

## President's Newsletter November 2011

Dear Members,

### 2011-12 Executive and General Committee

At the well-attended Ninth Annual General Meeting of the History Council of South Australia on 6 September, we welcomed some new faces, and farewelled some familiar friends from both the Executive and the larger body which our Constitution refers to as 'the Committee', but which (to avoid possible confusion) we have taken to calling the 'General Committee'.

So the 2011-12 General Committee consists of the following dedicated individuals, who are listed below together with the member organization which they represent:

#### **(a) Members elected 2011 for a two-year term:**

Daryl Best (History Teachers Association SA)  
Elspeth Grant (Museums Australia SA Branch)  
Hugh Magarey (National Trust SA, Coromandel Valley)  
Annette Mills (State Library of South Australia)  
Adrian Rudzinski (Flinders University School of Education)  
Jacinta Weiss (Australian Society of Archivists SA Branch)

#### **(b) Members elected 2010 for a two-year term, now with one year remaining:**

Margaret Anderson (History SA)  
Geoff Bishop (Historical Society of SA)  
Peter Brinkworth (Pioneers Association of SA)  
Alan Mayne (Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia)  
Jenny Stock (Professional Historians Association of SA)  
Richard Venus (Engineers Australia)

#### **(c) Office Bearers, elected 2010 for a two-year term, now with one term remaining, except**

Lauren Gobbett, who was elected this year for a two-year term:  
Wilf Prest– President (School of History and Politics, University of Adelaide)  
Carol Fort –Vice-President (School of International Studies, Flinders University)  
John Bannon – Immediate Past President (Friends of SA Archives)  
Greg Slattery – Treasurer (Rocky River Historical Society)  
Lauren Gobbett – Secretary (Individual member)

At the first meeting of the new General Committee on 26 September, Annette Mills was co-opted to the Executive (with special responsibility for the website), as also Jacinta Weiss. The Executive has now reached its constitutional maximum, but we still have three General Committee vacancies.

Other matters canvassed at the September meeting included the development of sub-committees or working parties, ways of improving communications with members (including a hard-copy version of the quarterly President's Newsletter), and the desirability of raising the community profile of the HCSA. These and a range of other matters were further discussed at the first meeting of the new Executive Committee early last month. So your new committees can be said to have already taken the bit between their teeth, if I may use an appropriately dated metaphor.

### Annual Lecture 2011

The History Council's Annual Lecture on 4 August was this year for the first time staged and promoted as the preliminary event or curtain-raiser for the State History Conference. We are grateful to History SA for facilitating this arrangement, which seemed to work well in terms of publicity and attendance. We were also very pleased to receive significant financial support for the expenses involved in staging the lecture and the associated catering from the Cultural Fund of the Copyright Agency Limited. We look forward to a continuing relationship with this important body, which administers copyright licensing arrangements on behalf of Australian writers and other creative workers. And once again the liquid contribution of our sponsors Brick Kiln Wines to refreshments provided after the lecture was greatly appreciated.

In keeping with the conference theme for SA's 175th anniversary year – 'In Perspective: Rethinking South Australia's History' – our distinguished speaker John Hirst took as his title 'South Australia and Australia: Reflections in their Histories'. Dr Hirst ranged widely over the course of Australian and South Australian history, both revisiting topics originally dealt with in his pioneering study *Adelaide and the Country 1870-1914: their Social and Political Relationships* (Melbourne University Press, 1973), and exploring new areas in terms of the distinctiveness (or not) of the South Australian experience, from 1836 to the present day. His discussion of the post-Federation transition of South Australia from a unique British colony to a smaller Australian state, and the efforts of Premiers Playford and Dunstan to assist SA to 'punch above its weight' was attentively followed by a near-capacity audience of some 180 persons, which may well be the largest attendance at any History Council function to date. A podcast recording of Dr Hirst's lecture may be found on our website ([www.historycouncilsa.org.au](http://www.historycouncilsa.org.au)).

As many of you already know, there will be no State History Conference in 2012. But we have already begun planning for the next Annual Lecture, which we hope may be delivered not only as before in Adelaide, but also for the first time at a regional centre. And of course we are now only six months away from what promises to be another amazing History Month, to which (as this year) the History Council will make its distinctive contribution. Our 'Forum' for 2012 is currently being planned as a half-day event involving representatives from historical

associations, groups and societies throughout the state, with a view to airing common issues and concerns around such matters as succession planning and community involvement, under the general title 'The Future of History?' Which brings me conveniently to the impending

### Review of the History Council

The History Council of South Australia Inc. has now been formally in existence for eight years. This seems a good time to engage in a little strategic planning, to ensure that we are doing the best we can with the resources available to us to 'provide a representative voice on major historical issues affecting the community in South Australia and on issues affecting the historical community', as also 'to raise the profile of history at all levels of government and throughout the community' – to quote our constitution.

