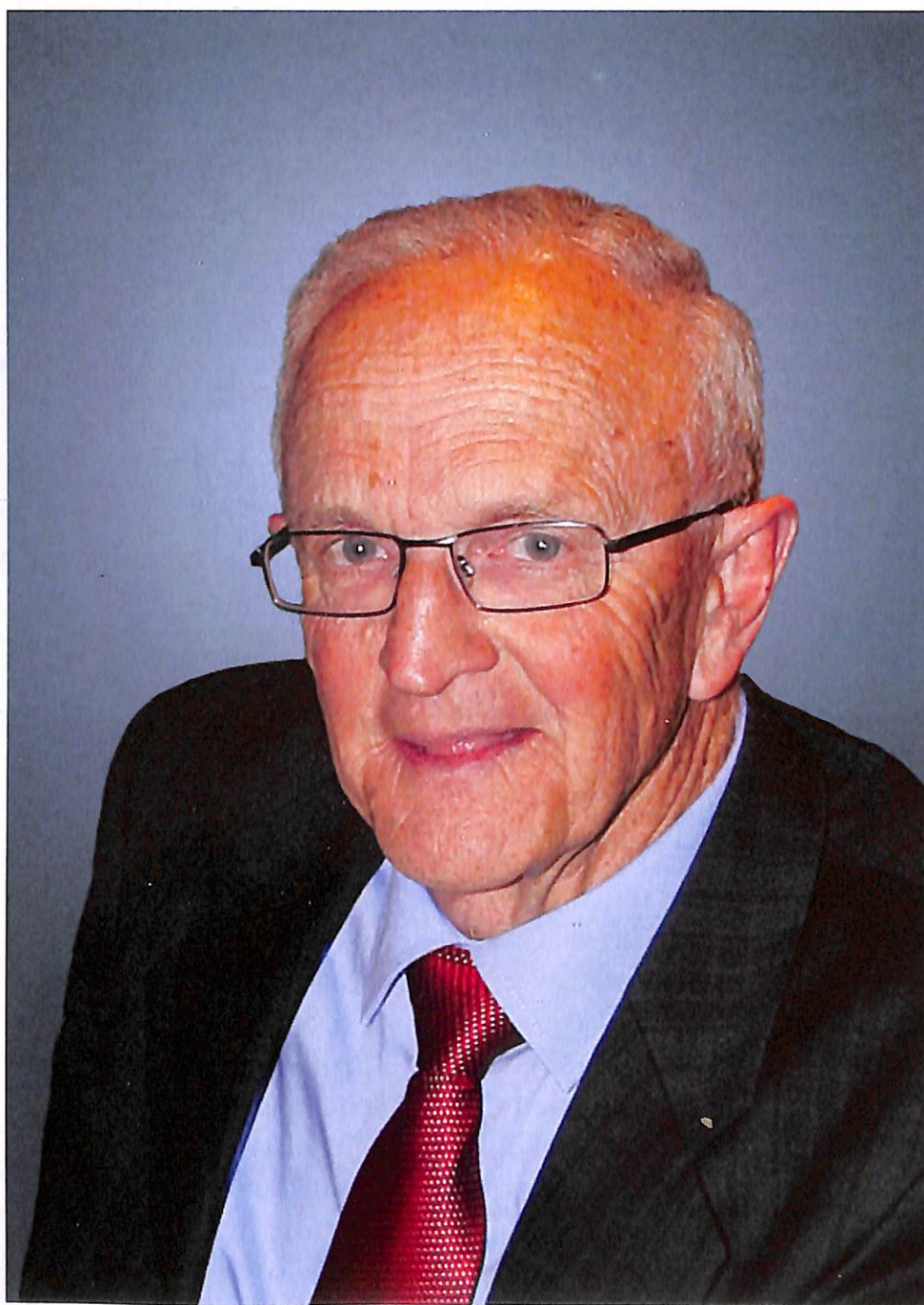


No. 233 January 2016



**Ronald Malcolm Gibbs AM 14 November 1938 - 16 September 2015**

Photograph by Richard Venus

## From the President

The passing of one year and the celebrations surrounding New Year always, without fail, bring about periods of reflection, both of looking back and forward.

