

# EXPLORE

The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.

## CHARLES STURT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2014

ISSUE NO. 22

Welcome to the winter issue of Explore. The last six months have gone particularly fast. We celebrated Sturt's Birthday on 28<sup>th</sup> April with the unveiling of the Charles Sheppey and Evelyn Gawler Sturt painting by our Patron, the Hon. Dean Brown AO. It was a beautiful day to celebrate with the weather treating us well. Many thanks to David B. Davies, the great grandson of Charles Sheppey for his amazing donation to the Trust. It now hangs with the oil painting of their brother Napier Sturt in the Dining Room.

We thank our special guests of Hon. Dean Brown AO and his wife Rosslyn for their special attendance as they had only returned from Africa the previous day. Dean was heavily involved in the negotiations to obtain the painting, and we are extremely pleased that he was available to unveil the painting and give an account of its provenance.

We also thank Kirsten Alexander, Mayor of the City of Charles Sturt, for her attendance and financial support of the event, through the City Benefit Fund. Linda Lacey, History Officer for the City of Charles Sturt for obtaining the easel, Anthony Zammit, our conservator for hanging the painting, Vili's for the supply of pastries, the members of the Fort Glanville Historical Association and the ladies of the Victoriana Society of South Australia for their attendance. A big thank you to all those that helped with catering, setting up, packing up and cleaning which added to the success of the day.



Unveiling of Charles & Evelyn Sturt painting by our Patron The Hon. Dean Brown A.O.

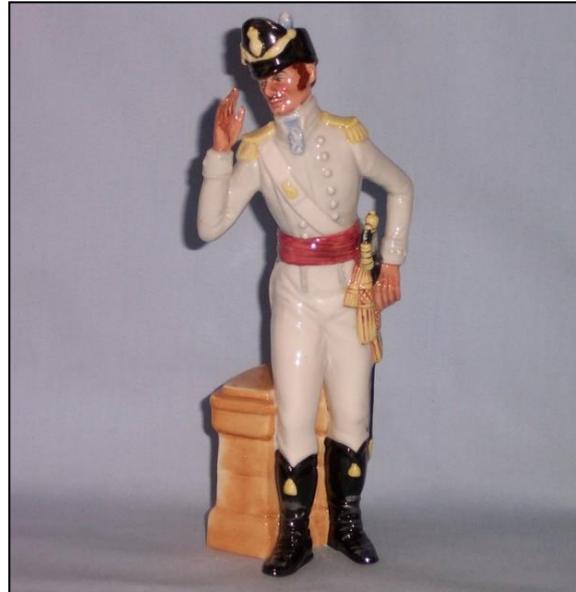
The Trust extends a further note of appreciation to David B. Davies who has donated to the Collection, the original eight letters from Beatrix Sturt to Frank Alderson which highlighted the provenance of the painting of Charles and Evelyn. These will be conserved for future display.



Paul Eshmade had the opportunity to view his fine donation of shako and helmet plate on display in Gallery one and to extend his appreciation to the City of Charles Sturt in making the display possible. Subsequently Paul donated two Royal Doulton figurines of a Waterloo drummer boy and an officer of the same period in 'walking out attire'. These will be placed on display in the near future and will make a contribution to the 200th celebrations of the Battle of Waterloo in 2015.



HN2679 Drummer Boy



HN2895 'Morning Ma'am'

The City of Charles Sturt has been extremely supportive of the Trust this year, providing the Trust with \$3,000 for the construction of display cabinet featuring an exhibition of toys and learning tools used by colonial children, the construction of a computer cabinet for viewing of our DVD by teachers and students and the printing of the booklet, The Mount Bryan Expedition. The Trust is also grateful to our two ward councillors Raelene Hanley and Tom Scheffler for the provision of \$5830 in funding for the replacement of the roof box guttering and the cutting down of the large palm which has contributed to so many broken roof tiles and bent guttering.

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A feature of this May was the Trust's involvement in History Month. This year we celebrate the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sturt's Central Expedition thus our theme for History Month was "In Search of the Inland Sea". We were inundated with visitors to the extent that our tour guides were exhausted at the end of each open day. It was extremely pleasing to see the interest that is still aroused by the story of Captain Charles Sturt and gratifying that the work of the Trust is still relevant as we continue to fulfil our objectives.

In keeping with the **Central Expedition** theme, we revisit the story of that important expedition. We pick up the story in 1844, five years after Sturt had brought his family from New South Wales to South Australia to take up what seemed at the time, a brilliant career opportunity in the new colony. Unfortunately not all bade well for his decision.

Sturt's tenure as Surveyor General proved to be very brief, because its rightful occupant 'Frome' arrived in the colony some three months later and Sturt was relegated to the position of 'Assistant Commissioner of Lands' at a much reduced salary. From then his circumstances went from bad to worse. 'Gawler' was recalled and replaced by 'Grey', an appointment that Sturt bitterly resented. His salary had been cut by two hundred pounds per annum, he had been unable to sell his cottage on East Terrace, and he bore the burden of a mortgage on his new residence. He also smarted under the belief that he had not received due recognition for his past achievements nor adequately rewarded for them. To escape this poisonous environment he applied to lead a grandiose expedition across Australia, but it was refused. Finally he appointed to lead an expedition into the hinterland of South Australia in search of the mythical 'Inland Sea'. Little did he know that he was to traverse a waterless land that was in the grip of a terrible drought.

