

EXPLORE

The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.

CHARLES STURT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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The Trust welcomes you to a new year and wishes you good fortune for the coming year. The last six months has had it highs and lows for the Trust. We had to wish our valued Chairman Malcolm Stafford better health as he retired as Chair of the Board but we are grateful that he still maintains a close association with the museum operations. We welcome Tony Botten to the position of Chair. He has shown himself to be a very able Chair and we look forward to his continued management of meetings to achieve successful outcomes for the Trust.

The advent of an intense storm in early October brought down a large bough from the back garden gum tree which landed on the Grange roof. Fortunately the wind directed the bough to the southern corner of the house rather than the central roof section. Arthur Jeeves, Trust President, was on site at the time so was at hand to facilitate direction action



Our disaster planning worked extremely well with the SES arriving in the evening to cut back the branches from the roof and make it secure against further damage while the City of Charles Sturt arrived the next morning to remove the rest of the branch. Special items in the dining room were relocated, the electrical damage contained, the insurers called, followed quickly by a damage assessment and later an engineers report and awarding of contracts to complete the repairs.



We were unsuccessful with our grant applications to HistorySA and the National Library of Australia. Nonetheless the City of Charles Sturt provided us with continued maintenance of the outer grounds and \$3,000 in funding for a display cabinet and a selection of toys made by the Henley Woodworkers Group.

The display is of prime importance to our education program for Reception to Year 2 whose history curriculum rationale is

"History is a disciplined process of inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination ... It helps students appreciate how the world and its people have changed, as well as the significant continuities that exist to the present day."

Our program for early childhood focuses on the continuities between colonial and contemporary life styles, by drawing comparisons between the tools of exploration, communication, domestic chores, attending school and the children's play. Our new wooden hoop and stick, set of wooden skittles, wooden finger tops, cup and ball, canvas ball and wooden fiddle sticks will provide them the opportunity to play like the Sturt children.

We thank the City of Charles Sturt also for providing \$737 in funding for the mounting and display of the 39th Regimental Shako and helmet badge. Paul Eshmade is to be thanked for his very generous donation of shako and helmet badge, and Anthony Zammit for his construction of the display.



HistorySA are to be thanked for their donation of an entomology cabinet and we thank Anthony Zammit our conservator for making the collection on another very hot day. We hope to use the cabinet for display purposes.

Our DVD ROM *The Life and Times of Captain Charles Sturt* was short listed for the 2013 Australian Community Maritime History Prize. Unfortunately we were not awarded the prize but we are pleased with the recognition of our product and its contribution to the telling of Australian history.

The **Charles Sheppey and Evelyn Gawler painting** has now been conserved at a cost of \$7,200 and will be on display in the Dining Room with that of Napier.

The conservation project has raised questions about its provenance and that of the Napier painting. The Trust had been informed by Anthony Sturt that Napier's painting had been commissioned in London when the family returned to England in 1853. This held credence as the ship, *Barbara Gordon* carrying the consignment of Sturt possessions, sank in a hurricane off the coast of Africa. The Charles and Evelyn painting was believed to have also been painted in England.

A new piece of evidence has challenged this notion. David B. Davies, the donor of the Charles and Evelyn painting, has discovered a series of letters written by Beatrix Sturt to Lieutenant Frank Alderson, grandson of Charles Sheppey.

*To Lieut. F. H. Alderson, RN at HMS Osea, Maldon, Essex
23rd March 1920, Winterdyne, Bewdley*

The picture of your grandfather & his youngest brother Evelyn Gawler Sturt as boys was by an English artist named Crosland (sic) who happened to be at Adelaide when Captain Sturt was about to send his eldest boy (my Napier) to Rugby a great wrench at a time when the voyage to England meant a slow sailing vessel all round the Cape! And photography was not yet. So he let Crosland do the boy portrait of Napier which hangs in my dining room. That was thought so good a likeness that it obtained a lot of work for the artist (who also had been commissioned to do a kind of official portrait of Capt. Sturt himself which still hangs in the Council Chamber at Adelaide. So I think it was partly in gratitude that the artist offered to do Charlie (your grandfather) then 10 years old (early in 1849 I think). Charlie hated having to pose! & as he stood feeling dreary, in burst little Evelyn aged 8½. "Oh come along, do! The fish are leaping in the Creek"! And the artist shouted for him to stand for one minute just so! while he hurriedly sketched in the eager little face... Old Lady Sturt often told me about that ... & certainly it is a very clever picture of the 2 boys & it somehow convinces one of its life-likeness; whatever might be its level among art critics.

*Your affectionate Aunt
Beatrice M. Sturt.*



What makes the letter interesting is that the conservator reported that the painting is not a John Crossland. The Napier on the other hand does present some aspects of a Crossland but it is unsigned so cannot be confirmed.

The 1849 dating is incorrect as Crossland had not arrived from England. He and his family docked at Port Phillip Bay Victoria aboard the *Slains Castle* on the 24 January 1851 before moving to Adelaide and settling in Waymouth Street.. For Sturt's part, he was absent in England most of that year until his return to Adelaide in August 1849.

The painting of Capt Sturt, as mentioned in the Beatrice letter, was completed in 1851 when he was serving as Colonial Secretary. Napier returned to England in the spring of 1852 and the family returned in March 1853. If the Charles and Evelyn's portrait was commissioned in Adelaide the date would be 1852-53 when Charles Sheppey was 15 years old and Evelyn 13 years old. Certainly you could question the accuracy of the dating of 1849 by Mrs Sturt.

The artist cannot be determined and the conservator believes that the brush strokes clearly indicate two artists, perhaps separately, as later restoration attempts are evident. The Sturt Pea in Charles Sheppey's lapel does indicate it may have been painted in Adelaide. Perhaps Crossland only completed a hurried sketch of a boy anxious to catch fish as the letter implies, leaving the portrait to be completed by another or the painting, while not showing Crossland's normal painting techniques, could actually be a Crossland as Beatrice has indicated.