

Donovan News

Number 19

Autumn 1997

... keeping in touch with clients and other friends ...

'Past Masters'

Historians are 'Past Masters'. They do more than simply recount what happened in the past. They seek to understand and explain the past. They try to draw meaning from the past, so that their work might help to increase the understanding of the present. Professional historians have particular skills to enable them to master the past. These skills enable historians to provide valuable services to the leaders of businesses and organisations.

Previous issues of the *News* have emphasised the benefits of a documented history to businesses and organisations. Such a history can help to preserve the record of an organisation; it can become a useful marketing tool; it can help to explain the culture and traditions of an organisation; and it can be used to acknowledge particular contributions to the success of an organisation.

But business leaders need to employ the services of professional historians in order to make the most of their history. A new building warrants the expertise of professional architects, engineers and others. The introduction of a new computer system requires the skills of an information technology consultant. So too, historical research warrants the services of a professional historian, a Past Master.

The volumes of Board minutes of any business do not represent the history of that organisation. Nor do the volumes of staff newsletters. Both are valuable record series. They are full of relevant facts, but such material needs to be interpreted. They include some facts that are fundamental to the history, others that are important, others still that might be useful, but also many that are inconsequential. Also, particular facts can have different degrees of significance, depending upon the nature and purpose of the history. It needs a competent historian to differentiate between the facts.

Many types of sources might be relevant to the history. These will certainly include correspondence files, perhaps project reports or consultants' reports. They might include newspapers, industry journals, personal papers and personal interviews. It requires a 'Past Master', to both identify the diversity of relevant material and to assess its appropriateness for the task at hand.



PROJECT UPDATE

The business life of **Donovan & Associates** continues to be measured by the successful cycle of projects, several of which have been completed since the previous *News*.

The history of Quality Bakers Australia, the makers of *Buttercup* bread and other baked products, was completed and delivered immediately prior to Christmas 1996.

The centenary history of Sacred Heart College was launched by the Chancellor of Flinders University, Sister Deirdre Jordan, AC, MBE, as part of the College's centenary celebrations on 26 February 1997.

The launch of the history of the Wakehurst Golf Club was the feature of a champagne breakfast at the club on 16 March 1997.

The final draft of **D&A's** history of the River Red Gum forests (near Deniliquin in southern New South Wales) was submitted at the end of January 1997. The manuscript has now gone forward for publication.

Continued on p. 2

Project Update continued

The major continuing project has been D&A's history of Asset Services. The impending sale of the business has meant that the completion date has been brought forward to permit publication as soon as possible after 30 June.

D&A will soon recommence work on the oral history of the Australian Medical Association. The bulk of the work was completed some time ago, but the project was suspended in order to allow time to pass before interviewing some of the more recent participants in the history. The project is to be completed by the end of 1997.

NEW PROJECTS

As projects are being completed, others have commenced and help ensure the continued success of D&A.

Work on the heritage survey of the District Council of Victor Harbor began in January 1997. We have again marshalled our long-standing heritage team, which includes Barry Rowney and Patricia Sumerling, for this project. Local knowledge is being provided by Simon Coote, a historic archaeology graduate from Flinders University.

D & A completed a report on the heritage significance of an industrial building in the city's West End for the Adelaide City Council.

Continued on p. 3

National Assets

Work continues on Donovan & Associates' history of Asset Services. This is one of several businesses that form part of the Commonwealth's Department of Administrative Services (DAS). Asset Services provides repair and maintenance services for customers throughout Australia, traditionally other government agencies, particularly the Department of Defence. However, increasingly Asset Services has tendered for work beyond the government sector.

Although Asset Services has been a separate business only since 1990, it has a long history. By one measure, this extends back to the foundation of the Commonwealth in 1901. The current Asset Services is the direct successor of the day labour organisation which was once part of the Commonwealth Government's construction department, which for a long time was known as the Department of Works.

The predecessors of those in Asset Services were responsible for building much of Canberra before World War II. Then, as the Civil Construction Corps during the war they built military installations, airfields and strategic roads throughout Australia. The day labour organisation was involved in the re-building of most of the nation's major airports after the war. It helped to build the town of Woomera. Until relatively recent times day labour was responsible for the provision of local government type services in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea, as well as providing repair and maintenance services for government installations. The organisation continues to undertake important work throughout Australia and in off-shore areas such as Antarctica and the Cocos and Christmas Islands.

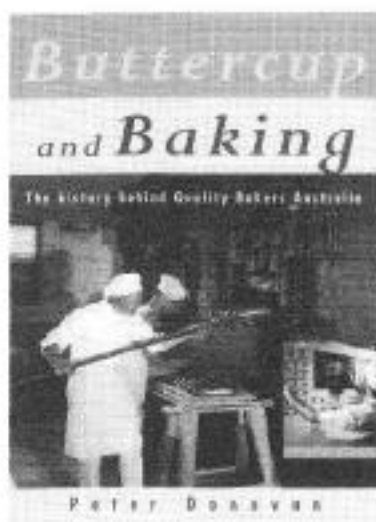
However, the history is more than simply a record of the Commonwealth Government's day labour organisation. The recent history reflects the changing nature of the Australian Public Service, particularly effects of the economic rationalist policies of recent governments. These policies have necessitated the contraction of the organisation as it seeks to compete in the private sector. Asset Services, along with several other DAS businesses, is marked for sale by June 1997. The impending sale was the spur to record the history of this important government instrumentality.



