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SA Incorporated:
Why and how the northern
'family' worked for so long

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SA Incorporated: Why and how the northern 'family' worked for so long

A centralised, partly-informal, benign and largely successful public/private partnership for the exploration, development, administration and support of South Australia's pastoral lands has existed for over 130 years.

In the flurry of legislative and organisational change that is accompanying the introduction of Integrated Natural Resource Management into the pastoral lands of South Australia, it should be remembered that most of the administrative arrangements that are being rationalised, or are to be rationalised, have only come into existence in the last 35 years.

The Water Resources Act, for instance, that mandated the first Arid Areas Advisory Committee, was passed in 1976 and with the revision of the Act the Arid Areas Catchment Water Management Board in 2000. It wasn't until the late 1980s that the pastoral soil conservation districts were proclaimed following the enactment of the Soil Conservation and Landcare Act, 1989. In that same year the Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act, that drives the current emphases within the State Pastoral Program, came into force. Within the last few years there has again been a push for change to integration of natural resource management and the amalgamation of water, soil, and pests under the new Natural Resource Management Act and the formation of the South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board. There are discussions underway to integrate the State Pastoral Program into the mix in some way. The community/government interface continues to change and evolve. Whether this results in better outcomes for people and the country remains to be seen.

The last 35 years have also witnessed a remarkable upsurge in infrastructure and governance development in the outback. In the same year that the first water advisory committee was formed, opal mining started at Mintabie. Earlier in 1970 Oraparinna Station became the Flinders Ranges National Park, and the original block of the Gammon Ranges National Park was acquired from the Yankaninna Run. In 1978 the Outback Areas Community Development Trust was legislatively empowered and in 1980 the new standard gauge railway to Alice Springs was opened, and Marree and Oodnadatta were bypassed.

In 1981 the immense Pitjantjatjara Lands Grant was made. One year later the Stuart Highway was re-aligned and sealed, Marla and Glendambo were surveyed and established, Kingoonya was bypassed and local government came to Coober Pedy. The following year saw the opening of regional offices at Port Augusta by the then Department of Agriculture and the Departments of Environment and Planning and Lands. In that same year two regional advisers were co-located with the Department of Agriculture to work with outback and local communities on pest plant and pest animal control issues. Two years later in 1984 the Maralinga Tjarutja Grant was made.

In 1984 also Balcanoona Station was acquired to form the current configuration of the Gammon Ranges Park, Mt Dare Station was acquired in 1985 to protect the Dalhousie GAB Springs, and in that same year the Lake Eyre National Park (comprising Lake Eyre North and South and parts of the Tirari Desert to the east) was proclaimed. In the following year Wilpena Station was purchased from the Hunt family to be linked in 1988 with old Oraparinna and Wilpena Pound (which had been held by the government since 1921, first as a Forest Reserve and later as a National Pleasure Resort) to form the current Flinders Ranges National Park configuration.

In terms of its indenture with the SA Government, Roxby Downs became a local government area in 1987, while in 1988 the Simpson Desert Regional Reserve and Conservation Park and the Innamincka Regional Reserve (previously S Kidman and Co's Innamincka Run) were proclaimed. Three years later, in 1991, the network of conservation reservations in the far

north was completed with the proclamations of the Strzelecki and Lake Frome Regional Reserves and the Lake Torrens and Lake Gairdner National Parks.¹

On a count-back from 1970

Over the past 130 years, since Edward John Eyre made his first forays into the north and west, the arid pastoral lands were explored, developed, governed and operated under a very different system. In the best sense of the phrase it was 'SA Outback Incorporated'. It was family and it was 'fit for purpose'. It could only have happened in South Australia.

It is necessary to go back to the very start in order to understand the emergence of the system. The system had its genesis in pre-settlement decisions made to ensure that the unfortunate experiences with transported convict settlement and availability of free land that had occurred in New South Wales and Western Australia were not repeated in SA. Colonial settlement in SA was the result of years of planning in England by a group known as the Systematic Colonists that practiced the theory of its leader Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield had a vision for a country systematically settled by young enthusiasts, prudent in their ventures, liberal in their minds and unhampered by the burdens of the English social class system. His general theory of colonisation based on closer settlement was aimed at ensuring that the situation in England at the time was not repeated in the new colony: 'the evils (exist) of too many people for the amount of land and great wealth in the hands of a few'. In essence, the vision for South Australia was that there would be Wakefield's systematic colonisation with no transportation of convicts and no free grants of land.

Wakefield and his band of supporters set out single-mindedly to pursue a scheme of land sales and emigration based on the fundamental principles that alienation and settlement of land should be restricted to keep pace with the growth of population, and moreover that this should be done to develop productive enterprises for all with minimum interference from government. They designed their new settlement system in England, based on English land values and farming practices, and buoyed by the belief that it could be successfully operated in a very different country.

The Province of South Australia was actually established by an Act passed in 1834 in the British Parliament that allowed a Governor to be appointed together with a body of commissioners to finance the colony. The Act was a compromise between the aspiration of those novel principles of colonisation and the Home Office for governance plans for the new colony. Wakefield and his colleagues wanted scope for development essentially free from government interference while the Home office wanted to control the benefits of the new Republic and the capacity to avoid the cost of establishment. A compromise system was finally agreed upon where the administration of land sales and emigration was entrusted to semi-independent commissioners who were, above all, to ensure that the new settlement did not become a burden on Treasury.

