

# Donovan News

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

## Historians are worthy of their hire

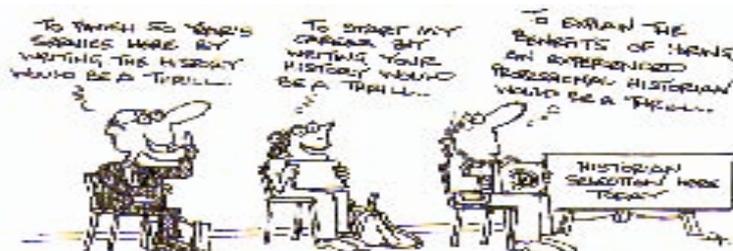
A regular theme of the *Donovan News* is the need for agencies to exercise due caution when engaging a historian, as they would when contracting for other professional services: the least expensive option might not always be the best. Long-time employees know a great deal about an organisation, but their knowledge may not be necessarily very broad nor objective; students might be inexpensive, but may lack the experience required.

The need for caution became evident recently after Donovan & Associates was commissioned to write a history of COMCAR. This is the Commonwealth government's car-with-driver service that provides chauffeured transport for the Governor-General, all Commonwealth ministers and politicians when on parliamentary business, members of the judiciary and government guests.

COMCAR's idea was to have the history for the centenary of the Commonwealth's acquisition of the first motor car for the use of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, which was believed to be in 1908. The date had been derived from an earlier attempt to record the history. In that instance, the decision had been made to employ a recent history graduate but then provide little time for the project. The historian did a good job within the time constraints. However, the early history referred to a third-hand account indicating that Fisher acquired the car soon after coming to power and noted that Fisher became Prime Minister in November 1908. This led readers to assume that Fisher acquired the car soon afterwards.

The 1908 date did not ring true to D&A: there was little time to acquire the car that year, and the Labor government lost office in May 1909. Indeed, it seemed more logical that Fisher might have acquired the vehicle after returning to power following elections on 13 April 1910. Other evidence pointed to the same conclusion. Finally, searches in the Melbourne daily, *The Argus*, put the issue beyond doubt. The newspaper on 11 June 1910 recorded the acquisition of the car — a four-cylinder 1910-model Renault — for Prime Minister Fisher in June 1910. The newspaper described the car as 'fitted with a special colonial model torpedo body painted in myrtle-green, picked out with fine red lines ... The car is capable of developing a speed of over 50 miles an hour.'

COMCAR has gained by having the error corrected, but also the lack of pressure to have a publication in 2008 will result in a more considered history. The organisation has certainly saved itself from any embarrassment by celebrating a centenary in 2008, when this will be only its 98th anniversary.



## D&A's Scope of Work

D&A continues to be busy with several projects completed and new ones begun.

One completed project is D&A's history of Australian defence science since 1907. This is currently being prepared for publication and will be available soon.

Our history of agricultural settlement on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, based on the reminiscences of Morris Wake, is at a similar stage and will be available prior to Christmas.

Our collaborative project with Bernard O'Neil, namely, a history of the Friends of the State Library of South Australia for its 75th anniversary is to be launched in November.

In the meantime, the History Trust of South Australia called upon D&A to undertake a short oral history of the Electrolux dishwasher factory at Regency Park. The factory had been established by the Simpson company, but after successive changes of ownership was being closed as part of Electrolux's worldwide rationalisation program. The factory was the only one in Australia making dishwashers when it closed.

More recently, D&A has been commissioned to undertake another series of interviews for the Don Dunstan Foundation.

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## Dog days

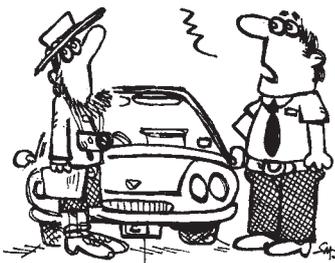
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Peter Donovan presented papers at two conferences during the year. He spoke on the history of coursing in South Australia at the State History Conference at Tanunda in early August and he spoke on business history at the Australian Historical Association conference in Armidale, NSW, in late September.



Ruth Donovan, who worked for a time with Donovan & Associates, graduated from the University of Western Australia with a PhD earlier this year. Her thesis examined the history of Public History in Australia. She has since taken a position as National Environmental Manager with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation and is based at Edinburgh in South Australia.

Actually, COMCAR  
drivers are those  
who keep the wheels  
of government  
turning.



Coursing in South Australia has the longest history of any Australian state. The first public coursing event in Australia was held at Naracoorte, South Australia, in June 1867. This informal affair was organised by a group of local people after attending a kangaroo hunt. The coursing involved wallabies rather than hares and the breed of the dogs is uncertain. Still, the Naracoorte Coursing Club — the first in Australia — was formally established in 1868, with the club conducting a 16-dog stake known as the Waterloo Cup.

William Gilbert of Pewsey Vale, in the Barossa Valley, was generally credited with importing the first hares to South Australia in the early 1870s. These were released near Corryton Park, near Mount Crawford. The South Australian Coursing Club was formed in June 1875, with leading colonist Sir John Morphett as President. The club's first meeting, at Corryton Park, comprised three events over two days. Eight dogs contested the South Australian Cup with six dogs contesting each of the Ladies' Purse and Puppy Stakes.

