

EXPLORE

The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.

CHARLES STURT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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Some members of the Trust, Victoriana Society of South Australia and The Adelaide Regiment of Volunteer Rifles 1860

The Trust was able to hold Charles Sturt's 228th birthday anniversary celebration at his colonial home this year on 28th April 2023. It was a beautiful day and attended by ninety guests including members of the Victoriana Society of South Australia, The Adelaide Regiment of Volunteer Rifles 1860 and the Fort Glanville Historical Association. The Dedication Speech was given by the Hon. Dean Brown AO, the Trust Patron, on the lawns of the Visitor Centre, followed by an artillery rolling volley and a cannon salute. We were delighted that Angela Evans, Mayor of City of Charles Sturt, could attend.



DEDICATION SPEECH by Hon. Dean Brown AO

We are here today, to recognise the achievements of Captain Charles Sturt, whose birthday we celebrate today. Charles Sturt is remembered primarily as an explorer. Initially in solving the riddle of the river systems of New South Wales and secondly, for being the first European to reach within 280 km of the centre of Australia.

In South Australia, the colonists regarded him as a Founding Father. The publication of his River Murray Expedition journal with the addition of Collett Barker's account of the Mt Lofty plains, inspired the British Parliament to establish the Province of South Australia in 1836. A province free of convicts and based on economic principles of land sales and assisted migration.

During the crisis of 1838 when land prices were falling and the survey department was in chaos with the resignation of Light and many of his staff, and with the site of the capital unsettled, and meat in short supply, in rode Sturt into Adelaide with 300 head of cattle. He was welcomed by the citizens as the Founder and immediately directed by the Acting Governor George Stephen, to Encounter Bay to assess it as a site for the capital, in a bid to stem further economic crisis. Sturt returned with the determination that Light's choice on the Torrens River was the excellent choice. This settled the question of the capital. Land sales and their prices increased and money began to flow back into the Province. Within the year, Sturt was appointed Surveyor General of South Australia.

Sturt's extraordinary exploration of central Australia won him further accolades – the appointment as Colonial Treasurer, a Founder's Gold Medal from the Royal Geographical Society of London, a

place on the Legislative Council, and from the citizens of Adelaide, a section of the seaside that always reminded him of his childhood spent on the Dorset coast.

Sturt had served as a member of Legislative Council from its creation in June 1843 till his resignation as Colonial Secretary on 31st December 1851. In that time Sturt showed himself to be a man of intelligence and culture, with an eagerness to advance human knowledge. He played a leading role in Holy Trinity Church affairs, the South Australia Club, the Adelaide Hunt Club, Agricultural & Horticultural Society, the Adelaide Literary and Scientific Association, the Mechanics Institute and the Hope Lodge of Oddfellows. He was a member of the first Railway Committee and Chair at the foundation meeting of the Steam Navigation Company seeking to advance steam navigation on the River Murray.

As Colonial Secretary he was a member of the Legislative Council, a new Council of sixteen elected members and eight members nominated by the Crown. Sturt in fact, supervised the introduction of an electoral system in South Australia and introduced the Aboriginal Evidence Bill to give first nations people the legal capacity to give evidence in court. However on 5th December 1851 Sturt submitted his resignation due to ill health. With his eyesight failing, his sons in need of a good English education and the servants already heading for the gold fields of Victoria, it was time to go home to England.

Sturt continued to maintain an interest in the affairs of South Australia. His counsel being sought about the deepening of the Port River harbour, the development of the river boat trade on the Murray and the preparations being made for the North Australian expedition of 1854. He was eager to return to Australia and applied, unsuccessfully though, for the governorship of Victoria in 1855 and of Queensland in 1858.

In recognition of his services to Queen and Country it was decreed that he be awarded the Order of St. Michael and St. George (K.C.M.G.) but fate intervened. On June 16, 1869 before the award was gazetted, Captain Charles Sturt died quietly at home, from heart failure.