The British Exchequer, however, still refused money. Then entered the first of the private interests that were to be significant in the exploration and development of SA in the person of Newcastle coachbuilder and canny businessman George Fife Angas. He formed the South Australian Company with sufficient working capital (£ 320 000) and himself as Chairman. The South Australian Act was revised in 1838 in an attempt to meet the aspirations of the land company and those of the Home Office. By 1841, it became clear that the powers of the Commissioners were untenable within the powers of the Crown. The Act was repealed and the colonial experiment was abandoned. A Governor was appointed by the Crown and

¹ Even within the escalation of formal administrative arrangements that took effect in the outback since 1970, the expansion of the conservation reserve system is a standout. Largely as a result of the push and energy of a visionary National Parks and Wildlife Director, Bruce Leaver, eight huge reserves encompassing 8.5 million hectares were added to the outback reserve system between 1985 and 1991.

charged with establishing a system of parliamentary laws and governance. However, Wakefield and his supporters, several of whom were key figures in the new SA Colonial government, still claimed that his principles had not been compromised and that South Australia would continue to grow based on ‘the Wakefield System’.

Well before the first ship arrived at Holdfast Bay in 1836, the SA Company was active. A considerable amount of land was sold in London before any settlers started out, and the need for survey to identify the parcels sold saw Colonel William Light being sent out ahead of the ships carrying government officers. By 1836 the SA Company had also acquired and sent out four vessels, including two whalers, and had established a small settlement on Kangaroo Island. With the arrival of Governor John Hindmarsh it became apparent that, like the operation of the SA Company, there was an official expectation that private capital and investment would form part of the exploration and development of the Colony. Original government officers like Fisher, Light and Gilles were all poorly paid, but they were at liberty to engage in private commerce to compensate.

The period of land settlement and the building of industry were driven by continued struggle between speculators and developers who wanted to open up the land and the ponderous, ordered system of survey and development metered out by those supporting the Crown. In fact, it was a system that could be best described as a centralised, partly-informal, benign and largely successful public/private partnership that involved successive governments, land administrations, explorers, water commissioners, the Pastoral Board, stock firms and pastoral houses, banks and finance institutions, and importantly, a large number of individual, Adelaide-based investors and backers. The early system was a system that relied on goodwill, corporate knowledge, administrative longevity, and an eventual general recognition that settled areas solutions might not apply, and that things would have to be done differently in the north. It purposely blurred responsibility lines, it informally coordinated effort, it relied on word and trust, it established lasting relationships – and, by and large, it worked.

Between 1836 and 1860 the flow of settlers to SA included a number of adventurous and entrepreneurial individuals who were looking to benefit from investment and expansion opportunities that would not be available to them in Britain. Because pastoral expansion in SA followed almost on the heels of the explorers and the efforts of explorers, pastoralists and those interested in mining were usually funded or rewarded by both private and government capital, the individuals who travelled north were important partners in the wider ‘company’ that was South Australia.

Initially at least, all the ‘partners’ were hampered by misconceptions about what they were becoming involved in. These resulted mainly from planning undertaken on the other side of the world in total ignorance of the real conditions ‘on the ground’ in South Australia. Some of these misconceptions were embedded in the British-based system of land valuation and production targets that were part of the Wakefield system itself. Lessons about the limitations of the system were learnt at a surprisingly slow rate and were to be costly both in monetary terms and in the long-term effects of settlement and land use on the country.

Before talking briefly about each partnership group and how they operated, it is appropriate to articulate misconceptions about the characteristics of the pastoral country because, until surprisingly recent times, they have underpinned much of the arid lands decision making at all levels.

The misconceptions and the fallouts

Early expansion and settlement into the outer districts of the Colony of South Australia was bedevilled in part by the naïve and mistaken belief that all available land in the Colony was essentially productively similar to that in England or the wetter parts of NSW and Victoria, and that the chief deterrent was distance. From this belief followed the initial view that pastoralism would be a sunset industry in what was to be an agricultural society. Early

immigration to South Australia was synchronised with assisted passage and land sales with the government dependent on returns from the productivity of newly settled lands. The early impact of overstocking on native vegetation was seen as a tolerable precursor to clearing the land for agricultural production in the future. There was an almost complete lack of understanding of the marginality and relative aridity of much of the land that had been taken up, very often, ‘sight unseen’.

The belief that South Australia was to be a society of small farmers was a basic tenet of the Wakefield system. Within the better rainfall areas the general theory of colonisation based on closer settlement worked—at least to the extent that there was no ‘leap frogging’ of settlement as had occurred in both New South Wales and Western Australia’s Swan River Settlement. In the drier, marginal areas, however, the effect was felt for many decades of consequent early policies that limited pastoral occupation to grazing license only (to prevent the outer edge of agricultural expansion from being locked up) and later imposed totally unsustainable minimum stocking rates on leases (to hedge against accumulation and speculation). In some areas the consequential, long-term impact on natural grazing lands is still being addressed today.

