of evening dresses'<sup>20</sup>.

## Supper

A good supper was part of the proceedings and was always a 'credit to the ladies who cheerfully supplied'<sup>21</sup> the

food. All of the delicious 'scrumptious' food on the supper tables was homemade and included delights like cream puffs, sponges, scones, small cakes, cockles, jam tarts, sausage rolls and sandwiches.

*Supper was arranged by Mesdames Birrell, Shaw, and Forbes<sup>22</sup>.*

Richard Charles Ford said, 'Down one side of the house they would have stalls and supper on the other side of the house. They would also have a stall to sell cool drinks.'<sup>23</sup>

A beer wagon, set up by one of the three hotels in the town, was popular with the male dancers. The wives and partners might enjoy a shandy (beer and lemonade) or a soft drink. Wine was not available. Drinking wine was a thing of the future.

*A cool drink kiosk was in the charge of Mr. H. Fry<sup>24</sup>.*

## Weather

Most articles reported that the weather during lawn dances was 'ideal' or 'perfect', especially on moonlit nights.

*Orroroo Croquet Club Holds Big Lawn Dance. ... A dance, conducted by the ladies of the Orroroo Croquet Club, was held on Mr. R. C. Ford's lawn. The attendance was unusually large, and the evening was ideal. Many visitors from surrounding towns were present.*

There may have been one cancelled dance because one advertisement ran the warning:

<sup>17</sup> Mrs Vivian Pitman (nee Taylor) .

<sup>18</sup> Mrs Vivian Pitman (nee Taylor) .

<sup>19</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 24 December 1926.

<sup>20</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford .

<sup>21</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 1 March 1928.

<sup>22</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 12 February 1926.

<sup>23</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford .

<sup>24</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford.

*Lawn dance if weather permits. Should the night be boisterous the fixture will be held in the Institute<sup>25</sup>.*

While rain was not a regular visitor in Orroroo, situated directly on Goyder's Line, dust storms were a more annoying part of daily life.

*On Saturday last one of the worst dust storms ever known took place. Starting about 7 o'clock in the morning the wind blew nearly a hurricane from the north - blew all afternoon and night. Trees blown down, straw sheds were unroofed ... Out on the Willochra Plain the country is in an awful state there being no feed left whatever - drift sand burying fences ... many farmers did not get their seed back ... some never planted.*

*We sympathise with the man on the land [after this] 5-year drought<sup>26</sup>.*

## Master of Ceremonies

The evening had some formalities, perhaps a farewell speech, and each evening would have a Master of Ceremonies (MC). Often it was Mr Ron Forbes who acted as MC.

*A presentation was made during the evening to Mr Pike [station master] who is leaving the district, by Mr Moody on behalf of the stock agents in Orroroo<sup>27</sup>.*

The host was always thanked.

*On Thursday evening Mr R C Ford's residence was again the scene of festivity, when a dance was held on the*

*lawn ... for the big Fair in aid of the Institute ... The town are fortunate in having a citizen as generous as R C F for he not only gives his lawn but also labours hard for whatever party uses it<sup>28</sup>.*

The generosity of R C F (Richard Coaker Ford<sup>29</sup>) came from a sense of community pride and was applied with a good measure of business acumen. Mr R C Ford ran drapery and general stores in Orroroo, Carrieton and Wilmington and his skills for gaining publicity were known far and wide, even to the point of dropping advertising leaflets from an aeroplane on one occasion. He took every opportunity to *do business*. I believe he also enjoyed showing off his new home, built in 1925, which included the first internal fully tiled bathroom in the district. Previously bathrooms were an attachment at the back of the house, often a galvanised lean-to. In addition he was proud of the large front verandah and the arch, which happened to be just right for seating an orchestra.

## The Orroroo Enterprise

*The Orroroo Enterprise* advertised the lawn dances and later described the proceedings in great detail:

*Even non-dancers will derive a good deal of pleasure from these entertainments, good music, a well-lit garden and supper among the flowers<sup>30</sup>.*

From 1926 until 1930 these well attended social events continued despite living through an:

<sup>25</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 16 February 1926.