The final gathering for 2015, which included our Christmas supper, was, as it always is, a wonderful occasion for joining together in celebration. It was also an occasion on which to celebrate the life and work of our much respected Founding President, Ron Gibbs, with the posthumous awarding of the inaugural Maurice Keain Medal for writing on South Australian history. Whilst specifically awarded for Ron's well-received history entitled *Under the Burning Sun*, all present at our final meeting for 2015 shared in a common belief that a lifetime's work researching, writing and sharing South Australia's story was being celebrated. This belief was echoed in the well-chosen comments of David Hilliard, spoken in support of the award. We are grateful to Maurice Keain for this opportunity to recognise the champions of South Australia's history. Ron's contributions saw him awarded the inaugural History Council of SA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013. My own memories of Ron include a strong sense of gratitude for his arrival at Streaky Bay to visit me in my inaugural year of teaching in 1979 (whilst he was History Consultant for the

Education Department), accompanied by many crates of history teaching resources to share from the back of his EH Holden wagon (as I recall). Subsequently, over several decades, he shared my passion for the work of the History Teachers' Association, a body of which he had been an inaugural Committee member in 1962. In coming issues of our Newsletter I intend to offer snippets from the earliest paper records of our Society, some of which were forwarded to me by another former President, David Cornish, following Ron's passing.

Only a few weeks after Ron Gibbs' passing the History community of South Australia suffered another sad loss with the untimely passing of John Bannon, former Premier of South Australia, former President of the History Council of South Australia (our peak representative group), published historian and, like Ron, a member of the Historical Society of South Australia. As the current President of the History Council, Professor Peter Monteath commented in his public notice in the *Advertiser*, John's contribution to the cause of History in South Australia, let alone society and government, was of great significance. His work on Australia's Federation has been deservedly critically acclaimed. Personally, I will

# From the President

treasure the time I spent with John whilst his Vice-President on the History Council. Genuinely down-to-earth, he even took time out to visit me for meetings at Concordia College where I was teaching at the time. John shared a passion for South Australia's history and a desire to advocate at every opportunity.

On behalf of the Historical Society and as a member of the South Australian History community I salute Ron Gibbs and John Bannon and in the spirit of looking forward I pledge to carry on their legacy of advocacy.

As an eternal optimist, I always look forward with a degree of optimism and confidence, whatever the naysayers might predict, and for me 2016 is no different. From the perspective of our Historical Society of South Australia there is much to look forward to. Our lecture program, themed 'Interesting People, Interesting Stories' (thanks to Richard Venus for the suggestion) offers just that, a veritable treasure chest of topics to appeal to a wide range of tastes. We are forever grateful for the sterling efforts of our Program Coordinator, Patricia Sumerling, who works hard throughout each year to seek out guests whose research is topical, whilst full with the engaging stories that are at the heart of South Australia's history. Our field trip program is taking

shape and details will be out shortly. In late December the Grants Committee judged the submissions for projects over the next few months and all applicants have been informed of the outcome. The next mailing for our members, after the distribution of the excellent 2015 Journal, includes both this Newsletter and our 2016 Program and membership form. All members are urged to rejoin promptly and to encourage new and lapsed members to join. Your Council will continue to review the various aspects of our core business in 2016, as well as discussing a tentative proposal I have put forward for a biennial HSSA conference, and I urge all members to seriously consider nominating for the Council at our AGM in early May.

Yours in history,

*Andrew Buxton*, President

The website of the Historical Society of South Australia is again up and running. Consult it at [www.hssa.org.au](http://www.hssa.org.au)

'The challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present.' ~David Thelen

# Contributing to SA's History

## Ronald Malcolm Gibbs AM

Ron Gibbs, who died on 16 September 2015, played a central role in the Historical Society of South Australia for over forty years. He was one of the founders of the Society in 1974, its first president (1974-1979), a member of the Council of the Society until 1993 (thereafter a Consultant), and a member of the editorial committee of the Society's *Journal* from 2000. At the same time, he was a valued member of the South Australia Working Party of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1974-2010), the South Australian Heritage Committee (1979-91), and the History Trust of South Australia (1980-85). In recognition of his service to education, especially History, in 1982 he was appointed a member of the Order of Australia. In 2010 he was awarded the Medal of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Ron's knowledge of the history of South Australia was enormous, and he was generous with advice and assistance to both the Society and many individual historians.