While we look at his accomplishments as the sum of the man, Sturt like all people, had a private side:

He had been a keen naturalist since a young boy. A trait which followed him through to adulthood and that exemplified his expeditions beyond surveying the terrain. His desire to collect all manner of species, to draw and write about, contributed to world scientific knowledge.

We find in his garrison duty in northern France, a man who pursued his love of drawing, music and natural science. In Dublin, Ireland, he produced a beautiful portrait of the Duke of Wellington, which was quickly snapped up by General Sir David Baird. But Sturt could also be mischievous, drawing an unflattering caricature of the Brigade-Major, of which, copies found their way into every gingerbread shop in Dublin. Sturt commenting that there was a bit of a dust up over it.

While stationed in Skibbereen, Ireland, he pursued his childhood love of sailing, along the coast between Cape Clear to Bantry Bay. Cape Clear an obvious destination, in order to visit the famous 12th century St Kieran's Church Bird Observatory. The evenings were rarely spent at home and during an extended visit by his cousin Isaac, were said to have danced on the carpet most evenings at the home of Irish friend Sandy O'Driscoll.

In middle age, his life was absorbed with public affairs and constant dinner engagements to provide support to various endeavours or to lecture about his discoveries. Public life also offered unique roles, a Croupier at one dinner, and a racing steward at the Adelaide Races or as host to the Adelaide Hunt Club and its pack of hounds, for their regular hunt across the Reedbeds.

The Grange, offered him solace against the political reverberations of Grey's appointment, his demotions to Assistant Commissioner of Lands and then Register General and reductions in salary. His garden became his keystone, a slice of paradise where all manner of animals and plants could be found: a place of retreat to enjoy with family and friends, a beautiful beach to walk, bathe and sail. It was also a place of amusement with evening soire's of music and conversation, elegant dinners and the playful antics of his mischievous sons.

Here we see a man who could enjoy life, even if sometimes, in the face of misfortune.

His biographer and daughter-in-law, Beatrix Sturt wrote of

"his rare charm and sweetness of expression", "his talk that sparkled with quiet fun" and "his transparently simple and straightforward, and guileless of motive".

Sturt's good friend George McLeay agreed: "The rare combination of sweetness and of strength, the zeal for science, his retiring modesty are extolled by all.

Close friend Edward Eyre remarked "'He was one of Nature's noblemen, generous and unselfish to a degree; always kind and considerate, always sympathising and ready to oblige or help others in every way he possibly could."

While Sir Roderick Murchison, President of the Royal Geographical Society of London, rendered this account

"Calm and collected, this brave man never failed to inspire perfect confidence in his followers, while he secured their love and respect by his unvarying courtesy and consideration. . . . Like all brave men, Sturt was most kindhearted, and compassionate . . . Modest and unassuming, he lived among us in complete retirement, never courting notice, though surely such a man ought to have been early sought out for public recognition."



Even when encouraged by friends to apply for a knighthood, Sturt was humbled by the process. After preparing numerous drafts in application, he turned to cartographer John Arrowsmith, to draw a map tracing the extent of his expeditions. This map alone was his submission. His primary concern in making application, was the future financial security of his wife and daughter, once he departed this world.

Beatrix Sturt observed: "Throughout life his conscientious care for others which contrasted markedly with his disregard for self." That the "true greatness of the man appears in the spirit which animated all his work, and which through his example has influenced the whole history of Australian discovery". Today we remember Captain Charles Sturt's many discoveries and his contribution to public life and celebrate his kindness and generosity of nature to all that knew him.



Trust Patron and Board Members at 228th Birthday celebrations

Prof Scott Smith, Merle Weston, Hon. Dean Brown AO

Anne McCutcheon, Prof Scott Smith, Margaret Phillips, Tony Botten

Recognition of support for the Museum:



City of Charles Sturt continues to support the Museum by maintaining our large park area with mowing, watering and mulching. Through Historical Society Funding, Council has provided \$9,706.84 for the continued maintenance of our Heritage Garden, for two external interpretive signs for the grounds and a new lap top and accessories for administrative purposes.

