



South African National Society

History - Culture and Conservation. Join SANS.

Founded in 1905 for the preservation of objects of Historical Interest and Natural Beauty

PO Box 47688, Greyville, 4023, South Africa

Email: hardy.wilson@telkomsa.net | Tel: 071 746 1007



NEWSLETTER & PROGRAM FOR MARCH 2015

THE DATE: 10th March 2015

VENUE: KwaMuhle Museum, Bram Fischer Road [Ordnance Road] Durban.

TIME: Meeting commences at 17h30; Refreshments will be served from 16h45.

PARKING: Off Bram Fischer/Ordnance road [next to the Museum]; security person is present

FEATURE: **A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE POWELLS IN SOUTH AFRICA.** Stephen Coan, who spoke to SANS last year on his research into the life and work of H. Rider Haggard, will detail the story of the Powell family in Natal. In the 1890s architect William Powell's career and reputation in London was ruined as a result of an extra-marital affair and so he came to Durban. His wife and family followed shortly afterwards. In Natal Powell rebuilt both his family life and his career. He was, most notably, the architect of the Colonial Buildings in Pietermaritzburg. One of his sons, Sydney, a free-wheeling spirit, took part in the Anglo-Boer War as a member of Mohandas Gandhi's Indian Ambulance Corps. Sydney would subsequently travel the world and gain a reputation as a writer. He is also said to have written the first guide book to Durban. His unpublished memoir throws fascinating light onto the woes of his father, his own life and Durban in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

FUTURE EVENTS: **WARRIORS GATE – OLD FORT OUTING**

Ken Gillings, historian of note, is leading us around Warriors Gate and then Congella on Sunday 29th March 2015. Warriors Gate is providing tea and scones the price of which is included in the outing cost. Please give your name and numbers attending with R30 for each attendee to Graham at the March Meeting. As Warriors Gate need confirmed numbers a commitment is needed – without a refund if you cannot subsequently attend.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER:

Thanks to the work of many SANS members who continue to contribute to SANS in various ways our meetings and organisation continues to strengthen and develop.

Our first outing of the year will be conducted by Ken Gillings who will take us around the Old Fort and Warriors Gate. This is in response to the request of some members that we explore the immediate environment to where we hold our meetings. KwaMuhle Museum is certainly situated in an historically rich environment. The details of this visit are outlined above.

We are trying to link up later in the year when it is cooler with the Maritzburg and other historical societies for another joint meeting after last year's successful excursion to Maritzburg. We are also planning a week day visit to St Paul's Church which is now in its 166th year. We have not held a week day outing before---at least not that I can recall, and although this may not suit all our members, unless we try it we will not know whether it will be supported or not.

Our January meeting also broke new ground when Hugh Thompson led us through the showing of a DVD about Richard III. It was a fascinating occasion and has led some folk to think about the possibility of starting a DVD library for members. Colin Boyes who addressed the second meeting of the year forced us into other uncharted seas when a student from Port Elizabeth reading for her Ph. D. heard that part of Colin's talk would be about Amelia Dyer and asked for it to be recorded. More technology to the fore!

Not all our innovations will be successful or well received, but it seems the KZN Events Diary listing information from different societies and which was initiated by Malcolm Wilson and implemented by Carol Allan has won universal approval.

SANS is 110 years old this year----time to innovate!

Jan Smith

February Meeting The Thames Valley Police and Museum – Presentation by Colin Boyes

Colin Boyes was another in our recent line of superb presenters when at the February meeting he held everyone's attention as he explained his role with Thames Valley Police and the great work performed by this Police Service. Not only were we enthralled for over an hour but questions flowed at the end - always indicative of the excellence of a presentation. And the 'reporter' apologises for any errors of fact, which of course should not happen when writing of 'police matters' and for the fact that in a newsletter it is not possible to provide a complete transcript.

Colin started by saying it was very special to be talking to a Durban crowd and more so as a member of Thames Valley Police (TVP) which is in reality not just a modern police force but in fact a police service and one of the few forces in the UK to have a museum.

Colin then took everyone on a virtual tour of the TVP and its Museum.

Members viewed a map showing the extensive area of the TVP Service which covers the ceremonial counties of Oxford, Buckinghamshire and Berks. Duties include protection of many notables and their homes; the PM's home at Chequers and Windsor Castle are both in TVP counties. TVP is the largest English territorial police force as well as the largest non-metropolitan police force in the UK.

Museum exhibits include the Great Train Robbery and Amelia Dyer murderer – personally his favourite exhibit.

Some of the statistics quoted gave an idea of the scope and variety of work performed by the TVP. For example they patrol 5700 km of roads; 315 km of motorways and have 2.3 million people in their area. Management includes a split into 14 LPA's or Local Police Authorities. There is a designated unit armed for specialist response; Air units; Public Order Unit; Anti-terrorist unit which is particularly important as there is currently a high alert in place for this risk.

Colin explained his role is fairly unique because it is split with 11 hours a week as museum curator and the balance as a community police officer.

Nearly 10000 force members; 4500 warranted police officers; 474 PFO'S; 3000 civilian staff; 1000 Special Constables colloquially 'Hobby Bobbies' which brought much laughter from the audience but without doubt these unpaid volunteers make a meaningful contribution to the community.

