

PROCLAMATION DAY AT THE BAY

Dieuwke Jessop

It all started December 28 1836. The other vessels had already landed along with the Colonial Secretary Robert Gouger and a makeshift camp of tents and transportable huts had been established at the lagoons, when against a backdrop of fires in the Mount Loft Ranges, Cygnet and Buffalo sailed into Holdfast Bay.

At 2.00pm 3 boats came ashore containing the Vice Regal party. In the first boat sat Governor Hindmarsh his Secretary George Stevenson and the Resident Commissioner Hurtle Fisher and their families. In the next boat came the Colonial Chaplain Rev CB Howard, the Colonial Treasurer Osmond Gilles and others and in the third boat were 20 marines.

With temperatures in the shade hovering around 40C walking across the sand to the settlement, must have been hot work.

The official party first entered Gouger's tent where the commission was read and the oaths administered to the Governor and his Council. They then emerged and in open woodland, beneath an old gum tree Stevenson read the document known as the Proclamation of South Australia.

I'll read the Proclamation as it is still read at the ceremony to this day.

Proclamation

By His Excellency John Hindmarsh, Knight of the Royal Hanoverian Guelphic Order, Governor and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Province of South Australia

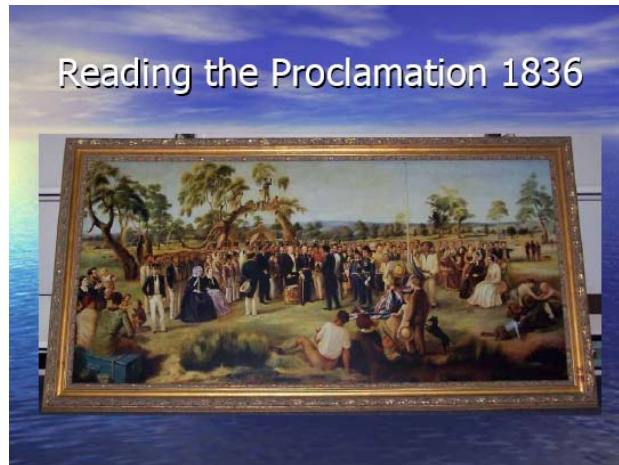
In announcing to the colonists of His Majesty's Province of South Australia, the establishment of the Government, I hereby call upon them to conduct themselves on all occasions with order and quietness, duly to respect the laws, and by a course of industry and sobriety, by the practice of sound morality and a strict observance of the Ordinances of Religion, to prove themselves worthy to be the Founders of a great free colony.

It is also, at this time especially, my duty to apprise the Colonists of my resolution, to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the Native Population as to the rest of His Majesty's subjects and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practiced or attempted against the Natives who are to be considered as much under the safeguard of the Law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects. I trust therefore, with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all Classes in their intercourse with the Native Inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting me to fulfil His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intentions toward them by promoting their advancement in civilization and

ultimately, under the blessing of Divine Providence, their conversion to the Christian Faith.

By His Excellency's Command, Robert Gouger Colonial Secretary God Save the King.

In 1834, the British House of Commons had already passed 'A Bill to erect South Australia into a British Province and to provide for the colonisation thereof. Therefore this was a public celebration to honour the Governor's arrival and the commencement of his new office.



This painting by C Hill painted in 1857 depicts the first ceremony

After the proclamation, a cold collation, which included dressed Hampshire ham, was served. Then with the festivities concluded, the official party retired to the Buffalo. Now they retire to marquees in Partridge House. All was not jolly after the official proceedings, the sailors became intoxicated, the aborigines set fire to the woods and the settlers were disappointed at not being able to go to their allotments straight away. Such was the first celebration.

It's a pity that there was no sketch made in situ of the event as it might have resolved the matter of 'the tree' and 'the' specific site where the Proclamation ceremony first took place. However that aspect is not being debated in this paper. It was in 1855 when Glenelg became a municipality that the finding of the site and the tree became important. Once identified as Lot 82 of section 184, John Hector, the owner of the land transferred part of the allotment, 62 feet square, to the Glenelg Corporation on the jubilee of South Australia's Coming of Age 28 December 1857. The site and the tree, (although now dead and incorporating large amounts of concrete) became an icon and object of veneration, as the place and icon for the birth of the State of South Australia.

The celebrations of the State's coming of age in 1857 were Glenelg's first Proclamation Day event and probably the first major Proclamation Day celebrations in the colony.