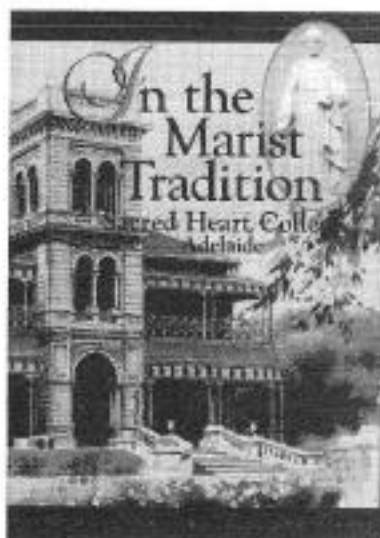
New Publications

Three new books resulting from the work of **Donovan & Associates** have been published since *News* no. 18.

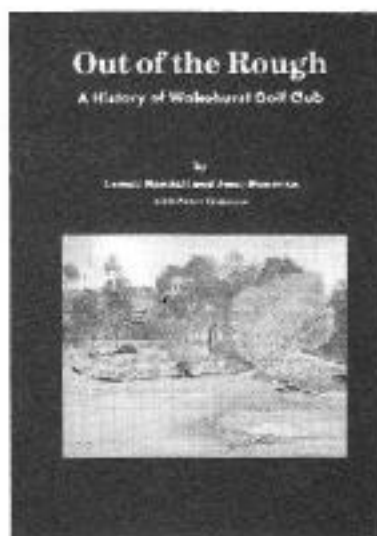
Buttercup and Baking: The history behind Quality Bakers Australia, by Peter Donovan, was published by Hale and Iremonger for Quality Bakers Australia, the makers of *Buttercup* bread and other baked products. The book is in hardback, measures 250 mm x 180 mm, has xvi + 248 pages, an index and is illustrated in black and white and colour.



In the Marist Tradition: Sacred Heart College Adelaide 1897-1997, by Peter Donovan and Bernard O'Neil was published by Sacred Heart College. The book is in hardback, measures 245mm x 170mm, has xvi + 352 pages, an index and is illustrated in black and white.



Out of the Rough: A History of Wakehurst Golf Club, by Leonie Randall and June Donovan with Peter Donovan, was published by Wakehurst Golf Club. The book is in hardback, measures 230 mm x 170 mm, has xiv + 260 pages, an index and is illustrated in black and white and colour.



New Projects continued

Donovan & Associates has been commissioned to write a history of MRW Merchandise Ltd. This South Australian company began in August 1921 as a co-operative called Murray River Wholesalers: it was a vehicle for buying such things as fencing, chemicals and animal products. Work is about to commence on this project.

D&A is to compile a course booklet on 'Writing History' for the professional writing course which is conducted by the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. Peter Donovan has long been involved in the 'Writing Local History' course which is offered by the Institute.

HISTORICAL
INTERPRETER
SERVICE
HERE..



Copy editing of the *News* is by Bernard O'Neil. The cartoons are by Stephen Stanley.

In Review

Given the project nature of our work and the niche market in which **D & A** has chosen to operate, it is not often that our published histories attract attention. So, it is gratifying when we receive feedback which commends the value of our work.

Dr Les Heathcote, Reader in Geography at Flinders University, reviewed *'In the Interest of the Country'* in the 1996 issue of the *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*. He wrote:

The contemporary concern for environmental management and the problems of land degradation make this history of the South Australian Pastoral Board particularly pertinent ...

It is not a history of South Australia's pastoral industry, although it does go a long way towards filling in the official management strategies towards that industry ... Nonetheless, it provides a carefully documented insight into the learning curve of governments and settlers as they came to grips with the realities of domestic livestock management on semi-arid rangelands ...

Whatever the future ... Donovan has provided a rich dispassionate account through the archives of the Pastoral Board, of how dedicated resource managers, both private and governmental, grappled with the combination of a fickle physical environment, fluctuating market forces and changing popular perceptions of the range, as they moved down the rainfall gradient into the arid interior.



DONOVAN & ASSOCIATES History & Historic Preservation Consultants

Donovan & Associates is a consulting firm which specialises in matters relating to aspects of historical research, writing and historic conservation. The firm undertakes a wide variety of tasks based upon these specialties. Major projects completed by the firm include large commissioned histories and heritage studies, recording of oral history, and providing advice on records management.

Donovan & Associates was established in 1980 and since that time has undertaken work for clients throughout south-eastern Australia on projects that have involved research and work in all parts of the country.

Donovan & Associates' services include:

- Corporate and institutional histories
- Regional and local histories
- Heritage surveys and assessments
- Land tenure research
- Oral history programs
- Advice on cultural tourism
- Advice on historical displays

PO Box 436, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051
Phone / Facsimile (08) 8270 1770