

LOWER ALBANY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AGM 2023

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Last year I concluded my Chairman's Report with the words "We look forward to a safer, and fuller year in 2022" and I think I can safely say that that wish was fulfilled.

We began in March with a talk by our Vice-President, Prof Pat Irwin on "***The Saga of Elizabeth Salt: Myth and Reality***" during which he debunked the myth of brave Elizabeth Salt carrying a barrel of gunpowder through the Xhosa impi to the troops.

In April we visited the remains of **Fort Peddie**. We began at the Fish River Diner, where, after coffee and scones, Yvonne Surtees gave us a talk on the Fish River Ferry, Waterloo Bay, the military camp and the connection to Fort Peddie. We continued to the Ayliff Methodist Church complex in Peddie where Margaret Snodgrass spoke about the history of the Ayliff Churches. This was followed by visits to the watchtower, Anglican Church, St Peters, site of military hospital, old barracks, military cemetery and the milkwood tree (Fingo tree) 20kms out of Peddie - not five, as we had been told.

In May, Chirag Patel addressed us on his book "***Forged on the Frontier 1818-1849***", the 'unbelievable' yet true story of history's strangest character, Norton I, Emperor of the United States, Cockney farmer, failed businessman, Mounted Rifleman and scurrilous reprobate who arrived in Lower Albany at the age of two and lived here until 1848.

In June Prof Jeff Peires spoke about the "***Xhosa clans in the Eastern Cape around 1820***", when the British settlers arrived.

On our second outing, in July, we visited the **Rokeby Park Methodist Church** and **Blaauwkrantz Bridge** where we picnicked and listened to talks by Ben Bezuidenhout and Stuart Lavender. Ben Bezuidenhout is the author of 'The 10:20 to Grahamstown: Blaauwkrantz Bridge Disaster - 22 April 1911'. After the talks, members were able to walk along the railway line to the bridge to see for themselves exactly where the accident took place.

In August Anne Irwin spoke on the "***Role of Horses in the Anglo-Boer War***", a most enlightening story, and so harrowing that there were few dry eyes in the hall and your Chairman was wholly unable to give a coherent vote of thanks.

September saw both a book launch of "***Burchell's African Odyssey: revealing the return journey 1812-1815***", by Dr Roger Stewart and Marion Whitehead, with a question-and-answer session between Sue Gordon and the authors [see review on page 38]; and a two-day outing to **Thomas River, Stutterheim, and the Mgwali Mission**. William Martinson, Chairman of the Border Historical Society, joined us on the second day as guide to look at the Ganger's cottages, Mgwali Mission Church, Bolo and beyond that to a bridge on the Kei River.

In October we visited four historic sites in **Bathurst**. LAHS has visited Bathurst on several occasions, however, there is always something new to see. First port of call was the recently restored Powder Magazine where Rod Hooper-Box addressed us on its history. This was followed by a visit to St John's Church, where Maryna Shepherd was our very able guide, then on to the Toposcope and the Agricultural Museum. This was a morning outing, and very interesting in spite of the wind! However, we have

learned our lesson and will ensure that in future we will limit the number of sites visited on any one outing, in order to do each of them justice.

The final talk for 2022 was given by William Martinson on ***“James Stewart (Somgxada) and the Stewart Memorial, Alice, Eastern Cape”***. James Stewart was a medical doctor, a missionary with the Free Church of Scotland, and served as Principal of Lovedale College for a period of 35 years - from 1870 to 1905. The talk covered James Stewart’s achievements in Africa and at Lovedale - but focussed primarily on the design of the Stewart Memorial (by architect Orlando Middleton), the construction details of the memorial, and the recent documentation of the structure using a drone to record its current condition.

Our most recent meeting, in February 2023, was addressed by David Hilton-Barber. He spoke on ***“Personalities who left their footprints in the early days of the Eastern Cape”*** and featured Robert Hart, Thomas Pringle, Andrew Geddes Bain, William Cock, Guybon Atherstone, Mary Elizabeth Barber and Ivan Mitford Barberton.

It only remains for me to thank the Committee for their support, for their enthusiasm, and for their hard work. This is still the most stimulating committee it has ever been my privilege to work with.

I would also like to thank our loyal LAHS members, who attend our meetings and join us on outings and are invariably interested, engaged and enthusiastic. Thanks, too, to Ed Hoseck and Tony Mitchell for their technical support, and of course to Settlers Park for the use of the Don Powis Hall.

Gwynn Crothall