Ron was born in Adelaide on 14 November 1938, the second child of Ernest and Mavis Gibbs. After schooling at Highgate Primary School and Prince Alfred College, he studied at the University of Adelaide and graduated in 1959 with a BA Honours degree in History. His Honours thesis on

'Humanitarian theories and the Aboriginal inhabitants of South Australia to 1860' led to his first publication in 1960 in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*. In 1963 Ron married Margaret Cook and they had three children - Julie, Brenton and Marina.

From 1960 Ron taught History and French at Marion High School. In 1970, after a year in the United States on a Fulbright Award, teaching at a high school in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, he was appointed a Consultant in History for schools, based at Wattle Park Teachers' College. During these years he wrote *A History of South Australia from Colonial Times to the Present* for schools and general readers. First published in 1969, it reached a revised third edition in 1999. In 1974 he published *The Aborigines* as an introductory survey, for schools, of the history and culture of the Aboriginal people of Australia and the impact of white invasion (fourth edition, 1996).

In 1981 Ron left teaching and started on a new career as professional historian. His first major work was a commissioned history of Prince Alfred College, the school that he himself had attended. *A History of Prince Alfred College* was published in

# Contributing to SA's History

1984, with a second edition in 2008. Ron's history of PAC is a distinguished work: generous in scope, astute in its judgements and its portraits of personalities, and honest in tackling the problems and controversies of each period.

Ron's next book was a centenary history of the Stock Exchange of Adelaide: *Bulls, Bears and Wildcats*, published in 1988. This is a trail-blazing (and very readable) history of business in South Australia which includes summary accounts of the major companies that have risen here since the 1840s. In his review the professor of Economic History at the University of Sydney praised it as 'a marvellously even handed and honest description of the good, the bad, and the colorful events in the Exchange's long history'. In 1994 Ron published *Not for Ourselves*, a history of St Andrew's Hospital. This took him into the fields of medicine, nursing education, the economics of health care and health administration.

Ron's major project was a history of South Australia in the nineteenth century, which he worked on for many years. His book was published in December 2013: *Under the Burning Sun: A History of Colonial South Australia, 1836-1900*. This is a massive work - in length, equivalent to three doctoral theses

- which surveys every area of the colony's political, economic and social life in a series of chapters on particular topics, arranged in broad chronological sequence. It will remain for many years a valuable work of reference and an essential starting point for further research.

It was fitting that in 2013 Ron was honoured by the History Council of South Australia with its South Australian History Lifetime Achievement Award.

*David Hilliard* OAM

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## What are you reading?

HSSA members share what they are reading.

**Madeline Ferguson Allen** *Wake of the Invercauld* (Exisle Publishing, Auckland, New Zealand, 1997)

This book could pass for a ripping 'boy's own annual' yarn. The main difference is that it is a true story. It tells of the wrecking of the *Invercauld* in 1864 on the sub-Antarctic Auckland Islands. The author is the great-granddaughter of Robert Holding, one of the men who survived the wreck and 12 months stranded on these desolate islands. Nineteen men survived the shipwreck but only three lived long enough to be rescued. Holding wrote his recollections of the events in 1926 and the author uses these as the basis for her book and a visit to the Auckland Islands. The attempts by the men to survive the extreme weather conditions and inadequate food supplies are remarkable. Madeline Ferguson Allen does an excellent job of relating the story of the shipwreck and Holding's later life. The reader also learns lots about the geology and natural history of these islands which are now a New Zealand conservation reserve.

*Geoffrey Bishop*

# Discovering SA's History

Friday 5 February 7:30 pm

Michael Ward

## History of Justices of the Peace: England and South Australia

For 200 years after the Conquest, law and order in England (such as it was) was the responsibility of the Norman sheriffs. For various reasons, they fell out of favour and were replaced by justices of the peace, mostly appointed from the gentry. Ultimately justices of the peace ruled England, always having a majority in parliament and the privy council (later, 'the cabinet'), and being responsible for police, local government and the courts. When Australia was settled, an attempt was made to run Australia in the same way, but two things prevented this from ever really taking place. In the first place, from 1850, justices of the peace fell out of favour in England. Secondly, there were insufficient 'gentry' in Australia to carry out the multiple tasks formerly carried out by their brethren in England. This talk gives the ups and downs of the South Australian attempt.