<sup>26</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 5 January 1928.

<sup>27</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 18 March 1927.

<sup>28</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* March 1928

<sup>29</sup> Richard Coaker Ford 1886-1963.

<sup>30</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 3 December 1926.

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*Age of wide world unrest amid wars and rumours of war<sup>31</sup>.*

In 1930 the *Enterprise* made three references to lawn dances in Orroroo, two for the cricket club and one for the Orroroo band - and then no other articles appeared until 1942.

## The last dance

Why did the lawn dances cease around 1930? Perhaps it was a lack of water to irrigate lawns. In 1926 Orroroo was described as having ample water obtained from:

*Springs in the Pekina Creek to supply the town with abundant water to irrigate lawns. During the summer months residents are enabled to indulge in open-air dancing on the lawns, which but for the spring[s] would not exist.<sup>32</sup>*

Perhaps it was the plight of the local farmers who were living through a five year drought<sup>33</sup> that started about 1926. When the farmers could not pay their accounts at the local shops, the shopkeepers lost income too. In 1929 R C Ford's shop in Orroroo tried to stop credit, even changing its name to reflect the changed circumstances. The business became 'Orroroo Cash and Carry'. However, R C Ford still gave credit. He told his son, 'You could not face a man at church when you had refused him new shoes for his children the day before.' Perhaps reduced personal fortunes forced a reduction in the generosity of public-minded citizens like R C Ford. Perhaps the cost of power for running the three floodlights became an issue for the Ford family by 1930.

<sup>31</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 3 December 1926.

<sup>32</sup> *The Register* 16 November 1926 Page 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Orroroo Enterprise* 2 February 1934.

The *Orroroo Enterprise* painted a contrast in fortunes for the town. Compare this account in 1926:

*A small northern South Australian town, but ... the centre of a large district ... The town has a good water supply, electric light installed, grass tennis courts, and a number of enterprising citizens among its business men. On sale days sometimes two hundred motor cars are parked in the streets. Within a few years approximately £100,000 has been spent in new buildings. ... Nowadays, when there is often a lament - about decadent South Australian country towns, it is opportune to mention this far northern town, which has made rapid headway during the past few years. Although an old established place, which remained stationary for many years, it has recently been bounding along at a great rate, but it is small, and there is any amount of room for expansion, as those familiar with - the country well know.<sup>34</sup>*

Contrast that description with this one written three years later. In 1929 the Orroroo district was described as:

*hard hit by the drought. Last year 83,948 acres were under crop and yielded 637,860 bushels. This year, approximately 120,000 acres were cropped with wheat, and with the exception of one or two small crops at Pekina there will not be any harvest. This is the sixth year that the*

<sup>34</sup> *The Mail* (Adelaide) Saturday 6 February 1926 page 11.

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*seasons here, have been on the decline, each one getting worse. Sheep have died in thousands on account of there being no feed on the pastoral lands. The whole of the station areas, including Minburra, Yalpara, Meadow Downs, Melton, Barratta, Coonamona and Coonamore stations, at present are just one stretch of barren, wind-swept country. Severe dust storms are frequent as there is no growth on the land to hold it firmly. On some occasions the dust was so severe that it was necessary to have lights burning in the day-time<sup>35</sup>.*

Perhaps it was easier to use the Institute hall and lessen the work involved in preparing what amounted to a bowling green, with all the rolling and watering that demands. Richard Charles Ford said, 'We had to cut the lawn about three times a week and roll it for a successful dancing surface<sup>36</sup>'. He went on to say, 'It was a bit of a novelty to have a dance on the lawn instead of in the hall. On a nice warm summer's night it was beautiful out there<sup>37</sup>'.

Perhaps the novelty just wore off. When asked why the lawn dances stopped Richard Charles Ford suggested they went out of fashion.