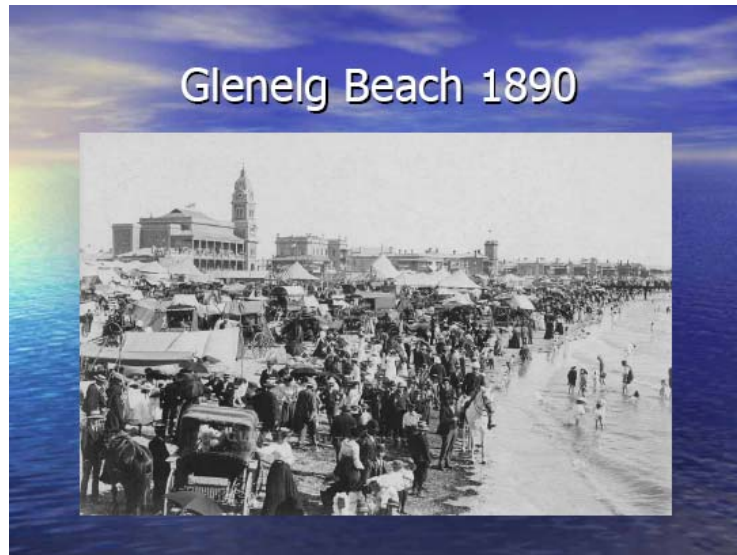
I have looked in the newspapers to see whether Adelaide held Proclamation Day ceremonies and events but except for a few dinners held for worthies on the first birthday and some subsequent ones, the marking of the day seems to have been limited to a public holiday and write ups in the newspapers as to the Colony's progress.

Preparations for the 21st birthday celebrations began on a large scale in the township of Glenelg and at the site established as the site of the reading of the inaugural Proclamation. Flags were displayed, and a sports festival of over 17 items organised. All sports had money as a reward and the prize for the greasy pole and the greasy tail pig was 1 guinea each. No sports were to take place between 12.00 noon and 2 00 pm except for the sailing race as that time was to be occupied by the ceremony and lunch. A gun was to fire at 11.45 am to signal to proceed to the tree and again at 12.00 noon to notify that the ceremony at the tree had commenced. A salute was to be fired when the ceremony was over. A large pavilion was erected opposite the Government cottage, on what is now Wigley Reserve. However at noon rain began, which changed to a downpour. Over 10000 visitors in a variety of horse drawn vehicles had reached the scene. The Governor, Sir Richard MacDonnell was going to put a tablet denoting the tree and its significance at the ceremony at the tree. However, this was delayed due to the non-arrival of the Governor. Two hours later, a waiting group of people hoisted the flag and broke a bottle of wine on its trunk. The Governor subsequently appeared and remained an occupant of the luncheon tent adjacent to the proclamation site. Very long speeches, toasts (which were drunk in South Australian wine) and singing diverted attention from the leaking tent. The newly formed Voluntary Artillery fired a 17 gun salute at the conclusion of the banquet. The football match did not take place because someone had forgotten to bring the balls from Adelaide and no one presented themselves for putting the stone. Sports were virtually cancelled in the afternoon and afterwards everyone made their soggy way home.

This disastrous event did not deter the Glenelgians. Every year thereafter they have held a Proclamation Day event until the present day, the Council of the City of Holdfast Bay taking it over after Glenelg and Brighton amalgamated in 1997. I myself attended one last year and the format over the years has remained much the same - the ceremony, sit down lunch and sports events with the Governor, Premier, Mayor and Councillors, Mayors from other Councils, representatives of the armed forces and descendants of the pioneers and others in attendance. When South Australia had her own naval vessels it was customary for these to be moored off the jetty on the day and for the vessels to fire the gun salute. Captain Cresswell at one lunch noted that the Navy was down as the last toast of the proceedings and he felt that this showed the significance attached to the Navy being the base that underpinned the Colony.

Where the event has changed is that there is no longer a gun salute and that there are no longer the numbers of people flocking to the bay for the associated amusements. The sports list has also contracted.

Sports, sailing regattas, cruise ships from Port Adelaide, sideshows or just enjoyment of the beach were all part of the day's merriment. People came by any vehicle available at the time, the trains were popular after they were introduced and bicycles were mentioned in the newspaper reports in the 1890s. Visitor figures of over 50000 were mentioned.