The 1851 issue of the first 14-year leases for pastoral purposes at least partly addressed the question of some tenure certainty. But again in response to fears of land being held for speculation, these early leases imposed minimum stocking requirements of 16 ‘great’ cattle or 100 sheep per square mile even on third class land—which effectively included all then known pastoral-grazing lands. And the misconceptions continued even after the 1857–58 drought and the crippling five-year drought of the 1860s. This was despite the fact that the 1860s drought was on a scale never before experienced by settlers from England and its occurrence prompted the commissioning of the then Surveyor-General, George Woodroffe Goyder, to survey the southern extent of the drought-stricken northern country and establish Goyder’s line.

In 1888, when some 21-year pastoral leases issued in 1867 were up for renewal, the government moved to allow them to be subdivided. This again reflected the on-going optimism among private settlers and the government about pastoral lands and the government’s desire to break-up larger holdings in the belief that smaller land-holders would manage better. In 1888, for instance, the large Paratoo Run in the northeast was subdivided and offered in smaller holdings with some disastrous results. The Paratoo offering was also driven in part by an 1884 report that 62% of the colony’s land was held by only a handful of families.

This aggregation of landed interests by relatively few families was, however, to remain a feature of the pastoral districts of the State and in itself goes some way toward explaining the relative ease with which the private-public dealings with pastoral lands took place. Historian Gordon Buxton notes that by 1871 ‘the wealthy had long since picked the eyes out of the State’. At that time there were in SA 12 000 holdings of less than 500 acres and only 200 holdings over 1500 acres. This was said to give 1.7% of the landowners 40.8% of the alienated land.

Efforts to overcome this dichotomy continued into the 20th century. The social engineering and closer settlement efforts made in the pastoral lands were no doubt well-intentioned and driven by some lingering adherences to the Wakefield system, but they were not good for the country. Even after the First World War the government actively supported the cutting up of larger holdings, and high stocking rates were encouraged during the years of reconstruction between 1910 and 1940.

If the misconceptions about the grazing occupancy of pastoral lands were costly, they were matched – and in some cases exceeded – by the extraordinary beliefs that surrounded the northern expansion of land thought to be suitable for cropping.

This advance of agriculture, and its later retreat, is well documented. In reading these accounts one is left with the feeling that something else must have driven the debate because, given that the expansion occurred from 1871 onward – well after the salutary lessons of the 1860s drought should have been ingested – it is difficult to believe that government administrators and settlers could have done what they did. The significance that some settlers and administrators afforded Goyder's 1865 line was clearly not shared by everyone, and it did not stop some early farming incursions well beyond it.

A record harvest in 1870–71 engendered considerable optimism and the government was pressed to open up new areas in what was later to be described and written about as 'the margins of the good earth'. The pressure to go beyond Goyder's line was maintained again after another bumper harvest in 1875 and by 1876 cropping had expanded north and east of Kanyaka.

In order to accommodate the push for expansion, in 1877 the government surveyed and proclaimed 10 new hundreds in the marginal northern areas, including the hundred of Carr at Blinman (although that particular hundred was principally to provide grazing and fodder sections for bullock teamsters carting ore and supplies to and from the central Flinders Ranges copper mines). With the revenue from the sales of survey sections within these hundreds, the government began to consider extending the railway north, and in 1881 it surveyed and proclaimed a series of hundreds abutting north along the western outwashes of the Flinders Ranges, ahead of such a railway. This was done in anticipation of the continuing northward advance of cropping.

Sectional survey stopped near what is now known as Parachilna, as the Parliament debated the agricultural advance into the northern areas. It was a debate that produced some extraordinary rhetoric, including the assertion by the Hon J Carr (after whom the Blinman hundred was named) that 'rain would follow the plough'. Others strongly urged a stop at Goyder's line and, in some cases, a pull back behind it.

The droughts of the early 1900s again reinforced the conservative view and today many of the sections of these far northern hundreds are parts of large grazing properties (stations). The plough has left its mark though, and in many of those old surveyed areas the grazing base is as much annual grass as it is perennial bush. The northern surveys have also left their mark. Most of the areas in hundreds were granted under perpetual lease or freehold and now comprise areas over which the Pastoral Board at least has no mandate to regulate stock numbers. The early surveys explain why, on the road from Hawker to Leigh Creek, the first pastoral lease is not actually entered until you reach Parachilna.

The excursions and retreats into and out of the northern lands initially affected the prospects and livelihood of outback people first, and of governments and agencies in the more settled areas second. The interests of outback enterprises continue to be shared by the people living on the country as well as those in Adelaide and the more populated regional centres. In talking about the 'partners' in the development of the state's pastoral lands, it is appropriate therefore to talk about people first.