Ward Councillors Tom Scheffler and Rachele Tullio, are to be thanked for their support for a Discretionary Ward Allowance for \$5,000 for rewiring The Grange homestead to ensure the wiring was compliant to current standards. We hope to install additional lighting throughout the building. Perhaps paving the way for evening tours.



The History Trust of South Australia has granted the Trust \$2,796 to conserve and remount the hairlocks of Charles Sturt and his children. The work to be carried out by Jodie Prymke, renowned fine art conservator.



The Department of Social Services, Federal Government Volunteers Fund has provided \$1,200 for the purposes of buying 10 California chairs, 4 folding trestle tables and a ladder for our volunteers. Many thanks to Mark Butler, Member of Parliament for Hindmarsh.



In early June, we had new gallery lighting installed in Galleries 2 and 4 as part of the Copland Foundation grant. Denise Schumann is in the process of installing a new exhibition wall in Gallery 2 which will feature an exhibition "My Country" revealing Sturt's kindly overtures with First Nations Peoples during his expeditions. While some

white explorers and settlers acted harshly towards the indigenous peoples, Sturt showed a genuine desire to understand their culture, to work cooperatively with various tribes as he passed through their Country and to be supportive of their needs. In return, the aboriginals guided his expeditions through their Country, leading them to water and providing them bush sustenance and saving the party from certain death.

Tax deductible gifts have also been received from individuals, and the Trust is always grateful for donations small and large to assist with conservation work.

MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

During the History Festival in May, the museum hosted an intimate evening event "Antipodean Dreams" for twenty three guests, serving wines donated by Marble Hill Winery and canapes. Denise Schumann OAM, the Exhibition designer, gave a presentation on the themes that formed the back drop to her approach, and the concepts and stories that served to cultivate a new notion of Charles Sturt as a man of science. It was truly a remarkable evening with guests amazed by Denise's insights into the life of Sturt and into colonial history.

In the past six months we have welcomed many visitors on our public open days and for mid-week group tours. Visitors have been astonished by the new facilities and our beautiful gallery exhibits. We have been able to tap into Probus and Rotary Clubs and University of the Third Age who are now regular bookings for morning teas and tours. Bus coach tours – Austwide, Endeavour and Eureka – have made a point, of including the museum in tours of the western region.

We were very pleased to welcome a visit by members of **the Australian Garden History Society of South Australia**. They enjoyed their visit with Anne McCutcheon talking to them about Sturt's Garden and the development of the Heritage Garden. She provided the group with a tour and received helpful suggestions as to plantings and positioning. The group commended the efforts of Richard Nolan and all the gardening volunteers in the development and cultivation of the garden. Merle Weston and Margaret Phillips provided guided tours of the Grange home and gallery. We owe much gratitude to Anne for making the lovely sandwiches and providing the dainty quiches for the Society's afternoon tea.

Artlab Workshop: There was a good attendance at the Preventive Conservation workshop presented by Artlab staff onsite at the Museum on 13 February 2023. A lot of questions were fielded about the different methods of handling and cleaning artefacts, fabrics and furniture. With regular monthly cleaning days and quarter yearly intensive cleaning and maintenance working bees being organised. The workshop was funded with a grant from the State Government's Dept of Human Services, Volunteers Grant.

Tour guide Workshop presented by Denise Schumann: OAM on 22 February 2023. Denise gave attendees a valuable introduction to the thematic approach of her exhibition *Antipodean Dreams* and her thought processes during the development stages. She sought to cast a different

perspective on Sturt's life through his interest in natural science and horticulture. Volunteers were guided around the exhibition, Denise explaining each theme, the stories that were enhanced by the objects on display and the methods used to inspire and challenge visitors to a greater understanding of Sturt's personae.

