

No. 235 May 2016

## From the President

May is one of my favourite times of the year, not least because it signals a whole month where the emphasis is on activities with a strong historical focus, in our very own History Festival. The Festival's launch at the Drill Hall of the Torrens Parade Ground featured a who's who of South Australia's history community. A crowd in excess of 150 responded enthusiastically to History SA's Allison Russell, the History Festival Manager's, welcoming address and to the Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Jack Snelling's endorsement and official opening of the festivities. Allison and the History SA staff responsible for putting the month's program together deserve great credit for continuing to lead and inspire so many organisations to participate by hosting activities. Much was made of the Festival's continued growth, both in terms of the number of participating organisations, over 350, and the numbers of events, exceeding 600 for the first time. There really is something for every taste. Along with numerous other

organisations' representatives, I was also pleased to welcome and congratulate Greg Mackie on his appointment to the lead role in History SA. Finally, it is wonderful to see the very real support being given to the program by all branches of the media and the lead sponsor, the Adelaide City Council. Never has the evidence been clearer that the population at large is indeed very interested in exploring our history!

The Historical Society of South Australia's contribution to the 2016 History Festival was a lecture by the ever-popular presenter Jo Peoples on Dorrit Black and Les Ballets Contemporains. The audience, the largest for some time at 130, enjoyed a fascinating tour through the history of the Adelaide arts scene of the first half of the twentieth century. Placing Black very squarely in her historical context, Jo covered the front of stage, the wings and back stage of the dance and arts scene, as well as the broader social milieu of the

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time. The evening's entertainment was added to by 'inside' snippets on Black's life from several members of her family.

If our History Festival has not adequately satisfied members' appetites for all things historical, you are invited to join our next field trip. On Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June, Pam Rajkowski will lead us on one of her very popular tours of Adelaide's Afghan heritage across the city's south-west corner. Full details are available on the Society's website <http://hssa.org.au>, where details of all our activities are posted.

As is our custom, the May lecture was preceded, thankfully briefly, by our AGM. In my President's Report, copies of which were distributed to all present, along with Anne Bowman's Treasurer's report, I highlighted the ongoing issues surrounding membership of both the Society in general and the Council specifically. The Council is very keen to explore the new opportunities afforded by social media and welcomes expressions of interest from those willing to assist. The impact of a sluggish economy on investment earnings and consequently our ability to maintain our Grants Program was also mentioned. Finally, I noted the importance of our Society engaging fully with the broader history community of South Australia, which has seen me and /or our Secretary Anthea

Buxton, meet with representatives from various groups, including our universities, the History Council of SA, History SA, the Historical Societies of Kapunda, Port Adelaide, and Burnside, and the Genealogical and Heraldry Society in recent months.

The other important business item of our AGM is the election of members of the Council and office-bearers for the next twelve months. Having thanked the retiring members of Council, Elspeth Grant and Rosemary Abbott, the meeting endorsed the election of Geoffrey Bishop, Pamela Rajkowski, Margaret Cliff, Colin Deed, Daniela Rose and Patricia Sumerling as members of Council and, as office bearers, Anthea Buxton (Secretary), Anne Bowman (Treasurer), Adrian Brown (Vice-President) and yours truly as President. Congratulations to the members of the new Council.

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)

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



Paul Stark, speaker at the April meeting.  
Photograph by Colin Deed.



Jo Peoples, speaker at the May meeting,  
with Glen Woodward and Adrian Brown.  
Photograph by Colin Deed.

A mere compilation of facts presents only the skeleton of History; we do but little for her if we cannot invest her with life, clothe her in the habiliments of her day, and enable her to call forth the sympathies of succeeding generations.  
Hannah Farnham Lee, *The Huguenots in France and America*

Patricia Sumerling is compiling a program of speakers for 2017. Please send suggestions to 8362 8262 or [psumerling@optusnet.com.au](mailto:psumerling@optusnet.com.au)

## What are you reading?

**Alison Weir - *Mary, Queen of Scots and the murder of Lord Darnley*, 2003.**

There is nothing as riveting as an historical intrigue told well. Many books relate the saga of Mary Queen of Scots, in which she and her close friend and champion Bothwell were implicated in the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley, to be the most celebrated mystery in Scottish history.