Edna Ford<sup>38</sup> remembered the lovely lawn dances. *They were wonderful. We had wonderful times. [Ford's] had a beautiful lawn out the front and it was built up. It was always well looked after. They used to hire an orchestra and have functions especially on summer*

*nights. It was beautiful there. Everyone used to come from near and far. Anyone could come and they paid at the gate the same as everyone else. It would be in aid of this or that.*

The last reference to Orroroo holding a lawn dance, in aid of the war effort, was in a 1942 edition of the *Advertiser*.

*The lawn dance in aid of the Orroroo Red Cross circle proved a popular summer evening's entertainment, and £5 15/ was raised. A district emergency stores depot for the Red Cross has been opened. Residents have been asked to make monthly contributions of required articles, and response to the appeal has been gratifying. — The Boy Scouts under the direction of the troop leader (Mr. Howard Cox) aided the aluminium drive by making a satisfactory house-to-house canvass.—Members of the Red Cross and VSD have provided fruit, &c, to the evacuees passing through Orroroo by train from Darwin<sup>39</sup>.*

Margaret Ford-Feckner

## Adelaidia

HistorySA (formerly the History Trust) is pleased to announce that the new Adelaidia website is up and running, including the first of the S.A.'s Greats profiles. Please have a look around: [www.adelaidia.sa.gov.au](http://www.adelaidia.sa.gov.au) <<http://www.adelaidia.sa.gov.au>>

<sup>35</sup> *The Advertiser* Monday 9 December 1929 p 24.

<sup>36</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford.

<sup>37</sup> Oral history Richard Charles Ford.

<sup>38</sup> Edna May Ford (nee Taylor) 1913–2008.

<sup>39</sup> *The Advertiser* Saturday 14 March 1942 p 3.

## **Launch of *Under the Burning Sun: a history of Colonial South Australia, 1836-1900.***

On 29 November numerous members of this Historical Society attended the launch at Prince Alfred College of Ron Gibbs' magisterial work *Under the Burning Sun*. This truly impressive work is the fruit of a lifetime of devotion to South Australian history by Ron, who was the founding president of our Society from 1974 to 1979.

The following are the speech by Emeritus Professor Eric Richards, who launched the book, and an abridgement of the speech that Ron Gibbs himself gave.

### **Eric Richards:**

It's a great pleasure and a privilege to be asked to welcome into the world this splendid new book by Ron Gibbs. And I want to tell you why I think this is a very significant moment in the publishing history of South Australia, significant for literary and historical reasons - and I'm glad to be the first to tell you about it.

As you will know Ron Gibbs has already made many notable contributions to South Australian history, as an educator and more especially for his services to public history and his school histories. And this year the History Council of South Australia honoured this work with the 2013 South Australian Life-Long History Achievement Award. Time therefore for him to rest on his well-

deserved laurels you might think. Instead he had been working away on this history of colonial South Australia, its first 70 years - and this is a great surprise - I had no idea.

And he has produced a whopper, a blockbuster, a heavyweight contender, a book for weightlifters. It's not so much a Magnum Opus but a Jeroboam Opus. Its sheer size might well put the gentle reader right off the task. I'll explain why not - because this is the very best of South Australian sparkling wine.

First of all it's a wonderful subject. It's difficult to imagine a more fundamental subject than that of creating a brand new society in a barely explored place on the other side of the planet: to create a new social organism; to create *ab initio* all the basics of life afresh; to reinvent the ways of living in a totally alien place. It was an act of herculean audacity and it staggers the imagination even now as we contemplate the modern outcome before our eyes. It was a feat of human engineering at a vast distance from its origins; it was also an act of faith, driven by the most common of motives - the economic motive - but it was also an act of renewal and genesis. This extraordinary feat of human engineering was a mixture of state initiative, private enterprise and individual idealism, of avarice and virtue.

Ron has produced a remarkable narrative of this entire experience, and it is remarkably readable - as it absolutely needs to be at almost 700 pages. This is not picturesque history, but deeply researched realistic history, history for grown-ups. It charts the early realities of this raw new society and its challenges - much of it in vivid dramas, full of humanity and its foibles, presenting the scale and depth of the subject as never before. And it is written

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in easy flowing prose, a real pleasure to read.

