

A rich archival heritage in the National Archives

Enid Woodley

People often have difficulties imagining what they might find in the National Archives – after all it's a collection of federal government records. Will there be interesting local stories to discover amongst the red tape? Certainly local history can often be easier to identify in council and state government records, and in private records kept by community members, churches and businesses from the district. But mining the rich seams of local heritage within the National Archives while sometimes challenging, can prove very rewarding.

Harvesting records about agriculture

At the start of my research for this talk I had some qualms about being able to find anything that provided much insight into Yorke Peninsula heritage aside from our shipping records, simply because the federal government has had little to do with the other mainstays of local industry – farming and mining. The National Archives doesn't hold school or local council records. Nor does it collect all the regional newspapers or donated private papers and diaries. But thinking laterally was the key to finding less obvious information.

Having farmers in our family I know how much their lives revolve around the weather so this was definitely an area of our government records worth exploring. Sure enough, some of our weather documents from the Bureau of Meteorology yielded results. Included in rainfall registers for the Yorke Peninsula districts of Daly and Fergusson were handwritten statistics from the 1860s to the early 1900s of the acreage sown for wheat, the total bushels reaped and average yield per acre.¹ These records clearly show the escalation of cereal cropping in the area from the 1870s onwards.

But where could I find more information about the farmers themselves? In the colony of South Australia at some stages to be able to own land you needed to be British, so many of those who'd migrated from Germany or Prussia and wanted to take up farming on the peninsula applied to become naturalised...including Johann Wehr of Kilkerran near Maitland². Naturalisation was a government function taken over by the Commonwealth at Federation so these records are with the National Archives. Not surprisingly most of the naturalisations I found for Yorke Peninsula residents were from the mid 1870s, some fifteen years or so after farming was pioneered in the area, making further sense of the jump in wheat production at this time. Incidentally there is no easy way of identifying those who were naturalised while living on the Yorke Peninsula

¹ NAA: AP810/45, VOLUME 1 - 1860 TO 1905

² NAA: A711, 754

– it’s a case of typing names of local families into our RecordSearch database to see what digital records you can find.

As more took to farming the Yorke Peninsula there was an increasing need for better implements to clear the native scrub, and often it was the farmers themselves who invented labour-saving devices – like the famous stump-jump plough. Within our patents collection is Richard Bowyer Smith’s handwritten letter to the Patents Office in 1876 applying for provisional registration of his now famous invention in preparation for exhibition of the plough at the Kadina Show later that year.³ Another letter from Richard on this file advises that the exhibition of the plough at Kadina hadn’t eventuated, but that he instead planned to exhibit it at the Adelaide Show in February 1877. Richard and his brother Clarence Herbert Smith forged ahead in the invention and production of agricultural machinery, patenting a number of other tools including the Achilles grubbing machine in 1878.⁴

So successful were their products that in 1880 Clarence set up business in Ardrossan manufacturing agricultural machinery. He continued to patent improved versions until his death in 1901, when his sons took over the plough factory.⁵ According to our trademark records, by 1903 the company was using the brand name “Defiance” and going from strength to strength.⁶

I also found an interesting summary of later operations of the Ardrossan factory included in the 1940s trading results file of an off-shoot company located in Adelaide. A letter in this file advises that the factory “at times employed between 200 & 300 men & turned out machines and duplicate parts on a very large scale using special moulding machines & plate patterns”.⁷ (This is part of a single group of business records we hold that were created by the Deputy Prices Commissioner around WWII to keep track of pricing in the state, and although it only covers a relatively short time period it gives an intriguing window into operations of South Australian businesses in this era).

The Smith’s success with the stump-jump plough no doubt inspired other locals to patent their own agricultural improvements, including William Telfer of Wallaroo⁸, David Mundy, commission agent of Moonta⁹, and Kadina farmer Daniel Crosby¹⁰. In fact applying to register patents became quite competitive on

³ NAA: AP476/8, 13/1876

⁴ NAA: AP476/9, 32

⁵ NAA: AP476/1, 3389

⁶ NAA: AP476/5, CLASS 7

⁷ NAA: AP5/1, 43/1271

⁸ NAA: AP476/1, 37

⁹ NAA: AP476/1, 4186

¹⁰ NAA: AP476/1, 5585

the peninsula as a letter from John Scoble of Green's Plains illustrates.¹¹ Mr Scoble had seen both the scrubbing machines patented by the Smith brothers and William Telfer in action and considered that they infringed his own previously patented invention.