It followed the appalling and dangerous behaviour the unpopular king-consort, 18 year old Darnley embarked upon once he married the older Mary, much of it in reaction to being denied the Crown Matrimonial due to his age.

When the marriage was all but over within three months, divorce was not an option, for later her son and heir would be denounced as illegitimate. There was only one way out and her heart ruled her many acts of poor judgement that entailed her becoming one of the most wronged women in history. She paid for her actions in the loss of the Scottish throne, lone years of captivity, separation and alienation from her only living child (the future King James I of England), and her own violent death. Was she the tragic heroine or fallen woman?

Guilty or not? Weir's impeccable and formidable research over 500 pages revisits the scene of the crime in a 'finger tip search' where the reader is privy to every known document (for and against) in order to understand Mary's involvement in Darnley's murder. Was she forewarned of James, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bothwell's plot to assassinate him? This has to be Weir's definitive history of this tragic story.

*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. Send your contribution to the Editor, Robert Martin, at [psumerling@optusnet.com.au](mailto:psumerling@optusnet.com.au)

Friday 3 June 7.30 pm

Chris Bettess

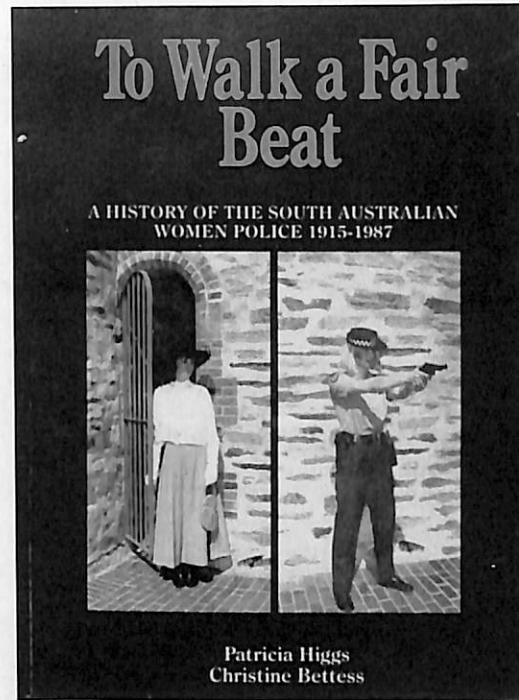
## 100 Years of Women in Policing in South Australia

Chris joined the SA Police in 1972 as a member of the Women Police Branch, performing plain-clothes duties, until the introduction of a uniform for women police in 1974. She then performed uniform patrol duties in both the metropolitan and country areas, was Editor of the in-house magazine *In Brief* as well as an instructor at the Police Academy. As there was no part-time work available in SAPOL at that time, Chris resigned in 1984 after the birth of her daughter.

Chris rejoined SAPOL in 1993, working at the Holden Hill Local Service area on patrols, and as the Drug Action Team Sergeant. In 2004, she was promoted to the rank of Senior Sergeant First Class and was manager of the Elizabeth Crime Prevention Section, until her retirement in August 2015.

In 2001, Chris was awarded the Australian Police Medal for services to youth and the community.

Chris is the co-author of the book *To walk a fair beat - a history of the South Australian Women Police 1915-1987*.



The South Australia Women Police Branch came into operation on 1 December 1915, when Kate Cocks was appointed the first Principal Police Matron, with Annie Ross assisting. The women were employed on equal terms with male police officers, the first women in the British Empire granted this status. At the time, many men were absent due to the First World War, and a considerable number of women and children were falling prey to prostitution or destitution. While good work was done by charitable organisations, they were acting without formal authority, and had to rely on powers of persuasion. It was believed women acting with police authority could achieve far more. The presentation looks at the development of women police from a small, separate, specialist group into mainstream modern day policing.