The annual Waterloo Cup became South Australia's premier coursing event. The first Waterloo Cup meeting — using hares — took place at Buckland Park, northwest of Adelaide, on 19–20 June 1884. The meeting was organised by the SA Coursing Club with 24 dogs entered at 10 sovereigns each. The winner received £80, a trophy and an oil portrait; the runner-up received £40 and the third dog £20.

Most South Australian country towns of any consequence had coursing clubs and conducted one or two meetings a year. A meeting was easy to arrange: no infrastructure was required and it was simply a matter of gaining permission of a local landowner to use his property. The major coursing events attracted large crowds. Seven hundred people attended the second day of the Waterloo Cup in 1911; the next year 1500 witnessed the win of Yankee Grit.

Live-hare coursing became problematic after World War II because of seasonal conditions, a scarcity of hares, and the decline in country populations that undermined the viability of clubs. There were 59 registered clubs in 1948 but, 20 years later, less than half that number. Moreover, there continued to be growing opposition to live-hare coursing from those opposed to cruelty to animals. The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985* ended live-hare coursing in South Australia: the last legal live-hare coursing meeting was at Mintaro on 28–29 July 1986.



Above: Patrons at a coursing meeting, featuring the judge on horseback. (SLSA, PRG 280-1-36-161)



Right: Yankee Grit, the winner of the 1912 Waterloo Cup with the trainer and owners.

## Driving governments

COMCAR, an important government agency, has antecedents extending back to June 1910 when Prime Minister Andrew Fisher had the government acquire a motor car for his use and that of his ministers. Entitlement to use the car-with-driver service extended over time. The so-called VIP service focused on the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, ministers, other federal parliamentarians, the judiciary, and guests of government. A 'business-class' service was available to senior public servants, while an 'economy-class' service, akin to that provided by taxis, served other bureaucrats and clients of departments such as the Repatriation Department. Government emphasis on economic rationalism since the mid-1980s has seen COMCAR return to a VIP service only, with a significant change in the agency's culture as casual drivers rather than permanent employees have become the norm.

A feature of COMCAR has been its association with significant events in Australia's history. Commonwealth cars and their drivers were part of the pageantry associated with the opening of the provisional Parliament House in Canberra in 1927 by the Duke of York and that of the new Parliament House by his daughter, Queen Elizabeth in 1988. The cars and drivers have been associated with Australia's Olympic and Commonwealth Games. The June 1966 shooting of federal Opposition Leader, Arthur Calwell, occurred while he was in a Commonwealth car: drivers were providing services to delegates to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting at the time of the Hilton Hotel bombing in Sydney on 13 February 1978: and the bombing of the home of a Family Court judge in 1984 occurred while a driver was waiting to collect the judge.

Providing transport for distinguished visitors to Australia is a high profile feature of the service with COMCAR drivers being at the interface between visitors and the Australian community. The changing nature of these special visits reflects the changing political role of Australia in the region and the world. Royal Family members were once the most distinguished of government guests, and their visits often extended over long periods and included all states, with major logistical implications for those organising these visits: modern royal visits are generally shorter and devoted to specific events. During the same period there has been an increase in the number of distinguished visitors and other heads of state, perhaps the most significant of these being American President Lyndon Johnson in October 1966. COMCAR has also served delegates to major regional and world gatherings, such as the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000 and the APEC Leaders' meeting in Sydney in September 2007, that have underscored the nation's growing influence in world affairs.

The history of COMCAR provides a unique insight into Australia's political and social history.



*Women drivers and their vehicles at the light fleet depot, Maribyrnong, 1942.*



*President Lyndon Johnson's visit to Government House, Melbourne, October 1966.*



*The Queen and Prince Philip visiting Melbourne, 1977.*



*The Prince and Princess of Wales in Melbourne, 1983.*

## Faith, Families, Farms and Football

The story recounted by Moss Wake, and to be published late in 2007, covers four generations of the Wake family, beginning with the voyage of Edwin Wake and his three brothers to South Australia and their arrival on 2 May 1865. The story is essentially a history of South Australian agriculture since then. Edwin took up land about Templers, immediately north of Adelaide, later moved to the area about Merriton as land became available there, and then moved to Elbow Hill, on Eyre Peninsula, as that area became available for agricultural settlement.

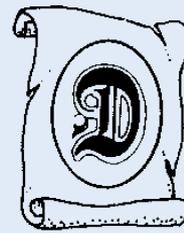
Edwin's sons established farms and families of their own on Eyre Peninsula. Cecil King Wake, Moss' father, began farming near Elbow Hill and went share farming at Cortlinye, near Kimba, before taking up a farm of his own near Buckleboo. Moss Wake followed a similar career. He began share farming at Waddikee, south of Kimba, after returning from World War II Army service, then acquired his own farm at Darke Peak and here raised his family.

The family moved to Adelaide in 1971 after Moss' first wife died, but several of the children have returned to the land: eldest son Michael has acquired three large properties on Eyre Peninsula — near Cummins, Darke Peak and Buckleboo — and now farms on a scale far greater than that of his father, though still contending with similar problems because of the seasons and the environment.

The personal history recounts the changing fortunes and social lives of those on the land. The changing technologies and scale of farming are highlighted by the photographs below which depict contemporary sowing technologies on the family farms in the 1920s and 2007.



Copy editing of *Donovan News* is by **Bernard O'Neil**.  
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 mainland 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  
e-mail: [donovanassociates@bigpond.com](mailto:donovanassociates@bigpond.com)