

Donovan News

Number 21

Autumn 1998

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

History is a valuable resource

Managers are constantly being told to make the most of all of the resources they have at their disposal. Few managers, however, consider history as a resource that they can use to improve the performance of their organisation. Even worse, many of them profess disdain for the past, claiming that they are only interested in the next job and the next customer. These managers proclaim that they do not want to become prisoners of the past. Yet, evidence of such a blinkered approach suggests that these managers might be condemned to repeat mistakes of the past.

Every manager needs to understand and appreciate the corporate memory. The SWOT analysis is basic to the development of any planning strategy. And the determination of the strengths and weaknesses of any organisation is essentially an exercise in historical research. It is necessary to understand the organisation and to determine where it has come from before plans can be made for its future direction.

But history can be a vital resource in other respects also.

An understanding of history can be useful for members at all levels of an organisation. History helps to explain why the organisation has developed in a particular manner. It can be used to explain the development of the organisation's distinguishing culture. The history of any organisation can also highlight the need for future change by explaining change that has taken place in the past which has ensured the continuity of the organisation.

History is also a valuable promotional tool. Any organisation with a proven track record would normally be expected to have the edge over a competitor of recent or uncertain origin. Organisations that have overcome challenges in the past and have maintained their relevance can be expected to perform well in the future.

Commissioned histories of organisations make good sense and ensure that a valuable resource is not left idle.



D&A Scope of Works

D&A's oral history of the Australian Medical Association has been completed except for an interview with Bruce Shepherd, a recent president of the AMA. This interview was not possible during the main part of the project: we plan to interview him when we are next in Sydney.

D&A and its team continues to provide historical advice to the Attorney-General's Department in the matter of native title claims in South Australia. The demands of research took Peter Donovan into one of the claimed areas in the northwest of South Australia during January. Other work and travel interstate has provided opportunities for team members to research sources held in repositories beyond South Australia.

Work continues on the oral history of the Birdsville Track for Transport SA. So far, D&A has conducted interviews in Adelaide, Port Augusta and other

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centres in the mid-north of South Australia. Field work into the region has been programmed for the southern winter months. In many ways this project complements our native title research in country South Australia.

Meanwhile, research and writing of the history of Murray River Wholesalers Pty Ltd continues.

D&A has garnered new work since the previous News.

A project, now completed, was to prepare a statement of cultural significance of the Adelaide Parklands. In this instance D&A worked as sub-consultants to Hassell, architects and planners, for the preparation of 'The Adelaide Park Lands Management Strategy: Visions and Directions Report' for the City of Adelaide as the client. The study highlighted the unique nature of Colonel Light's plan for the City of Adelaide, which included the arrangement of the squares and major connecting streets as well as the parklands. The study suggested that all aspects must be seen as a unity, rather than as many discrete parts, and management strategies devised accordingly.

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Glass Master

Bob Brown is one of those successful businessmen who confounded experts and succeeded in founding prosperous businesses on two sides of the world. Bob started in business in Adelaide as a ticket writer, providing signs for department stores and land agents. Life changed when the whitegoods manufacturer, Simpson, asked him to print decorative patterns on glass to be used on a new range of stoves. He knew nothing about the properties of glass but succeeded in bonding patterns to toughened glass. In a very short time he closed the signwriting business and concentrated upon supplying toughened glass to Simpson. The new business, Seraphic, prospered as toughened, heat-resistant glass was used in modern cookers. Bob Brown sold the business to a subsidiary of the glass-makers, Pilkington-ACI.

Retirement at an early age did not sit well with Bob Brown. He decided to establish a business in Britain to provide decorative ceramic glass to cooker manufacturers in the United Kingdom and Europe. New opportunities became apparent in the automotive industry with the provision of toughened sun roofs and frameless glass for cars printed with black or coloured edging to hide hinges and other attachments. Thermax, the British business, thrived.

Thermax also developed a unique system for bonding electrical resistance circuits to glass. This opened up new opportunities for the production of rear windscreens for motor vehicles. The licence was ultimately sold to the Italian motor vehicle manufacturer, Siv. In the mid-1980, Bob Brown once again sold a thriving business but this time was happy to retire.



Published Recently



National Assets: A history of Asset Services and the Commonwealth's day-labour organisation, 1901-1997 by Peter Donovan. Published by the Australian Government Publishing Service for Asset Services. The book is hardback, measures 170mm x 250mm, has xii + 338 pages, an index and is illustrated in black and white.

The Roche Approach

Roche Bros was founded in 1921, when Fred and Vic Roche won the contract to build a small road in rural Victoria. The business grew to become a leading civil engineering contractor with projects throughout Australia. In the mid-1980s the company introduced its civil engineering skills to the mining industry and became the nation's leading contract miner. It revolutionised contract mining with the introduction of ever larger plant as the company won increasingly bigger contracts, including work in the Big Pit at Kalgoorlie.