It has obviously been a herculean task, documenting in detail the evolution of a society in this strange and often cruel environment - and this is what Ron has achieved wonderfully well.

Throughout you get the feeling that he understands these people, these colonists, and he knows the troubles they had seen - the sheer effort of making their way, their entrepreneurial energy, their greed, their ideals, the severity of the geography of this place, the sun, the droughts, the floods, and some of the God-awful country beyond Goyder's line.

I think Ron must have read virtually everything to produce this astonishingly big book - all the standard sources and then the tiniest details - all kept under control in the narrative. So if you are interested in sheep breeds or the Swedenborgians, wire fencing or the export of wattle bark, or caged birds, or the great waves of rabbits, or mules from Chile, or the wheat varieties, or the foxes, the feral dogs, or the figure of the bushman or the immensely important Friendly Societies - it's all here and very much more. Ron obviously knows the country in all its corners. And he is especially good on the stinks and smells of Adelaide, a neglected dimension of our social history.

But we also find the big themes of the story - the impact of planning, the obsession with land, the audacious thrust into the Northern Territory, Federation, the cycles of boom and depression, the quasi-communistic settlements on the Murray and elsewhere, the religious enthusiasms and rifts, the political manipulations, the technologies and the experimentation, the testing of the

environment, its special rural technologies and the narrow vulnerable base of the colonial economy with its fabulous wealth and grizzled poverty side by side. And always there was Adelaide as 'the capital of a little principality', not to mention the whiffs of State Socialism.

All this was under 'the burning sun', and then most of all the pillaging and plundering of the land by progressive agriculture and settlement. This required the destruction of Aboriginal societies, often with recourse to lynch law. And here Ron is chillingly candid. It is not a pretty story. So this is history of a sophisticated sort, the great and the small, warts and all.

It is an extraordinary achievement to keep all this in balance, not to be overwhelmed in detail and trivia, but to see the underlying drama unfold - and to expose the constraints imposed on the people of colonial South Australia as they approached Federation. Trial and error were the main engines of progress and subject to endless experimentation and disappointment. This is not celebratory history but sharp edged and critical, not a catalogue or a compendium, but a thorough authoritative record which quietly describes how humanity evolved in this peculiar place.

So we have a vast panorama of South Australian life in the first 70 years, in a sardonic, sympathetic, knowing and highly engaging manner. It gets the story as straight as is possible, with little moralising or preaching, and is a real pleasure to read. It's a deeply informed descriptive narrative which quietly explains how this society emerged and how it worked.

This is also a generous book - in every way. And not only by its formidable size and weight; but in its sheer scope, its

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intelligence, its balance and understanding. But it is also generous in another sense – this is Ron Gibbs' exceptionally generous gift to South Australia. He has obviously invested half a lifetime of scholarship in this great work – I imagine he has spent not only much of his working career in this wonderful achievement but much of his retirement on this task. Anyone who has done serious historical research knows that this is arduous work and without end, and Ron Gibbs has done this astonishing service to South Australia and indeed to Australian historiography, from his own reservoirs, his own dedication, his own time and capital. It is an inestimable gift to South Australia. It embodies an enormous amount of original research, it is authoritative and panoramic all at once.

Having said all this it has to be said also that the reader needs to be properly prepared. I have some practical advice. Clearly this is not a book with which to lounge on the beach or on the train – because it's a bit big for that. What you will need is a very comfortable armchair and a succession of days, perhaps weeks – and I would suggest a nice cup of tea or, much better, a bottomless glass of Scotch – and then savour in contemplation the sheer readability and the literary pleasure that this vast book will give you. This is mature scholarship with every form of human life portrayed in a convincing and sympathetic form with a quiet understanding of the operation of our society in its formative years. It is intrinsically fascinating and it is here produced with style and verve.