At Wallaroo William Henry May had also established an engineering and foundry business, producing his versions of agricultural machinery like the Automatic Relief¹² and later expanding the business to include his sons¹³. W H May and Sons was still going strong nearly fifty years later and in the 1940s along with other Yorke Peninsula engineering businesses, was called on to help out with the war effort by producing parts for machine gun carriers under contract to the South Australian Railways workshops at Islington.^{14 15} (These are amongst the railways records we hold relating to defence – another federal government function).

The federal government was also responsible for controlling those interned in Australia in both of the world wars. So knowing that some farmers were allocated internees to help out with labour, I tracked down records of a number of Yorke Peninsula residents who were approved as suitable to employ internees in the 1940s¹⁶ ...and some names of Italian internees sent to work for them¹⁷. These included E H Giles of Yorketown who was allocated Giuseppe Colosimo.

After the Second World War the Commonwealth Employment Service was set up and sought to find work for migrants on the land. Some farmers saw potential in the scheme and applied for migrant labour. But this didn't always work out as one Maitland farmer explains: *"I am badly in need of labour but am just going to sit quiet [quite] and see what happens this time. When I had labour it was taken away. The country is crying for wheat (in my case) and offers labour to get it – in April. The land was fallowed for wheat last year for this years crop. What help will they be now? – none whatever."*¹⁸

Digging for records about mining

Shifting my focus to the peninsula's mining heritage I decided the best place to start was with patents and soon found another patent submitted by William Telfer of Wallaroo in 1884. He identified himself as a manufacturing chemist and had moved from grubbing machines to an improved way of manufacturing salt. Also

¹¹ NAA: AP476/1, 37

¹² NAA: AP476/1, 660

¹³ NAA: AP476/1, 8866

¹⁴ NAA: D1743, 1943/4111

¹⁵ NAA: D1743, 1942/4284

¹⁶ NAA: D1920, 31

¹⁷ NAA: D1920, 27

¹⁸ NAA: AP31/1, LETTERS FROM FARMERS

within this patent file is an indenture made five years later selling the patent rights to the Castle Salt Company.¹⁹

Trading from Grenfell Street in Adelaide, the Castle Salt Company built a factory at Edithburgh to take advantage of the salt lakes nearby, and the harvesting and refining of salt became a major industry on the lower part of the peninsula, with the Castle brand continuing on even after it was amalgamated into the Australian Salt Company in the 1930s.²⁰

Richard Northway, a Curramulka farmer, clearly knew of the back-breaking work involved in the process of drying salt in the late 1890s and designed a steam-powered alternative.²¹

Increased mechanisation was also a feature of Henry Richard Hancock's inventions. Henry Hancock was superintendent of the Moonta copper mines for many years, and over this period continued to make improvements to his apparatus for jiggling ores.²² He also worked with his sons Henry Lipson and Leigh George to improve the design of rock drills and other mining machinery and processes.²³

But it wasn't only those managing the Moonta Mines who were patenting their ideas. In 1879 Joseph Mitchell, a mining captain at Moonta Mines, submitted his invention of a salve to heal a wide variety of wounds and sores – including burns and scalds.²⁴ It's highly likely that Captain Mitchell concocted this salve to ease the afflictions of his fellow miners and those working in the smelting works at Wallaroo.

Others could see different business potential in the mines and smelters. In 1904, Ray Letheby, Wallaroo chemist, newsagent and stationer registered copyright on a Wallaroo souvenir booklet he had had printed.²⁵ The booklet included images of Owen Terrace (with his shop prominently displayed) and a photo promoting the smelting works and acid towers as one of the local sights.

As Mr Letheby knew, the name "Wallaroo" had become synonymous with mining copper – so much so that in 1906 this word alone was deemed the best trademark to register the Wallaroo and Moonta Mining and Smelting Company and all of its copper products.²⁶ One of the bi-products of the smelting works

¹⁹ NAA: AP476/1, 513

²⁰ NAA: D5005, CL42 VOL 7 1906

²¹ NAA: AP476/1, 4346

²² NAA: AP476/1, 2484

²³ NAA: AP476/1, 4927

²⁴ NAA: AP476/1, 86

²⁵ NAA: AP476/4, B696

²⁶ NAA: D5005, CL4-11 – VOL 3 1906-09

was sulphuric acid which from the late 1800s was supplied to the Wallaroo Phosphate Company to use to make fertiliser.²⁷

Having dug through our patents and trademarks I moved on to other possible mining heritage sources and discovered some treasures in our postal and telecommunications records. Within a file about the establishment of telegraphic services at Marion Bay were letters from Arthur Hasell, proprietor of the local gypsum works, describing the extent of the industry in the early 1900s and offering gypsum works employees to run a basic telegraph service for the town.²⁸ This proved to be just one example of the involvement of mining companies in expanding services in Yorke Peninsula towns.