Audrey Tennison in 1899 in a letter to her mother wrote as follows

.....we went by train to Glenelg...the 28th December is a general holiday all over the colony and from that day till next Thursday it is holiday time and all the shops are shut, which is very tiresome. Well on this date at Glenelg the first Governor, Hindmarsh made the first proclamation and proclaimed South Australia as a free British Colony and ever since it has been kept as the fete of the year for the lower class. Glenelg is on the sea six miles from Adelaide and the papers say 30000 people were there Thursday. They say they campout there with their families the night before and at any rate families began arriving there at 6.00am. There is not an atom of shade, but accept for the very poor, everybody here possesses a cart and horse of some description and they are very ingenious in taking out their horses, tipping up their carts and then hanging rugs as shelter from the sun, and then you see families and parties having their meals on the ground under the carts.

The ceremony

This was not always held at the Gum tree. Initially a new Governor was welcomed by the Mayor and Councillors at the Old Gum Tree and after the Town Hall was built he and dignitaries were taken to the town hall, introduced to the

pioneers and after about half an hour proceeded to a lunch in the Town Hall where speeches were made. In 1940 the Gum Tree became the annual place for the Proclamation ceremony.

However the Gum tree did not feature for the Tennysons when they made their first Proclamation Day visit in 1899

The Mayor welcomed Lord Tennyson as follows

His Excellency Lord Tennyson Governor of South Australia

The Town Council of Glenelg desire on behalf of the citizens of this historic town to give you a hearty welcome within its bounds. We are gratified that your Excellency and Lady Tennyson have chosen Proclamation Day for your first official visit to our town because we are thus enabled to connect you as Her Majesty's latest representative with the first Governor of South Australia who landed on this spot 63 years ago proclaimed the colony a British Province. Assuring your Excellency of our loyalty and devotion to our beloved Queen and wishing your Excellency, Lady Tennyson and your family health and happiness during your sojourn amongst us. We are your Excellency's obedient servants (signed) Alfred Roberts Mayor JP Bickford Town Clerk.

Tennyson came back again in 1903 when he was Governor General.

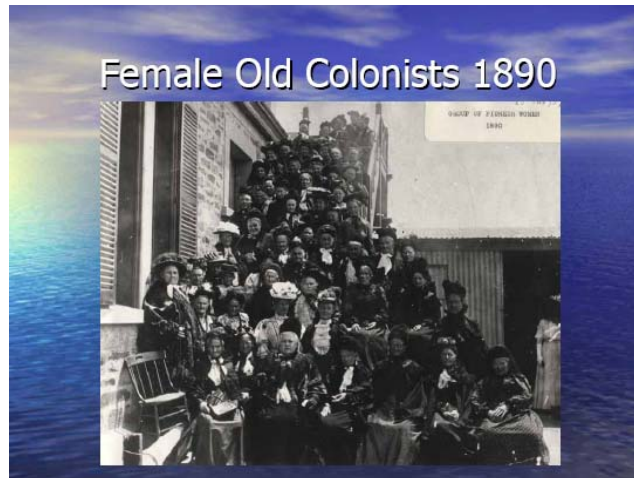
Audrey Tennyson in the same letter to her mother in 1899 describes their arrival in Glenelg

We were received by the Mayor and the Town Clerk and Colonel Gordon of the forces, getting down straight from the train onto the street, the trains running all through the streets here and the engine driver ringing a bell all the time as he goes along as a warning [we have such a bell in our collection] and we were taken along to the Town Hall where the Mayoress met us and we went into a hall with a dais and on this was a carved chair made from wood of HMS Buffalo which brought Governor Hindmarsh in 1836. Then began a sort of Levee of all the old pioneers of the colony who arrived here before 1840, about 35 of them...

The pioneers

The pioneers, and later the descendants of pioneers are an integral part of the proceedings. These people are defined by those that can prove their descent from immigrants that arrived on vessels prior to and including 1846. This aspect is causing problems for Council's invitation list as the event cannot continue to grow and how to make it fair to all pioneers who qualify? The cost of the event is born by Council. In 1905 the Premier the Hon T Price offered to have the event supported by the State but this was politely declined by Mayor Varley and Council, as Glenelg wanted to maintain control of the event. Council would not decline such an offer now! The guests were chastised by the Register, as for this event, the Mayor had sent out 300 invitations, of which 200 replied and 300 turned up, resulting in a shortage of chairs and food. It was customary for 2 pioneers to respond to the toast to the Pioneers at the lunch. In 1905, Mr HT Morris (nephew of Captain Hindmarsh) wisely gave his speech to someone else

to read but Mr WL Beare insisted on reading his own, with the result that only those next to him heard it. Again the Register had something to say about it and you will be pleased to hear that Mr Beare handed over his speech in the subsequent year.



