

No. 261 January 2021

## From the President

The Historical Society of South Australia's Council looks forward to reuniting with our members in 2021, both at our monthly Friday meetings commencing 5 February, and at other events such as excursions. The HSSA membership who attended the final two meetings of 2020 was inspiring in the usual high numbers, signalling the vitality of our membership.

Change challenges us in different ways and becomes 'history'. The international Covid-19 virus challenges us in 2020 and 2021. 'Lockdown', requiring absence of gatherings, or limits on their size and frequency, staying at home more often, home deliveries, many historical, cultural and retail venues shutting down for several months, restricting interstate and international travel, a great shift away from face-to-face contact towards using online tools such as 'Zoom' or 'webinar' for meetings, or increasing learning or working at

home. The year 2021 brings more inspiration and optimism. What is valued by ourselves in our history is still preserved and celebrated. The HSSA has rebooked speakers cancelled in 2020 (see our HSSA 2021 Program brochure and Pat Sumerling's article in this newsletter) and whose works celebrate aspects of South Australian history. Wakefield Press continues to release new publications. The HSSA will offer opportunities for excursions to some beautiful local sites that have a significant role in our state's heritage.

Change can also threaten valued South Australian historical sites. Due to transport route restructuring at Fullarton the state heritage listed lodge or gatehouse built in 1890 (and 20 trees over 100 years old) of the Waite Estate is threatened with demolition. Formal registrations of concern are coordinated by the National Trust of SA and the

# From the President

University of Adelaide, with the SA Heritage Council voicing concern.

The HSSA Council continues to monitor and update Covid-19 safety regulations. The choice of methods for registering for our Friday meetings or events are either online using Eventbrite, or the traditional face-to-face method of arriving at the entrance, providing name and contact details personally, then hand sanitising, maintaining social distancing, with minimal lingering in the foyer and progression to your seats in the auditorium where appropriate seating is identified. Follow HSSA's methods of communications (see below) for updates, e.g. when the use of name badges or supper may return.

## Keain Medal nominations:

We would love to hear from members who roam bookshops or the Wakefield Press catalogue seeking to discover non-fiction books with a South Australian historical context. Check if your book retail outlet offers home deliveries, to minimise social contact and leaving home. Nominate your favourite book for a Keain Medal award in 2021 by checking submission due dates in this and the next HSSA mailing, or on our HSSA website. Post the

nomination form included with this newsletter or complete it online. Entries reach our Secretary Bridget Jolly whose postal and email contact details are on the back page of the Newsletter and the 2021 Program brochure.

## Communication:

The HSSA newsletter is a major means of sustaining South Australian historical knowledge and communication between the HSSA Council and members during the year. Members find news, information of forthcoming events, including excursions, and other business on the HSSA website managed by Jenny Hein. Our Facebook page is managed by Lyn O'Grady. You can communicate your queries, suggestions, ideas, feedback or submissions, to members of the HSSA Council by viewing their names and contact details on the back page of this Newsletter, on our new 2021 Program brochure and the HSSA website.

The HSSA Council very much looks forward to seeing and greeting members during the year.

*Pamela Rajkowski OAM,  
President*

The **Annual General Meeting** of the Historical Society of South Australia will take place on Friday 9 April, before the General Meeting.

Members will be asked to approve changes to the schedule of fees so that annual fees, effective in 2022, become:

Individual: \$45

Family: \$55

Concession: \$40

Sent with this newsletter is the year's program brochure including a form for the **renewal of your membership**. Please be prompt with your payment.

Please consider nominating a book on South Australian history, published in 2020, for our annual **Maurice Keain Award**, to be announced in May. A nomination form is sent with this newsletter.

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Members occasionally send in **photographs** in the hope that someone can identify them. Henceforth please send these to our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/HistoricalSocietySA](http://www.facebook.com/HistoricalSocietySA)

# Contributing to South Australia's History

Friday 5 February 7.30 pm

Carolyn Spooner

## The extraordinary life of polar explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins

George Hubert Wilkins (1888-1958) had many talents, interests and achievements but is little remembered in his home state of South Australia. This slideshow will be a glimpse into his life as author, photographer, cinematographer, war correspondent, serviceman, aviator, polar explorer, submariner, botanist, ornithologist, geographer, anthropologist, climatologist, meteorologist, scientist, musician, spiritualist, family man and all round wonderful modest person.

