

POANT MISSIVE
NEWS FROM THE PORT OF ADELAIDE BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL TRUST
MARCH QUARTER 2018



Current Committee Members

- Pat Netschitowsky Chairperson/Treasurer
- Karen James Strategic advocacy
- Michael Weir Principal researcher
- Sandra Elms Design/publicity
- Sharon Holmes Membership liaison/website/Facebook coordinator
- Andrew Winkler Friends of Torrens Island/Quarantine Station contact/
Port Adelaide Wiki development
- Michelle Hogan Port Adelaide Enfield Council contact
- Phillip Winter Strategy/research
- Clare Shuttleworth Strategic planning

Our branch has a passionate and active Committee. If you have enthusiasm, energy and an interest in joining our Committee, please contact Pat at pat@pnetschi.com or on 0402 008 589 with an expression of interest for the Committee's consideration.

It's been a while since we have gotten around to preparing a Newsletter. However, the Committee has been busy writing letters and submissions, being contacted by and being available to the media, meeting with decision makers and establishing relationships with local, state and federal government politicians.

○ **Meetings:**

Individual Committee members attend various meetings. Main ones are highlighted below:

- Darren Peacock, CEO National Trust of South Australia
- MP's Stephen Mullighan & Susan Close
- LendLease: Together with Port Adelaide Residents' Environment Protection Group, we are talking to the organisations involved about the creation of a green corridor (from the river to the coast) on Le Fevre Peninsula
- Port Adelaide Enfield Council: we meet regularly with staff from the Council. Maggie Hine, Team Leader Strategic Planning and the Environment, and Tony Kamenjarin, Urban Planner attended our last Committee meeting to give an update on a range of PAEC initiatives and programs

- **Activities:**
 - August 2017: AGM held in Fontanelle Gallery in St. Vincent Street Port Adelaide, showcasing adaptive reuse of the former Port Adelaide Post Office.
 - Heritage Plaque Project - ongoing meetings and planning with Port Adelaide Enfield Council
 - October 2017: Regional meeting of National Trust branches at the Torrens Island Quarantine Station (included tour of the Island and a BBQ lunch).
 - March 2018: State Election Forum (with the Port Adelaide Environment Protection Group) held at the Naval Association Hall, Quebec Street, Port Adelaide.
 - Port Environment Forum- this is a community led forum that is supported by the Port Adelaide Enfield Council. Together with the Port Adelaide Environment Protection Group and the Estuary Care Foundation we work with the Council to organise the topics and speakers for the Forum

- **Rex Munn Cultural Heritage Award** - with the Maritime Union of Australia and the Port Adelaide Enfield Council as part of the May Day celebration. **To be held on Sunday 6th of May at 10 am at the Workers Memorial on the corner of St. Vincent Street and Commercial Road.** The recipient needs to meet one of more of the following criteria:
 - Recognises cultural activism in the Port of Adelaide region.
 - Recognises persistent work towards progressive change, engaging community and strengthening bonds.
 - Acknowledges those who have a strong focus on progressive cultural activity that promotes social action, community involvement, equality and diversity.
 - Celebrates The Arts with a community orientation which shares the stories of the communities of the Port of Adelaide region.
 - Celebrates the workers and the contribution of the working class community in the Port of Adelaide.
 - Recognises the benefits of collective action through strength in Unions.
 - Commends activity that celebrates place-making and its unique identity in the Port.

- **Tourism and Heritage forum** (with Port Adelaide Enfield Council)
 - Will be on **Thursday May 10th, 2018, 7.00 - 9.00pm**. We are inviting a number of groups and organisations with an interest in celebrating and promoting the history and heritage of the Port, and working together to identify some strategies for how this can be integrated into tourism and economic development. **If you are interested and wish to attend, please advise me so that I can send further details closer to the date.**

Article about Fletcher's Slip - Michael Weir

Henry Cruickshank Fletcher (1820-1912) remains a well-known identity in the history of the Port of Adelaide. He is largely associated with the construction of South Australia's first slipway that around 1849 became known as Fletcher's Slip (hereafter 'The Slip'). The construction of this 'patent' slip aligns him with the European origins of Port Adelaide and the development of the state of South Australia.

As pointed out in *The SA Register* a "patent slip [obviates] ... the disadvantages of docking" (1850: 4) and is a much more inexpensive and less time-consuming way to inspect, repair and refit larger ships. A 'patent slip' has been described elsewhere as being a 'marine railway' or 'slipway'. The term 'slipway' is often abbreviated to just 'slip'. In short a 'patent slip' is said to be "A large mechanical apparatus by means of which vessels may be hauled up high and dry on the shore, and whose keels may be elevated" (Reynolds 2008).