So, as one of the very first readers of this wonderful addition to our scholarship, I heartily congratulate the author, and now hereby launch it among its eager readers.

**The following is an abridged version of the author's speech at the launching of *Under the Burning Sun: a history of colonial South Australia 1836-1900*. (The author's acknowledgments to others, given at the launch, can be found in the book itself. Some other sections of the speech have been condensed.)**

To some extent I apologise for the size and weight of this book. I actually don't like big, heavy books. Colin Thiele, tolerant of nearly all books, once declaimed against big books. He said they were simply too heavy to read comfortably in bed. If they slipped, he said, they could crush your chest, break your ribs, puncture your lungs and do other damage—though he said he was rewarded one night in bed when reading Xavier Herbert's first edition of his huge novel *Poor Fellow My Country*—a novel that ranks even now on a world scale as one of the longest ever written. Colin had discovered a literal mistake on a certain page. Herbert had intended to say 'The moon was peering through the trees', but unfortunately the letter 'r' had been left out of the word 'peering', and the moon was doing something else ...

So, why is this book so long? I know other historians could have said much the same in a shorter work. In fact I became worried quite early about the length of some chapters. I had previously found that FH Schubert, known to some of you as once second master at St Peter's College, was an astute critic of the written and spoken word. He could often raise the very question I hadn't thought of. Thus, when discussing education, he said first up, 'What is a school?' If you think that's easy to answer, try it for yourself—

it's tougher than one might think. Anyway, I asked Mr Schubert whether some readers might be bothered by the length of the early chapters of this book. He made a few critical remarks about some things and just for a moment seemed too kindly to come to the point. Then he registered his typical steely look and bellowed, 'Damn those readers, put it all in, put it all in!' Thus fortified, and also remembering the Duke of Wellington's famous injunction—though I was in happier circumstances than the Duke when he made that remark—I thought I should just 'publish and be damned'. In the end, the Duke's four words became distilled in my mind into a justification just in two words for what I was doing: 'sheer bloody-mindedness'.

Besides, many readers and perhaps students above all, will be concerned with only some issues raised and only some chapters in this book. They will look for at least a reasonable discourse about those issues, if only to inform themselves about what happened and when. If such a reader finds enough to encourage further reading and goes on to sturdy criticism of what is here, then the book will have done its work. And the story of South Australia in colonial times does not fit easily into the general histories of Australia. For one thing, in nearly all respects South Australia was less Irish, less Catholic, less Anglican, less Presbyterian, but more Methodist, more Lutheran and more Congregational than other colonies. To take another example, South Australia in the 1880s had markedly different experiences from those of other colonies. That malevolent year 1886, when the Commercial Bank of South Australia crashed after a sensational fraud and the colony suffered many other woes, might surely rank as the worst in South Australia's history. (Since it's cricket war in Australia now,

we should recall that the bank's manager, Alexander Crooks, who had brought the bank down, had earlier caught the legendary champion WG Grace in the first-ever match against the English on the Adelaide Oval. Grace, of course, disputed the catch—Crooks, he alleged, had sprawled across the boundary chain in completing the catch, but Grace was out.) In the 1880s Victoria, still in a riotous boom and often a target of South Australian scorn, was in quite a different situation. Nor are we helped by the writings of the easterners themselves. Douglas Pike was surely right when he said in 1957 that the short history of this young nation has been told too often through eastern eyes and is more than the history of Sydney and Melbourne writ large. Since 1957 the easterners have sometimes continued in the same vein. A Booker prize-winner, lately turning to history, has a description of South Australia's history that is surely a travesty. Some of the individuals prominent in the South Australian story don't fare too well, either. Manning Clark, in the fourth volume of his history of Australia, calls John McDouall Stuart a 'pompous wild ass of a man'; four pages later, when he returns to Stuart, he immediately resorts to the term a 'wild ass of a man'. Well, at least to Clark at this second attempt, Stuart was no longer 'pompous', but just 'a wild ass of a man'. Yes, Stuart was clearly fond of the cup that cheers, but the northern squatter and writer in South Australia, Robert Bruce, astonished at sighting an emaciated Stuart emerge from the bush, was closer to the mark when he recognised that the explorer had the pluck of a giant in his puny frame, coupled with a prudence and good judgment that eminently fitted him for the leadership of exploring expeditions, on which no life was ever lost. Nowadays we seem to reserve such

admiration of pluck and sheer courage for those on sportsfields—such as for those facing Mitchell Johnson with aplomb. Stuart, to use Clark's common phrase, might have had a worm in his clay, but he had much more besides.