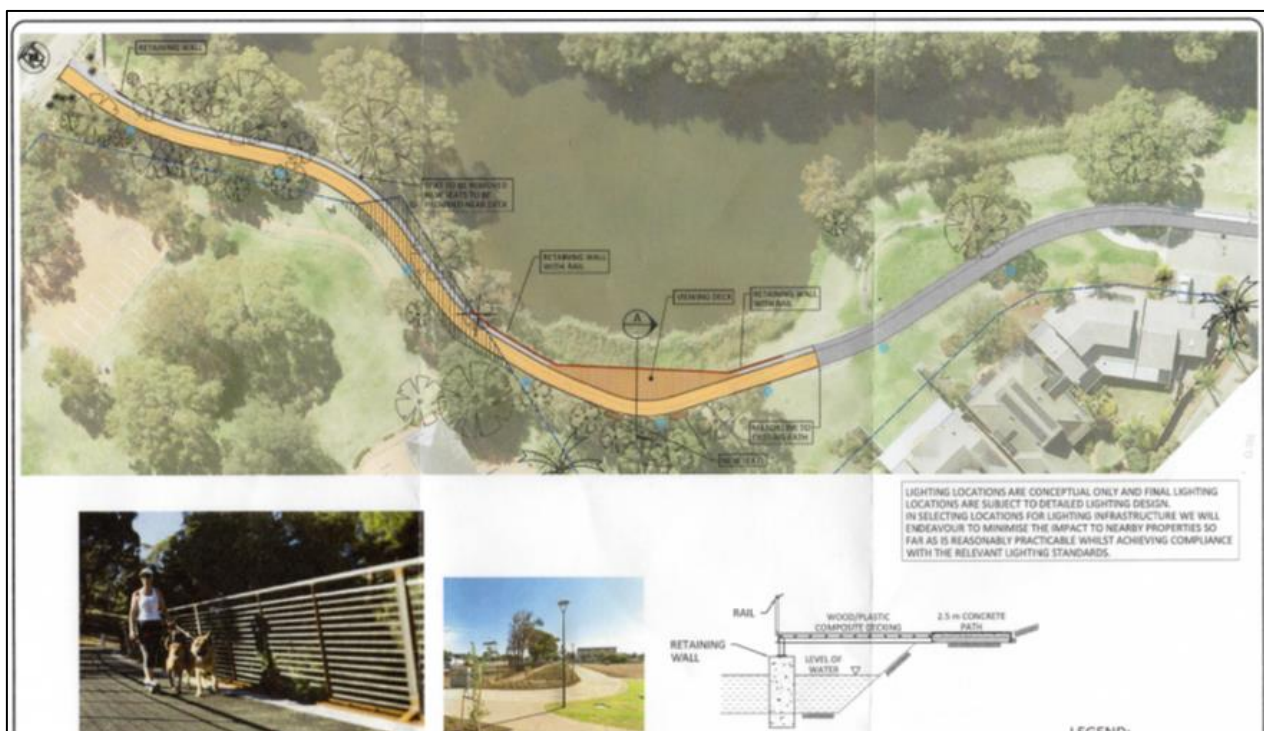
Out and About: Prof. Scott Smith, a Trustee, provided a stimulating lecture to the West Lakes Current Affairs Group titled "Exploring the Frontier: From South Australia to Mars", challenging attendees to compare Sturt's explorations of the continent to that of current space exploration. The Group were very pleased to welcome such a noted academic into their midst and contributed \$50.00 to the Museum Trust.



Revaluation of The Grange Precinct. Preston Rowe Paterson carried out a property valuation in March for the purposes of ensuring our Building & Contents insurance suitably covered the Trust after the construction of the Visitor Centre. Their report has now been received and they have re-valued the property at \$2,190,000. This includes an estimated replacement cost of \$1,659,545 + demolition costs etc. This valuation will substantially increase the cost of our Building and Contents insurance.



