

Donovan News

Number 40

Winter 2008

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

Putting 'I' in History

The television program *Who do you think you are?* proved to be very popular, even with people who would not normally have expressed much interest in history, let alone something as esoteric as genealogy. Yet the series tapped into the desire of people to know something of their origins. One of those featured in the series made the telling point that 'history had taken on a whole new dimension once it had become personal'.

Personalising history is a key aim of **Donovan & Associates'** endeavours. The firm has specialised in corporate histories and counts many major corporations and organisations among its clients. The histories of these organisations concentrate on the people who have helped establish, invigorate and work for these organisations rather than their economic history or list of achievements — though these aspects are also featured. People relate to others and prefer to read about them rather than philosophies, programs or systems; they like to read about themselves, what they and their colleagues have achieved, and how they relate to an organisation.

Every organisation has its heroes and a corporate history is a way of acknowledging them. Those who establish an organisation, set its course and build its culture are generally exceptional people with interesting stories that help explain the the organisation's origins. Bert Baulderstone, an Adelaide builder, had the energy and determination to establish a major construction firm. Jim Roche was the driving force behind the the growth of Roche Bros from a small Victorian transport company to a major civil engineering group. Bert Baulderstone and Jim Roche were the public and human personalities behind their companies, and people worked for them rather than their companies.

But others are generally required to ensure that organisations outlive their founders. Bob Mierisch was the one who fostered the change necessary to transform AW Baulderstone into the national construction giant Baulderstone Hornibrook. Henry d'Assumpcao, who had worked all his life for the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, was the one who promoted radical change to ensure the organisation's continued vitality.

Heroes are to be found throughout an organisation. Dr David Warren never aspired to be Chief Defence Scientist, but brought great renown to Australia's Aeronautical Research Laboratory after inventing the 'black box flight recorder', though senior management did not appreciate its value at the time and failed to capitalise on its development.

People make history. Some people make decisions that affect the lives of others, whether in political, corporate or community life. Understanding people and their motivations are means of understanding history. This explains why biographies represent a popular form of writing and documentary making. This is why people should figure prominently in the history of any company or organisation. Readers readily appreciate history when they can understand how and why they are involved personally.



D&A's Scope of Work

D&A continues to be busy with several projects completed and new ones begun since the previous *News*.

Anticipating Tomorrow's Defence Needs: A Century of Australian Defence Science, written by Peter Donovan, has been published. See page 4.

Moss Wake: Faith, Families, Farms and Football, Moss Wake's recollections of his life, assisted by June and Peter Donovan and produced by **D&A**, was published before Christmas 2007. It recently won the TT Reed Award of the South Australian Genealogy and Heraldry Society for the best book with an ISBN published in 2007. See page 4.

Our collaborative project with Bernard O'Neil, *For the Love of Books: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 1932–2007*, was also published late in 2007. See page 4.

Our history of COMCAR, the federal government's chauffeur-driven car service, has been intermitted, with the idea that it be completed in 2010 to mark 100 years of the organisation, rather than 2008 which had mistakenly been considered the centenary year of its establishment. The story behind the mistake featured in the previous *News*.

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The History Trust of South Australia called upon **D&A** once again to undertake a short oral history program focused on an important South Australian industry that was about to close, in this instance the Mitsubishi car plant at Tonsley Park in Adelaide. See the story on this page.

D&A's experience with corporate history prompted the National Library of Australia to engage Peter Donovan to undertake a series of oral history interviews of leaders in Australia's financial industry. So far interviews have been conducted with Bob White, (former general manager of Westpac) and Charles Rennie (former general manager of the ANZ Banking Group). Maurice Newman (chairman of the Australian Stock Exchange and former chairman of the ABC) has agreed to be interviewed.

D&A has been commissioned to prepare a concept management plan for housing, displaying and interpreting safe-working equipment at the National Railway Museum at Port Adelaide. This follows the need to relocate equipment from the West Torrens Railway Signal, Telegraph and Aviation Museum which has closed.

D&A is once again involved in heritage studies. The firm is well advanced on surveys of two local government areas, with the object of identifying places of local heritage value. In both instances this represents repeat business.

D&A has also been asked to assess the preservation needs of the West Torrens Historical Society's collection.

The firm's latest commission is to write a history of National Pharmacies.

History as it happens

Historians generally record and interpret the past well after the event. However, **Donovan & Associates** was present to help record the last vehicles coming from the assembly line of Mitsubishi Motors in Adelaide. The History Trust of South Australia was keen to record some of the company's history upon its closure and commissioned **D&A** to undertake a series of interviews with employees during the company's final days.

D&A conducted ten interviews over five weeks. Interviewees included men and women, Australian-born and migrant workers, tradespeople and management. Some were longtime employees, who had worked for Chrysler at its Keswick plant, and who were able to comment on changing work practices since that time. The program succeeded in providing a detailed account of life within a significant sector of Australia's vehicle-building industry.



Some of the last Mitsubishi 380 vehicles on the assembly line. Above, immediately after side panels had been attached to the chassis, and right, immediately after the dash panel had been installed.



The media were invited to record the last Mitsubishi 380s leaving the assembly line on 27 March 2008 and gave special attention to the very last of these.

