



INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

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Contacts Mandy Coote 0401 540 024
 Ian Morphet 8298 5585

marionhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Our February Meeting Pamela Rajkowski The First Cameleer Settlers

Last month, Pam Rajkowski gave a lively and interesting talk which was attended by 26 members and visitors, meeting for the first time at the Marion Sports Club.

The main purpose of establishing colonies was to get resources to take back to the Mother Country. In the United Kingdom industrialisation was coupled with a greater demand for resources. Colonies produced raw materials to meet this demand.

South Australia was settled in 1836, and to begin with the settlement clung to the coastal areas. In the 1850s the settlement expanded towards the undeveloped, arid far North. Means had to be found by which to haul the immense loads of produce over an equally immense, arid terrain. Bullocks proved to be quite unsuitable for this task.

The first debate over the possible introduction of camels occurred in 1858. The “Camel Troop-Carrying Company” was formed, and it petitioned the government for financial assistance – without success. In the early to mid-1860s some unsuccessful attempts were made to import camels.

In 1863 – 65 South Australia was hit with the Great Drought, which scorched and laid waste all the land North of Mt Remarkable in the Flinders Ranges. There was great disruption to haulage schedules, and delivery times were unreliable. There was a stockpiling of wool on pastoral stations.

From 1839, Scottish-based company Elder & Co made investments in South Australia, especially in the far North to supply the huge markets in the United Kingdom. In 1854 the youngest of the

Elder brothers, Thomas, came to South Australia. His aim was to “control an area of land the size of Scotland and corner the wool market”. In 1862 he bought Beltana Station. Eventually, with changes in partnerships, the company became known as Elder Smith & Co. and operated far Northern pastoral wool stations.

In 1866 the first commercial importation of 120 camels and 32 native handlers came about, and Elder’s Beltana Station became South Australia’s first commercial breeding stud. It was necessary to bring out the cameleers along with the camels, as they were the only ones who knew how to manage and utilise these animals. Not that the use of camels was unusual in other parts of the British Empire – they had long been used in India by Indian Mohammedans. These were descended from the Afghan tribal peoples who had invaded and occupied Northern India 500 years earlier. The camels were brought from Kandahar, Afghanistan and Bikaner in North-West India to the port of Karachi, India, then by sea to South Australia.

The camels were organised by their drivers into strings for carting goods to far North pastoralists and produce back again for export. The camels were dromedary, having one hump, which was the most suitable for carrying loads. They could go 5 – 7 days without drinking and ate plants that other types of haulage animals could not.

The cameleers were bound by conditions of entry into Australia. They were to have temporary residence – a maximum of three years and could not bring their wives or daughters with them. As no arrangements or means were made available for their return, many stayed on in Australia.

The work of the cameleers (and the camels) was very heavy indeed. The cameleers walked alongside the camels, rather than riding on their backs, so as to maximise the loads that were

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carried. The camels walked in strings for ten to fifteen miles a day, and the oft-walked trip from Marree to Birdsville and back was a three-month round trip. They also travelled from Oodnadatta to Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, to deliver stores there and to other gold-mining towns. In 1871-72 they supported the construction of the Overland Telegraph line. On the Strzelecki and Birdsville Tracks camels were also used for hauling wool bales and supplies in situations where other haulage animals could not be used.

The second importation of camels and cameleers occurred in 1883, and among the other uses stated, they were also used by the South Australian railway surveyors. The third importation was in 1893 to Port Augusta. Camels and cameleers were employed to cart stores to Bourke and Broken Hill. They carted water for the construction of the Oodnadatta to Alice Springs rail extension, and were also employed by “Cattle King”, Sidney Kidman, on his vast station holdings in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

Camels and cameleers were also used in Western Australia for carting early wool exports from the coastal wool stations and the Kimberleys and carting supplies, wood and water to the goldfields at Coolgardie and from Pt Headland to the Marble Bar track goldfields, to name a few.

The cameleers and their camels made an indispensable contribution to the opening and workability of the far North of South Australia. As many of the cameleers did not ultimately return to their home countries, they settled here and married European or Aboriginal women and had families. The descendants of the cameleers are very well represented in Australia today.

From the newspapers 100 years ago

An article showing the need to care about the physical and spiritual, the historical and traditional items, and, in this case a “good luck” symbol.

*Southern Argus (Port Elliot, SA : 1866 - 1954),
Thursday 17 March 1921, page 4*

One of the most ancient English devices, which also has long served as a significant symbol, is threatened with doom by the advance of civilisation. Elaborate experiments are going on

to find a type of footgear for horses, which, if successful, will make the horseshoe as it has been known for 1400 years as extent [sic] as the dodo. The present hard, flat pavements, designed principally to sustain motor traffic present a surface on which ordinary horseshoes either slip or cause objectionable indentations, and so the authorities are joining the human [sic] societies in trying to devise a new form. None of those so far tried out bears the slightest resemblance to the old symbol of good luck.

News from the Marion Heritage Research Centre

*Happy Autumn to all our heritage friends!
We have been busy answering heritage enquiries, meeting with visitors and working with our collection. We often have enquiries about the history of people’s homes/streets and so have become quite good at it (well we like to think so 😊) If you would like help finding out about your property, don’t hesitate to contact us!*

The Heritage Research Centre is open for 2021, and you are welcome to call us on 7420 6455, email us at heritage@marion.sa.gov.au or drop in from 10am to 4pm, Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

*Watch out for our events listed in the Marion libraries’ What’s On! brochure, and on the City of Marion social media pages.
Have a great historical year!*

Next meeting:

April 21st

at 7.30pm at Club Marion
Hills View Room 2/West

**Annual General Meeting
(no speaker)**

followed by

Show and tell.

Please bring an item of interest along and share its story.

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