The adventurous and the entrepreneurial

Many of the names of the very early individuals who expanded the Colony settlement outwards are familiar, either through place and geographical feature names, or through continuing associations with contemporary business, pastoral or educational institutions. Among those who put their labour or money into the outer districts in the 1850s and into the 1860s were men like John Oakden, John Browne, Samuel Sleep, Price Maurice, John and James Chambers, Philip Levi, John McTaggart, William Marchant, William Finke, Samuel Davenport, the Duttons, the Hawkers, Joseph Gilbert and William Younghusband. Others were to follow them. The names of people like Thomas Elder, Peter Waite, Sydney Kidman and Thomas Barr-Smith are still mentioned almost daily in the context of business,

pastoralism and education. And in more recent times there are the family dynasties that still have interests in significant areas of pastoral land: Kidman, McLachlan, McBride, McTaggart, Oldfield and Crawford.

To give some context to the extent of the pastoral involvement of the early investors, the cases of Philip Levi and the brothers John and James Chambers are instanced. They encapsulate both the risks that were taken and the close links that existed between investors, explorers and the country they were investigating.

Philip Levi came to the Colony of SA, aged 16, in 1838. By 1842 he had taken out 'occupation and de-pasturing licenses' over much of what is now suburban Walkerville and Prospect and encouraged later by the 1851 decision to grant 14-year pastoral leases, he accumulated while all the time combining his pastoral activities with mercantile and commercial pursuits.

Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia, Volume 1 (Adelaide Stock and Station Journal 1925) notes that Levi 'put his heart and soul into opening up the north'. His pastoral operations have been described as being 'on a colossal scale'. At various times and mostly concurrently he held Dustholes (at Truro), Gum Creek, Coffin Bay, Booleroo, Marachowie, Callana, Wadnaminga, Moolooloo, Wirrealpa, Franklin Harbour or Mangalo, Oulnina, North West Bend (at Morgan), Mt Margaret (now The Peake), Bobmonnie and Coconut (on Yorke Peninsula).

He remained a bachelor and made and lost a fortune, the latter due to the combined effects of the great drought of the 1860s and some unfortunate overseas commodity trading.

James Chambers came to the Colony in January 1837 and was followed later that year by his brother John Chambers. They established themselves as carriers and facilitators of mail and gold escort services before turning their interests to pastoral occupation.

From 1845 onward they variously held the Pekina Run, Moolooloo, Wirrealpa (which they transferred to Philip Levi), Oratunga, Chambers or later Stuarts Creek, Bookmark and Chowilla. They took out early grazing licenses on the River Murray near Lake Bonney and later established Cobdogla Station and the Overland Corner Hotel. They were involved with both gold mining in the Adelaide Hills and copper mining in the north Flinders Ranges.

Both brothers, but perhaps John Chambers particularly, had a very close association with John McDouall Stuart and helped finance his first two explorations which, among other things, first recorded the mound springs that were to provide the arc of safety for travel and communication to the north. Stuart named Chambers Creek after the brothers (at Lake Eyre south, not to be confused with Chambers Creek at Barmera, also named after them but not by Stuart) and William Creek after John Chambers' second son.

As a reward for his exploration work, Stuart sought and was granted a lease over the Chambers Creek area at Lake Eyre South. This was later transferred to the Chambers brothers who renamed it Stuarts Creek in honour of their friend the explorer.

It was people like these who pushed the pastoral frontier out. In considering the spatial extent of their holdings, it must be remembered that the pastoral frontier in those days was well inside what we now know as the pastoral districts or rangelands. In keeping with the Wakefield tenet, pastoralism began just beyond the agricultural lands and in those days the frontier began in what we now call the Lower North; the eastern slopes of the Mount Lofty Ranges, the bottom corner of Eyre Peninsula and the lands of the Upper South East.

The locations of some of the holdings of Levi and the Chambers brothers illustrate this—Yorke Peninsula, Truro, Morgan, Coffin Bay and Barmera. Held by others there were then also substantial runs at Mannum and Blanchetown; in the area north and west of what is now

Keith and in the sand dunes and flooded flats of the Coorong and Upper South East district. Some of this latter country (namely parts of Didicoolum) was still held under pastoral lease into the mid 1950s.

As has been intimated, the explorations of the frontiers of the Colony were almost inevitably a government/private effort and this often included the provision of the support resources needed. In some cases the endeavours of the pastoral interests left lasting legacies. Take, for example, the introduction and import of camels and cameleers into the Colony. Camels were first brought into NSW in the late 1830s but were not widely used until the immigration of Afghan handlers. The first Afghan cameleers to set foot in Australia were enlisted to accompany the camels for the Bourke and Wills expedition of the 1860s. Camels adapted quickly to the new environment and proved very suitable for living and working in the Australian inland.

In 1866 Thomas Elder imported 109 female breeding camels from Karachi to Port Augusta for use at, and availability from, his Beltana Run in the North West Flinders Ranges. Virtually from that point onward, up to 130 camels were available at the station at any one time. Beltana resourced a number of exploratory efforts and provided most of the camels used by Sir Charles Todd in the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in the 1870s.

Elder was a key figure in establishing camels and cameleers as the most efficient and economical method of transport in inland Australia for decades to come. Camels became the lifeline for people living and working in the far-north and for several decades were essential for the transport of supplies from railheads to stations, missions and towns and the transport of goods and people back to the railheads. The role of the camel in transport, the Afghan culture that came with their handlers, and their presence today in the wild state is now a colourful part of South Australian history.

