

HSNT Newsletter

No.29/August 2009

Historical Society of the Northern Territory
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Patron: The Hon Austin Asche AC, QC

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Historical Society had a memorable visit to Raffles Bay and the Fort Wellington ruins on the weekend of 24-27 July. For the party of 7 vehicles and 16 members it was very successful. With the help of the Park Rangers and a contemporary site plan by the last Commandant of the Fort, Captain Collet Barker, we were able to identify the fort site, the ruins and some artefacts of the military occupation.

We also undertook two small, shallow archaeological digs at two of the other structures and confirmed that they too were related to the British settlement. This suggests, contrary to earlier belief, that the possible impact of buffalo hunters from a later period has been minimal. We were also able to briefly visit Observation Island in Raffles Bay. Although we found no evidence of the brief French occupation, several Macassan stone sites were identified.

The tasks ahead now are to technically write up these new insights and then discuss them with the Park Board [for the] development of a conservation plan and Northern Territory heritage listing.

Brian Reid

DATES TO REMEMBER

- 14-15 AUGUST:** Open Days at Government House, Friday 4.30pm to 7pm, Saturday, 3pm-6pm
- 15 AUGUST:** Open Day at Supreme Court, Darwin and Parliament House, Darwin. [see times in paper]
- 14-17 AUGUST, Friday/Monday:** HSNT trip to Bradshaw Training area
- 20-21 AUGUST:** Australian Sound Recordings Association conference, National Library of Australia, Canberra: information sgrant@nla.gov.au
- 23 AUGUST:** Australian Maritime Museum, Sydney: Farewell to Charles Darwin lecture, 1pm-4.30pm; members \$20, guests 30 includes afternoon tea.
- 9 SEPTEMBER:** HSNT Council Meeting, 55 Ross Smith Avenue, 7.30pm
- 22-24 SEPTEMBER, Tuesday-Thursday:** CDU Charles Darwin Symposium, Darwin Convention Centre: register at www.cdu.edu.au/cdss2009
- 26 SEPTEMBER:** Saturday, boat trip around Darwin Harbour to celebrate Darwin200. Cost \$10pp. Bookings janie.mason@cdu.edu.au
- 30 SEPTEMBER:** HSNT Patron's Dinner: Speaker: Earl James, at the Quality Hotel Frontier Darwin at 7pm [Rooftop Restaurant]. Buffet, \$42pp. Bookings and cheque by 25th September to HSNT P.O.Box, ATT Bev Phelts (0417 868 827)
- 28 OCTOBER:** HSNT lecture: Speaker Richard Luxton: venue: Fred's Pass Reserve, Beehive building, 7.30pm, gold coin donation.

EDITORIAL

We have received our \$1000 from the Australian Central Credit Union lottery as well as \$100 for the GST. Thank you all for your support as it is a relatively easy way to raise money. I am also particularly pleased—one of my tickets won prize number 43!!! As they sell a lot of tickets I suspect that you really have to be very lucky to win anything—I am thrilled!! They don't list the prize winners but publish the ticket numbers in the Sunday Territorian so do check! (towards the end of July)

I believe that the trip to Cobourg Peninsula to dig at the site of Fort Wellington went well—I am hoping for a report for the newsletter.

Shortly some 30 members will travel to the Victoria River district to visit Bradshaw Station—we will be staying at the Timber Creek pub—camping or (some us are rather lax) staying at the motel—it should be great fun.



Judy Opitz had a most successful launch of her latest book *An English Rose in Kakadu* at the Northern Territory Library recently. Telling the story of her life both in the Northern Territory and that of her forebears, it is most interesting and the photos are wonderful. Oh to have been in the Territory in the 1960s and 1970s when men were men and life was much less complicated in remote areas. Still I guess we are pleased to have 'mod cons' and better roads and bridges!

In the copy of the Stockman's news (June 2009) there is a tribute to Danny Forster, a stockman on Alexandria station by Rod Bellette. Danny was noted as one of the greatest buck jump riders and a top bronco roper in the era of the 1950s and 1960s. Danny passed away recently in Queensland.

We wish the Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway *Happy Birthday* on the occasion of their 120th birthday. 25th and 26th July was a weekend of celebration with a photo exhibition, markets, children's art show, a rail trail walk from Bonrook gate back to Pine Creek along the 1917 formation and a reunion of North Australia Railway workers and families.