The Grange Lakes Shared Bike and Walking Path final stage is now under construction by the City of Charles Sturt and is progressing well. The 2.5m pathway is adjacent the museum grounds, and it is hoped that the large fenced decking area on the water's edge, literally in front of the Grange homestead, will attract more visitors to the Museum.



IN MEMORIAM

An article was published in The Compass Vol. 1 No. 7 September 2010 by Gloucestershire's U.K. correspondence Mike Cooke titled Captain Charles Sturt, an Australian Hero. Part of the article, which many readers may not be aware of refers to Sturt's retirement to Cheltenham on his return to England.

"Cheltenham spa had become a popular place for retirement amongst senior civil service officials and military officers, who had served overseas. For Sturt the main attraction was probably Cheltenham College, a fee-paying 'public school' particularly geared towards educating sons for the army. Indeed soon after their arrival in March 1853, Napier and Charles went there as dayboys. The Cheltenham Annuaire lists Captain Sturt as residing at St Edmund's in Tivoli Road from 1854 until 1860 which was conveniently situated for the College. ... By 1860, the expensive time of educating and fitting out his three sons for the army was over. Suffering badly from rheumatism and needing to economise Sturt, his wife and daughter went to live in Dinan, Brittany (North West France). Not finding it to their liking, they returned to Cheltenham in 1863. Sturt's final six years were spent living quietly at 19 Clarence Square, Cheltenham, just inside the fashionable Pittville area, on the other side of the town."

However, Sturt was becoming steadily more infirm. He was now nearly blind from the ophthalmia (severe inflammation of the eye) ... In 1866, Sturt wrote to an old friend that his sight was much worse, and he was unable read his own writing. Nevertheless, his death on the afternoon of 16th June 1869 was unexpected, it being shortly before he was due to receive the K.C.M.G. (Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George). It came with no warning and without pain, whilst sitting in a chair alone in his home.



JILL HILBIG, VALE

On Sunday 28th May, 2023 Jill Hilbig, F.R.C.N.A, a long serving member of the Trust, passed away peacefully surrounded by her family. Board Members attended her funeral at Holy Innocents Anglican Church, Belair, where Jill and husband Paul were parishioners. Jill was a remarkable woman having started her career as a Registered Nurse, gaining her Masters in Nursing before becoming a lecturer at the University of South Australia, School of Nursing, specialising in Perioperative Nursing Education. She

travelled the world, lecturing and published many papers in medical journals. Jill will always be remembered for her kindness, generosity, her warm smile, and willingness to serve her community. The Trust extends its deepest sympathy to Paul Hilbig, a former Trustee and his family.

DR ROBERT EDWARDS, VALE

Life Member, Dr Robert Edwards passed away peacefully on 22 May 2023. Dr Edwards was an early member of the Trust, serving as Trust Chair in the 1970s. He studied as an anthropologist at Monash University, Melbourne, working extensively in Arnhem Land during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1965 he was appointed Curator of the South Australia Museum. From 1973 he served as deputy principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council. His extensive experience with Indigenous Australians and his close associations with cultural institutions led to him becoming the Inaugural Director of the Museum of Victoria in 1984. Then as Chief Executive and Director of Art Exhibitions Australia Ltd, he was responsible for co-ordinating many major touring exhibitions. In 1997 he was appointed as first Chair of the Board of the National Portrait Gallery, responsible for determining and overseeing Collection Development policy. He served on many Boards – the Ian Potter Museum, the South Australian Museum and the Stockman's Hall of Fame – and was an



Honorary Fellow of both the National Museum of Australia, and Museum Victoria. www.portrait.gov.au

For the past three years his health had been declining but he continued to maintain a strong interest in the Charles Sturt Museum, following our activities through the newsletters and donating to the Trust annually to show his enduring support. The Trust is truly grateful for his sustained dedication.