Fletcher was born as Henry Cruickshank Flett in Strathness, Orkneys of Scotland on 9th March 1820. He completed an apprenticeship as a shipwright while still in Scotland. This apprenticeship included a great deal of engineering knowledge (Fletcher family cited in Jenkins 2004). Cormack (2007) believes that Henry changed his name on account of there being too many relatives with the same name at Fletcher's Slip and that he wanted to avoid confusion among those so named. However, I prefer the understanding Jenkins (2004: 30) brings to this name change, namely that Henry and his brother both changed their names because Flett was too common a name in Orkney. It seems people from the Orkney's were also stigmatised in mainland Scotland at the time in that people from Orkney were believed to be inbred and therefore stupid; so the brothers wanted to change their name to distance themselves from the island (Ann Woods *pers comm*, October 2002 cited in Jenkins, 2004).

Jenkins (2004) also points out that the story of the beginnings of Fletcher's Slip has two different versions; the family's version and the generally accepted version. The family's version begins in 1842 when it is alleged that Fletcher sailed to South Australia for the first time to assess the possibility of emigration and business opportunities. As a reputedly frugal Scotsman he came out as a ship's carpenter rather than pay his passage (Jenkins 2004). He thus allegedly travelled to South Australia earlier than first thought arriving here not as a passenger but as crew and thus not on the ship's list of passengers. The veracity or otherwise of this account is however, is somewhat difficult to ascertain.

However, an article in *The South Australian Register* 19th March 1867 would seem to support the family version of events as it states that in 1843 Fletcher had leased the land and become owner of the Slip that was still in pieces (*The South Australian Register* 19th March 1867). From Jenkin's accounts of the present day Fletcher family, it appears that in 1843 H.C. Fletcher bought the Slip and had it brought to Port Adelaide and left there in pieces before returning to Scotland in 1845 to marry and possibly settle his affairs (Jenkins 2004: 31). He is then said to have returned to South Australia in 1849 aboard the *Camilla* with his wife Robina and their son John and daughter Robina (Jenkins 2004: 32). This would seem like a more probable version of events than that presented by historical records alone.

The version from historical accounts show the South Australia Company had brought a slip to South Australia and landed it on Kangaroo Island in 1839. The Slip was brought to Kangaroo Island in 1837 by the South Australia Company and left at Kingscote. In October 1845 the Slip was moved aboard the *Victoria* to Port Adelaide and again left until 1849 when Fletcher arrived. The historical records then indicate that Fletcher arrived and saw the opportunities that this slip could afford and that consequently he leased a two acre piece of land from the South Australia Company at ten pounds a year for twenty-one years (*The Register (Adelaide South Australia)* 28th December 1926).

Whichever way events unfolded, the site chosen for the Slip was on the Northern side of the Port River, across from the wharves at which many of the ships visiting the Port would unload. It was part of section 916 of the Hundred of Port Adelaide. It is believed that he bought the Slip from the South Australia Company in partnership with a William Ibister. Ibister did not stay to work the Original Slip and there seems to be little information about him other than he was an initial partner in the purchase of the original Slip.

The construction of the Slip and the surrounding buildings began in September 1849. The Slip and its buildings were built on reclaimed land built-up using the silt from the dredging of the river bottom. It was completed and functioning by 1851. The winch was powered by an eight-man windlass and reducing gears (*The South Australian Register* 19th March 1867).



Figure 1: Photo overlooking Fletcher's Slip and towards Hart's Mill (obscured) in 2008. Most of the terrestrial part of the Slip lies beneath foliage and soil. (M. Weir 2008)

A single piece of paper loose in the records of the South Australia Company is a memo carrying costing details for a Patent Slip at Port Adelaide. The memo is undated and whether it pertains to the Slip the South Australia Company brought to South Australia in 1837 and sold to H.C. Fletcher or not is unknown (South Australia Company Records cited in Jenkins 2004).

The fact that the memo refers to a steam winch would seem to indicate that it was not with regard to the Slip purchased by H.C. Fletcher and William Ibister. The first boat to be launched from the Slip after repairs was the *Panama*. Her launch was an occasion watched by a large crowd. Finally Port Adelaide had a functioning Slip to service the ships. Before the completion of the Slip, shipping at Port Adelaide requiring repair had to be undertaken in one of the other Australian colonies or else was cleaned by being pulled-up and leant over on the shore.

