



Our October Meeting Heather Cox Cobham Hall

It was wonderful having last month's meeting at the beautiful Cobham Hall, and to be able to experience first-hand the subject of the talk. Heather Cox gave an excellent and well-researched talk on the building and its owners over time, along the way crossing paths with some prominent South Australians and historical events.

Cobham was built on section 149 – Hundreds of Noarlunga and Adelaide. Section 149 was first owned by Henry Nell, who obtained the original land grant in 1838. Nell sold the land to John Morphett in December 1842, who in turn sold to Joseph Bell.

Joseph Bell came from Tasmania to South Australia in 1837. He was a builder, carpenter, and undertaker. He built his first home on section 171, calling the house Cobham. Bell was a friend of Colonel Light, and on the latter's death he arranged his funeral, importing a black horse and hearse from Tasmania for the purpose.

Bell purchased section 149, and in 1850 built a house for which he reused the name *Cobham*. The house was built on two levels, with an underground kitchen and seven upper rooms, some of which had a good view of the Sturt River. The farmlands were extended by the purchase of section 175, where wheat was grown, ably processed by Bell's homemade threshing machine. Joseph Bell's children married into the families of local landowners: Hamilton, Fielder and Filmer. Bell and Filmer both served terms on the Brighton City Council. Financial dire straits forced Bell to sell Cobham in 1871.

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INFORMATION NEWSLETTER

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The next buyer was Frederick Ransford, who had arrived in South Australia from England in December 1840 aboard *Fairfield*. He settled in the Rapid Bay area. In 1851 when the *Marion* was wrecked on Troubridge Shoal, some of the longboats taking passengers to safety were misdirected, arriving at Cape Jervis instead of the Yorke Peninsula. Ironically, the boats which were misdirected were the first to raise the alarm, when they were discovered by Frederick Ransford. Ransford was the chairman of the Rapid Bay Council in 1857. He leased land to the local farmers and was an active member of St James Church. He used Cobham as a town house and raised sheep on the farmland.

The next owner was Ransford's daughter, Mary Jane Chambers, born at Cape Jervis in 1849, and wife of Charles Chambers. Charles' company, *Chambers and Blade* (est. 1871) operated the Green Dragon Brewery and Hotel. The Brewery closed in 1901 and was gutted by fire in 1926. The hotel ran until the 1990s and is currently a “Fasta Pasta” outlet. Mary Jane lived at Glen Osmond and owned a house at Glenelg. She leased Cobham to George Andrew Nelson in for five years from 1909. Nelson came from the USA and was embroiled in both the Oakbank scandal and the Grenfell St betting raids which occurred in 1905, accused of running an illegal betting shop. Mary Jane ultimately sued him for not leaving Cobham in the agreed state of repair.

William Aaron Bennett purchased Cobham on 7 May 1925. He was born at Delamere and was acquainted with the Ransfords. William and his wife, Emma, went away on holidays and during this time, on 24 March 1926, the family woke to find the house on fire. The fire brigade was called at 2:15 am. Unfortunately, there was insufficient water pressure to manage the blaze. The bluestone walls and brick foundations were all that remained of Cobham. The house was insured for 1,500 pounds, but the contents were

not insured. So began a new chapter in the life of Cobham, as the new Cobham Hall rose from its foundations. Cobham Hall was designed by William Claridge in 1926 as a “gentleman’s residence in the grand Tudor style”.

Bennett sold it in 1945 to H.C. “Slinger” Nitschke, an opening batsman for South Australia. In 1951 he sold the whole 80-acre Section 149 to the South Australian Housing Trust, but in 1953 they sold an almost 5-acre portion, including the homestead, to Mervyn Wood, who was a building contractor. Wood sold off sections of land for roads and housing, and in 1965 sold the house and remaining 1.25 acres of land to John Malin Fowler, who sold it to Dr Robert Wight and his wife, Nancy. Dr Wight had emigrated from Scotland in 1968, and worked at the surgery on the corner of Cobham Ave.

Dr Wight sold Cobham Hall to Kathleen Filmer in 1980 for a 16-bed retirement home. Approval was given for the venture in 1981. In 1998 Cobham Hall was re-named Amber Lodge, with a shift from aged care to supported accommodation for people with disabilities or mental illness. Amber Lodge closed a few years ago and was sold in 2017. It was left empty for a year, while the new owners applied for a demolition permit. During this time the house suffered considerable vandalism. The new owners realised that the heritage listing would most probably be upheld and withdrew the application for demolition.

Dara school was opened in 2017 with a twelve-month lease at Ascot Park Primary School, catering for gifted students whose needs were unmet by regular schools. At that time there were less than 30 students at the school. By the end of 2018 three potential permanent sites had fallen through. Finally, the Dara School found a new home, via a lease – at Cobham Hall, and to this end Cobham Hall was restored and brought up to standard by its owner. It wasn’t quite ready to open in the first term of 2020, so the move was planned for the Easter holidays. Another setback was COVID19, which cancelled the volunteers’ plans for the move. Finally, on 28 April 2020, the beautifully refurbished Cobham Hall opened its doors to the students of Dara School.

News from the Marion Village Museum

Seasons Greetings from the Museum.

All our volunteers are happy to be back, with our COVID-19 restrictions in order.

We have enjoyed having schools attend again this year. With interactive displays and fingerprinting the police station is a hit, as is the typewriter where letters can be typed like they did in the olden days.

The display of locally grown produce and the kitchen attracts interest showing what great-grandmother used when cooking.

Come and have a look in the holidays and bring your grandchildren for an outing.

The Village Museum is located in Township Road behind the Wesleyan Chapel.

Opening times: Tuesdays 10am to 12 noon
Sundays 2pm to 4pm

For more information please call Judy Morphett on 8298 5585.

News from the Marion Heritage Research Centre

Thank you very much for your interest in and support of the Heritage Research Centre again this year. It has been an unusual, but busy one as always, with several interesting new items donated to the collection.

We will be closing for Christmas at 4pm on Wednesday 23rd December and re-open in the New Year at 10 am on Monday 1st February 2021.

Watch out for our events, listed on the Marion Libraries Facebook site and brochures, including more online ones in 2021.

In the meantime, Danielle and the MHRC Volunteers wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy 2021.

Marion Historical Society Next meeting:

7.30pm at Cooina

Wednesday 17th February 2021

**Pamela Rajkowski
The Afghan Cameleers**



Wishing you and those you love a merry Christmas and a happy and healthy new year

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