In 1911 another postal file reveals the involvement of the South Australian Premier in a dispute over the staffing of the post office at Moonta Mines. An extract from the Premier's letter reads *"the Postmistress at Moonta Mines is to be turned out after she has erected the Post Office and bought the house, and they are trying to put in an officer of the Wallaroo Company which I think is an unfair thing to do."*²⁹

Six years later, the Deputy Postmaster General happily accepted an offer by Mines' Manager Henry Lipson Hancock to provide posts for additional letterboxes at both the Wallaroo and Moonta Mines and to erect and maintain these boxes at the company's expense.³⁰ Mr Hancock sent plans of both of these mining settlements to show the proposed sites for the new letterboxes. While Wallaroo Mines residents were well served with an institute, bowling greens and a public school among other facilities³¹, those living at Moonta Mines also had four Methodist churches in the near vicinity, indicating the deep religious convictions of the Cornish miners.³²

Although the Wallaroo and Moonta company was amenable to helping the community, there were still limits to its benevolence. When the company was asked for some of its land for a drill hall by the Defence Department in 1914, it declined pointing out that it needed to keep the mineral rights³³, and a drill hall was built later that year on another site in the town.³⁴

The First World War also brought about our War Precautions (enemy shareholders) Regulations as one way of limiting the potential funding of wartime

²⁷ NAA: D5005, CL1-3 VOL1 1913-15

²⁸ NAA: D960, B1926/2565

²⁹ NAA: D957, 1911/4315

³⁰ NAA: D961, C1927/851

³¹ NAA: D961, C1917/2673

³² NAA: D961, C1927/851

³³ NAA: D844, 50/30/1

³⁴ NAA: D1051, MOONTA DRILL HALL FOLDER 43

adversaries. Amongst records of the Department of Trade and Customs (responsible for overseeing these regulations) I found documents about the Wallaroo and Moonta Mining and Smelting Company's dividends in 1917.³⁵

Our Customs and Excise records also include a file with some interesting information about the operation of the Moonta Copper Recovery Company in the late 1920s, after the demise of the Wallaroo and Moonta mines. In an application for free duty on a pump imported by the company, the author describes how the equipment is to be used to help recover copper from five large tailing heaps left at Moonta.³⁶

Navigating through shipping records

Not surprisingly our Customs and Excise collection was my first port of call when looking for information about Yorke Peninsula's shipping heritage too. A shipping register for Wallaroo demonstrates how busy the port was in the late 1870s with many ships calling each month, some even carrying passengers from overseas.³⁷ It was still busy in the early 1900s too, servicing both steam and sailing vessels, as one of Mr Letheby's postcards shows.³⁸ As Wallaroo was a major port on Spencer Gulf, quarantine inspections and fumigations were carried out in addition to customs clearance work.³⁹

Customs duties in Port Victoria could be particularly onerous when large overseas vessels came into the port, with the customs officer often having to row eight miles out to where they were anchored. Understandably Mr Andrew McArthur, after doing this job for many years tried to tender his resignation at the end of 1910 stating that he was "*getting too old*". A sad letter on the same file reports his death a year later; ironically he was still working for the Customs Department.⁴⁰

Customs officers were also responsible for recording any crew reported at their port as having deserted, something that apparently happened quite often on the peninsula!⁴¹

Documenting any changes to a ship's specifications or ownership for the "Register of British Ships" was another important Customs function. From these records I discovered that a ketch engaged in the wheat trade - the "Broughton", was at one time jointly owned by a number of Yorke Peninsula residents,

³⁵ NAA: D596, 1917/3959

³⁶ NAA: D596, 1929/3892

³⁷ NAA: AP378/50, VOLUME 1

³⁸ NAA: D4477, 819

³⁹ NAA; D596, 1927/8117

⁴⁰ NAA: D596, 1939/2415

⁴¹ NAA: D596, 1936/1154

including Herbert Bowman, an Ardrossan agent and farmer.⁴² The “Broughton” had a tumultuous life. Built in England in 1873 she was wrecked in a storm at Wallaroo in 1932 and then refloated to continue plying her trade in the Spencer Gulf for another fifteen years.⁴³ In the 1940s she was sold to Port Lincoln shark fishermen and just two weeks later was completely wrecked near Port MacDonnell.

Wrecks were relatively common around the coast of the Yorke Peninsula. One of the best sources of information detailing wrecks are the logs recorded by the ships’ masters and submitted to a Mercantile Marine Office together with the articles of agreement for crew for the voyage.