Roche Bros has changed a great deal since D&A first began recording its history. When we completed the initial phase of the history project the company had recently commenced its contract to help build the platform for the new Hong Kong airport. This contract was completed very successfully and attracted a great deal of positive publicity for the company. This confirmed Roche Bros as a leading contract miner. During the same period, however, CHART Roads, a consortium which included Roche Bros, failed to win the contract for Melbourne's City Link project. This persuaded Roche Bros to wind back its civil engineering capacity and concentrate all its head office activities in Brisbane.

The increased concentration on—ever larger—mining contracts greatly increased the financial risk to the Roche family. At the same time, the need to invest upwards of \$80 million each year simply to maintain its position relative to competitors became increasingly hard for the family to sustain. The family reluctantly recognised the need to sell the business if Roche Bros, as a company, was to continue to maintain its industry leadership.

The Roche family found a willing buyer in the Paul Y.-ITC group, a leading construction company based in Hong Kong, but with interests throughout Asia. Roche Bros came to the attention of Paul Y.-ITC during its work on the Hong Kong airport. Paul Y.-ITC, with its construction company, Downer, was seeking to expand in the Asia-Pacific region. The acquisition of Roche Bros, along with other strategic acquisitions, promises to provide Downer with the perfect opportunity. This also meant that Roche Bros would retain its individuality. However, it is evident that the culture of Roche Bros must change, even though the company will continue. Now is the ideal time to complete the history of Roche Bros.

OK—WE'LL SELL YOU THE COMPANY AND THROW IN A HISTORIAN FOR FREE..



D&A Scope of Works continued

Another task already completed by Peter Donovan is the writing of a handbook for the 'Writing History for Publication' module of the Advanced Diploma of Arts (Professional Writing) course offered by the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. This represents a rewriting and upgrading of the booklet prepared several years ago for the course in 'Writing Local History' which continues to be offered by the Institute.

Work has recommenced on our history of Roche Bros, Australia's leading contract miner. Work on this project began several years ago (see *News* no. 11). It has been resumed following the sale of Roche Bros in mid-1997 (see the article on this page).

D&A has begun work helping Bob Brown record his business history. Bob built and sold two thriving businesses, one in Adelaide, Seraphic, and another, Thermax, in the United Kingdom. The history also provides a unique insight into social conditions in post-World War II Adelaide (see the article on page 2).

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

Client Liaison

Peter Donovan spoke at the State History Conference held at Port Adelaide on 16 and 17 May 1998. He was one of a panel of historians speaking on the issue of 'Dealing with the Critics'. In this instance 'The Critics' were considered to be clients or their representatives, rather than reviewers.

Peter contended that this had not been a major issue with clients as far as **Donovan & Associates** was concerned. In all instances **D&A** has sought to maintain close liaison with clients or their representatives from the beginning of each project in order to educate them in the manner in which historians work; to keep them informed of the progress and scope of the project; and to provide them with the opportunity to comment on work during the course of the project.

In working on commissioned histories, **D&A** recognises that our clients generally know far more in detail about aspects of their organisation's history than we will ever know. Therefore it is important that we listen to their comments and not dismiss them as interference in our work. We will certainly seek extra information and discussion if we believe an interpretation is significantly different to ours.

Our philosophy is that each commissioned history is a joint venture with the client. The client is the one with the information: our expertise lies in gathering this information and synthesising it into a history of the organisation.



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 has since undertaken work for clients throughout southeastern Australia on projects that have involved research and work in all parts of the country.

Donovan & Associates' services include:

