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Making Sense of Non-sense

The essential task for any historian is one of making sense of what is literally *non-sense*. At the beginning of any project the historian is confronted by a mass of data. There are many stories somewhere amid the minutes of board meetings, the annual reports, the compactus full of files, and the tales of the many employees. However, the historian must tease out these stories and then, can recount only one at a time. This is the challenge. The manner in which they address it becomes the measure of the historians and their craft.

It is not good enough for a historian simply to present a mass of historical data. Such material is useless unless it is interpreted because not all items of historical information are of equal value. Nor is it sufficient for the historian to be content with a chronicle of what happened, because a chronicler or journalist can do this just as well. Instead, the historian's task is to explain why things happened, when, and in the manner that they did. In order to do so, historians must discriminate between the pieces of data that they wish to use in accordance with the needs of the story that s/he wishes to tell. There is always some information that is fundamental to the explanation, and additional information that is helpful, while there is yet much more that might be useful, or conversely, of such little consequence that it is irrelevant. The historian must choose.

All history is contrived, with aspects of the past being interpreted by the historian. It cannot be otherwise. However, historians are aware of this and they try to ensure that the story they tell is honest and internally consistent and does not ignore information that runs counter to the story that they hope to tell. Instead this information must be woven into the story and complementary data found to explain it.

The histories reflect the historians' background, training, interests, prejudice and, even bias. However, the professional is aware of this, acknowledges the fact, and takes steps to minimise its impact. This is why history should be undertaken by trained professionals.



D&A's Scope of Work

Donovan & Associates continues to be very busy. This helps explain, but not excuse, the belated issuing of this *News*.

The history of the De La Salle Brothers in Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand has moved forward to the production stage with its launch anticipated before Christmas.

Similarly, the manuscript for the history of Tip Top Bakeries has been completed and is about to go forward to the production stage. It is also expected to be launched later in the year.

D&A has garnered additional work at the Salisbury Defence Site in South Australia. Late in 2000 we were asked to undertake the architectural recording of those buildings to be demolished as part of redevelopment work on the site. That project has been completed, with the final report being submitted on CD-Rom as well as in hard copy. Since then we have commenced a new contract on the site. This time we have been commissioned to update the Conservation Management Plan for the

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site that was originally undertaken in 1994. The recent history of the site has involved physical changes of such an extent as to require a new conservation management plan to ensure that heritage elements are not lost inadvertently. This project will continue until September 2001.

Our contract with the Attorney-General's Department concluded in November 2000, though we have been asked to undertake incidental work since. The hearing of South Australia's first native title claim began in the Federal Court on 4 June 2001.

Donovan & Associates has begun work on two small commissioned histories since the previous *News*. The first of these is a history of the real estate firm, Jackman & Treloar which celebrates its centenary in 2001. The second commission is for a small publication to commemorate the first 20 years of the Engineering Employers' Association Training Scheme.

D&A completed two short projects for the City of Port Augusta during the latter part of 2000. The first of these was a re-assessment of the heritage significance of the former primary school following public submissions on plans to redevelop the site. The second project involved research into the location of Minchin's Wells at Stirling North. The wells were sunk by Sub-Protector of Aborigines, Henry Minchin, at his ration depot in 1853.

Real History: Jackman & Treloar

Donovan & Associates is once again writing 'real' history. Peter Donovan and Alison Painter wrote a history of the South Australia Real Estate Institute, *Real History*, in 1990. **D&A** was recently commissioned to write a short history of the real estate firm of Jackman & Treloar. Our earlier works means that **D&A** approached the task with a thorough understanding of the industry.

Jackman & Treloar commenced in 1901, the year of Australia's federation. It suffered many vicissitudes as the Australian economy and the real estate industry waxed and waned during the past century. The firm prospered during the early years of the twentieth century when it was responsible for developing several of Adelaide's eastern suburbs. Injudicious lending at the end of the boom period that followed World War I meant that it nearly succumbed during the depression. However, with attention to economy and a supportive bank, Jackman & Treloar managed to trade out of its difficulties. Prosperity returned in the years after World War II.

Jackman & Treloar has had several changes of ownership, but has continued to be regarded as one of the premier real estate firms in South Australia. Four of the principals have served as presidents of the Real Estate Institute including Trevor Dunsford, the present owner. He, with Ian Bromell, acquired the business in 1987 precisely because of its high public profile and solid reputation so that it could become the flagship business under the Nationwide Realty franchise.