One of the logs submitted to the South Australian office documents the final voyage of the “Willyama” in 1906 and 1907, giving a blow-by-blow account of her demise at Marion Bay. The “Willyama” ran aground in the early hours of the 13th of April 1907. The conditions on board were precarious and at three thirty in the afternoon the master, Captain Bewley, reported: *“Hearing some of the crew were unwilling to remain during the night I mustered all hands and requested those who wanted to leave the ship to stand to port. The fireman in a body elected to leave and said they were willing to return in the morning if required they then proceeded ashore at 4pm with their effects.”* The log reports that it took nine days for the cargo of coal to be jettisoned (during which a wharf labourer who was helping fell from the deck into a hold, sustaining head injuries) and at 1.45pm on the 21st of April the ship was abandoned.⁴⁴

A log of the “Wandana” records a series of more minor disasters. The run of bad luck began in May 1917 with the “Wandana” first breaking the heavy fender on the Wallaroo jetty and later in the day damaging another ketch when backing out. In June the galley boy accidentally stepped into a bucket of scalding water, while in July first the trimmer deserted and then the ship became grounded near Riley Point north of Wallaroo. It took five hours for the crew to float the ship off, only to find it was leaking.⁴⁵

Working on the ships that sailed the peninsula’s waters could be dangerous – sometimes for less obvious reasons. In 1944, Reta Bawden, a stewardess on the “Quorna” was hospitalised - thanks to the cargo. According to the log she had opened a door on the vessel only to have it kicked back into her face by a horse that was tethered behind it.⁴⁶ The “Quorna” was one of the fleet of the Adelaide Steamship Company and was part of the popular Gulf trip for some

⁴² NAA: D596, 1936/8940

⁴³ NAA: D596, 1932/2094

⁴⁴ NAA: D13, WILLYAMA 108264

⁴⁵ NAA: D13, WANDANA 122745/2

⁴⁶ NAA: D13, QUORNA 122740/12

years. In 1941 for the princely sum of £5/5 “Quorna” passengers could take a round trip.⁴⁷

The “Quorna” was also one of the ships originally selected for requisition by the Navy in WWII but being considered essential for local trade was replaced by the “Warrawee”.⁴⁸ The “Warrawee” owned by Coast Steamships, did regular trips to Edithburgh and Ardrossan for many years, and was contracted by the Postmaster General’s Department (PMG) to deliver mail to Edithburgh. This contract was in abeyance for nearly three months in 1919 due to the seamen's strike, and local carriers were called on to drive the mail over land instead.⁴⁹

Like the PMG, the Lighthouse Branch also needed the assistance of local carriers, to ensure that its keepers received their supplies on a regular basis. There were four manned lighthouses around the coast of the Yorke Peninsula, three of which were offshore: Althorpe Island off the south west tip near Stenhouse Bay, Tipara Reef near Moonta and Troubridge Island across from Edithburgh. In 1918 the Lighthouse Branch files note that the keepers at Tipara Reef and Troubridge Island got their supplies delivered each week, but the replenishment of stores was monthly for the more isolated Althorpe lighthouse.⁵⁰

Completed in 1877, just a couple of years before the stone Althorpe Island lighthouse, the Tipara Reef structure looked very different, and was similar in design to the one on exhibit at the Maritime Museum in Port Adelaide.⁵¹

The isolation of lighthouse life could have devastating effects as the official logs completed by the keepers sometimes reveal. Just before Christmas in 1878 a keeper’s child died at the Tipara Reef light station. The log entries are heart-rending: *“Friday...at 2.0 am W Stirling’s child taken with convulsions and died at half past ten am. At daylight hoisted signals for cutter and Dr but none came. Lamp burned brilliant and machinery worked correct the whole night. Saturday...at daylight again hoisted signal for cutter but nothing came. At 10.30am sent third keeper with wife and dead child on shore in dingy”*.⁵²

The Troubridge Island lighthouse was built twenty years earlier than the one on Tipara Reef and still stands to this day. Although reading through some of the logs this seems remarkable...it survived an earthquake and fire in 1902 and has been under constant threat from erosion. An entry from the light keeper in May 1865 describes just how bad the erosion could be: *“Terrific squalls with heavy showers of rain and the highest tide I have seen since I have been on the*

⁴⁷ NAA: AP5/1, 41/825

⁴⁸ NAA: D305, 17/14

⁴⁹ NAA: D961, C1925/2812

⁵⁰ NAA: D14, SA1922/181

⁵¹ NAA: A9568, 4/11/1

⁵² NAA: D30, 07 JAN 1878 TO 25 OCT 1882

*island...the sea has also washed away at least half the island. The high bank of sand and bush that was between the lighthouse and the under keeper's cottage has all disappeared leaving only a high bank of a few feet here and there...*⁵³

While these sands may be disappearing, Yorke Peninsula heritage is alive and well in the National Archives.

⁵³ NAA: D31, 01 MAR 1863 TO 28 FEB 1867