

THE GOLD ESCORTS RE-ENACTMENTS: Reinforcing Memory of Trusted History

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Literature tends to be written according to the authors bias, which can be interpreted in a number of different ways, therefore to study the past examine the physical evidence left behind.

From an inscription in Cadman's Cottage, The Rocks, Sydney Cove, April 2006

Since the mid 1850's, anyone who has lived in the vicinity of a defined, surveyed route between Horsham in Victoria and the River Murray crossing at Wellington in South Australia, knows about Alexander Tolmer's GOLD ESCORTS.

Travellers moving to and from districts and regions on the route know about the Gold Escorts. They know because of active ongoing remembering - street names, plaques on roadsides and reserves - and re-enactments.

Re-enacting historic events in modern times keeps the significance of the event memorable for appreciative, impressed communities. Celebrations and promotion of any history-making milestone in our state's past provides golden windows of opportunity for all, to generate new enthusiasm and involvement, to remind ourselves and to advocate to others... *what was so special about what was contributed and achieved.* '

Our state history since European settlement is young. Only 170 years old. Readily available primary sources, reference materials and handed down oral recorded personal memory provide trusted accuracy and authenticity for organisers to use when planning re-enactments. Tolmer's published work in two volumes *Reminiscences Of An Adventurous and Chequered Career At Home And At The Antipodes, 1882* might be (written according to the author's bias and interpreted in a number of different ways). However accessible diaries, journals, ordinance maps, surveyors reports, receipts, letters, the *Adelaide Register* and other newspapers, weather and temperature charts, Rainfall gaugings, graves and inscriptions thereon, the South Australian Government Gazette, Hansard, Police Department orders and proceedings together with countless other public documents, and not the least, art work – especially S. T. Gill's original watercolour paintings 'Fryer's Creek, Castlemaine', 'Forest Creek, Mount Alexander 1862', ' Mount Alexander Gold

Escorts to Melbourne, 1852-53' and his twenty four published sketches entitled 'Gold Diggers & Diggings of Victoria', allow examination to substantiate the physical evidence left behind.

For fifty years the National Trust of South Australia (NTSA) at head office, regional and branch levels has involved itself with remembering and re-enacting. Such fun has been enjoyed. Such pride has been felt. Unforgettable it must have been to be a passenger on board the paddle-steamer *Marion* in 1963 after the NTSA purchased it and had her old neglected wood burning steam engine fired up again for the evocative passage to dry dock at Mannum.



Poster for the re-enactment in 1986

But among countless other successful re-enactments, it's the Gold Escort re-rides, and in particular the 1986 re-enactment ride from Castlemaine in Victoria to the original assay office in the old Treasury building in Victoria Square, Adelaide that remains so remembered by so many, locally, nationally and internationally.



ATHRC departing Castlemaine 19 Sept. 1986



Along the route

Other rides in 1936 and 1961 confined themselves to sections of the route only. The 1978 ride from Bordertown to Wellington attracted an enthusiastic following culminating in a major 'Golden Gala Day' event organised by the Lower Murray Branch of the NTSA, which was held at the state and national heritage listed Wellington Police Station and Court House Complex. Crowds literally in their thousands welcomed the 'escort' in. The 1999 ride from Keith to Wellington was less celebrated and marketed, but nevertheless memorable.

None of the above compare even slightly with the thoughtful and meticulous pre-planning that went into the 1986 Jubilee 150 event.

A committee, established two years earlier under the auspices of the Sesquicentenary Board, were inspired by LJ Blake's 1971 'thirst for knowledge' publication *Gold Escort* and its extensive bibliography, chronicling a story 'once tenuously held in the mist of folk memory about a coach laden with gold journeying across Victoria's western plains to the desert country, of the route taken and the oft told story of bushranger Melville lurking atop Mount Arapiles, ready to bail up the horsemen escorting the gold toward the westering sun'. About old campsites, horse yards, soaks and claypans, timbered wells put down, worn wheel ruts of the track itself and unique, romantic place names known well to the seekers of fortunes, the escort riders, and in latter times to all those associated with the various re-rides.



