

HISTORY COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

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President's Letter

March 2011

At such a proverbially hectic – not to say mad - time of the year, I'll try to keep this Newsletter brief and to the point. ...

Web site We've been off the air for far too long. So it's good to report that the History Council's new website, wholly re-designed by Alison Fort, is now very close to going live. Members of the Committee viewed an 'Initial Release' at our meeting on Monday 7 March. The overall concept looks and works superbly, although there is still some tweaking to be done, both of layout and content. We hope to go live within the next few weeks, adding further content and functionality thereafter.

A key component of the re-modelled HCSA website is its 'News and Events' page. This will carry information supplied by our various corporate members about their upcoming activities. It should become an indispensable resource for anyone wanting to find out quickly what's on across the wide world of history throughout South Australia. So please, make sure that details of your organization's upcoming events – talks, seminars, classes, meetings, walks, workshops, whatever - are supplied to us, most conveniently by email to secretary@historycouncilsa.org.au

Archives The hard-fought struggle to prevent closure of the Adelaide office of National Archives has been won, with co-location at the Leigh St premises of State Records imminent. Congratulations to all concerned for this signal victory! We still await further positive news on the mooted re-opening of the former Collingwood repository as a joint State-Federal facility. Meanwhile we can take comfort from the fact that a good deal of important SA archival material, transferred interstate when the Collingwood facility closed, will now be repatriated – quite a remarkable achievement when you think about it.

For further details, see the March 2011 Newsletter of *The Friends of South Australia's Archives Inc.*

The Historian's Dilemma The History Council's contribution to **Abouttime** – i.e. History Week cubed for SA175 - will be a forum debating the general issue of historical

responsibility, under the title ‘The Historian’s Dilemma: Moral Arbiter and/or Objective Observer?’. Discussing how historians approach and interpret past events, including past injustices, and responding to questions from the audience will be a distinguished and lively group of practising historians and others, including the immediate past-president of the HCSA, John Bannon, Professor Alan Mayne of the University of South Australia, and Rebecca Richards, recently selected as Australia’s first Indigenous Rhodes Scholar.

‘The Historian’s Dilemma’ forum will be held in the Basil Hetzel Lecture Theatre of the State Library of South Australia, from 5-6 pm on Thursday 5 May; admission by gold coin; light refreshments and nibbles. Pre-bookings are essential, and may be made from 1 April on www.slsa.sa.gov.au/goto/abouttime2011

History in the Schools Daryl Best, representing the History Teachers Association of South Australia on the History Council Committee, has drawn attention to the serious impact of the new four-subject Year 12 structure on school History enrolments. In 2010 some 1800 Year 12 SACE students were enrolled for Modern History and Australian History. But this year there are only around 1100 – a drop of nearly 40%. (And only some 300 enrolments in Year 12 Geography). With the abandonment of previous subject-breadth requirements, one reason for these falls may be the widely-held belief that ‘language-rich’ Humanities and Social Studies subjects are less rewarding in terms of TER marks than Maths and Science.

Yet if senior students seem (for the moment) to be deserting History, teachers are simultaneously preparing to introduce their juniors in primary and middle school to the new National History Curriculum, which will be first taught in South Australia from 2012. This development will - or should - increase demand for specialist History teachers, and in the longer term may encourage more students to continue with History into Year 12, and beyond.

History in the Universities The results of the first national assessment of research in Australian universities – ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) – appeared just before Christmas. All three South Australian universities gained level 3 (= ‘world class’) rankings for Historical Studies. This is quite heartening, given the straitened circumstances of the established History disciplines at Adelaide and Flinders universities over the past decade or more, and the comparatively recent development of History at the University of South Australia. If only all three universities could combine their efforts in a single South Australian School of Historical Studies, which would surely receive a 5 (= ‘well above world standard’)!

WEA and U3A The History Council works to raise the profile of History in South Australia. So I have been talking to two major bodies concerned with Adult Education in this state, the long-established Workers Education Association – soon to celebrate its centenary year – and the more recent University of the Third Age. While already providing some History content

in their programs, both are keen to work with us to increase the amount and range of History offerings, whether one-off events of an hour or more, to courses extending over 6-7 weeks.

Membership Perhaps in part because of the recent changes to our membership fees structure, renewals of HCSA membership and payment of subscriptions have been somewhat lagging. Reminder notices are being sent out, but for the convenience of those who have not yet renewed their membership for the current year, a copy of the 2010-11 membership form is attached.

Finally Three new books of real interest to historians in South Australia and South Australian historians have just been released by Wakefield Press. Pride of place must surely go to *Great Central State: the foundation of the Northern Territory* by Jack Cross, current President of the Friends of South Australia's Archives. This handsome volume is the result of 40 years' research into, and thought about, an extraordinary human story. The Territory was administered by South Australia between 1863 and 1911, with the initial ambitious aim of building a commercial bridge to South-East Asia. But material and human factors combined to thwart that vision splendid; as Cross remarks, 'History plays many tricks on those whose approach to planning is too single-minded to adapt to the vagaries of change...'

Skye Krichauff was commissioned by the Narungga Aboriginal Progress Association to research the history of their forbears' interactions with European settlers on the Yorke Peninsula in the nineteenth century. The resulting *Journey through Narungga History* is a fascinating account of a complex, many-sided relationship, written in shades of grey, not simple black and/or white.

Red Silk: a biography of Elliott Johnston by Penelope DeBelle tells the life story of South Australia's Communist QC, later Supreme Court Judge, and head of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Johnston's career was thus inextricably interwoven with the political, social and cultural history of this state, from World War II to the end of the twentieth century.

Good reading!

Wilfrid Prest

9 March 2011