Accordingly, at their first meetings for the year the General Committee and Executive have decided to commission Kate Reynolds to undertake a review of our organization; Kate is well-experienced in helping small groups and organizations in the not-for-profit sector 'work smarter, not harder', as outlined in her business profile: <http://www.katereynolds.com.au>

The plan is for her to meet over several hours in mid-January with the entire current General Committee, and also any past office-bearers or committee members who may wish to attend, and to join us afterwards for an informal meal. Following these discussions, and doubtless her reading of our constitution, minutes and other material, she will draw up a brief report and suggest the outlines of a strategic plan. Any member who would like to know more about the process or be involved should get in touch either with me or Lauren Gobbett (email [hcsasecretary@internode.on.net](mailto:hcsasecretary@internode.on.net))

### Advocacy

Considerable public outcry followed a media report in August that then Premier Mike Rann had determined to transfer the Mortlock Wing of the State Library to the SA Museum. My own letter of protest made two basic points: first, that the entirely legitimate needs of the Museum for more room to stage exhibitions ought not to be met at the Library's expense, and second, that the Mortlock Wing should be restored to its former glory as an architecturally impressive space dedicated to reading and research, especially in South Australian history.

That letter appeared in the *Advertiser* on 26 August, immediately after Mr Rann's extensive response to Susan Marsden's criticisms of his government's apparent lack of concern for the conservation of South Australia's built heritage. While denying any intention 'to abolish the Mortlock Library', the Premier refrained from comment on the sensitive issue of reinstating the Mortlock with its South Australiana collection, research facilities and staff as they were before the rebuilding of the State Library.

Because this is a matter of general concern to the state's entire historical community, and also because of lingering doubts about how a newly announced 'Integrated Cultural Campus Master

Plan' for North Terrace might affect the Mortlock Wing, I sent a further letter last month to Timothy Horton, the Integrated Design Commissioner, whose office is responsible for coordinating the new 'Master Plan'.

After expressing relief at assurances that there is no present intention to remove the Mortlock Wing from the State Library, my letter reiterated the History Council's view that the Mortlock Library of South Australiana, created in 1986 with the aid of substantial private benefactions, should be returned to its former superb setting in the Mortlock Wing. Notwithstanding the need to provide appropriate environmental conditions for certain classes of archival and other materials,

these issues are not technically insurmountable, while the benefits of making the Mortlock Wing once again readily accessible to the community, as also to tourists progressing along the North Terrace cultural boulevard, should not be underestimated. It seems possible that the cultural and social significance of the State Library's historical collections, and the extent to which they are consulted by readers of all kinds (including secondary and tertiary students, as well as family, local and regional historians) have not always been fully appreciated in recent years.

We must hope that the new state administration under Jay Weatherill will prove more sensitive than its predecessor to the cultural, economic and social benefits which can flow from enhancing and promoting all our historical assets. They could do much worse than study *Living Heritage Vision 175*, a discussion paper on heritage and development issues released by the National Trust of SA last month and summarised in *Heritage Living*, November 2011. And surely the Cultural Campus Masterplan must include provision for a Museum of Adelaide!

### Awards

After considerable discussion and redrafting over the past year, we have decided on detailed rules and protocols governing a series of annual awards for historians ordinarily resident and/or studying in South Australia. Look out for our announcement and media release early in the New Year, together with news of an exciting additional sponsorship in connection with these awards.

### Books

I have been busy with various writing tasks over the past couple of months, so my reading of South Australian history has tended to fall by the wayside. But there was one book which I could not ignore, partly because I was asked to launch it. Moreover *Sir John Langdon Bonython: Newspaper Proprietor, Politician and Philanthropist* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2011) is the work of a namesake (albeit no relative) E. Jean Prest (*née* Wadham) graduated with History Honours and an MA from Adelaide University in the mid-1950s. So her book is the culmination of more than half a century's research on South Australian history.

It's hard to think of any single person who could be said to have done more to mould the culture and values of this state and its people than Bonython, who over 45 years exercised direct personal control as editor and owner of the *Advertiser*. Jean's biography is a triumph - fascinatingly perceptive and overturning many myths. Who would have thought that the eventual owner of Carclew began his career as an assisted migrant, of radical-liberal principles, with a frugal Methodist lifestyle quite different from what we have come to expect of modern media moguls? Very strongly recommended!

All best wishes

**Wilfrid Prest**