Carolyn Spooner is Community Engagement Librarian at the State Library of South Australia where she has been privileged to work for some 40 years. She has a special interest in its archival collections which reveal the stories of South Australians. As part of that interest she coordinated the Library's archival transcription program for some years. As well as her own research she enjoys assisting researchers in the Library with their quests. She is a member of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, the Australian Society for Sports History and the Cricket Lovers Society. Carolyn is a former



Sir Hubert Wilkins

editor of the journals of the Royal Geographical Society, the Australian Croquet Association and the State Library, and now enjoys creative writing for [footyalmanac.com](http://footyalmanac.com)

**All lecture meetings commence at 7.30 pm on the first Friday of the month at the Burnside City Uniting Church, corner of Portrush Road and Fisher Street, Tusmore.**

Friday 5 March 7.30 pm

Penelope Curtin and Tansy Curtin

## Blooms and Brushstrokes: a Floral History of Australian Art

'Blooms and Brushstrokes' takes you on a unique journey through the history of Australian art, one flower at a time, examining the blooms depicted in still lifes, floral portraits, decorative interiors and botanical illustrations by a long line of Australian artists. Mother-and-daughter team Penelope and Tansy Curtin start this fascinating journey in the late eighteenth century, when the traditions adhering to the Western art canon were transplanted into the newly colonised Australia. They follow it through the rapidly developing artistic styles of the early twentieth century, to the new media of the contemporary period.

These works of art also shine a light on the role and importance of plants and flowers in everyday life. They illustrate changing floral fashions, as well as highlighting flowers in their various forms - cut flowers, pot plants and gardens. And along the way you'll encounter many of Australia's most significant artists, including John Glover, Arthur Streeton, Margaret Preston,



Penelope and Tansy's book, Wakefield Press 2019

Grace Cossington Smith, John Brack and Margaret Olley, as well as some of Australia's most beautiful, and sometimes intriguing, native flora, such as the waratah and Sturt's desert pea, not to mention perennial garden favourites like roses, sweet peas and daisies.

Penelope Curtin is a freelance editor who works mainly in the area of art publications. Her great loves in life have been the gardens she has established and Edwin, Alice, Rupert and Rosey, some of whom are grandchildren, the others Italian Greyhounds.

Tansy Curtin is Curator, International Art Pre-1980, Art Gallery of South Australia. She holds a Masters in Art History from the University of Adelaide. Tansy inherited the gardening gene from her mother, although she also loves growing edible plants.

## Forthcoming presentations in 2021

Well what a non-year 2020 was for our Society. We cancelled six talks and one was cancelled at short notice due to illness. But we all survived the bleak months and still managed to sneak in two talks in October and November.

The good news is that five of the six speakers affected by the 2020 pandemic have cheerfully committed themselves to speak in 2021, with five new speakers.

Our first speaker on 5 February is Carolyn Spooner who is Community Engagement Librarian from the State Library where she has worked for some 40 years. Her talk is *The extraordinary life of polar explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins*, a much forgotten South Australian whose talents were diverse.

Our speakers on 5 March are mother-and-daughter Penelope and Tansy Curtin, giving a talk derived from their beautiful book *Blooms and Brushstrokes, a Floral History of Australian Art*.

On 9 April, Roger Irvine will speak about his recent publication by Wakefield Press, *Colonial Settlers of the River Torrens: A different approach to local history*. The title says much about what can be expected about early life on Adelaide's premier river (or creek).

On 7 May, the speaker is Rob George, well-known screenwriter and

playwright who was involved in many films, including the telemovie, 'Captain Johnno', which won an International Emmy Award - and he wrote and produced the TV mini-series 'The River Kings' and the feature film 'Selkie'. Rob will present *A Letter from the Alice: the passing of Frank Rees George*, a government geologist who took part in a number of explorations in the west and north until his death in 1905.

Our own recent President, Dr Geoffrey Bishop, is giving his talk on 4 June based on his 2019 publication, *Château Tanunda - Icon of the Barossa since 1890: an experiment in adverse times*.