Celebrations were at the West Terrace cemetery in Adelaide on 17 May last when members of the John McDouall Stuart Society visited the graves of Francis William Thring, William Patrick Auld, James Frew and John McGorrery. Their graves were re-dedicated by the Rev, Ted Bray and a short biography was read giving those present an insight into their lives and their connection with John McDouall Stuart. Many of their descendants were present. Our Society remembers William Patrick Auld with Auld's Compass as our logo.

Bev Phelts has said how easy it is now to access the digitized newspapers—www.ndpbeta.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home.

August 1-9th was *National Family History Week* when I was asked to talk about the HSNT at a seminar at the NT Library. Although most of the information was for genealogists, the HSNT fitted in as an organization that may also be useful as a place to find information. It was an interesting morning with the Family History Group (Mormons) giving a talk and one of the Library staff who has traced her family back to England. I was asked about our logo!

Bev Phelts and I had an interesting Sunday morning recently when asked by Ray White to visit a house in Humpty Doo. The owners are interested in the history of the house, knowing it was built prior to the War. The owners think that the house was built around 1927 or 1940 and moved from the Parap area in around 1982 (we think). We are asking friends to assist but if anyone knows the addresses of houses that were moved from the Parap in the 1980's we would like to hear from them.

More news from the FAHS in the following newsletter—there will be a telephone linkup meeting on Monday 10 August—with a 15 page agenda!

Yvonne Forrest

NEW BOOKS/ARTICLES ON THE NT

BROCKWEL, Sally and others (2009) 'Radiocarbon dates from the Top End: a Cultural Chronology for the Northern Territory Coastal Plains' IN: *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2009/1, pp.54-76

DEWAR, Mickey 'Social Climbing or Just Being Cool: the 1950s Ideal of an Elevated House in Darwin' IN: *Memento* (2009) 37/July, pp.13-15

OPITZ, Judy (2009) *An English Rose in Kakadu: the Authiobiography of Judy Opitz*. Virginia, NT, David M Welsh.

ISBN 978 0 9775035 5 1

ARCHIVES

Journals received:

- Australian Association for Marine History quarterly newsletter (2009) 114/June
History News (2009) 281/June-July; 282/July-August
History SA (2009) 201/July
Katherine Museum newsletter (2009) July
John McDouall Stuart Society newsletter (2009) 126/June
Manning Clark House newsletter (2009) 37/Winter
Memento (2009) 37: [Dewar, Mickey: *Social climbing or just being cool: the 1950s ideal of an elevated house in Darwin*]
Placenames Australia (2009) June
Queensland History journal (2009) vol.20,no.10, May
RHSQ Bulletin (2009) 731/June; 732/July
Signals (2009) 87/June-August
Stockman's News (2009) 105/June

The following (living in the Territory) have received NT History grants for 2009:

- Peter d'Abbs: history of community based initiatives to control alcohol problems in indigenous communities;
- Henry Johnson: history of Dr Cecil Strangman, early medical officer;
- Christine Collins: history of sport parachuting in the NT
- Kim Johnstone: history of indigenous fertility in the NT
- Eileen Cummings: record oral histories from two generations of indigenous people in the Top End work place
- Phil Herdman: research origins of European place names of North East Arnhem Land
- Petronella Vaarzon-Morel: research camel histories and Aboriginal encounters on the NT settler frontier 1860s-1970s
- Christian O'Brien: research a history of weather and climate in Australia's Top End. 1820-1960
- Charlie Ward: research helpers and wayfarers recounting their experiences of the Wave Hill walk-off.

Charles Darwin symposium, CDU, Darwin Convention Centre, 22-24 September 2009.

The programme for this symposium is on the Charles Darwin web page and, please note, you do have to register however the symposium is free: www.cdu.edu.au/cdss2009

Key speaker at the opening of the programme will be Professor Tim Berra speaking on *The concise story of an extraordinary man*. Day 2 will cover *Brave new world? What is Darwin's legacy in the era of modern medicine and technology-based societies?* Speakers will include Professors Peter Doherty, Sarah Hrdy, Keith Crandall, John Mattick, Michael Akam and Simon Longstaff. On Day 3 the theme will be *Understanding the controversy between Darwinian science and religion* with Professors Ed Larson, Ted Peters, Emeritus Professor Martinez Hewlett (University of Arizona, USA) and Drs Lester-Irabinna Rigney and Maggie Walter.