On August 10, 1844, with 15 men, 11 horses, 32 bullocks, 6 drays, a light carriage, 200 sheep, a boat and boat carriage, and several dogs, Sturt's expedition departed Adelaide on what he predicted would prove 'a fearful but splendid enterprise'. Eight days later the party reached 'Moorundie', then followed the Murray River to its junction with the Darling, then along its course to the vicinity of 'Lake Cawndilla'. Here they camped for two months, exploring the surrounding country and mountain range they named the 'Barrier Range'. In December, desperately short of water, the party moved further north into the 'Grey Range', where they located a permanent source of water and made camp. They named these waters 'Preservation Creek' and the site of their encampment, 'Depot Glen'. Their discovery was fortuitous because the extreme summer heat had dried up all the surface water within easy reach. They remained trapped at 'Depot Glen' from January 27, 1845 to July, 27, 1845, in temperatures so extreme that they were forced to dig an underground shelter in order to survive. Both men and animals and their equipment suffered terribly from the intolerable heat. In the case of the men, the lack of an adequate diet was to claim the life of Sturt's second-in-command, James Poole, who died of scurvy.

In July, 1845, there were very heavy rainfalls which enabled Sturt's party to explore to the northwest to Fort Grey and for three months the little party travelled over a desolate landscape and crossed the 'Stony Desert'. Finally, defeated by the red sand dunes of the Simpson Desert and suffering from a lack of water, Sturt reluctantly came to the realization that his mythical 'Inland Sea' did not exist. Exhausted and dispirited, he returned to Fort Grey, where following an altercation with Dr. John Harris-Browne, he determined to mount one last expedition. This proved more fruitful in that he discovered the permanent waters of 'Cooper Creek', but with exhausted horses and himself physically spent and near death from scurvy he was forced to return to Depot Glen. Following fortuitous thunderstorms which replenished the surface water along their intended escape route, Harris-Browne took charge of the party. Loading Sturt into the spring cart he made a dash for 'Cawndilla' and thence the 'Darling River'. Having rested the party, Harris-Browne then travelled on to 'Moorundie' and thence to Adelaide where on January 28, 1846, the gaunt, blackened survivors and their equally gaunt horses and bullocks wended their silent way up King William Street to Victoria Square. Daniel Brock, the gunsmith and bird skinner of the expedition made an entry in his diary on that day that said it all. *"I am home!"*

Although the expedition was a commercial failure, in that the expedition had not discovered useful water or fertile land, Sturt had discovered the 'Cooper Creek' and penetrated inland to

within 240 kilometres of the geographical centre of 'Australia'. Along the way he had noted, without realizing their full significance, that the geological strata of the 'Barrier Ranges' *'had good ore bearing potential'*. Many years later that potential would be realized and give rise to the mining town of 'Broken Hill'. In that way, Sturt's expedition did prepare the way for those who followed, and one of those was a member of his own party, John McDouall Stuart, who went on to become a noted explorer and the first man to cross the continent from South to North and to return safely.

Sturt returned to England where he wrote his 'Narrative of an Expedition To Central Australia 1844-46' and in 1847 was awarded the 'Founder's Medal' of 'The Royal Geographic Society'. In 1849 he was given the post of Colonial Secretary of South Australia and a seat in its Legislative Council, but his health deteriorated forcing his retirement in 1851. He returned to England in 1853 and took up residence in Cheltenham, from where he regularly communicated to his many friends and admirers but as time passed he was saddened by the deaths of family members, including his son Evelyn who died in India of cholera. After numerous attempts for another government appointment or the bestowal of a knighthood, his latter wish was finally granted.

In recognition of his services to 'Queen and Country' it was decreed that he be awarded of 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 suddenly from heart failure. His biographer eloquently records *"there was no sign of pain or struggle: he smiled placid as a child asleep. On the brow unadorned by man death had laid gently the crown of a great life's fulfillment"*.

On June 22, 1869, Captain Charles Sturt was laid to rest at 'Prestbury' near 'Cheltenham'. The spot is marked by a stone cross which as he would have wished bears the words: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"*. In recognition of his service to his Queen and Country, Queen Victoria ordered that henceforth Mrs. Sturt was entitled to use the title and to be addressed as 'Lady Sturt' and she was granted a Civil List Pension of £80.

Thus from this mortal coil passed the explorer Captain Charles Sturt, but his legacy remains. His explorations opened up vast tracts of land for settlement thereby accelerating the growth of the nation, whilst his journals provided the catalyst that resulted in the establishment of the colony of South Australia, in which he became one of its foremost pioneers. History records the significant part that he played in the early days of this unique colony of South Australia, whose citizens were to significantly influence the events that culminated in the Federation of Australia.

'Captain Charles Sturt' was in every way a man of his times and that is the yardstick by which he must be measured and judged. He was first and foremost a devout follower of the Christian Faith, a loving father and husband, and a most loyal subject of his sovereign. He was by his birth and upbringing, a gentleman and a soldier, committed to the service of his "God, Queen and Country", and should fate have so decreed he would have willingly laid down his life for those tenets. This was the measure of the man and that is how he should be remembered.

