

# EXPLORE

The Charles Sturt Memorial Museum Trust Inc.

## CHARLES STURT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025

ISSUE NO. 42

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2024 the Annual General Meeting of the Trust was held at the Museum. Elections were held for the Board of Trustees with six members re-elected and two new members welcomed – Dr Walter Dollman and Julie Dini.



Hon. Dean Brown AO, Anne McCutcheon, Prof. Scott Smith, Margaret Phillips, Julie Dini, Tony Botten, Dr Walter Dollman, Merle Weston, David Posaner, Graham Pike in abstentia



Graham Pike



Sally Pentland



Bill Parry

We thanked Sally Pentland (22 years) and Bill Parry (8 years) for their many years of dedicated service on the Board after retiring prior to elections. Both will still remain active members of the Trust.

Patron:	Hon. Dean Brown AO
President	Merle Weston
Vice President	Graham Pike
Vice President	Anne McCutcheon
Vice President	Prof. Scott Smith
Chairperson	Tony Botten
Hon. Secretary	Margaret Phillips
Committee	David Posaner
Committee	Dr Walter Dollman
Committee	Julie Dini

Vacancies still exist for a Committee person and Hon. Treasurer. M. Phillips will continue to act in the role of Hon. Treasurer until the vacancy can be filled.

The Chair provided an account of the year's activities, detailing the Trust's focus on the conservation of the Museum's collection and enhancing our exhibitions. The Hon. Treasurer reported a small surplus for the year and was pleased to note the increased value of our modest share portfolio. A plea was made to members, to encourage family and friends to join the Trust or our Friends group to assist with maintaining The Grange.. A delightful luncheon was served on completion of the meeting, with everyone enjoying the festive occasion.

The City of Charles Sturt was thanked for their continued support of the Museum, recently providing the Trust with \$9,757 for enhancing our exhibitions and the maintenance of our Heritage Garden. Council continue to maintain our public park area and provide the Trust with a 50% rebate on our Council rates. The History Trust of South Australia was acknowledged for their continued support both with advice and grant funding.