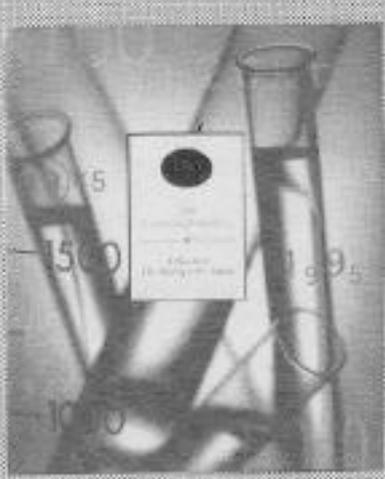
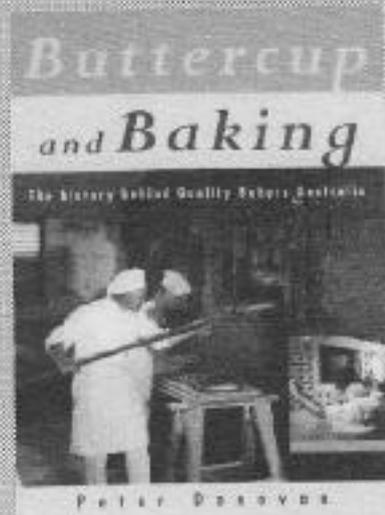
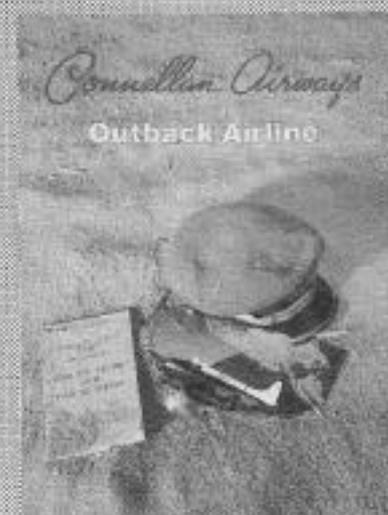
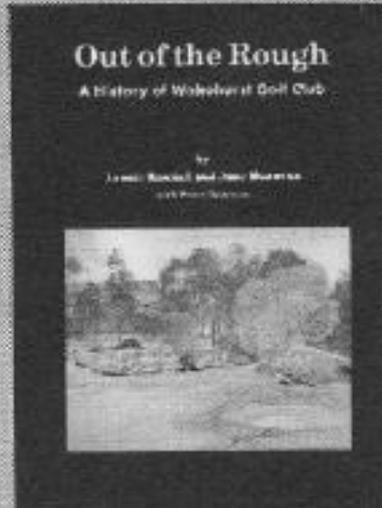
- Corporate and institutional histories
- Regional and local histories
- Heritage surveys and assessments
- Land tenure research
- Oral history programs
- Advice on cultural tourism
- Advice on historical displays

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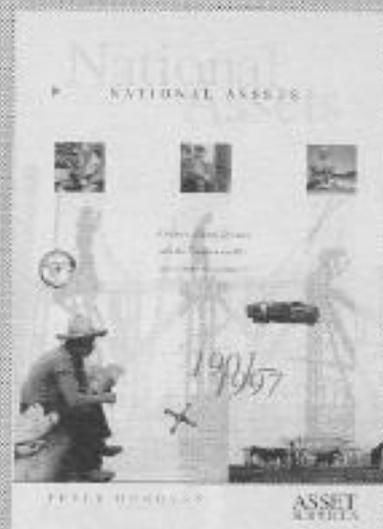
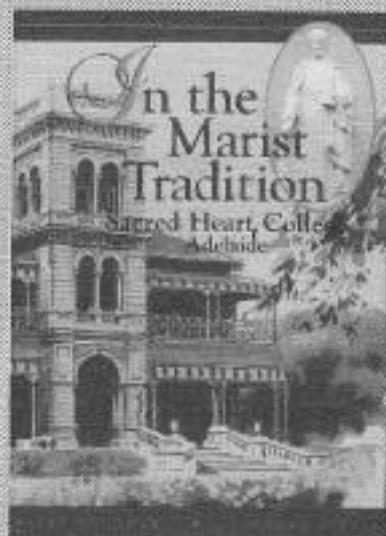
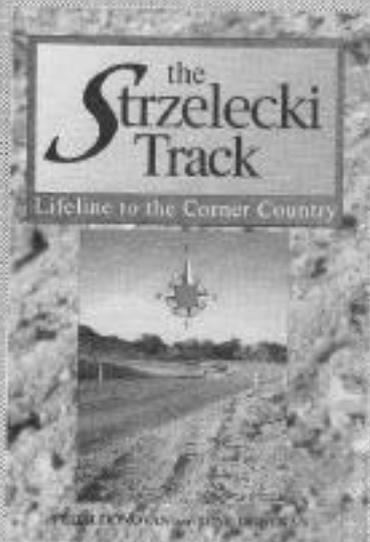
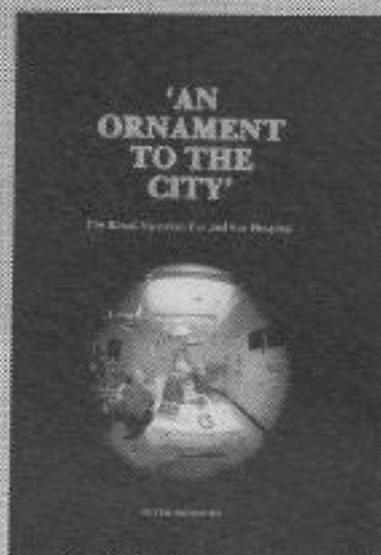
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PUBLICATIONS



