



## INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

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### Our March 2016 meeting

**Bruce Munday**

#### **Those dry-stone walls: stories from South Australia's stone age**

Bruce and his wife Kristin run a farm in the Adelaide Hills. Kristin is a photographer and her photos provide beautiful examples of walling to go with the talk. There is no doubt that this talk will enhance our trips around the South Australian countryside as we will now take notice of these walls.

The talk took us on a tour of South Australia covering the dry stone walls in different areas of the state.

Dry stone walls and structures have been part of Australia's history for hundreds of years, built without mud or cement as 'mortar' they rely on the skills of the waller to make them strong and durable.

There are stone walls on Bruce's property and other properties in the hills but they are often not considered worthy of preservation. Indeed, the wall on a neighbour's property was knocked down because it was old and considered to have no intrinsic value.

Bruce's interest in stone walls grew after a visit to Machu Picchu. The walls were built 600 to 700 hundred years ago. The Incas had built massive structures using huge blocks that fitted together with unbelievable accuracy. It is not known how they achieved this. How and why did they build these remarkable walls?

The dry stone walls in SA are not in the same realm of those of the Incas but nevertheless they show remarkable engineering and architectural skills in stone that we should be proud of and brag about.

Built in 1868 the retaining wall at Cut Hill, near Victor Harbor was built on a steeply sloping site to a height of up to 5 metres to support a roadway and is still going strong. It is a long-lasting civil engineering masterpiece.

Dry stone has not only been used for walls but

also for lining creek beds. For example, the Brown Hill Creek near the Goodwood Orphanage had a stone floor added in order to stop erosion when the creek was realigned when the orphanage was built.

Information on stone walls comes from historic journals in which settlers wrote about all aspects of life on the stations in those times.

In the early days of settlement shepherds looked after the sheep but with the discovery of gold in 1850 there was a shortage of labour. Fences were needed. Brush fences and post and rail fences were subject to damage and destruction by ants and fires but stone fences were not and there was plenty of stone around.

A station in the early days of settlement was more like a village community with gardeners, blacksmiths, cobblers, saddlers, wallers and labourers all part of this community. Wallers were considered to be craftsmen because of the skills required.

Good dry stone walls are long-lasting and are basically two walls leaning into each other, packed in between with small stones and with coping stone sitting at the top.

Walls were built by teams, generally two adults and two children and they could build a one-metre-tall wall at a chain a day (22 yards); this equates to three months to build a mile. The rate for building varied but 18 shillings/chain was the going rate for this skilled craft – roughly the same as a shearer. In addition to the pay, rations for the building team and their horses were provided. Little else is known of wallers.

While it was usual for a team to build the walls there is a documented instance of a husband and wife building a substantial wall with the wife carting all the stones in a wheelbarrow. Thousands of tonnes were needed to complete the wall.

Goyder was sent to the north to investigate the problems of the settlers during the drought in the 1860s and travelled about 3,000 miles. In his report to Parliament he advised that fences

were needed to control stock in the drought and that the best fence is a stone wall which is fire proof, white ant proof and uses local material. Dry stone walls were cheap compared with post and rail as not much timber was available locally and the timber had to be cut and holes dug for the posts.

It was also noted that stone walls will stop normal grass fire.

Stone walls were used for fencing and also for substantial stockyards, dipping yards for sheep and farm buildings. Farm buildings included stables, barns, apple sheds, pig pens and huts. Some are in excellent condition after 150 years.

Dry stone walling continued into the 1940s. Prisoners of war were not considered a security threat and were allocated to farms. Many had building skills that were utilised on the farms. After the war many came back to Australia, sponsored by former hosts.

Camel Hump is the longest wall in Australia, running 67 km from Farrell Flat, near Clare, to Boorowie. The style of walls varies and the Galloway style from Ireland, used on parts of the Camel Hump wall is recognisable. It is one of few examples of this style to be found outside of Ireland.

Not only do styles vary but also the stones themselves vary across the state in colour and texture. Some look like slate while stones in the southeast are soft and easily shaped.

Around the Yorke Peninsula the land was initially considered to be incapable of being farmed with no water and no soil. Eventually, water was found and then it was found that soil did exist if the rocks were removed. Rocks ended up in road base or silos and many in walls. Many of these walls are fat and are known as 'consumption walls' as they were built this way to consume more stones.

Recognising the large amount of stone on Eyre Peninsula someone has written on a lintel over a doorway "God created this place in 6 days: on the 7<sup>th</sup> day he threw rocks at it."

There is an organisation looking after the walls. The Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia Inc. (DSWAA) is an active volunteer not-for-profit organisation comprising dry stone wall owners and enthusiasts, rural landholders, urban dwellers and practitioners in the craft of dry stone walling. Website

[www.dswaa.org.au](http://www.dswaa.org.au)

There are stone wall workshops run by professional wallers and these have proved to be popular.

The vision is that dry stone walls and dry stone structures are widely accepted for their unique place in the history, culture and economy of the nation and for the legacy they represent.

## History Month in May

For the 2016 SA History Festival, the Marion Historical Society is running a guided walk of the Marion Historic Village on 1<sup>st</sup> of May from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., starting at the Display Centre on Township Road. Book your place on the walk as soon as possible by calling Heather on 0417 883 909.

Annie Doolan's Cottage is being opened from 2 to 4 p.m. on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, and the Display Centre is open every Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m.

The Friends of Glenthorne are running a guided tour and talks about the history of Glenthorne on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> of May. Bookings are essential (Pam Smith 0428 315 266 or Keryn Walshe 0412 356 387). Further details can be found in the printed programme for the history festival or online at <http://historyfestival.sa.gov.au/>.

## News from the Marion Heritage Research Centre

Keep a lookout for a small ANZAC display in the Marion Council Foyer "Marion and 1916".

May is History Month and a "**Marion Secrets**" open day will be held on 9<sup>th</sup> of May when lesser known facts about Marion will be revealed. Put it in your diary!!! Includes a talk by the National Archives of Australia at 2pm – bookings essential.

For more information please contact Danielle on 7420 6455 or email [heritage@marion.sa.gov.au](mailto:heritage@marion.sa.gov.au)

## Marion Historical Society

*At this time no future meetings have been arranged.*

*The future of the society will be decided at this meeting.*

*If there is sufficient support the new committee will arrange meetings for the forthcoming year.*