Michael Ward is a barrister and solicitor and served 36 years as a magistrate in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. He is the author of numerous texts and

books, including two on the history of justices of the peace.

*A Bench of Bastards* is a history of the judicial system, not from the boring rarefied atmosphere of the upper echelons of the



An English poacher faces a Justice of the Peace

judiciary but viewed from the lower 'tar pits' where all the work is done. Included is the origins and development of the magistracy in England touching on the history of punishment, imprisonment and the poor laws, forerunner of today's modern social security systems. This is followed by the history of magistracy in each Australian state and territory, including civil jurisdiction and the controversial question of Aborigines and the law.

**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.**

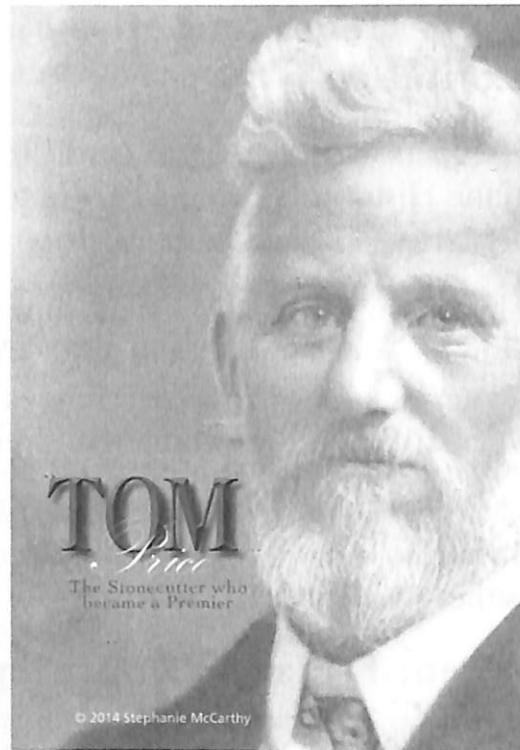
Friday 4 March 7:30 pm

Stephanie McCarthy

**'No Ordinary Man' - Tom Price: from Stonecutter to Premier**

Stephanie McCarthy is a South Australian author who has been writing for the page, stage, screen and radio for 45 years. She has been a book reviewer and is a teacher of both adults and children, conducting creative writing workshops. This biography of Tom Price led her along an eight-year path of research in Wales, Liverpool and South Australia.

This is the forgotten story of an underprivileged boy stonecutter who was determined to make the world a happier place for working men and women. Battling against wealthy and powerful conservatives, Tom's honesty, humour and never-say-die attitude became powerful tools to help the new United Labor Party achieve ground-breaking reforms, including women's suffrage. As master mason he shaped the marble columns of South Australia's Parliament House in 1889 before entering the Assembly as Member for Sturt, and from there, against all the odds, the 'Stormy Petrel' rose to become SA's greatly-



respected and much-loved Minister of Education and its first Labor Premier from 1905-1909.

Says Stephanie: 'I tell the story within the story; of why I as mostly a fiction writer devoted eight years of my life to researching and writing this biography about a man and his equally remarkable wife. The more I uncovered about Tom and Annie, the more I realised that here were some of the most interesting "fictional" characters the world has ever witnessed - yet they were not fiction, they were real. I became determined to bring these two extraordinary people and their times to life in order to ensure that they and their achievements can be marvelled at, and forever remembered'.

# Visiting SA's History

## Ayers House and Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries Exhibition

Members and Friends are cordially invited to join members of the Council of the Historical Society of SA in touring the Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries Costume Exhibition and Ayers House.

This rare opportunity to view 'sumptuous costumes, props and furniture from the popular Australia ABC TV series Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries' in the exquisite setting of the rooms of 'the finest home on North Terrace', our wonderful Ayers House, is not to be missed.

Visitors may view 'up close' the costumes created by designer Marion Boyce for series three of the TV program and even try on replica costumes as they walk through the sets.