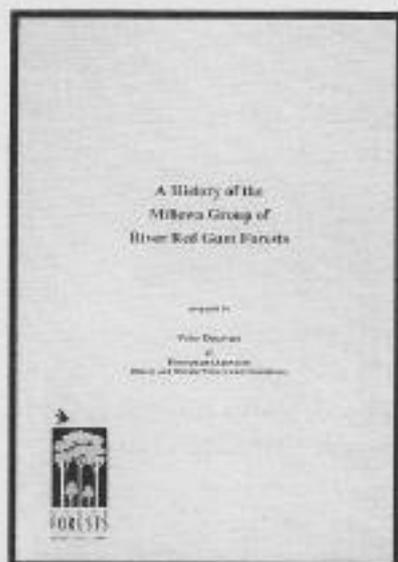
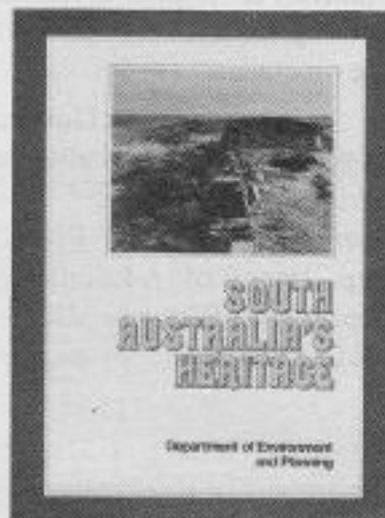
PUBLICATIONS



PROJECTS

Donovan & Associates has undertaken a broad range of historical projects in addition to published histories. These include:

Stained Glass in South Australia * Mound Springs Study * South Australia's Challenge to Defend the America's Cup * Study of the European Cultural History of the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Region * Conservation Analysis of the Port Adelaide Customs House Complex * A Six-stage Development and Management Plan for the Homestead Park Pioneer Museum, Port Augusta * An Oral History of Collison & Co., Patent Attorneys * Peterborough Heritage Survey * Heritage of Sedan, South Australia * City of Marion Heritage Survey * City of Salisbury Heritage Survey * An Oral History of Giles and Giles, Chartered Accountants * Conservation Plan for Keswick Barracks * Sunnybrae Farm: a history * The Railway Heritage of South Australia * State Strategy to Promote and Interpret the Life and Achievements of Mary MacKillop * An Oral History of the Adelaide Gaol * The Local Heritage of Marion * An Oral History of the Australian Medical Association * A Heritage Assessment of the Laboratories Area, DSTO, Salisbury * An Architectural Assessment of the Laboratories Area, DSTO, Salisbury * *HMAS Encounter* Conservation Study * An Oral History of Lindsay Point Almonds Pty Ltd * A Heritage Assessment of Drill Halls at Alberton, Beulah Park and Somerton Park * Flinders Ranges Heritage Survey * Mining in Australia * A Heritage Survey of the District Council of Victor Harbor.



KEY CLIENTS

Donovan & Associates has had the pleasure of working for a diverse group of valued clients. They include:

Australian Government

Asset Services * Australian Army * Australian Heritage Commission * Australian Property Group * Australian Protective Service * Department of Administrative Services * Department of Defence * Department of Housing and Construction * National Museum of Australia.

State Governments

Attorney-General's Department (SA) * Department of Environment and Planning (SA) * Department of Housing and Construction (SA) * Department of Road Transport (SA) * State Forests (NSW) * State Library of South Australia * South Australian Tourist Commission.

Local Government

City of Adelaide * City of Enfield * City of Hindmarsh-Woodville * City of Port Augusta * City of Unley * City of West Torrens * City of Marion * City of Salisbury * City of Port Adelaide * District Council of Victor Harbor * Municipality of Peterborough * Town of Alice Springs.

Other

Australian Council of National Trusts * Australian Medical Association * Australian National Railways Commission * Australian Submarine Corporation * Boulderstone Hornibrook * BHP Long Products Division * CSRLtd * Cobdogla Irrigation Museum * Connellan Airways Trust * Electricity Trust of South Australia * F.H. Faulding & Co * Giles & Giles, Chartered Accountants * Goodman Fielder * Hassell Architects * Hymix Australia * Lindsay Point Almonds Pty Ltd * MRW Merchandisers Ltd * National Environmental Consultancy * Narwietooma Pastoral Co * National Trust of Australia (SA) * Norman Waterhouse & Mutton, Barristers and Solicitors * Oakhill College * Payneham Primary School Council * Real Estate Institute of South Australia * Roche Bros * Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital * Sacred Heart College * SAGASCO Resources * Wakehurst Golf Club.



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