It is interesting to note that once motorised transport replaced camels, many were turned free but continued to flourish. Australia now has the only truly wild substantially disease-free camel herds in the world. Populations have increased to hundreds of thousands in desert Australia and feral camels have become a major threat to the integrity of inland ecosystems.

Many of the early lessees, such as Thomas Elder, Peter Waite, Sydney Kidman and Thomas Barr-Smith lived at or near Adelaide and conducted other businesses that both complemented and supported their pastoral interests. Their location and their interests put them into positions of considerable influence in the Colony, much of which they exercised through membership of the Legislative Council. A number were also members of the Adelaide Club and it has been said of that time that if all the Adelaide Club members gathered in the Club's smoke room at any one time the proprietorship of some 80% of the known geographical area of the Colony would have also been in that room. Half of the rest would have been accounted for if you took a short walk diagonally across North Terrace to the Legislative Council. Perhaps not surprisingly, Philip Levi was one of the founders and trustees of the Adelaide Club.

These relationships continued up until the late 1960s and early 1970s and still influence the management of the pastoral lands as we now know them. It has been traditional to think of the proprietorship of these lands in those terms but while much of it has been city or near-city based, in more recent times the stock firms and banks have played a much more prominent role in the fluctuating fortunes of the pastoral industry and its associated communities.

Maintaining social services

Successive governments have, however, been happy to use the unique positions of pastoralists, particularly those families who established themselves out there, to provide and deliver services that would have otherwise been difficult or near-impossible for centralised public administrations to deliver. Pastoralists and people living in the remote townships and settlements have been Justices of the Peace, Magistrates, Coroners, weather reporters, dingo

pelt collectors, search and rescue coordinators, distributors of provisions and supplies to Aboriginal people, fuel and water suppliers, public water-point managers and chairpersons of community groups formed to provide some amenities in the absence of formal local government. They have focussed distance education, supported health services through the Flying Doctor Service and helped maintain a road, air and communications network. The expectation exists for people living in remote areas to donate an inordinate amount of their capacity to maintain civil society over this large geographical region of SA with little recompense or acknowledgement.

It is not surprising that on many of the early and still-existing maps and plans of the larger pastoral runs the homestead is referred to as 'Government House'.

Banks and stock firms – in good times and, sometimes, bad

Banks and financial support institutions, such as stock and station agents, played a considerable role in the pastoral penetration, particularly of the remote areas of the colony. Because of both the nature of their business and, until the mid 1900s, the commonality of some of their ownerships with those of the enterprises they were assisting, their precise influence on early inland exploration and development is often not recorded.

As Peter Donovan observes in his 1993 *History of the Pastoral Board of SA*, the financial institutions generally supported greater security of pastoral tenure and 'importantly, by controlling the amount of finance they were willing to lend, they helped to determine the cost structure of the industry and many of its practices'.

Both institutions have been linked at varying times with practices that encouraged stocking up to and beyond the capacity of the country, and the pastoral houses particularly have been known to encourage land prices that have ensured a very high cost structure. On the other hand they have also supported people through droughts and dry times. It has, however, been observed that this was probably because it was preferable to have the existing owners remain on the properties rather than the institutions having to manage them.

It should be remembered that given the window of time under discussion here, the banks and stock firms were radically different entities than the ones trading now. They were far more locally focused and owned (some only traded in the Colony and later the State), there were more of them and they played a much wider role in the day-to-day operations and administrations of the rural and pastoral lands of South Australia.

In more recent times the banks included the locally owned and operated Bank of Adelaide (absorbed into the ANZ Bank in the 1970s) and the State Bank of South Australia (absorbed into the St George Bank). Then there were the Australia-wide Commonwealth Bank, the National Bank, Bank of New South Wales and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney (CBC Bank) and the overseas-interested Australian and New Zealand Bank (ANZ) and the English Scottish and Australian Bank (the E.S. & A). Almost without exception, these banks were represented in country areas up to and including the pastoral areas we know today – either by a branch or an agency.

In addition to normal banking services they supplied financial and estate planning advice and commodity market intelligence. The staff was usually accessible, knew quite a bit about the country, and would, by word of mouth, allow account variations and flexibility if the asset base was sound.

The pastoral houses or stock firms were just as numerous and, in South Australia, included companies like Elder Smith Ltd., Goldsbrough Mort Pty Ltd., Dalgety Pty Ltd., Bennett and Fisher Ltd., the SA Farmers' Co-operative Union Ltd. and Coles Bros Ltd. The spectrum of activities these firms were involved in that affected the pastoral lands was very wide indeed. The core businesses of marketing and brokering wool, meat, livestock and real estate were

complemented by trustee services, estate management, country property and business staff procurement, travel arrangements, financial advice and machinery/equipment supply. These were the official activities, but there were many others. It was possible through these firms to arrange city boarding accommodation, domestic help and governess services and the pick up and delivery of a limitless range of needs.