On 2 July Dr Skye Krichauff is presenting *Early relations between the Tarndanya (the people of the Adelaide Plains) and European colonists, 1836-1845*.

Dr David Hilliard, who has spoken to the society on a number of occasions over many years, will present *A view from the pew: worship and preaching in 1890s Adelaide* on 6 August.

On 3 September Anne Black will give a talk about her recent publication by Wakefield Press entitled *The Overlooked Pendragon: George Isaacs*. Who was this man, you may well ask? He had many strings to his bow. For instance he wrote the *Burlesque of Frankenstein*, now recognised as Australia's first science fiction; he was directly responsible for the composition of the iconic 'Song of Australia' and was a co-founder of the Gawler Humbug Society - this is just a fraction of what he was.

# Contributing to South Australia's History

On 1 October Craig Campbell of Sydney University, and a foundation member of our Society, will give his talk *A radical life from Glenunga: Jean Blackburn, her communism and feminism, her work for educational reform*. His talk will concentrate on her Adelaide years from 1946 onwards.

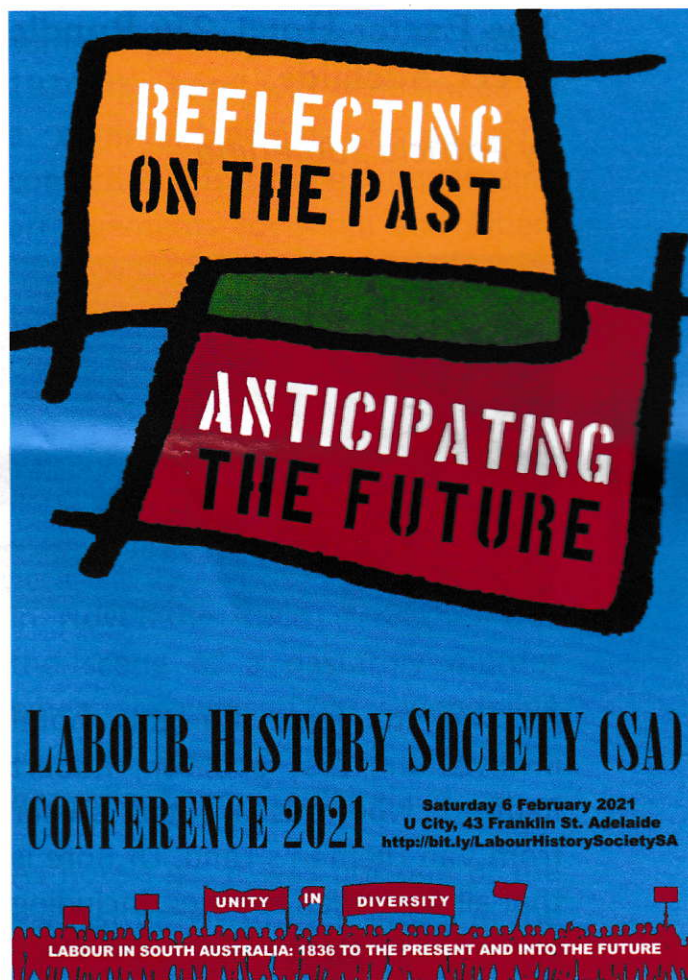
The last presentation for the year, on 5 November, is by one of our Society's Council Members, Lyn O'Grady. In her illustrated talk entitled '*Wilyama, the Silver King and Countess*, Lyn discusses the Medindie home of Charles Rasp and his wife Agnes, and some of the mysteries about their lives.

To conclude with a request, we are always looking for interesting speakers and I look forward to suggestions by members of possible speakers, or subjects they want to know more about.

*Patricia Sumerling, Council Member.*

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**For more information, google  
Labour History Society SA  
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Faber 0488 079 753.**