To redress this picture of easterners and their writing of South Australian history, one should note just how much of South Australia's past has been explained with insight and facility by historians from elsewhere. Douglas Pike, author of that monumental work *Paradise of Dissent*, was born in China. His missionary father was killed by bandits there. Pike himself spent years in the bush in New South Wales, where he worked as a shearer, rouseabout, surveyor's assistant and overseer. Another historian, Gerry Portus, was first a country parson in New South Wales. The geographer Donald Meinig came from America to study the South Australian landscape and the colonial wheat rush, and then to write his classic *On the Margins of the Good Earth* in the early 1960s. The historical geographer Michael Williams, whose work *The Making of the South Australian Landscape* is well known, was born in Swansea in Wales. One could go on listing those whose insights were first nourished beyond this state. There is surely a message in all of this.

I won't enlarge on themes covered in this book, but mention just some in passing. Quite obviously, Adelaide is distinctive in the whole story. The city is tucked away in a gulf, sited more shyly than other Australian capitals, as though trying to hide, even if for a long time it was the third largest city in Australia. Often the city was away from the regular shipping lanes, forcing the colonial government to have a mail boat of its own for quite a time. And no other Australian colony or state was, or is, so much dominated by its capital.

The relationship between Adelaide and the country districts was, and still is, marked by its own tensions. A typical outburst came from a Jamestown editor who declaimed in 1881 against what he saw as a city conspiracy against the country; 'Adelaide, Adelaide, Adelaide' he thundered, 'Only one conclusion can be arrived at, that Adelaide is the place for everything'. That country sentiment, of course, is still much alive.

As for Adelaide itself, people in colonial times tried to describe its characteristics by applying various labels to the city. It was variously described as the 'white city' from the whiteness of its stone buildings, though later the same stones became dull and grimed. Adelaide was known as the 'city of belltowers', too, and the 'garden city', even if Melbourne also claimed that title. Other labels for Adelaide were the 'city of palms' and the 'city of culture', the latter title soon becoming enshrined in John Foster Fraser's well-known book *Australia: making of a nation*. 'Adelaide for culture', Fraser said, 'Melbourne for business, Sydney for having a good time'. And he pictured Adelaide by another title, as the 'Philadelphia of Australia'. In the 1890s Adelaide, because of the fever of mining speculation in it, had won a new title—the 'city of churches and shares'. This was a reflection of Adelaide's, and South Australia's, predilection and ability for seizing opportunities beyond its borders. The heart of the Golden Mile at Kalgoorlie was pegged by an Adelaide syndicate, and Adelaide was a principal conduit for British capital flowing into mining. Broken Hill was almost a South Australian province, and it is astonishing to reflect that in February 1886 more than one-third of the BHP company's 317 shareholders were South Australians. As for the National Bank, the largest part of its business was once in South Australia,

and the bank had more than half its shareholders living in the colony.

One title, of course, above all others—the ‘city of churches’—has clung fast to Adelaide. I don’t care for the term—I think it reinforces the image of conservatism that has hung about Adelaide, and one can argue that its accuracy is questionable anyway. Besides, that mighty authority Wikipedia lists 24 cities in the world with the title the ‘city of churches’, and that list does not include Chicago—which it should—and that would make 25. And why didn’t colonial people give the title the ‘exploration city’, or something similar, to Adelaide, because in the 19th century the city was clearly the exploration capital of the continent.