While it is true that these groups had shareholders to answer to (often their own clients), and were in business to make a profit, they offered a considerable amount of personal advice and assistance and often operated on the basis of word and trust. And they had something else that bush people liked: a very high proportion of their staff were there for their working lives and the longevity of association that country people valued then was there in abundance. These institutions invested more than money in the pastoral country and their services extended beyond brokering land, stock and wool.

Executive Government—the view from North Terrace

Through the passage of legislation, successive elected governments played an important role in the development of the pastoral districts of the State. The acts Parliament passed related to transport, railway corridor development, land tenures, water usage, mining exploration, stock movements, survey and eventually land care, which effectively reflected the slow emerging understanding of the northern country and its limitations.

Police provided the only government contact for early pastoral settlers. Governor Grey began to build the strength of the police force in the 1840s. Police constables were assigned to patrol settlement areas as settlers moved inland in the 1850s. Expeditions of Colonial Law officers were dispatched to attend to incidents between settlers and Aborigines, and following reports of criminal offence such as cattle duffing. As the railway moved inland to service the pastoral and mining industries, constables were assigned to service centres and became the face of government to the scattered stations and Aboriginal communities in their large areas. Police provided more than just law enforcement. They were involved in delivery of mail and goods, rescue, dispute resolution, and support for community youth. Country police officers often become an integral part of the glue that holds dispersed communities of people together in pastoral country.

The legislation often arose from parliamentary enquiries and commissions usually in response to drought or other costly setbacks. In the earlier days, these enquiries usually also had one underlying objective: to better understand and hopefully break the boom and bust cycle that occupation of the pastoral lands seemed to entail.

While the pastoral districts over the years have been affected by legislation passed that applies to the whole of the State, there have been, within the period of administration discussed here, comparatively few legislative efforts that have focused entirely on the arid pastoral lands. The 1876 legislation that authorised the construction of the narrow-gauge northern railway line from Port Augusta to Government Gums (Farina) was local and important, but it also had whole-of-colony implications through the transport options for brown coal from the Telford siding in the north Flinders Ranges (the deposit at Leigh Creek was discovered in 1888 by a construction crew sinking a dam for the railway) and the movement southward of copper from the central and north Flinders Ranges mines.

There was one piece of legislation, however, that was to establish a mechanism that played a significant role in the management and administration of the pastoral lands. This was the Pastoral Act 1893 that established the first Pastoral Board.

A Board for all seasons

There has been a Pastoral Board in South Australia for 112 years now. The First Board established in 1894 was the result of a recommendation from the 1891 Pastoral Lands

Commission and was appointed to administer the 1893 Pastoral Act. It is now thought to be one of the oldest active statutory authorities in Australia.

Officially, at least, successive early Pastoral Boards were involved in the mechanics of pastoral land occupation and development concentrating on area allotments, rents, boundaries, improvements and renewals. The work emphasis of more recent Boards had its beginnings in the 1920s and 1930s—firstly with the reports of Cecil Goode, an inspector and later a Board member (who was constantly prepared to identify and criticise inappropriate and damaging grazing practices), and the proclamation of the 1936 Pastoral Act, which, for the first time, introduced stocking controls on leases. It has, however, been observed that it was not until the mid-1970s, coinciding with the appointment of Jim Vickery as Board chair, that the Pastoral Board shifted its main emphasis from managing the industry to managing the resource base on which the industry depended.

Whatever its emphases, successive Boards – and the inspectorial staff that supported them – have historically carried out additional duties of both a private and public nature for the graziers of the pastoral districts and the communities they both supported and relied on. In the period now under discussion, and particularly through the 1900s, the only regular, pro-active on-ground government contact outback residents had was with Pastoral Board members or inspectors. The Board was part of the network, and very few pastoralists failed to call at its offices when they were in Adelaide. With the exception, until recently, of the State's stock routes, the geographical mandate of successive Pastoral Boards has been defined precisely by the spatial extent of the pastoral leases issued. The Board's use as a government-community liaison mechanism has been very much a reflection of this 'pastoral districts-only focus'.

While outback residents had intermittent, and welcome, contact with Highways Department road gangs and police stationed in the regions, regular government contact was through the periodic visits of the Board or its inspectors. As well as inspecting the runs (and government water reserves), and providing some welcome social contact, Board representatives brought limited pre-ordered supplies and sometimes mail. They took some supplies out and, like the stock firms and banks, assisted with staff employment, Justices of the Peace services, city financial contacts, city accommodation and the location of people willing and suitable to be station bookkeepers and governesses.

Aboriginal People

The South Australian Act of 1834 declared that the land of South Australia was 'waste and unoccupied' despite representations to the contrary made to those planning for the establishment of the colony. Several of the early leaders with political and administrative influence in SA supported humanitarian campaigners such as Thomas Buxton and Charles Grant (later Lord Glenelg) in efforts to avoid the travesties against native peoples that were committed on the east coast. These humanitarians believed the prior land rights of Aboriginal people should be recognised, and that revenue from land sales should be directed toward their education and welfare. Those supporting the Wakefield system supported systematic colonisation and the development of productive profitable enterprise. They hoped they could sell enough land to establish themselves before the native-rights reformers got a hearing. The South Australian Company was not a philanthropic venture, but one designed to turn a profit on venture capital through the sale of 'waste land'. However, the Colonial Office was determined to get its way and persuaded the Commission to agree to provide for the welfare of Aboriginal people and avoid selling land occupied by them. The battle appeared to have been won by Glenelg and his supporters. The rhetoric suggested that SA was intended to be a new kind of colonial society, based on attitudes and principle more enlightened than a penal colony. There is a great deal of difference between rhetoric and the economic imperative that was driving colonisation.