**When: Friday 12 February 2016 at 10.00am.** The cost of the visit is \$20 per person \*, payable in advance, or on the day to Margaret Cliff. Please meet Margaret at the East Terrace end gate of Ayers House at 9.45am. The tour takes approximately 90 minutes.

\*Discounts apply for Concession Card holders, children and National Trust members (current membership card needed).

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### What are you reading?

Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, London, William Collins, 2015

*Ulysses*, *Moby-Dick* and *A Brief History of Time* must be the books most often begun but not finished. With regard to *Moby-Dick* where did Herman Melville obtain his story which ends with the sinking of the ship *Pequod* by the white whale? The true story *In the Heart of the Sea* makes a book I promise you will not be able to put down. Supported by meticulous research and several survivors' testimonies, we learn the fate of 21 crew members in three small boats over 90 days. Pertinent to the story is the moral dilemma faced by survivors, often discussed as 'the custom of the sea'. With me trawling through many books a year, this was my 2015 Christmas present which I completed by New Year, easily my favourite for the year. *Patricia Sumerling*

Readers are invited to share information on books they have been reading. The entries should be short, giving title, author, publisher and a short comment on why you like the book. We are restricting this to books on history, but from wherever, not just South Australia or Australia.

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'History is an argument without end.' ~Pieter Geyl

Wakefield Press, our generous sponsors, have moved their premises to 16 Rose Street, Mile End. The new telephone number is 8352 4455.

## Speakers in 2016

'Australian history is almost always picturesque; indeed, it is also so curious and strange, that it is itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer and so it pushes the other novelties into second and third place. It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies; and all of a fresh new sort, no mouldy old stale ones. It is full of surprises and adventures, the incongruities, and contradictions, and incredibilities; but they are all true, they all happened.' *Mark Twain, 1897*

Another year and we have another gaggle of fabulous speakers to entertain us. As stressed last year, finding suitable speakers months before each Christmas, means some are committed for up to 18 months. A week or so before a talk I contact the speaker just to make sure they haven't fallen off the perch or gone off to foreign climes and forgotten us.

This year topics range from transportable homes, policewomen, and JPs to Dragon Trees, and from ballet troupes to former premiers, artists, spies, antifascists and more besides.

On 5 February we begin with former Chief Magistrate Michael Ward, author of the 2013 publication *Bench of Bastards: a*

*history of justices of the peace and magistrates in England and Australia*. I am sure he will have a lot to say about the South Australian situation.

During Writers' Week on 4 March Stephanie McCarthy will give us an account taken from her publication of the life of Labor's first premier and the establishment of the Labor Party. This is 'No ordinary man - Tom Price: from stonecutter to premier'.

What did people live in and what options were open to South Australia's earliest migrants on arriving in a colony where do-it-yourself was the order of the day? One of these options will be discussed by Paul Stark on 1 April, 'The portable cottages of Henry Manning: system building meets systematic colonization'. Meant to be just temporary buildings, amazingly several survive to be some of the oldest buildings in South Australia. Will anything from Ikea last that long?

Many years ago Jo Peoples of the Adelaide Festival Theatre's Performing Arts Collection gave us an illuminating talk about dramatist and larger-than-life identity Patricia Hackett. This time on 6 May, she is going to give a presentation about another notable woman - a modernist artist - and her association to a ballet troupe. Her talk is titled

# Discovering SA's History

'Dorrit Black and Les Ballets Contemporains'.

Women feature prominently in the talk of 3 June when former policewoman Chris Bettess, author of *To walk a fair beat - a history of the South Australian Women Police 1915 - 1987*, gives us a presentation of '100 years of women in policing'. This is in celebration of their centenary in 2015.

On 1 July we move from portable buildings and people to trees when Dr Geoffrey Bishop will enthral us with an ornamental but most unusual species of tree - the Dragon Tree. His talk is titled 'There's a dragon in my garden'.

After hearing Denise Schumann giving an absorbing talk in May last year during History Month, I invited her to present it to the Historical Society on 5 August. It is titled 'An unlikely Alliance: Women's Suffrage and Wesleyanism in South Australia'.