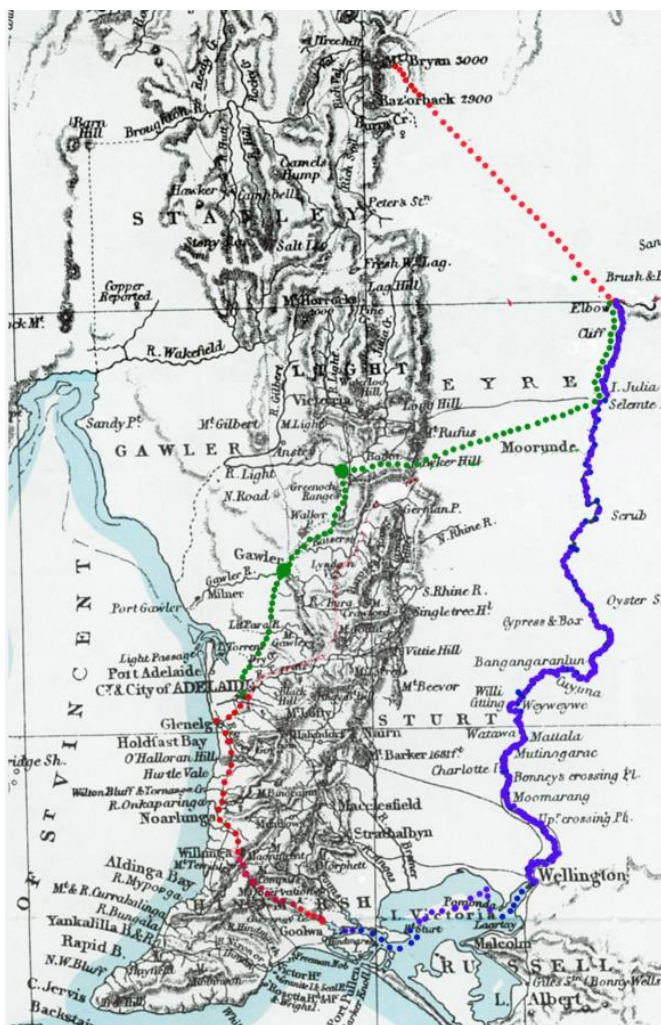


Recently our Patron, Hon. Dean Brown AO and his wife Rosslyn visited England with a view to visiting Captain Sturt's home in Clarence Square, and to visit his grave site at Prestbury Cemetery, both in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. The grave was found to be in poor condition and Dean was most alarmed that there was no recognition of Sturt's service to Australia as either explorer, a founder of South Australia or his civil service as Colonial Secretary. Dean contacted the South Australian Agent General in London, and requested he visit the gravesite and recommend to the Cheltenham Council that more visible recognition be given to Sturt's contribution to the development of Australia. Prof Scott Smith, his wife Lisa and son Kaiden are planning to visit England in the near future and hopes he can accompany the Agent General to Cheltenham.

### MT BRYAN EXPEDITION 1839

We would like to draw our readers attention to the forgotten events of December 1839, when Governor Gawler set out 'to examine the land along the Murray River, with the hope of finding fertile country; and to determine the capabilities of river and lake for inland navigation.' It was to end in tragedy. Henry Bryan was to perish of thirst and Gawler himself was lucky to survive. These events were recorded by Sturt's biographer, his daughter in law, Beatrix Sturt, in Chapter XII Fatal Mirage of *Life of Sturt*. Sturt's account of this excursion also appeared in the 'Register' newspaper of Saturday, January 4, 1840. This brief narrative is much compressed and supplemented by contemporary letters from Gawler to his wife (December 15, 1839), to Torrens (January 5, 1840) and *In the Eye of the Beholder* By Barbara Dawson, Australia National University Canberra, Chapter 3, *Literary Excesses – Eliza Davies – Imagination and Fabrication*.

The five-week tour of the lower reaches of the Murray River had been discussed in November 1839 by Gawler and Sturt. "They proposed to cross Lake Alexandrina from Currency Creek (near the present town of Goolwa), to proceed up the Murray to the Great Bend, and thence to return overland through the township of Gawler to Adelaide." Miss Julia Gawler, 15 years old was eager to accompany her father; and though Sturt, was aware of the arduous journey before them, yielded to the suggestion, even





to Gawler's further stipulation that Mrs. Sturt should join the party. "Gawler was keen to promote inland settlement and allay fears that travel into the interior was unsafe for women". Before leaving, Sturt's two sons Napier and Charles, were transferred to the care of Mrs Gawler at Government House.

On November 22 the Governor and Miss Gawler, Captain and Mrs. Sturt, Eliza Arbuckle (nursemaid) Henry Inman (Superintendent of the Police), Henry Bryan (a young house guest of the Gawler's) and two attendants, drove and rode to Onkaparinga, whence two days' journey on horseback brought them to Currency Creek.

On arrival the expeditionary group expanded to 20 -30 people including the Colonial Marine Surveyor, Captain W.J.S. Pullen RN and his survey team. "Going along with them were two Aboriginal men, the Raminyeri (Ra:Mindjeri) man 'Encounter Bay Bob', and Tom, who would act as the colonists' interpreters. Tom was a Porta'ulun man from Pomanda Point, to the north of Lake Alexandrina. Bob was the colonists' main interpreter; Tom joined the group to act as interpreter between Bob and the northern clans of the Jarildekald (Jeraldkeld), the Ngaralta, the Nganguruku and the Ngaiawang, the latter two being small Meru clans. The language groups of the Jarildekald, Ngaralta, Porta'ulun and Warki were collectively known as the Narrinyeri (Ngarrindjeri)". (B. Dawson ANU)

"Here Sturt and Pullen took charge of the little fleet of four boats, which on the 26th, spreading sail to a fair south wind, sped across the Lake. That night the party encamped on 'Point Sturt' (the western point), whence they enjoyed a fine unbroken view of the lake to where 'seawards the sand-hummocks glittered in the evening sun.' A change of wind hindered them from entering the river proper till the 28th."