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## The Exeter Hotel, 246 Rundle Street, Adelaide

by Patricia Sumerling



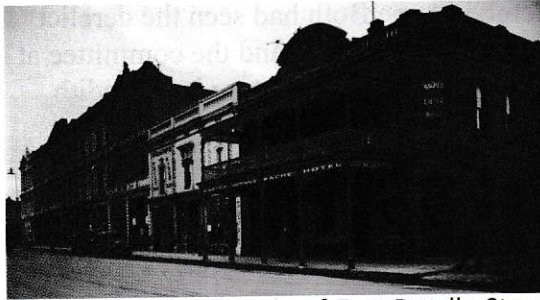
The Exeter Hotel in 1854. SLSA B13424

A claim to fame for this hotel involves the first publican, Robert Radford, who was a circus owner from Van Diemen's Land. Of note is that all Australian circuses, including several in existence today, can trace their direct or indirect origins to Radford's pioneering circus enterprise - so claims an Australian circus historian. Originating from Exeter, Devon, while Radford was in Van Diemen's Land between 1843 and 1850, he opened Astley's Amphitheatre (a reference to the famous London circus venue) in Launceston. When he arrived in Adelaide in September 1850 aboard the brig *Queenstown*, with his repertoire of animals and performers, he soon opened the Circus Royal in Currie Street in November, which included a program of horsemanship, singing, dancing, rope dancing and an

orchestra. He may have done well but for the sudden exit from the city and colony of gold prospectors to the eastern colonies, leaving behind a dearth of currency. With a recession, there was little to spare for entertainment purposes, such as going to the circus - and so he sold out and went into hotel-keeping.

This hotel of the Victorian Italianate style (which was rebuilt in 1888) replaced an earlier two-storey building. The hotel that was first licensed in March 1851 may have been rebuilt because of strong competition from several nearby pubs such as the Tavistock Hotel (now demolished), the East End Market Hotel and the Stag Hotel. The design is typical of many commercial buildings in the city with chamfered corner and a two-storey form, highlighted by the verandah/balcony. The hotel is constructed in quality coursed squared bush-hammered sandstone and chamfered openings copying the original building. The stucco detail is restricted to the first floor where surrounds to openings are particularly elaborate.

Many hotels were remodeled following the commencement of six o'clock closing in 1916. Small



The elegant streetscape of East Rundle Street in 1929. SLSA B 5534

ground floor public rooms were enlarged to cope with large crowds and spilt beer. The floors of these enlarged bars were often covered in heavy lino, while walls internally and externally were tiled to customer height. In 1929 when the Exeter was remodeled to suit 'six o'clock swill' conditions, green glass tiling was added to the façade, which has since become an essential part of the hotel's character.

Like other hotels backing onto the East End Markets, it had a special licence for early opening times to suit the working hours of those associated with it when the market operated until 1988. Since the market's closure, the hotel has retained a loyal arty clientele and is now within a major fine food location.

Like many hotels the Exeter has a rich and colourful history. In the middle of the Great Depression when there were few pennies to spare, the hotel was popular with the patrons who sought their fun wherever they could find it. The

kind of fun patrons enjoyed was sometimes illegal for, in March 1934, the hotel was condemned as a common gaming house. The conviction upset the existing leasing arrangements for Alma and Albert Rook who were the licensees from June 1932 to July 1939. If one in a marriage partnership was convicted, the licence was simply transferred to the other partner, as it was from Mrs Alma Rook to her husband.

In November 1969 the hotel was the scene of a dastardly murder when publican, Gwendoline Josephs, was stabbed to death by her cellar hand, Frank Ireland.

As hotels go, it was not one of the earliest hotels to be licensed in the city but the 136<sup>th</sup>. In the present day when the city has lost more than half of its hotels, the Exeter has now been elevated to being the 33<sup>rd</sup> oldest licence still trading in the city.

[This article is a foretaste of my next publication *Adelaide's Hotels: A Social History*, which is taken from a larger project, *The History of South Australia's Hotels*.]

*References* - Mark St Leon, 'Talent in the tent: circus in South Australia, 1851-1977', in JHSSA Vol 36, 2008, pp.24-43; *SA Register*, 8 February 1851; *South Australian*, 16 September 1850, p.2, Shipping intelligence, arrivals; ACA ACC Rate Assessments, *Digest of Proceedings*, 17 October 1887, Smith Survey fieldbook No 10 p.53; JL Hoad, *Hotels and Publicans*, 1993, p. 157; *Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* 23 March 1934, p.10, Conviction for Exeter Hotel for being a common gaming house.