Under our Constitution by which we can invite one speaker a year to give a topic about an aspect of Australian history rather than just relating to South Australia, prolific author Professor Peter Monteath's presentation will be taken from his (and co-author Valerie Munt's) intriguing biography of one of Australia's lesser known but 'tarnished' characters. From his publication

*The Red Professor: Fred Rose*, on 2 September Peter will discuss Rose's communist roots during the Cold War period and how he went on to spy/inform for the Stasi Secret Police when he left Australia to live out the remainder of his life in East Germany.

Many of us know that the famous Sherlock Holmes author came to South Australia in the early 1920s, but why did he come to Adelaide? Fran Zilio, archivist from the South Australian Museum, together with her colleague Jenni Thurmer will give a presentation about 'Conan Doyle in South Australia' on 7 October.

Our final talk for the year on 4 November will be given by David Faber. Titled 'Anti-fascism: Francesco Giovanni Fantin', his presentation concerns an Italian labourer and anti-fascist émigré to South Australia. David's talk concerns his assassination by fascist conspirators in 1942 whilst held as an enemy alien at Loveday Internment Camp in the Riverland.

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

*Patricia Sumerling*, Committee Member.

# Contributing to SA's History

## NOTICE BOARD and TABLE

The Notice Board and Table need your help in supply. Whether it is advertising for other clubs or societies, notices, brochures, booklets etc, all would be greatly appreciated.

Need help? See Colin Deed at meetings or phone 8277 2953

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## THE SHED PRIZE

Your donated book(s) have been so good it has enabled The Shed Prize to be 2 - 3 books per raffle which in turn gives the ticket holder a better chance of scoring a prize.

Looking forward to more books in 2016. If you need help to carry or collect, please see Colin Deed at meetings or phone 8277 2953.

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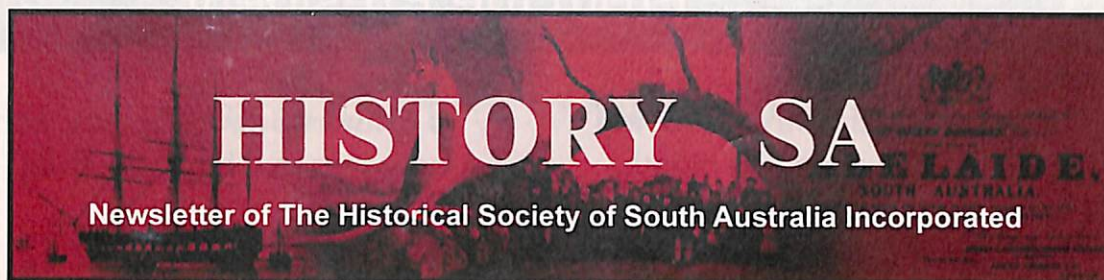
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Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome. The deadline for submission of articles for the next Newsletter is Sunday 12 March.



No. 234 March 2016

## From the President

As I mentioned in our last newsletter, the recent passing of Ron Gibbs meant that I came into possession of copies of the minutes of many of the early meetings of the society, along with several letters between our founders at the time of the society's establishment. Rather than 'dry and dusty' records of our society's past, the documents bring our past to life, giving interesting insights into the actions and thoughts of our founders, or, in this month's selection suggesting how our beginning might have been quite different.

Prior to the July 19, 1974, inaugural meeting of the Historical Society of South Australia at the Historical Museum at the rear of the Art Gallery, Brian Samuels actively sought the support of the State's political leaders for South Australian history. Writing in the context of what he described as 'the burgeoning interest in local history and the growth of S.A. history in the schools', Brian, writing on 4 September 1973, to

The Hon. D.A. Dunstan, then Minister for Tourism and Development as well as Premier, noted the need for a historical society devoted to 'the whole extent of South Australian history', providing such services as: 'a clearing house for research, compiling and publishing research guides; the dissemination of knowledge via lectures, a journal and television; a society where the public, teachers, journalists and researchers can share their interests, an advisory service for country people'.

He urged the creation of a History Section in the government bureaucracy whose roles could include 'seeing that contemporary history is written as well and as soon as possible as an aid to decision makers and commentators at all levels, advising the Department of Conservation and Environment, publishing small booklets on the State's history, establishing new and liaising with existing historical groups and organising monthly meetings which may take on a life