It is the common view that because of this, South Australia was settled without major conflict between white settlers and Aboriginal people. It is generally true that early contact between

settlers and Aboriginal people was benign. However, tensions increased to violence with increased incidents of land encroachment by settlers and the killing of livestock by Aborigines. As settlement moved inland, Aboriginal people made initial attempts to assimilate whites into what they considered a superior, far better-adapted culture, but as white settlers refused to acknowledge Aboriginal culture or to compromise in any way, they quickly abandoned the idea and pursued a path of determined resistance. Settlers enforced their property and land rights with sword, musket and arsenic. This, along with disease and displacement, led to defeat and acceptance of white domination.

By the middle of the 19th Century, missions were established among Aboriginal groups to civilise and educate them so they could become true Christians and assimilate into white society. In light of the uncertain future that Aboriginal people faced under white colonisation, the cultural impact of these early missionaries has left a mixed legacy amongst Aboriginal people. Stories surrounding these stoic missionaries and the Aboriginal people who lived and worked with them are an important part of the cultural fabric of the north.

Aboriginal people were an important part of early exploration and pastoral development. The journals of many early explorers recount the importance of Aboriginal people and their knowledge in finding water and navigating the outback. Many early pastoral families developed a close relationship with local Aboriginal people. Their knowledge of the country proved invaluable in the early development of pastoral runs. They were a source of cheap labour that was exploited by pastoralists. In return, the pastoralists fed the people and offered them basic support. Many children of mixed race resulted from relationships between Aboriginal people and white settlers. The treatment of Aboriginal people and mixed-race children varied from station to station and with changes in government policy. Governments were not quick to recognise Aboriginal law or cultural boundaries, and many groups were thrown together and moved as the government struggled to deal with the ‘Aboriginal problem’. However, South Australia was the first State to recognise Aboriginal access rights to pastoral lands to perform traditional activities. Today, almost 40% of South Australia is freehold Aboriginal land, and five pastoral leases are held by the Aboriginal Land Corporation, making Aboriginal people by far the largest landholders in South Australia.

Agency effort – a mix of need and opportunity

Both State and Federal government agencies made recurrent and needs-driven efforts to provide services to residents and communities in the evolving pastoral districts and their support centres.

Throughout most of the latter part of the 130 years in question, the State Government supported distance education through both its correspondence and ‘School of the Air’ phases (both depending on private partnership participation for their success) and law enforcement in the outback via police presence.

Rail transport was first developed and operated by the State Government. Work began on the railway north from Port Augusta in 1878. It was anticipated that it would reach Darwin but was built only as far as Farina by 1882 and Maree by 1884. Camels and cameleers were used to carry goods beyond the railhead along the Birdsville, Strezlecki and Oodnadatta stock routes for the next several decades. Later, with assistance from the Federal Government, the line was completed to Oodnadatta and then to Alice Springs in 1929. The Commonwealth Railways operated the Ghan service on the narrow and broad gauge line from Port Augusta to Alice Springs until its closure and realignment in 1980.

The government invested considerable resources in the drilling of artesian bores at two-day stock points along the stock routes around the turn of the 20th century to encourage transport of goods from stations in SA and QLD to the railheads and on to Adelaide markets. Since that time, the maintenance of bores and tracks by government workers has provided another service, which has become an integral part of outback culture.

Successive Colony and State Commissioners of Crown Lands and Surveyor-Generals involved themselves and their staff in providing government waters of varying types along potential stock routes and transport corridors and in setting aside reserves around these waters to help ensure their public availability. Particularly in the first four decades of the 20th century, they also oversaw the inspection and maintenance of these waters – even when leased to private interests. With the first tapping of the Great Artesian Basin in South Australia in 1883, this work, focused on drilling stock bores, intensified.

Many years later the availability of stock water bores to the pastoral industry was aided by an unintentional partnership that had considerable spin-off benefits for some outback residents. When exploration began in the Cooper Basin, very late in the period under review, drilled and cased wells that failed to produce gas often produced water, and these were regularly and effectively handed over to the landowners. The ripple effect of exploration and its accompanying infrastructure turned one or two very opportunistic grazing holdings into viable working stations. And it was the Federal Government that bore the cost of supplying River Murray water to Woomera from Port Augusta in 1947.

Perhaps the most consistent and usually appreciated effort made by the State Government in the outback has been the work by successive roads and highways agencies to open and maintain public roads in 80% of the State where local government does not exist. As an adjunct to the arterial routes that had developed along old stock and bullock wagon corridors, department machinery and work gangs have established and provided varying degrees of maintenance to access roads that link homesteads, shearing sheds and cattle yards. On a ‘while-in-the-area’ basis, they have established access to community sport and recreation facilities, and they have graded and improved both community and station airstrips.