Then there is the theme of identity. At first the European colonists saw themselves as settling in an adopted home. They used the term their ‘adopted land’ freely. E.W. Andrews, in his colonial verse in 1844, put it this way:

My heart has never left my home—  
I know it never will;  
My body to the south might come,  
My soul’s in England still.

Few South Australians then liked the term ‘colonial’. It savoured of roughness and perhaps the convict colonies. But by the end of the century South Australians had a different view. Richard Chaffey Baker, born in North Adelaide but educated at Eton and Oxford, told Audrey, Lady Tennyson, the governor’s wife, at dinner at Government House in 1899, ‘I’m not an Englishman, I’m a colonial’. That caused Lady Tennyson next day to write home to her mother in England and say, ‘I am so surprised at the way they are so proud of being colonials’. As for being ‘Australians’, there was still

caution and confusion in this pre-federation time. Dr John Cockburn, speaking as premier at the commemoration ceremony at Glenelg on 28 December 1889, reminded the gathering that they should be proud of being Australians as well as of British origin, and they should look forward to the federation of Australia. But he also urged them to remember that their first allegiance was to their own colony — they were ‘South Australians first and Australians second’. (To us, that sentiment sounds curiously like what a certain Queensland premier was saying about his own allegiances some years ago.) It was left to a more thoroughgoing nationalist, Josiah Symon, to make a better statement and ask in 1894 whether it was really necessary to divide into sections. ‘We are all Australians first, and anything else you like afterwards’, he told a town hall meeting in 1894.

Other themes well up strongly in South Australia’s nineteenth century. What was the proper function of a central or local government? How far was that function to be bridled, so that individuals might freely pursue their own ends? What products could town and country supply, and for whose benefit? How far should the land itself be tamed and its natural environment exploited? Who should control the Murray River and its headwaters? (Even the famed fathers of federation could not adequately answer that question.) What was a family? How could health be better, when people were ravaged by epidemics, or even bitten by snakes, or blighted by the accidents then so common on farms and roads and in small factories? What should be done about polluted air? And was the South Australian *Register* newspaper anticipating a modern issue when it complained in 1870 that riders of velocipedes (‘velocipedarians’, it termed

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them) were competing for space with other vehicles on the road? Then, too, came the mighty question of how the indigenous people should be treated, when the humanitarian spirit enshrined in Governor Hindmarsh's first proclamation on 28 December 1836 had waned so rapidly. And who should fight in war, and where and with whom? Did the Adelaide suffragist Mary Lee really deserve the label 'treasonous', the label given to her when she wrote to the *Advertiser* in 1899 during the South African War to protest against the use of lyddite mines and what she called a dastardly raid on a young state struggling for independence? And what was to be done about the recurring bouts of unemployment and its consequences in a fragile economy? Can we blame one of the shuffling group of unemployed men who milled outside the Treasury Building in that black year of 1886 and called out to premier John Downer inside, 'Come out and show yerself, can't yer?' And what was to be thought of the actions of the city council when it used its steam pump in 1894 to saturate portions of the Torrens banks to deter some of the unemployed who were camping there? Or, at the same time, what was to be done about the twenty-six unemployed men who were roused by police at dawn from their rain-soaked bedding under trees in Botanic Park and then were delivered into court and charged that afternoon? Thomas Moran, one of those unemployed, had his own answer: 'Well, Sir,' he sneered at the magistrate, 'you give me two months for something; next time I won't get two months for nothing', and he refused to apologise when summoned back to do so.

The colonial world tosses up for the curious historian, and for anyone else willing to observe it, many disturbing questions. How far have we come in tackling them? Perhaps far – but

perhaps not. One can also suggest that a study of the colonial world is of a world that comes alive not merely in antiquarian probing, but responds, like all good historical inquiry, with enough spontaneity and liveliness to engage us firmly. And it should never be treated with condescension but with humility and a desire to learn from it wherever we can. For much of that colonial world is with us yet.

*Ron Gibbs*



Ron Gibbs signing purchases of his book at its launch. Photograph by Colin Deed.

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