Your Society is supporting this symposium with a harbour tour on Saturday, 26 September, 9.30am to 12.30pm, leaving from Cullen Bay. Emeritus Professor Alan Powell will provide a commentary. There are restricted tickets available (they will be available to all the symposium participants) so we are suggesting that you book early with the Secretary: janie.mason@cdu.edu.au Tickets are \$10pp.

BITS AND PIECES

The Australian year books, 1908-2008 are now available on www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1301.0. These documents not only give statistics but also essays describing the social, political, economic and environmental state of Australia. They often have articles on specific subjects with detailed descriptions explaining the history and operations. They are essential for historians, genealogists (looking for birth, marriage and death information) and are just interesting to read.

WHO ARE THE GENEALOGISTS OF AUSTRALIA?

University of New England has a student doing a Masters and who is making a survey of Australian genealogists to examine questions about their interests, research practices and make up as part of a master's research programme. They will ask about their motivation, how and where they conduct research and why they make those choices. The survey can be found at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/> and is open until 30 November 2009. Information and questions can be directed to lalekna@une.edu.au but you are encouraged to assist the survey.

Illustrated Glossary of Australian Rural Fence Terms

Dr John Pickard has made available free on the web this publication. Arranged alphabetically with definitions, quotes from primary and secondary sources, illustrations and an exhaustive list of references, it is available from the NSW Heritage Branch at www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/03_index.htm

Dr Pickard's previous publication is now superseded.

VISIT TO RAFFLES BAY AND THE FORT WELLINGTON SITE IN GARIG GUNAK BARLU NATIONAL PARK

Fort Wellington was the second British settlement established in the Top End during the 19th Century. It had only a short existence from June 1827 to August 1829.

Over the period 24-27 July 2009 a group of some sixteen members of the HSNT, both local and interstate, rendezvoused at Cahill's Crossing on the East Alligator river at 10am to catch the low tide on Friday morning. Some had stayed overnight at Jabiru, others had driven from Darwin, leaving very early in the morning.

From Cahill's Crossing we travelled in convoy, heading 300 kilometers east then north into the Cobourg Peninsula National Park. Lunch was at Mulgur Creek, and we eventually reached our camp site at Miariah Beach on the western shore of Raffles Bay. Camps were made amongst the rather scanty shade along the seashore. Regrettably the only casualty during the trip was the loss of an Esky full of liquid refreshment!

That evening we were met by Senior Ranger, Peter Fitzgerald, who prepared us for movements the following day which had been compromised by the non-

availability of his largest launch. We moved, four at a time, across the bay in the smaller boat!

People were allocated to undertake a number of tasks about the Fort in four teams led by Richard Woolfe (site survey), Alan Powell (old grave site investigation), Brian Reid (re-identification of features from previous visits) and Clayton Fredericksen (to investigate the Commandant's House knoll site).

Early next morning as the day warmed up people worked steadily identifying sites, ruins and artefacts and attempting, unsuccessfully to identify the old fort site.

That evening, at the pow-wow at the bonfire on the beach the day's activities were reviewed and objectives set for the next day. This was to include a visit to Observatory Island to investigate if any traces of human occupation could be determined.

On the Sunday morning the first trips were initially to the Fort site. All parties were successfully landed before the low tide prevented boat movements for several hours during the middle of the day. This day was more successful, first with the discovery of the old Fort remains, including the discovery of a metal uniform badge and other artefacts. Later the discovery of apparent "trepan lines" on Observatory Island. A most successful day and lots of tired, sunburnt people.

Monday morning was a leisurely breakfast and pack-up before travelling independently the 550 kilometers back to Darwin via Cahill's Crossing, getting there in time to catch the midday low tide.

Our thanks to Peter Fitzgerald and his rangers who included Richard Ledger who is doing a plan of management for the area. Our findings will be incorporated in this document. Also thanks to Richard Woolfe and Clayton Fredericksen, our two most able archaeologists.

Colin Beard