Women pioneers invited by the Mayoress

Initially only the male pioneers were invited but women were included in the 1880s. However if space did not permit, they were dropped off the list again! They ate in separate areas, women being invited by the Mayoress. In 1895 a visitors signing book was established for the pioneers who attended the ceremony to sign. Council still has these records. It also became customary to display pioneer relics at the Town Hall on the day another feature that has been stopped.

Samuel L Clemens alias Mark Twain attended a Proclamation Day in 1895 and wrote up his impressions in his book *More Tramps Abroad*. I quote as follows;

There were six of them... They were down for six speeches, and made forty-two. The governor and the cabinet and the mayor were down for forty-two speeches and they made six. They have splendid grit, the old settlers and splendid staying power. But they do not hear well, and when they see the mayor going through motions which they recognise as the introducing of a speaker, they think they are the one, and they all get up together and begin to respond, in the most animated way; and the more they mayor gesticulates, and shouts 'Sit down! sit down!' the more they take it for applause, and the more excited and reminiscent and enthusiastic they get; and next, when they see the whole house laughing and crying, three of them think it is about the bitter old-time hardships they are describing, and the other three think the laughter is caused by the jokes they have been uncorking... And finally, when ushers come and plead, and gently and reverently crowd them down into their seats, they say, 'Oh, I'm not tired – I could bang along a week!... And so one of the great dignitaries gets a chance' When we, now great, and prosperous, and powerful, bow our heads in reverent wonder in the contemplation of those sublimities of energy, of wisdom, of forethought, of-

Up come the mortal six again, in a body, with a joyous 'Hey, I've thought of another one!...

The History Centre has a menu signed by him at the lunch and also a copy of the book.

The 25th Anniversary saw the Pier Hotel and adjacent buildings festooned with flags and 3 guns were fired when the Prince Alfred left the Glenelg Jetty for the return journey to Port Adelaide with 150 excursionists. Fireworks were discharged at dusk. In 1864 one of the tire wheels came off the gun carriage at Black Forest on its way to Glenelg but it still managed the trip and a 19 gun salute was fired to start the program.

1876 was the first time that Proclamation Day was not celebrated as a public holiday on the appointed Day. Christmas Day fell on a Monday and the 28th on a Thursday and Government and business thought it inappropriate to close businesses for 4 days. So business etc closed on the 27th but Glenelg still kept the 28th and celebrations went ahead as normal except for the gun salute. The Government refused the firing of guns by the Volunteer Artillery so at 12.00 noon Mr Knight fired the salute with dynamite placed in the sand instead.

Accidents happened. 1880 saw the Yatala charging the left end of the jetty and shaking the planking. The Committee who was on the lighthouse at the time, thought it would topple over and were badly shaken. The worse part however was that the shaking of the pier jerked the lad Harry Wilson off the wall piece on which he was sitting, headlong into a boat, breaking his left arm in 2 places and dislocating it also. 1885 saw a fatal accident while firing the Protector's gun. Davies, Captain of the gun had forgotten to wash the breech since they were firing blank cartridges only and therefore there was fire in the gun which exploded.

In 1896 the only mishap on the day was that Mr Payne was run down by one of the Protector's cutters and received a very heavy shock.

1886 was the Queen's Jubilee year and Proclamation Day turned out to be a huge event with the customary sports on land and water. Throughout the day 10 locomotives, 26 carriages and 5 trucks were in use and the numbers were thought to be 48000 passengers on the Victoria Square line and 35000 on the North Terrace line. A banner was slung between the Pier Hotel and the Institute Building (later to become the Town Hall) with 'Welcome to our Jubilee' and the Mayor entertained 250 old colonists at the Institute. To meet increased requirements, 30 foot police and 10 troopers were sent from Adelaide.

Apart from the relics being put on display, from time to time objects were also given to the Glenelg Council. At the 1893 Proclamation Day ceremony Mr HJ Moseley presented an original JM Skipper watercolour of the encampment at

Glenelg in 1837 and in the subsequent year SJ Skipper donated his father's watercolour showing 2 brigs and the landing at Glenelg in 1836. Council still has these watercolours in its collection.