"Near 'Pomundi' the troublesome curiosity of a large tribe of aboriginals showed that Sturt's hesitation to take ladies into the wilds was not groundless." However the overtures by Bob, ensured the party did not have to worry. Julia Gawler merely noting in her diary: 'Saw some natives, and one of the men started a kangaroo, but it hopped off, and we saw no more of it'. And in another entry. 'Saw plenty of natives in the camp. Very harmless and quiet'. Several days later, she wrote: 'Plenty of natives, very good tempered men showed their astonishment at every[thing] they saw by calling out "yar"'. ..

Governor Gawler, while acknowledging the part played by white overlanders in inciting racial conflict, concluded that the

*'natives are neither a ferocious nor a warlike race. Europeans, reasonably armed, cool and cautious, have little to fear from the worst of them in the worst situations'. He expressed a high opinion of the Indigenous people he met, recording that they were: 'lively, intelligent, good-tempered people – full of the general native sense of propriety – doubtful of the disposition of Europeans, of the extent of the powers of their warlike weapons, and consequently often timid.*

"One of the group was asked to join the party to tell the native names of prominent points. Sturt's chart was again in request, for Pullen was carrying on his survey of the lake and river; while the other officers were constantly in the saddle examining the adjacent country."



Coming ashore at Lake Alexandrina, J.M. Skipper

"Thus the progress up the river was intentionally slow; and not till December 10th were the tents pitched at the North-West Bend, near present day Morgan. On the arrival of horses and supplies from Adelaide; Gawler, Sturt, Inman, and John Craig prepared to start for the north. 'Mr. Bryan, however, with the spirit natural to youth, begged so hard to be of the party, that the Governor at last consented to take him also.' The ladies were to remain at the campsite.

"With a week's provisions and two barrels of water, this party started on the 11th, making to the north-west for a distant mountain, which Gawler at once named Mount Bryan, after his young friend. Beyond the river scrub, on the higher level of the fossil formation, the sandy plains were not devoid of good grass.

But at the first night's bivouac, thirty-two miles from the river, so much water had leaked and evaporated that a quart only could be spared for each horse. At noon next day a distant northerly range was seen rising from a valley with lofty gum trees. These hopeful signs Sturt too truly attributed to refraction; and, seeing the failure of the water-casks, and realising that the mountains were far more distant than they appeared, he strongly urged instant return to the river."

"None of the others, however, could believe that the view before them was unreal. Alas! from the next hill, after a long ride westward, the 'illusion' was at once dispelled. The smiling valley, the fine trees had vanished; the ranges were thrown back to unattainable distance; bare and brown stretched the level plains as far as the eye could see without a promise of water in any direction."

"The position was truly critical. A second day of extreme heat had left scarcely a drop in the barrels. Sturt's advice that, after a short rest, the cool night hours should be used for a forced retreat was unanimously approved. Unfortunately at sunset a native fire on Mount Bryan decoyed his companions from the path of prudence. In vain Sturt urged the difficulty of following so slight a beacon on a mountain in the dark; in vain he declared that the twelve miles of apparent distance would be at least doubled before they could reach Mount Bryan. In vain finally, to spare the failing horses, he begged that he and Inman should seek on foot the native camp and should make an unmistakable signal in case of finding water. Gawler hesitated, but allowed less wary counsels to prevail."

"At 7pm the party set out; and at midnight, after riding full twenty five miles, halted on a high part of Mount Bryan. With daylight began a frenzied but unsuccessful search for water, the eager Governor wearying out both himself and his fine horse in unavailing efforts. All to no purpose. Impetuous torrents had furrowed the hills; the dry main channel tantalized the searchers. Gawler found ashes near a native hut, but no where a drop of water. There may be doubt as to the prudence of the night march to Mount Bryan, but the disappointment was ruin. Another day of tremendous heat had risen; none of the party had tasted water since the previous morning; the horses had only one quart apiece since they left the river sixty five miles away."