It was not long before the Slip was very successful and H.C. Fletcher had a flourishing business on his hands (Fletcher 1987). By 1857 the Slip was doing so well that Fletcher was able to stop using the man-powered winch and installed instead a steam-powered winch (*The Greater Port Adelaide Heritage Survey* 1989: 118). The first building on the site to support the Slip was a wrights' and blacksmiths' shed. This was followed with an engine house to which an extra storey was later added to serve as a storeroom and mould loft.

After a few years the tramway developed some faults and the size of the vessels, which could be taken up, had to be reduced (*The South Australian Register*, 11th November, 1866).

Increasing business and the fact that what had become to be known as Fletcher's Slip was not able to work to full capacity led Fletcher to purchase a patent Dunnikier Slip from the Dunnikier Foundry of Scotland. Fletcher was only willing to undertake the building of a larger slip because he was able to gain the land to build it on in fee simple from the South Australia Company (Jenkins

2004: 36). He was able to do this because Captain John Hart intervened with the South Australia Company on his behalf (*The South Australian Register*, 19th March 1867). This new Slip was shipped to Port Adelaide in two lots. The first arrived aboard the *Saint Dunstan* on the 17th January 1862 (Jenkins 2004: 34).

The second lot arrived on the 16th March 1862 aboard the *Cherokee*. Installation of this Slip began in that same year. Details of the building process for the Dunnikier Slip are given in two articles in *The South Australian Register*, the first in 1866 during the construction phase and the second in 1867 covering the opening of the Dunnikier Slip. These two articles go into much detail as to the building processes of the Dunnikier Slip. According to the *Register* article of 1867 it was designed to be able to take 2,000 tons and was therefore very large, partially covering a piece of the floor of the Port River (*The South Australian Register*, 19th March 1867). At the 1892 Graving Dock Commission H.C. Fletcher stated that the Dunnikier Slip could take vessels up to 1,600 ton (*Parliamentary Papers, South Australia, 1892*, Pgs. 48-53). It is claimed that the Dunnikier Slip extended 360 feet into the Port River along the river bottom, approximately to the middle of the Gawler Reach (*The South Australian Register* 19th March 1867).



Figure 2: Dunnikier Slip in August 2012 (photo taken from Hart's Mill by M. Weir)

The Dunnikier Slip was completed in 1867 and the first boat launched from the Dunnikier Slip was the *Edinburgh* on the 16th March 1867. Fletcher did not seek financial assistance from the Colonial Government in the building of the Dunnikier Slip. At the opening of the Dunnikier Slip much was made of the fact that such an important piece of maritime infrastructure had been completed by an individual without Government assistance (*The South Australian Register* 19th March 1867). The two Slips working together became the symbol of the H.C. Fletcher's shipwrights' business, to the extent that it was engraved on a copper plate used to print the dockets for the Slips. This original engraved copper plate is still held by a member of the family (Jenkins 2004: 37).



Figure 3: Section of the Dunnikier Slipway, 2008 (M. Weir)

Fletcher became a prominent figure in the Port Adelaide community and was consulted about matters like a bridge across the Port River and had attained membership of the Port Adelaide Institute Committee in 1851 (The Greater Port Adelaide Heritage Survey, 1989: 118). The success of his business can be measured by his wealth and his ability to buy partnerships for his sons John and William in the Etna Iron Works. He also bought his son Henry Cruickshank Junior a farm at Clarendon called 'Prior's Court'. His fourth son Tom was employed as the secretary at Fletcher's Slip (Fletcher (1986) cited in Jenkins 2004).

Reynolds (2008) notes that Henry Fletcher is said to have originally lived with his family in a house at Fletcher's Slip. He also notes that according to Cormack, "Mr Fletcher set up residence in Hall Street, Semaphore." (Cormack cited in Reynolds 2008). When John Newman, the shipping agent, died in 1873, Henry Fletcher bought Newman's old house, "The Brocas" on Woodville Road, Woodville. His son William then took over the running of the Slip. "The Brocas", was dedicated as a Museum by the Woodville Council in 1975, the year of the Council's centenary. The "Brocas Museum" was then managed and operated by the Historical Society of Woodville Inc., with support provided by the Council of the City of Charles Sturt. The museum is now closed (<http://www.thebrocasmuseum.com.au>).



*The Brocas' - Henry Fletcher's home at Woodville
(photo Steve Reynolds in 2007)*

Later Fletcher commenced construction of a Graving Dock next to Dunnikier Slip. However, the Graving Dock construction struck a number of obstacles firstly due to seepage from the striking of an underground spring which caused major problems. Costs also escalated in the wake of the 1890 shipping strike and as a result of the 1890's depression. Both of these events impacted on the business of Fletcher's Slip and H.C. Fletcher was forced to sell his son's farm (Fletcher 1987 cited in Jenkins 2004).