## **Osmond Gilles Grave Restoration Ceremony: Burnside Historical Society's success for History and Heritage**

*This article concludes the Osmond Gilles Grave Restoration Project as set out in History SA July 2020.*

Friday 6 November, about forty guests attended a ceremony in West Terrace Cemetery, adjacent to the restored grave of Osmond Gilles, Colonial Treasurer. Robert Pitt, Adelaide Cemeteries Authority CEO, introduced Honorable David Speirs, Minister for Environment and Water, who spoke about Osmond Gilles' contribution to the early colony. Judith Francis, the new President of the Pioneers Association of South Australia, talked about Gilles' life, his attributes and generosity to South Australia – including donations to different denominations and even a loan to the Treasury to keep the colony afloat.

Meredith Ide, from the Burnside Historical Society, explained the process to achieve the high quality, restored monument and plaque, detailing Gilles' life. Honorable Vickie Chapman, Deputy Premier, Attorney General and recently appointed Minister for Planning and Local Government, was unable to attend. However, as explained to the guests, she was instrumental in informing the Society of avenues to follow for the grants it received. Two grants were given by the South Australian Government; through Heritage SA and SA History Funds (History Trust SA). It is the first time a grant has been made for grave restoration work. Donations came from organisations, including The Historical Society of SA, and individuals, some using the tax deductible option available on the National Trust of South Australia website.

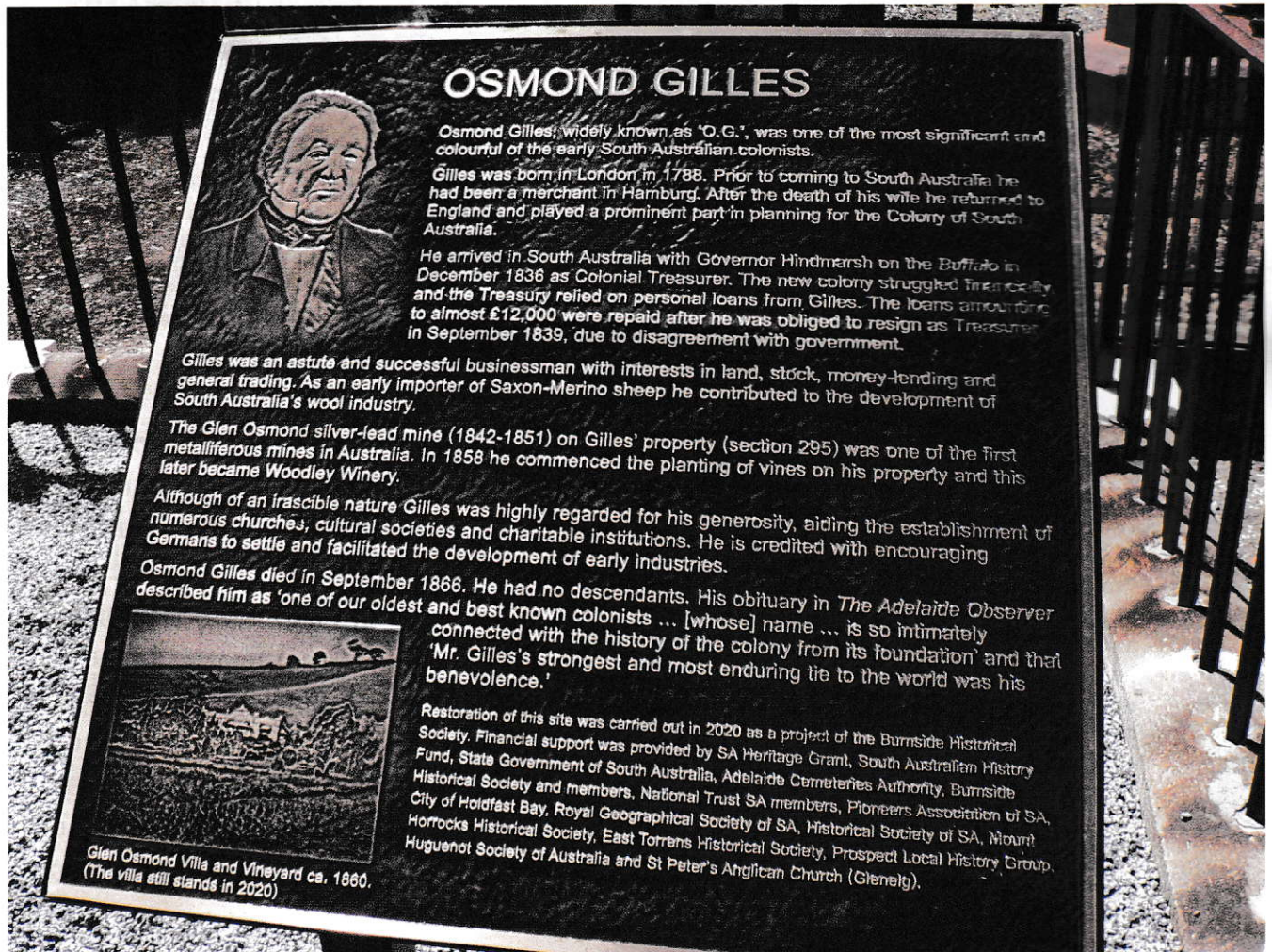
In 2012 Burnside Historical Society member Anne Both had seen the derelict state of Gilles' grave and the committee at that time decided to restore it. Meredith stressed the valuable role Anne and Ross Both played throughout the project.