Even with the advent of air travel, this road maintenance work has been critically important to outback residents. It was effectively at no direct cost to the beneficiaries and at a time when much was being made of social inclusion principals and inter-regional subsidisation. It is interesting to reflect that both these principles have been driving road maintenance services in the outback for years.

As an adjunct to what advice the Pastoral Board could offer people running domestic livestock in a region of high risk and extreme variability, the State’s formal efforts at extension and advice tailored to the pastoral districts have, during this period, been somewhat disjointed. Early efforts were partly encouraged by interest from major state tertiary education institutions – an interest that was to continue into the 1970s when Dr Bob Lange of the Adelaide University’s School of Botany helped establish the Middleback Field Centre west of Whyalla.

In some cases the extension effort was driven by necessity, and until the early 1980s managed from either Adelaide or centres in the more settled agricultural areas. As an example, grazing and animal health advisory services tailored to the needs of the pastoral lands have arguably been fragmented and reactive until quite recent times.

The first localised attempt to better understand grazing impacts on natural pastoral herbage came with the establishment in 1926 of the Koonamore Vegetation Reserve by Professor Osborne from the University of Adelaide. In the 1930s there was further grazing impact trial work in the pastoral districts followed by grazing trials at Yudnapinna Station north west of Port Augusta by Trumble and Woodroffe over the next decade. Between 1948 and 1951 Fred Jessup, then with the Department of Agriculture, conducted his well-known pastoral soil and vegetation studies in the Kingoonya district. Jessup’s departure to the CSIRO in the early 1950s was followed by a 15-year hiatus until Bob Robinson was appointed to the Department of Agriculture in the mid-1960s as an arid zone ecologist. His position was later filled by Brendan Lay who, for 10 years from 1972, undertook follow-up studies of Jessup’s ground-breaking work.

The Department of Agriculture's Jamestown office played an early role in some aspects of research and extension in the pastoral districts. From 1960 to about 1980, the office was involved with on-station disc-pitting work to rehabilitate scalded and degraded land in the north east pastoral district. Animal husbandry and health advisory services gravitated out from Adelaide and Jamestown, while vegetation, pest plant and vertebrate pest work was undertaken almost entirely by Adelaide-based Department of Lands staff.

Prior to 1975 the Department of Lands had its own Vermin Control branch. Although, like the Dog Fence Board, it had a focus on dingo control, the Branch (like the Dog Fence Board support group) was entirely Adelaide-based.

The significant administrative and support requirements of the State's Brucellosis–Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC) from 1970 to about 1984 played a major role in the decision to establish a Port Augusta regional office for the Department of Agriculture in 1982.

Private effort and vision

Although the spatial extent and some of the vagaries of the pastoral areas have been more or less understood for the past 80 years or so, recently there have been some very significant private individual contributions to the area's social, spiritual and recreational development. By and large, these have been catalytic contributions and it has been left to government, or government-supported and private groups to manage the outcomes – but the impetus has been critical to the quality of experience of the area and the social well-being of those who choose to live there. Five examples:

- **Alf Traeger:** the self-effacing radio pioneer from Balaklava who developed his pedal radio concept to a stage where it helped the School of the Air get underway and contributed greatly to the 1920s operations of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.
- **Padre John Flynn:** the bush padre who established the Inland Mission and Frontier Service, and then the Royal Flying Doctor Service.
- **Dr. Cecil Madigan:** A scientist from the University of Adelaide who made the crossing of the Simpson in 1939. His expedition, supported by the Royal Geographic Society, focused the scientific and wider community on the natural and cultural history of the far north of SA.
- **Dr. Reg Sprigg:** The geologist who was key to the discovery of petroleum in the Cooper Basin, northern uranium reserves and the development of the mining industry. He is best known for developing and operating the Arkaroola tourist resort and generating enthusiasm amongst visitors about the Northern Flinders.
- **Warren Bonython:** contemporary bush walker, explorer and author. In 1967, as a member of the National Parks Commission, he successfully agitated for the proclamation of the original Simpson Desert Conservation Park and the Elliot Price Conservation Park adjoining the Hunt Peninsula in Lake Eyre North.

A final note

It might be tempting to assume that the concentrated administrative structuring that has occurred in the outback over the past 35 years came about in response to some strategic belief that there was a governance vacuum out there. It didn't. It came as the result of an accelerated acceptance of the region as part of the political agenda. This occurred because distances

became less inhibiting. Increasingly affluent urbanised Australians began travelling to the outback and adopting the inland as their icon while scientists and new generations of better-informed and caring students also turned their attentions to the area. Major mineral and petroleum discoveries also created considerable interest.

The consequence of this was that politicians began to take notice of an area that had previously caused them little agitation and from which very little electoral pressure occurred. The die is cast now and the arrangements are potentially beneficial, provided they are not starved of the one resource that the outback has always been marginally deficient in: people. The irony is that the distance, isolation and people dissipation that were always features of the area, and which attracted many of its inhabitants in the first place, may still mean that the old informal partnership model could find a place in the new quest for better regional governance.

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