Although nearing completion, the Graving Dock construction was never finalised as it risked the financial viability of Fletcher's Slip operations. The project was abandoned around 1896, according to family records (Jenkins 2004). Instead it became a popular swimming spot and was used for several swimming competitions. Later it was modified and used by the Glanville Dockyards as a docking bay. The graving dock site is situated on the western side of the Dunnikier Slip site, with a small piece of land between the two. The graving dock became known as Fletcher's Dock and was used for a dock as part of the Glanville Dockyards complex (Reynolds 2008).



Figure 4: Graving Dock area in 2008 (M. Weir)

The South Australian Government and The Corporation of Port Adelaide also had wanted a Graving Dock built to ensure the viability of Port Adelaide to deal with the constantly increasing size of ships used by the various lines trading around the world. In a series of reports by the Mayors of Port Adelaide over a number of years, the need for a Graving Dock and the frustration of the City of Port Adelaide at the failure of the Government to act is clearly expressed (City of Port Adelaide Mayor's Reports 1896-1906).

Nevertheless a Graving Dock was never constructed by either party.

Fletcher's Slip was acquired by the Harbours Board in 1917 after Fletcher's death in 1912 and later leased to the Adelaide Steamship Company, who replaced the steam winch with an electric one in the 1950's (Cultural Mapping and Survey 2012: 3.67). The Adelaide Steamship Company had been formed in 1875 and had its origins in Elder, Smith & Co. which was another significant mercantile operation (Cultural Mapping and Survey 2012: 3.67). Another significant contribution to Fletcher's Slip came about as a result of Adelaide Steamship Company's formation of a subsidiary named Adelaide Ship Construction in 1957 which brought a capacity to build replacement tugs on the site for Australia's aging tug fleet (Ritter 2005: 171 cited in Cultural Mapping and Survey 2012: 3.67).

The slip continued to function until at least 1987 (Fletcher, 1986 cited in Reynolds 2008). According to Cormack, "the Dunikier (sic) slipway closed in 1991" (Cormack cited in Reynolds 2008).



Figure 5: Part of a winch mechanism at Dunnikier Slip (M. Weir 2008)

Fletcher's Slip was closed down in 1973 and it has been completely filled in above the waterline. Use of the site has since lapsed and the area is subject to proposed housing redevelopment (Reynolds 2008).

It was accepted for listing on the State Heritage Register on 19th October 2009 after a State Heritage Application for the site was made by the Port of Adelaide National Trust.

The application was successful and the State Heritage area is located at 230-246 Semaphore Road.

Following the completion of Fletcher’s slipway in 1851, a number of slipways were established in the immediate area adjacent. These included slips owned by Messrs. Jenkins, Playfair, Chant, Taylor, Murch & Moore, Thomas Cruickshank and Thomas Swiggs (Reynolds 2008).

The sheds associated with these slips were removed as a result of a proposed new Waterfront development around 2009.



Figure 6: Some of the adjacent Slips nearby Fletcher’s Slip (M. Weir 2008)



Figure 7: Searle’s Boatyard 2008 (M. Weir)

Jenkins (2004) study of Fletcher’s Slip and surrounds provides many past and present details regarding the two slipways discussed above. She states that, “There are no longer any remains of the cradle which had still been on the Dunnikier Slip as late as 1987. At extremely low tide iron rails going out into the waters of the Gawler Reach are still visible. There are no iron rails remaining above the low water line. The Dunnikier Slip floor is currently made up of basalt blocks, copper slag blocks and concrete. There are also features of iron and wood on the site.”

She also makes a number of recommendations regarding the future archaeological survey of the various areas discussed above. Among all of the recommendations it may be noted that:

“A full underwater survey, including bathymetric and possible side scan sonar, to determine the remains of the Original Slip, the Dunnikier Slip and the Graving Dock should also be carried out. This underwater survey could give a clear indication of the methods and materials used to construct the lower portion of the Slips. It could also be used to establish to what extent the Graving Dock was completed. Therefore this survey work could be of importance in gaining any information about the history of this part of Port Adelaide’s early infrastructure” (Jenkins 2004: 73-4).

It is not apparent that any such study has yet been carried out before the time of writing the above article (April 2018). The Port of Adelaide National Trust hopes that underwater archaeological survey work and a more detailed ground survey will take place in the near future.

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