Those involved with the restoration were formally thanked - Robert Pitt, Adelaide Cemeteries Authority CEO; Heritage Architect, Andrew Stevens who wrote the specifications and obtained planning and development approval; Fred Caruso and team from S.D.Tillett Memorials; Geoff Hansen from Option One Property Services, for the ironwork; and Phoenix Foundry for the plaque, listing donors. The organisers of the event were also thanked.

At the conclusion of the ceremony Minister Speirs spoke again and launched a commemorative Osmond Gilles olive oil vintage derived from West Terrace Cemetery olives, bottles to be sold at an Adelaide Central Market stall. Refreshments and conversations followed.

Completion of this restoration project in June this year was a commendable achievement for a small, community-based, not-for-profit, volunteer group, with a three-member subcommittee. It was a win for Heritage. It is hoped that other groups will work towards adopting a Heritage grave to restore, for the sake of History.

*Meredith Ide, Burnside Historical Society, Past President*



Every true history must force us to remember that the past was once as real as the present and as uncertain as the future.

- G. M. Trevelyan

There's an old saying about those who forget history. I don't remember it, but it's good.

- Stephen Colbert

Historians always have the last word.

- Robert Martin

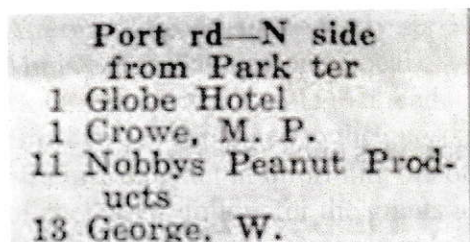
# Contributing to South Australia's History

## Request for help:

I am a collector of antique coin-operated vending machines. In 1960, 16 peanut vending machines with advertising attachments were exported from Australia to the United States. The advertising attachment was patented in 1924, by William Ferguson Paul. These attachments carry an advertisement for Nobby's Nuts, Adelaide. The best guess for an age of the machine and attachment would date the machine to the late 1920s to 1930s. The advertising card for Nobby's appears to also date to the 1930-1940 (or so) range. I have contacted Smith's Brands and they do not have any history for Nobby's Nuts prior to 1950. Max (Nobby) Noblet (1913-1995) would have been the correct age to have used peanut vending machines during this period. The current company's history suggests that Noblet did not get into the peanut business until during or after World War II - drawing into question the dating of the machine. I wondered if you would have any information that might suggest an earlier involvement for Mr Noblet or if someone else might have used the name during the timeframe of the vending machine. I would be happy to supply pictures of the machine if that would be of any assistance.

Roger Smith [bgumalley@earthlink.net](mailto:bgumalley@earthlink.net)

Thank you for any assistance you can provide. If it helps, review of city directories shows that Nobby's Peanut Products first appears in 1951:



Port rd—N side  
from Park ter  
1 Globe Hotel  
1 Crowe, M. P.  
11 Nobbys Peanut Products  
13 George, W.

**Contributions to this Newsletter are always welcome. The deadline for articles for the next edition is Sunday 7 March.**

**Historical Society of South Australia Inc. PO Box 519 Kent Town SA 5071**

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