Personalising history

Interest in genealogy is thriving. The South Australian Genealogy and Heraldry Society has a membership of about 3000. Some historians disparage genealogy as mere antiquarianism. Yet the numbers demonstrate that learning about their forebears is what attracts many people to history. A major attraction is that genealogy enables them to personalise history. Indeed, genealogy and associated historical research can be an ideal means of gathering insights into significant historical events and issues.

Joseph Hitch is not a name to be found in many history books. He was but one of innumerable British migrants to seek his fortune in South Australia in the nineteenth century, yet he and his descendants have been associated with key issues and movements in South Australia's history.

The migration story is a fundamental part of Australia's history. Joseph had been born in Ely, Cambridgeshire, where successive generations had lived. He decided to migrate to the other side of the world. He had been born in 1834 and as a young man worked as an agricultural labourer like his father. Access to land of his own would have been difficult to achieve:



Joseph and Mary Hitch with eldest daughter, Mary Ann.

the promises made by agents of the London-based Colonial Land Fund and Emigration Commission seeking migrants to travel to South Australia were appealing. He had married in 1853, and with his wife, Mary, and two young daughters arrived in South Australia in April 1857. He and his family were precisely the type of migrants desired by the government to settle the land.

Joseph eventually achieved the promised material success in the colony after taking advantage of ready access to credit to enable him to acquire land in the colony's Mid North and be part of the agricultural expansion through that region.

Yet colonial life encompassed more than economic endeavour. Joseph's life in the colony also exemplified important aspects of its social history. He would have been mortified when his eldest daughter left home, became pregnant to the son of a Baptist missionary, was abandoned by her lover, and was sent by Port Lincoln police to Adelaide's Destitute Asylum. Joseph and Mary took their daughter home immediately after learning of her circumstances. Her son was born in 1872, but she died two years later, leaving Joseph and Mary to raise the child as their own. Tragedy continued with

this grandson committing suicide after missing out on the affection of a woman to a rival.



Francis and Nora Hitch.

Religion was important to men such as Joseph, with each Sunday and the major religious feasts marking the passage of time. A staunch Protestant, he never forgave his son Francis for marrying a Catholic, Nora O'Dea, and left him only one shilling in his will.

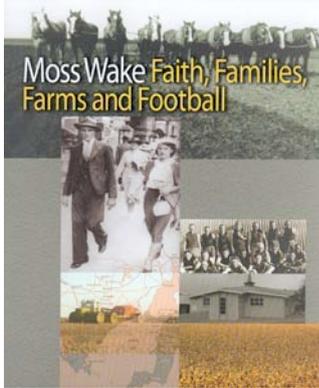
Ill-luck continued to dog the family. Francis' eldest daughter Molly left home

when a young woman, but returned soon after to give birth to a daughter. She left this daughter in the care of her parents and sought work in Broken Hill, then still a raw mining town. Here she met and married William Butler in 1914. Misfortune continued. Molly gave birth to a second child in 1915, but contracted typhoid and died late in 1916. Francis' wife Nora took on the care of her grand-daughter, but the toddler drowned in a pond on the farm only four months after her mother had died. Butler, a Boer War veteran, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force soon afterwards: being a Broken Hill miner, he was assigned to a tunnelling company. He never saw action. He contracted bronchitis while *en route* to England, was hospitalised soon after disembarking, and died in August 1918. He was buried in Melcombe Regis cemetery, with other Australian and allied soldiers.

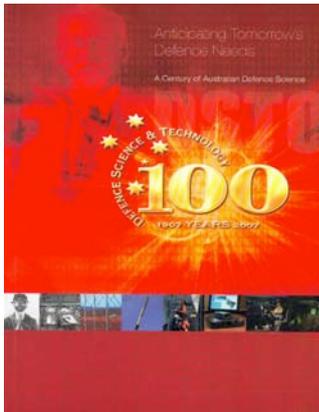
Genealogy and family history is often dismissed because of a perceived obsession with detail. But this is precisely its attraction and value. Family history personalises major events and movements in history and can offer insights into issues that cannot be provided by historians concerned with the broad sweep of history. Well researched and written family history is a valuable resource for those primarily concerned with the big issues, because it provides them with the detail with which to underpin their histories.

New publications

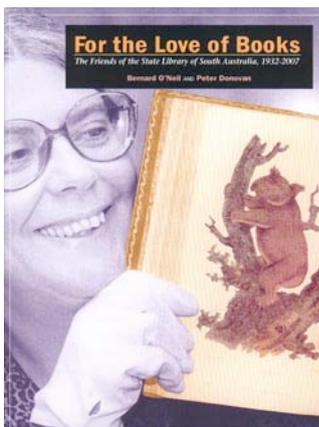
Three new books by **D&A** have been published since the previous *News*. The books are distributed by the publishers.



Moss Wake: Faith, Families, Farms and Football, was written by June and Peter Donovan, produced by Donovan & Associates, and published by Mike Wake & Associates, North Adelaide, SA. The book is hardback, measures 280 mm x 210 mm, has xii + 188 pages, is illustrated in colour, and has a bibliography and index.

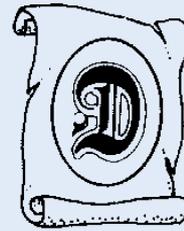


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Copy editing of *Donovan News* is by **Bernard O'Neil**.
Cartoons are by **Stephen Stanley**.



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

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