Friday 1 July 7.30 pm

Geoffrey Bishop

## 'There's a dragon in my garden' - the heritage of Dragon Trees in South Australia

The plant kingdom features strongly in human history. Some species have featured in famous events (for instance, Breadfruit *Artocarpus communis* and the *Bounty* mutiny), and many others have, in less dramatic fashion, enabled social groups to settle in one place, notably, cereal crop species. It is rarer for a particular plant species to have the degree of interest to form the basis for a talk to an historical society.

The Dragon Tree, *Dracaena* is one of the plant world's most unusual species. Its origins, mythology, uses and cultivation will be discussed in this talk. And, furthermore, what led to Adelaide becoming the home of *Dracaena* in Australia?

Dr Bishop grew up on the Bishop family orchard property at Basket Range surrounded by relatives who were keen gardeners and lovers of native plants. He studied Agricultural Science at the University of Adelaide, graduating with a PhD in Plant Pathology. He worked for some years with the SA Department for Environment and Heritage in



bushland management, and currently works in natural resources management.

Botany and historical research have been abiding interests. He has a special interest in horticultural and wine industry history. He has written histories of the Oenology Degree Course at Roseworthy Agricultural College, and for the Angove, Tolley, Norman and Taylor wine families. His other publications have concentrated on the East Torrens district where his family has operated orchards since 1851.

He is the immediate past-President of the Historical Society of SA and Vice-President of the East Torrens Historical Society.

**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, Tusmore.**

# Visiting SA's History

## **Heritage Walk - South-West Adelaide's Afghan Herbalists and Afghan Cameleers Community**

**Saturday 18 June: 10.00am-1.00pm**

This very popular guided walk, led by Pamela Rajkowski OAM, commences at the South-West Community Centre at 171 Sturt Street, with a historical talk, accompanied by photos, maps, a display and Afghan cameleer herbs, lasting about 1 hour.

The 2 hour walk passes the former shop of the world famous herbalist Mahomet Allum, the mosque in Little Gilbert Street, cottages and lanes of the south-west cameleer community, locations occupied by previous Afghan healers, and the Afghan Cameleers Whitmore Square memorial. The walk finishes at the 'Afghan' section in the West Terrace cemetery.

There is the option of continuing on for coffee at My Kingdom for a Horse Coffee Shop.

Participants are advised to park in metered parks neighbouring Whitmore Square before the 10.00am start. Free parking continues after 12.00pm.

Tour cost: \$10 per participant (no concessions). Bookings and payments can be directed to HSSA Secretary, Anthea Buxton at 0417834990 and by email to [secretary@hssa.org.au](mailto:secretary@hssa.org.au) Alternatively, bookings can be made at our monthly Lecture Meeting with Margaret Cliff.

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## **Port Adelaide and the Coast**

**Saturday 10 September: 9.30am - 4.30pm**

This full day tour takes in historic Port Adelaide and the surrounding district. Whilst the final itinerary is being confirmed, it will take in the Port's centre and other sites that may include the SA Maritime Museum, National Railway Museum, SA Aviation Museum and the Port Uniting (formerly Congregational) Church. Morning tea at the Largs Pier Hotel and lunch at the Birkenhead Tavern are also being planned.

The tour will have various guides, including local stalwarts from the Port Adelaide Historical Society. The tour will commence and conclude at the Burnside Community Centre car park.

Tour cost (including museum entries and morning tea but not lunch) is approximately (TBC) \$55 per participant (\$65 for non-members of HSSA). Bookings and payments as for the Afghan walk above.

# Contributing to SA's History

## The Queen's Theatre, Gilles Arcade and Playhouse Lane

Hidden at the end of an obscure lane is an early colonial structure which are the remains of the oldest theatre on the Australian mainland. The Queen's Theatre opened 11 January 1841 with John Lazar playing the leading role in *Othello*. Lazar was the lessee of the theatre but was forced to close the theatre with its last performance held on 28 November 1842 because of the effects of the colony's first economic recession.

The Queen's Theatre was built by former Sydney convicts, merchants Vaiben and Emanuel Solomon which cost £10,000. Apart from the Adelaide Gaol and Government House, it was the most substantial structure in the city.