Such a long and successful history has brought significant repeat business. A Federation villa on a double allotment at Glenunga became something of a favourite with Jackman & Treloar and was sold by the firm on five occasions between 1980 and 1990. The first auction took place following a meeting between its owners and Trevor Dunsford's mother at the Burnside Bowling Club. The vendors were only the second occupants of the house since it was built in 1901. Ian Bromell bought the house for \$54,000 at the second Jackman & Treloar sale in 1981 before he became associated with Trevor Dunsford or the firm. He renovated and landscaped the villa and added a pool, then leased it out while he became Dunsford Bromell's property manager in Perth. Then, in 1988, he sold it for \$444,000. It was sold again in 1989 with the new vendor also making a profit. At another sale the following year the price dropped by \$5000, but Jackman & Treloar secured the fifth commission on the property.



Digging up the Past

Both **Barry Rowney** and **Ruth Donovan** have recently returned to Australia after seven weeks working on an archaeological site in northern Syria. The site overlooks the River Euphrates to the northeast of Aleppo, beyond the village of Manbij. The ruined site was once that of a prosperous city founded by the Romans to facilitate trade with regions further to the east.

Barry has been visiting the site for many years. His chief tasks have been pegging out the trenches and measuring and drawing significant buildings. Ruth was invited to join the team this year to supervise excavation in one of the trenches in the domestic quarter of the site: the actual digging is undertaken by local people from a nearby village.

The daily regimen is a strict one. Work on the site begins early each morning and continues until lunchtime. The afternoon is given over to curating and documenting any excavated material. However, it was not all work, with provision being made to visit Aleppo regularly and the opportunity being made available at the midway point of the dig to visit other places of interest in northern Syria.



Far left above: Barry on the site, having pegged out one of the trenches.

Above: Ruth with one of the local women who worked on the site. The River Euphrates is in the background.

Left: Ruth with another Australian, James, on the site: Barry is on the extreme left.

People

Mary-Louise Geyer continues to work with D&A. Most recently she has been particularly concerned with researching and writing the Jackman & Treloar history and that of the Engineering Employers' Association Training Scheme.

D&A has engaged four consultants to assist with the updating of the Salisbury Defence Site conservation management plan. **Iris Iwanicki** is providing advice on the manner in which local government and the Development Act may be used to encourage conservation; **Greg Drew** is providing practical advice to assist with the interpretation of the site to visitors; **Vivienne Wood** is advising on the conservation of Aboriginal associations with the site; and **Barry Rowney** is providing architectural expertise.

Ruth Donovan, recently returned from an archaeological dig in Syria, is to leave D&A temporarily to take up a scholarship at the University of Western Australia to complete a PhD in history. She is keen to study the manner in which opportunities have arisen for historians to practice outside tertiary teaching institutions.

In March 2001 **June and Peter Donovan** led members of the Historical Society of South Australia on a walk around parts of Adelaide to look at significant examples of stained and painted glass.

Plain Words

Those of us at **Donovan & Associates** like to consider ourselves as 'expert generalists' who may be called upon to write about all manner of subjects. The challenge of this is to ensure that our readers understand what we write. Thus, we were amused to find the following exhortation in South Australia's *Register* of 5 July 1917.

In promulgating your esoteric cogitations, or articulating your superficial sentimentalities and amicable philosophical or psychological observations, beware of platitudinous ponderosity.

Let your conversational communications possess a clarified conciseness, a compact comprehensibleness, coalescent consistency, and a concatenated cogency. Eschew all conglomerations or flatulent garrulity, jejune babblement, and asinine affectations. Let your extemporaneous descantings and unpremeditated expatiations have intelligibility and voracious vivacity without rhodomontade or phrasmycal bombast.

Sedulously avoid all polysyllabic profundity, pompous prolixity, psittaceous vacuity, ventriloquial verbosity and ventriloquent vapidness.

In other words, talk plainly, briefly, naturally, sensibly.

Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do not use big words.

We at D&A try to follow this advice.

MY NEW BOOK - 80,000
WORDS AND NOT ONE
OF THEM WITH MORE
THAN TWO SYLLABLES..



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



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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