

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2019/2020

It gives me great pleasure to present the Chairman's Report for the 2019/2020 LAHS year.

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to take over the Chairmanship from the redoubtable Heather Howard, but we have been fortunate in that she has remained on the Committee. And what a Committee! It has never before been my privilege to work with such a committed, knowledgeable, and agreeable group of people, a true team indeed.

Last year's programme of talks and outings were both entertaining and popular, as evinced by the increase in the numbers of attendees. Professor Pat Irwin started our year in **March** 2019 with a bang. His talk on the Battle of Grahamstown was fascinating and most enlightening, and we look forward to reading his book when it is published.

In spite of inclement weather (**April** showers), a sizable group visited the Settler Church and graveyard, the Vintage and Classic Car Museum, the West Bank Cemetery and Richmond House Museum, led by Dave Hawkins and Sue Gordon.

In **May** palaeontologist Dr Billy de Klerk presented 'South African Ecosystems in Deep Time: Evolution of life in the Karoo Basin - a 110 million years of change' - macro history at its best, and a very different spin on our usual timeframe.

Also in **May** five members of your Committee attended the annual ECHO (Eastern Cape Historical Organisations) Day, hosted by the Border Historical Society in East London. Presentations were given by all the groups attending, and ours, a recap of our talk for the 2018 60th Anniversary on the history of the Lower Albany Historical Society, was presented very ably by Sue Gordon and was well received.

Marion Whitehead, author and photojournalist and one of our Bathurst members, spoke to us about "South Africa's Favourite Passes and Poorts"

in **June**. This was a most popular topic, and we had a record attendance of over 81 members and visitors.

In **July** LAHS assisted Footprint Press with the launch of Mike Bruton's book on Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer 'Curator and Crusader'. Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, ornithologist, botanist, anthropologist and museum curator, was the first curator of the East London Museum. She was acclaimed for her research on birds and plants as well as on isiXhosa customs. The discovery of the coelacanth, as well as of the fossilised skeleton of a rare mammal-like reptile, ancient human footprints, and a prehistoric human skull, thrust her and her museum into the international limelight.

Our **July** outing to the farms Glendower and Barville Park was a great success. 72 members and visitors joined us, the largest group we have ever had for an outing. We were most grateful to the Fords and the McGarvies for allowing us to visit. Elizabeth Ford and Judy McGarvie spoke eloquently about the history of the farms, and we were able to visit the Beacon on Glendower and the fortified farmhouse at Barville Park which was much appreciated.

The Annual Morse Jones Lecture held in **August** is the highlight of our year, and we try to do something special for it. This year Kathie Satchwell agreed to give us her talk on the Songs of World War I, a wonderful, emotional combination of history, photographs, lyrics and music, which had us all joining in the singing and wiping away a tear. One of the highlights was her inclusion of the Eastern Cape boys who lost their lives in the Great War, which brought it home to us in a way that nothing else could have.

September saw an unusual meeting for LAHS – the showing of a full-length feature film, Peterloo, as a fundraiser for the Kowie Museum. 2019 marked the 200th anniversary of the notorious Peterloo Massacre. On 16 August 1819, a crowd of 60,000 from Manchester and surrounds gathered in St Peter's Fields to demand Parliamentary reform and an extension of voting rights. The meeting had been peaceful but the armed government militias panicked and charged on the crowd. The toll of casualties has been disputed but as many as 18 people were killed and up to 700 wounded. The immediate effect of the massacre was a crackdown on reform. The film gave insight into the life and conditions in England shortly before the coming of the 1820 Settlers to the Eastern Cape.

October's outing saw a group of over 60 members brave 40+ degree C heat to visit Riebeeck East, followed by a tour of St Peter's Church on Hilton Farm where we enjoyed a picnic lunch.

The **November** meeting was addressed by William Martinson, a Heritage Architect and Chairman of the Border Historical Society. His subject was 'The Bridges over the River Kei' which proved a most interesting topic and brought 2019 to a very satisfactory close.

This year, 2020, is the bicentenary of the arrival of the British settlers in the Eastern Cape, and we had planned an interesting and varied programme to commemorate their arrival. From Margaret Snodgrass' February Newsletter:

'Around 25 000 000 people emigrated from the British Isles during the nineteenth century. Therefore, the departure of a mere 4 000 to South Africa in 1820 made little difference and hardly merited mention in the history syllabus in British schools. In South Africa, we all know that our history does not begin with the arrival of the British or the Dutch or the discovery of the sea route to India by the Portuguese; nevertheless, from within that large group of diverse settlers from the British Isles, lie the origins of many English-speaking South Africans.'



Commemorating the arrival of the 1820 Settlers in South Africa

In **February** Alan Weyer, a well-known historian and raconteur gave us 'An overview of circumstances that led to the settlement of 1820.' What an enlightening and amusing talk! Alan has an open invitation to address us at any time in the future – his audience did not want to let him go.

We are sad to say goodbye to our President Ian Moore who has resigned his position at the beginning of 2020. We thank you, Ian, for all that you have done for the Society over the years, and hope that we will see you and Marion at the occasional meeting, should you happen to be in Port Alfred.

We are delighted to announce that Dave Hawkins has graciously accepted the position of President, and Professor Pat Irwin that of Vice President.

We remember Mrs Jennifer Lowry and Michael Whitnall, who passed away during the year and extend our condolences to their families.

It only remains for me to thank the Committee for their valuable work in identifying and locating speakers, organising the meetings, for the research and logistics involved in planning our outings, for their enthusiasm and good humour during the (sometimes long) Committee meetings, and for the hard work involved in the production of our journal, the Toposcope.

Thanks are also due to Pat Bailes and Robin Collett who arrange and serve tea at each meeting, and to Ed Hosek and Val Williams of Settlers Park for their technical support. And of course to Settlers Park for the use of the Don Powis Hall.

Last but not least, thank you to Sue Gordon, our Vice-Chair, for standing in for me for the two months when I was incapacitated by a shattered knee cap.

Gwynn Crothall

Postscript

The arrival of the Coronavirus Pandemic meant the cancellation of all our meetings after March 2020. We do not know when we will be able to meet again, but our first indoor meeting will be our postponed Annual General Meeting and will feature a set of readings about early Settler days gleaned from a variety of sources for eight voices entitled '1820 Settlers: Prose, Poetry and Pictures.'