Receiving the gold for escort to Adelaide



On the route to Adelaide from Castlemaine

Tracking south by south east on the way over, and north by north west on the way back, place names like Morning Star, (now Wistow) Potts at Langhorne Creek, Ferries McDonald (now a reserve) Mason's Lookout (Mason = Protector of Aborigines) Cooke's Station (Plains), Perkindoo, Hawks Nest, Kangaroo Flat, Chinaman's Hut, Tolmer's Rocks, Cold and Wet, Artimore, Binnies, McKinley's, Reedy and Limestone Wells, the 73 Mile Well, the 85 Mile Well, Mount Monster Station (now Keith) The Tatiara (the good country), Scott's Woolshed (now Bordertown), The Little Desert, Mount Arapiles, Kaniva, Polkemmet, Glenorchy, Navarre & Avoca. It's all still there.



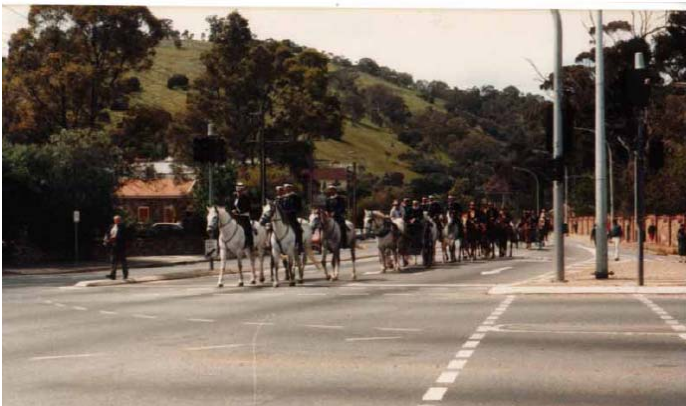
Crossing the River Murray at Wellington

To enable a re-enactment faithful to the fact that it *is* all still there, to reinforce memory of this trusted history, much time, effort, expense and work both from a distance and 'on the ground' was painstakingly carried out by a dedicated and enthusiastic committed group of people, from wide backgrounds and expertise, especially from the South Australian Police Force, The Adelaide Trail Horse Rider's Club, the National Trust of South Australia and it's four Lower Murray and South East Branches.

Proudly sponsored by the Commonwealth Bank - Susan Caracoussis - so much else went into it by the organising committee, personnel participants, involvement with communities along the route, schools, service groups, civic dignitaries.

Logistics - obtaining the cart, and a competent driver with horses and harness who could go the distance, authentic reproduction of Mounted Police 1850's uniforms, catering, budgeting, overnight stays at camps and other accommodation, official ceremonies, Town Halls, Town Bands, WATER,

promotion, posters, pamphlets and publicity, permanent markers to fix at regular pre-decided intervals, transport, back-up communication, special event clothing and accessories, education/teachers guide booklets, liaison, local and state news media, co-operation and vision.



The escort at Glen Osmond on the way to the Adelaide Treasury

Extraordinary as it seems, the physical re-enactment actually began twelve months earlier. A group of fit and able bodied police Star Force officers led by Police Historian Robert Clyne (also of the Adelaide Gentlemen's Walking Club), representing gold miners travelling to Victoria to stake their claim walked 700 kms from Adelaide to Castlemaine to deliver a gold plated shovel as an introductory gesture of goodwill between the two organising state committees. A year later the re-ride convoy headed over to Castlemaine to set up camp in preparation for the official re-enactment which began on 19 September 1986 and ended on 8 October with a parade of honour at the Wayville Showgrounds in conjunction with the International Police Association conference & South Australian Police Tattoo.

In closing, I can genuinely say that in my 40 years involvement with heritage celebration, study and involvement, the 1986 Gold Escort Re-enactment was more emotionally & physically memorable than anything else. I'm so proud to have helped in a small way to reinforce memory of trusted history.

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