"At 11am the Governor, feeling ill, decided to wait till sunset, and then to push for the river. Sturt, anxious that Gawler should regain the camp as soon as possible, persuaded him and Bryan on the strongest of the horses, to precede the more heavily equipped party, and gave them careful bearings by landmarks and compass. Gawler and Bryan therefore started at 5pm on the 13th (Friday), fully intending to send relief to their comrades on the exhausted horses."

"Sturt, Inman, and Craig did not get away till 7pm. They then pressed on all night, only stopping for an hour at 3am to rest and to take bearings. On Saturday, the 14th, by 9.15am the thermometer stood at 92°F (33°C); and the horses flagged grievously. By 10.30am Inman began to waver from his steady course, and Craig was much exhausted. At twelve a halt was imperative; but Sturt, seeing the value of every moment, and now supposing himself within twelve miles of the camp, dragged on his party again at 1pm. Craig now lying on his horse and Inman galloping forward and throwing himself under a bush for relief. At 3pm Inman and Craig gave in. It was clear that they would not move that day, and it was equally clear that, without some relief, they would never move again."

"In this extremity, Sturt bled one of the three horses left, rejecting the cart-horse as too much reduced in strength. All partook of this desperate remedy. Sturt very sparingly, more to moisten the parched mouth and throat than from any sensible decay of strength. Inman, after swallowing a full quart, fell into sound sleep; Craig, who took a larger quantity, was ill from the effects, and only slept from exhaustion. Gawler and Bryan by 7am on the 14th had come within twelve miles of the camp. The Governor's horse then refused to move beyond a walk; and Gawler in his anxiety to obtain speedy relief for the main party, consented to exchange horses with Bryan, whom with compass and careful bearings he left, apparently strong and in good spirits, eating with his damper and a quantity of small wild fruit. In less than an hour, at only four miles further by half-past 2am on the 15th they gained the river. Sturt made his companions halt while he brought them each a bottle of water; nor would he refresh himself till after thus attending to their wants. While tea was being made, he also carefully brought for the horses four bottles full apiece, and let them feed before and after they parted. Gawler, overpowered by a sudden hot wind, dismounted, and, having first fortunately tethered his horse, fell into broken slumber."

"He knew not how long it was before he roused himself and remounted, arriving at the camp to find Sturt's party there before him. Relief was at once sent for the missing Bryan, though no doubt was felt that he would soon rejoin his friends. But in different directions the country was vainly searched; and a boat sent down the river returned with no better result."

“On Monday, the 16th, Sturt and Inman with a native lad took up the quest. Tracking back to the spot where Gawler and Bryan had parted, they with difficulty followed a horse's hoof-prints five miles through the bush. Here Bryan had slept, and here he had stripped for a long walk, for they found his blankets, coat, and stockings, and Gawler's saddle, bridle, and telescope. On a scrap of paper the poor fellow had written that he had been detained by exhaustion, but was going to the south-southeast. This was dated 9pm on Sunday. A second careful search at this spot disclosed the tree to which he had tethered his horse. The animal on escaping had taken a course due west to the hills with his rope trailing after him, and he eventually found his way back to Adelaide. But no search could disclose even to a native's piercing eye any footprint or other mark in the direction indicated. Repeated efforts were made; they examined every bush, fired at intervals, constantly shouted; but to no purpose, nor was any further trace of 'Bryan' ever found.”

On 20<sup>th</sup> noting Bryan had been missing 8 days, and the party's food supply was all but consumed, Gawler ordered the boats to return to Currency Creek. The Governor's party travelled 18 miles down river by boat, before being met with a resupply of horses and supplies near Julia Island. Travelling overland to Gawler Town, they arrived in Adelaide on 28<sup>th</sup> December.

Gawler and Sturt both gave promising reports on the fertility of the land for farming and the future prospects of steam navigation along the Murray River as the “stunted pine woods and pine scrub frequently close to its banks that would furnish an inexhaustible supply of the best wood fuel”. While the death of Bryan was tragic, the excursion served to promote the area's viability for settlement.



Mt Bryan Memorial Cairn

