

**HISTORY COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**  
PO Box 6809 Halifax Street, Adelaide SA 5000

November-December 2010

Dear Members:

In drafting my first Newsletter, I'm very conscious that over the past two years John Bannon has set an exceedingly high standard for succeeding presidents of the History Council to attempt to follow. So it's good to know that John's strong commitment to advancing the profile of history in this state will continue in his role as immediate past-president. I much look forward to working with him, and indeed all members of History Council, most especially its Committee and Executive, over the next two years.

**Administration and governance:** as we are still without a functioning website (but see further below for imminent developments on this front), it may be helpful to list here the Executive and Committee for 2010-11:

Executive (meets monthly)

President: Wilfrid Prest (History, University of Adelaide); vice-president: Carol Fort (History, Flinders University); secretary: Annette Mills (State Library); treasurer: Greg Slattery (Rocky River Historical Society); John Bannon (immediate past-president); co-opted member: Alison Mackinnon.

Council (meets quarterly)

As above, plus Margaret Anderson (History SA), Daryl Best (History Teachers), Geoff Bishop (Historical Society), Peter Brinkworth (Pioneers Association), Jenni Jeremy (Society of Archivists), Hugh Magarey (National Trust), Jenny Tilby-Stock (Professional Historians), Alan Mayne (Hawke Research Institute, UniSA), and Richard Venus (Engineers Australia).

NB there are still some vacant places on the Council, for both institutional and individual members...

Since our September AGM (and the preceding Special General Meeting), the new Executive and Council have each met once.

Members will have recently received subscription renewal notices, and doubtless observed the amended membership fee structure and optional two-year discounted subscriptions, an option which is proving popular, according to our indefatigable treasurer.

**Meeting with Minister Caica:**

The main issues before the Executive and Council have been (i) next year's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European settlement – or SA 175 for short, and (ii) the on-going National Archives/State Records co-location saga. But following the announcement in September of the removal of Union Hall from the State Heritage Register by direction of the new Minister for Environment and Conservation, Hon.

Paul Caica, as ‘contrary to the public interest’, concern was expressed by a number of our members that this government had embarked upon a ‘development at all costs’ policy. The omission of ‘Heritage’ from the title of his portfolio, following reorganization of his department, and the fact that the government had then allocated only some \$33,000 towards marking next year’s 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary, seemed further evidence of a downgrading of history and heritage considerations in the eyes of the current administration.

Accordingly the Committee at its first meeting determined to seek a meeting with Mr Caica, with the aim of clarifying both his government’s position, and our own concerns, as the chief representative voice on major historical issues and issues affecting the historical community in this state. That meeting took place on Monday 8 November, and despite an unfortunate mix-up on the time of the appointment (due to some confusion in the minister’s office), Carol Fort and I were able to spend nearly an hour in what seemed a productive discussion with Mr Caica and his ministerial advisor.

We were assured that there has been no change in government policy on the necessity of conserving SA’s built heritage, that the de-listing of Union Hall had been an exceptionally difficult decision, and one which did not herald a more permissive attitude towards developers seeking to knock down old buildings in defiance of heritage considerations, while the omission of ‘Heritage’ from the portfolio title merely reflected a functional re-organization of ministerial responsibilities, with conservation of the built and natural environment remaining of equal significance.

We in turn assured the minister that the History Council represents a large, diverse and active community of historians, including both individuals and organizations with historical interests, who would be closely watching the government’s future performance in this broad area. We also welcomed the (then just-announced) decision to provide an additional \$175,000 towards next year’s 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but stressed that this was still a relatively small sum, and that further requests to support important projects related to the 175<sup>th</sup> might well be forthcoming (instancing the scheme for a web-based mapping publication to celebrate and chart the development of SA from 1836 to the present developed by Dr Ann Herraman, President of the Mt Lofty Districts Historical Society, which the HCSA’s Executive was happy to endorse at its November meeting).

We also raised the question of co-location of the Adelaide branch of National Archives Australia and State Records. Although not strictly part of Minister Caica’s portfolio responsibilities, resolution of this matter has been pending for some quite considerable time. Rumour has it that while the Federal Government is happy to proceed with co-location both at Leigh St and in its former Collingwood repository, protracted delays have arisen due to various questions raised by State Treasury. The minister agreed that this was an issue of real importance on which Cabinet must soon reach a decision, and undertook to pursue its favourable resolution with his colleagues. (Well-placed and usually reliable sources suggest that an announcement is imminent, and that all those who have laboured so long and hard in the cause are unlikely to be disappointed by the outcome. We shall see!)

## **2011: SA 175**

While next year’s anniversary may not exactly rank with the sesqui-centennial of 1986, it is still a significant milestone. So it is a considerable relief to know that the state government has now made additional monies available, which besides increasing the success rate of Community History grant applications, will enable the increasingly successful History Weeks of recent years to expand to a full four weeks plus (1-31 May) of history-related activities, under the banner ‘About Time’. There will

also be a major state history conference running from 5-7 August, entitled 'In perspective: rethinking South Australia's History'. The History Council looks forward to participating in both ventures, staging at least one forum on a History/Heritage subject during May along the lines pioneered this year (although I do not undertake to revisit the role of 'Brad Torrens'), while our popular annual lecture will be held as a curtain-raiser to the conference proper. It gives me very great pleasure to announce that Dr John Hirst, one of South Australia's most celebrated, perceptive and witty historians, has kindly accepted our invitation to deliver the 2011 History Council Lecture, on the subject 'My South Australian history'.

