

PROSPECT LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

CLIC Reference Group

Summary of Visits to See Other History Collections

Introduction

Over the last few weeks I have visited three venues to talk about their history collections:

- City of Norwood Payneham and St Peters (NPSP) - Denise Schumann, Cultural Heritage Adviser
- Town of Gawler - Mayor Karen Redman
- Parliamentary Library - Dr John Weste, Parliamentary Librarian and Ms Anna Graves, Manager Research Services

All three visits were productive.

City of Norwood Payneham and St Peters

This Council has a Cultural Heritage Service which incorporates its local history collection. Cultural heritage services encompass the provision of specialist cultural heritage facilities, historical research services, integrated heritage planning, heritage collections management, cultural heritage public programs, cultural heritage tourism services and cultural heritage place-making.

The Council has developed a Collections Heritage Management policy that governs the administration of its heritage collection – this includes significant artworks, artefacts, photographs, memorabilia, archives, books, textiles and costumes etc. This is catalogued using an excel asset data base where each item is registered, accessioned and documented. The photographic collection is digitised but access is via relevant collections staff - it is not uploaded to a website.

The Cultural Heritage Service helps the community to understand, celebrate and benefit from its rich and distinctive history. The Service has a close working relationship with Council planning staff and provides an historical research service to them to assist in assessment of development applications. There is also space for exhibitions, including temporary exhibitions.

A prime driver of this new strategy was the recognition that cultural heritage has a substantial economic benefit to the community of around \$4 for every dollar invested by Council.

I estimate that the total space allocated to this service comes to around 150 square metres, including historical records, local history collection, offices, exhibition spaces and storage.

I have written to Prospect Council suggesting they invite Ms Schumann to address a Council workshop on the topic of cultural heritage.

Town of Gawler

The Town of Gawler is currently revamping its State-Heritage-listed Town Hall and Institute, which have been neglected for some years, at a cost of \$14.3 million, including a Commonwealth grant of \$5.6 million. There will be a new library, new cultural heritage centre, exhibition space, performance space, business innovation hub and café.

Like NPStP, Gawler has chosen to create a Cultural Heritage Service which incorporates and builds on local history.

Total space to be allocated to the Cultural Heritage Service is very generous.

Gawler have created a Gawler Heritage Collection Committee which reports to the Elected Members (a Section 41 Committee) and this provides advice direct to Elected Members as well as to the architect eg in regard to lighting, cabinets, colours.

Council is developing a Collections Policy - to assess potential donations from the community.

The Cultural Heritage Service is being seen as a huge drawcard for Gawler and will provide substantial economic benefits.

Parliamentary Library

The Parliamentary Library exists primarily to meet the research and information needs of Members of Parliament. It is also one of two Libraries of Deposits in SA, the other being the State Library.

The Parliamentary Library has a very substantial collection of historical records including maps, old surveying plans and various documents, as well as a rare book collection.

I was particularly impressed by the balance struck between preservation and display in a warm, comfortable and inviting environment, where much use is made of carpeting and wooden furniture and fittings. I loved the display cabinets.

Some items have been digitised but the originals are retained - after all, digitised records are also fragile and not necessarily immortal. Computer files can become damaged and corrupted.

I don't have a number for the space allocation but it is very generous.

I was also impressed by the use made of electronic displays incorporating touch screen operation. These provide a large amount of current and historical information not only about parliament and the electoral system but also about South Australia's history. This is a feature I would love to see utilised in Prospect.

Ms Anna Graves, who is a member of Prospect Local History Group, works at the Parliamentary Library and would be a good contact. She has offered to host a tour for the CLIC Reference Group if we desire one.

Take Home Messages

The conclusions are reached from these visits are:

- A framework of Cultural Heritage is a good way to go, and local history should be viewed within this context
- Cultural heritage has an economic value and should be seen as an asset not a liability
- A warm, inviting, comfortable and sound-dampening environment is best for the enjoyment of users
- Wood is an excellent material for use in the local history environment as it creates a pleasant, historical ambience
- Ample space is required to do the job properly
- Digitisation complements original documents rather than replacing them, and allows more flexible and accessible use
- Touch-screen electronic displays are an exciting idea which will engage people's attention and enable easy access to documents and audio-visual items

David Kilner
Convenor
Prospect Local History Group
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