Toasts were long. Sometimes the speeches had been known to continue from 12.00 noon until 4.00 pm! However in 1896, the 60th anniversary of the Colony, saw the curtailment of the toast list for which Mayor Marten was duly thanked.

1901 was the first time that the King was toasted and 350 people were entertained to lunch. 1903 after lunch and seeing some of the sports, saw Governor George le Hunte donning his oilskins and taking himself off to the Protector to have afternoon tea with Captain Clare CMG after which he accompanied Lord Tennyson (who had become Governor General and had come down later in afternoon) in his carriage back to Adelaide.



1936 saw major celebrations and the first re-enactment of the 1836 arrival of the settlers and the proclamation ceremony and lunch. 'Governor Hindmarsh' was rowed in with due pomp and ceremony, 'settlers' were carried or rowed onto the beach by 'marines' and a fake gum tree also made it onto the beach.

Jubilee 150 Celebrations 1986

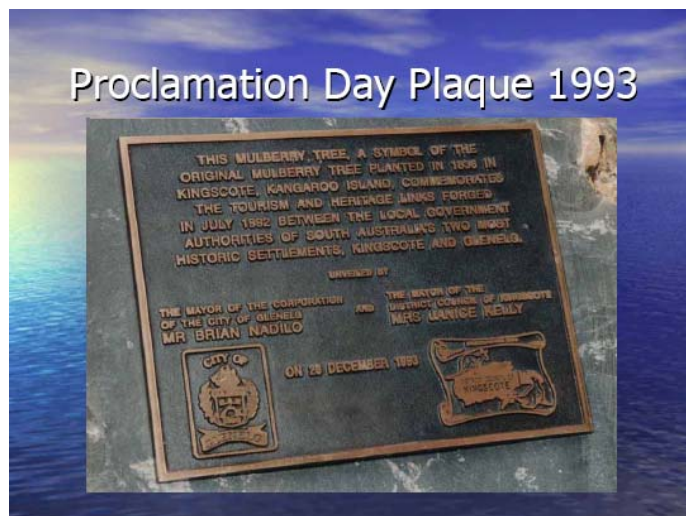


The 1986 Jubilee 150 Celebrations were along similar lines, again with a fake gum tree on the beach and everyone dressed up in period costume for the re-enactment, including Premier John Bannon.

I doubt if I will be around to see it but it would be interesting to see what the year 2036 brings forth. Another re-enactment?

Over the years the formality of the ceremony at the Old Gum Tree has become more marked. The problem of keeping the tree has also been tackled, from propping it up, dabbing it with cement, to what it is now, a dead tree with large elements of concrete. Dignitaries and visitors who once stood are now seated dignitaries with basic shade protection, then a collapsible canopy, to a full-blown permanent structure (supported by Federal and State grants) to protect the tree and the dignitaries, which appeared in 1988. In 1993 scaffolding was erected to seat the pioneers and some seating was provided for attendees. School children sit on the paving under the canopy. The ceremony I attended no longer had the scaffolding for pioneers but seats.

Proclamation Day Plaque 1993



1993 saw a permanent link with Kangaroo Island established with the planting of a mulberry tree and the erection of a plaque.

Today the ceremony has become more officious; the lunch initially set up as a veneration of the pioneers now incorporates other elements. Last year it was shared with SA Great and SA Great awards were presented. They also contributed to the cost.

The hoopla at Glenelg around the day no longer exists. The focus is now on the Ceremony at the Gum Tree and the lunch afterwards. The Navy no longer fires a salute, Steamers no longer make the trip from Port Adelaide with trippers. The 'new' jetty is no longer able to accommodate most ocean going vessels as it is too short and therefore there is not enough draught for the vessels to allow them to tie up to it. The pavilion and aquarium on the jetty have gone and there are no seats on the jetty. Luna Park, sideshow alley, and Magic Mountain have gone, bunting and flags are no longer put up on the day and people no longer camp on the beach. Modern amusements and easy access to other places have caused the population to diversify away from Glenelg for the public holiday and the crowds have become spread out over the holiday season rather than there being a major influx of people into Glenelg on Proclamation Day. However, as part of the development taking place along the shore at Glenelg, a new amusement centre, The Beach House, will incorporate the old merry-go-round.

Perhaps as happened in the past, with the right kind of marketing and the State's acceptance of it as a State event, Proclamation Day could once again become a major celebratory event based at Glenelg to compliment the solemn ceremony and lunch.