Finally, at this year's History Council lecture by Angela Woolacott, and again at the Murray Bridge State History conference, we distributed a series of postcards designed by Richard Venus, depicting previous commemorations of SA anniversaries, with an invitation to nominate an event or activity which might best mark SA 175. The winning entry, as adjudicated by the HCSA Executive, came from Jude Elton, who will receive a copy of the *Wakefield Companion to South Australian History* for her suggestion of 'The development of a Treaty between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal South Australians, commencing with support for Aboriginal Peoples to define what they want in and from a Treaty'. We thank all entrants for their suggestions and participation.

Incidentally, although Wakefield Press still has a few unsold copies of the hardback edition of the *Wakefield Companion to SA History* (which Carol Fort, Kerrie Round and I edited in 2001), History SA plans to put an updated version on-line as part of their new website. Michael Bollen of Wakefield Press and I both strongly support this venture, which will give the *WCSAH* a new lease of life and an even wider reach than it has already achieved. Contributors to the 2001 edition are currently being contacted to seek permission for their entries to be included in this project, with the option of expanding or updating the existing content if they so wish. As contact details are likely to have changed over the past decade, any contributors who have not yet heard from Mandy Paul at History SA on this subject are invited to contact her at 08 8203 9808 or MPaul@History.sa.gov.au.

### **HCSA Website**

Almost last, and far from least, the reactivation of the History Council's website has become my personal number one priority. We are now very fortunate to have obtained the services of a highly talented graphic designer, Alison Fort ([www.alisonfort.com](http://www.alisonfort.com)), who having worked in the field for well over a decade in London and Sydney, has now returned to live and practice in South Australia. (We owe to her elder sister Carol our introduction to Alison – a shining example of the benefits of networking, even if Carol's proper sense of propriety made it quite difficult to extort from her the necessary contact information...).

Alison is being assisted by Ursh Richards, an experienced web-builder (until recently I had no idea that such persons existed), and is working closely with Richard Venus, who has undertaken to design us a logo which, besides the website, will feature on our letterhead and other paper outputs. My hope is that we may yet see a HCSA website up and running even better than before by Christmas, or very shortly thereafter. In this day and age, a functioning website is an absolutely critical communications tool. (Having said that, we realise that some History Council members do not have ready access to the internet; those who wish to receive their History Council communications through the post rather by email are invited to let us know that preference, which we shall endeavour to meet, although it may be necessary to introduce a nominal annual charge of \$5 or so to cover the additional cost of mailings.)

## Finally

I should like to extend to all members my best wishes for the Festive Season and the coming New Year. I know many of you already, and hope to meet more, if not all, over the course of 2011. While scarcely a 'real' South Australian (i.e. by birth and upbringing), I first came to live in this state nearly half a century ago, and since then have continually practised as a historian. True, most of my historical research and writing has been on non-local topics, but I haven't totally neglected the local scene. And while South Australia is a fascinating place for historians to learn more about, the interest and significance of much in our own history may well best be understood when placed within a broader frame of reference, one which includes other places and times besides the immediate here and now.

This point is rather well illustrated by the example of two fine working historians. John Hirst's first book *Adelaide and the Country, 1870-1917* (1973) is a South Australian classic, and he has gone on to write about convicts, colonial democracy and the coming of Federation, as well as *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (2005). But John's latest book, now in its second printing, is *The Shortest History of Europe* (2009), based (as he says) on 'lectures to students in Australia who had had too much Australian history and knew too little of the civilisation of which they are a part'. This is a remarkable statement from a distinguished historian of Australia. It reinforces the growing recognition (thanks not least to Hirst's own efforts) that too narrow a focus on Australian history alone risks selling short the cultural, educational and intellectual needs of all Australians.

A second exemplar is that of W.K. (later Sir Keith) Hancock, who arrived here in 1926 as Professor of History at the University of Adelaide aged 28, 'the youngest professor in the British Empire' as the press evidently liked to describe him. Before he left Adelaide to take up another chair at Birmingham in 1934 (followed by Oxford and then Canberra, as a founding 'maestro' of the ANU – alongside Adelaide's own Mark Oliphant), Hancock had published his *Australia* (1930), another classic, one which indeed has been said to anticipate almost every interpretation of Australian history developed since its first appearance. But *Australia* is actually Hancock's second book; his first, written while still an expatriate in Oxford, was a local study of the mid-nineteenth century movement for the unification of Italy, *Ricasoli and the Risorgimento in Tuscany* (1926). There is a fascinating chapter on Hancock's Adelaide years in Jim Davidson's recently published biography, *A Three-Cornered Life: the Historian W K Hancock* (2010). Although a good deal more substantial (at over 600 beautifully-typeset pages) and so less portable on and off the beach than John Hirst's 'entertaining, learned piece of historical compression' (to quote a reviewer), both books would provide excellent summer holiday reading.