When the theatre closed after less than two years, the Solomons tried to sell it and even raffle it at a pound per ticket but it never raised the required amount in raffle tickets nor could anyone afford to buy it. Instead, it was leased to the colonial government who made it into several courts until they constructed a purpose built one in Victoria Square in 1850.

The former theatre, now several courts, was described as:

'The stage is now the Supreme Court ... More appropriately still, a lower dungeon, which formerly served for ghosts and wizards to rise from, or sink into, in melodrama or pantomime, is made a temporary prison for the rough and rugged old convicts from Sydney and Van Dieman's Land, who form the staple of our criminals.

'The pit is our Police Court and is still surrounded with tiers of boxes which occasionally, as if in memory of olden times, are tenanted by an inquisitive audience. What were once the lobbies are now the offices respectively of the Police Commissioner and his clerks. The Resident magistrate and the Official Assignee occupy the saloon, while the ladies cloak room is claimed by the Sheriff. Other apartments are used by the judge, the master of the court, the Advocate General, the Deputy Registrar, while some are devoted to the purposes of a tavern keeper, whose larder and cellar provide well-spread tables for litigants, witnesses and advocates.'

In 1846 the large billiard room that had adjoined the former theatre was turned into another theatre called the New Queen's Theatre by new arrival George Coppin. Known as 'the father of theatre', he is very important for his early contribution to theatre in the colony. Although very successful, the theatre in this period between 1846 and 1850 gained a notorious reputation and Edward Snell wrote in his diary 'the actors were a set of dull dogs, scenery was damnable and the audience a mixture of prostitutes and pickpockets - one visit was enough'. It was also described as a 'hotbed of vice and demoralisation'.

In 1850 when the courts vacated the earlier theatre, Coppin and his partner Lazar decided to modernise it. A new façade and a large interior were built. The new theatre, now called the Royal Victoria Theatre, opened in time for Christmas in 1850. Described as a 'tout ensemble', it 'had a pit constructed on the principle of the Princess Theatre in London', a dress circle with a ladies' retiring room and saloon, a gallery capable of seating 400 persons, and an extensive stage department for the production of 'gorgeous spectacles'. Six private boxes were attached to the dress circle, the entrance being from Gilles Arcade, while the entrance to the pit and gallery was from Waymouth Street. When the theatre closed for the last time in 1868 its sale was advertised thus:

'The magnificent saloon, casino, a dwelling-house ... and buildings, together with all the scenery, machinery, splendid wardrobe and lamp, as forming overall one of the most elegant places of amusement existent in this or any of the neighbouring colonies.'

Being superseded by the new Theatre Royal in Hindley Street, the former Gilles Arcade theatre became a low class dance saloon. In 1873 it became the first home of the City Mission until their purpose built hall arose in Light Square.

In 1877 when new owners Formby and Boase transformed the theatre into a horse and carriage bazaar, alterations were made to place stalls, a ring and offices within the auditorium and stage areas. The tiered seating around the walls remained intact in order to give prospective buyers an adequate view of the livestock. The auctions became famous both for the quality and size of stock auctioned and for the facilities provided by this clever conversion of the theatre. Formby and Boase held some of Australia's largest sales with buyers attending from all over the country, while 'the ring' was described as one of the most capacious in Australia.

In about 1901 a large proportion of the theatre was demolished. The timber internal structure was simply sawn off at support points, and much of the stage area and rear structure were removed. However, the 1850 façade fronting Gilles Arcade survives, as do the side walls of the earlier Queen's Theatre. Following an archaeological dig in the late 1980s, the theatre, technically an urban ruin, was renovated to become a favourite venue for theatrical events.

### Further reading:

- Alec Bagot, *Coppin the Great*, 1965.
- Mortlock Library, see Research Notes 39 and 486A on theatre.
- Edward Snell, *The Adventures of Edward Snell*, 1988.
- Derek Whitelock, *Adelaide from colony to jubilee: a sense of difference*, 1985.

*Patricia Sumerling*

# 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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Treasurer: Ms Anne Bowman:  
8362 7772

Bookings: Ms Margaret Cliff:  
8362 9517

## 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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Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome. The deadline for submission of articles for the next Newsletter is Sunday 3 July.