Sarah Thornton is Chief Constable and it was her decision to keep the TVP Museum from closing in spite of severe budget cuts presently being made throughout the UK because her belief is the museum is an important link with the community which is used to create a good experience when the public interface with the police service.

HQ South primary HQ North; 48 operational police stations with his station a tiny unit ; two control rooms; Police Enquiry Centre handling 999 and other calls; Police Training Facility which trains 200 officers a year. But the only protection is a Kevlar vest and two weapons used by most police officers are 'pepper spray' and a baton but the pepper is not actually a spray but a jet – CS gas and quite effective.

Members then watched an historic video which was filmed in Reading and proved to be a somewhat nostalgic reminder for some of how things were in times gone by but also allowed members to understand what immense changes have taken place in the intervening years.

On 1st April 1968 – Reading Borough Police, Berks, Bucks, Oxon and Oxford City police combined to become the TVP. Fittingly the badge is an amalgam of all the badges of these five forces. We admired the slogan for the new force, *Let there be Peace in the in the Valley.*

We looked at the 'White House' a beautiful 300 year old former family home, which is Grade 2 Listed and therefore has a strict 'no changes allowed' to the fabric or parts of the structure. This is the Police Training College and home of the Museum. To garner and learn more of the past history items found in the building included a photo of a family group – which close examination showed was probably taken outside the conservatory.

During WW2 it was part of an elementary flying school in which one room was painted black for air bomber training and trainees lay on their stomachs peering through a tiny 'window' at a map learning to 'let go the stick of bombs' at the correct time. Then in 1952 it became the Berks Police HQ.

The museum itself is 8 m x 9 m so quite small but they still manage to do a good job. For example visitors examine a Police uniform which kids can then try on; Communications and how they work; Scene of the Crime Officer and of course the exhibits.

A few copies of a memorial book were available for members together with the other material from TVP. Sheila Leonard a volunteer had produced this with design by Tony Key. It was a fictional account produced to give people a flavour of what it was like to be a police officer during that period and for the 100th anniversary of WW1 during which 49 police officers from this force lost their lives. Although in protected employment they had volunteered. There is also an Official War Memorial on site.

The Denham Murders – traveling blacksmith John James butchered a family of 7 using poker and pickaxe. Sad story but have some amazing artefacts from the event including newspapers, funeral cards and the pocket watch awarded to Supt Thomas Dunham who displayed great bravery when arresting James as well as the mantel clock given to him following 35 years of service in the force.

The museum covers Research – Visitors – Talk Audiences. Last year between April and December it touched lives of 7420 people with a minimal budget of just £2500.00 a year and countering poor experience on part of the public. To reinforce its value they record everyone who walks thru the museum.

The Great Train Robbery of 1963 occurred in Bucks but near Bedfordshire and was the greatest robbery in the UK and possibly greatest robbery ever. Was the largest investigation in the UK's history involving 2000 reports and 2500 witness statements. Many indications are that it was an inside job as it took place just after Scottish Bank Holiday. The robbers rigged the green light of the railway signal with a glove to show red. Train stopped and rest of the train was uncoupled behind the high value postal coaches but the 16th man found he did not know how to drive this type of loco so robbers coshed the driver and made him move the train to Bridego Bridge where a white sheet showed where the train must stop allowing the mailbags to be unloaded. High value coaches were then attacked with pickaxes to gain entry and staff forced to lie down.

Gangs were disguised as SAS troops so if stopped could explain their presence. Postal workers left on the train which remained parked on the track. Links from the handcuffs which were cut by a fire officer who had to cut them because they were of US design, were recently offered to the museum. The police knew robbers must be holed up within 30 minutes driving radius because the postal staff were instructed not to move for 30 minutes. The guy who was meant to burn Leatherslade Farm and therefore the evidence, took the money and ran but a Monopoly board was left behind and many fingerprints were found in the house and surrounding buildings as well as other evidence such as the empty mailbags. Specialist team took photographs and documented evidence whilst team of police guarded the farm during period evidence was gathered.

First arrest was Roger Cordrey because his friend William Bold tried to rent property from a lady who was a police widow and recognised something suspicious.

Trial lasted 51 days with 250 witnesses giving evidence. £30000 fees per each defendant. Summary and Investigated notes from Malcolm Fewtrell recently given to the museum. Gang was sentenced to 20 years with the ringleaders receiving 30 years, which was of far greater length than many sentences given even to murderers and this was at a time when parole was not in place.

£2,6 m was taken which is £48 m in today's terms and equates to R793 million in South Africa and this at a time when a pint cost just one p. £47000 left in a phone box – possibly a deal between police and the robber. However much of the money was never recovered.

Ronald Biggs was a petty criminal who only became involved because of his friendship with train driver. Sentenced to 30 years but 15 months after being jailed escaped to France, had plastic surgery then moved to Australia where he worked as builder and for Channel 9 News. Then moved to Brazil, married and had a child so he could not be extradited. However he could have been nicked when he went on board a Royal Naval vessel in Brazil.

Keith Milner the SOCO was told by Det Super Malcolm Fewtrell to go along the track and collect evidence which he did and then patiently documented 1700 exhibits of which 1000 made it to court.

Sarah Thornton Chief Constable wanted to create something to honour them so the few surviving officers received a commendation not long ago.

Colin commented that he is a social historian so personal testimonies are important and he had been able to interview one or two of the officers involved in this case

Bucks Constabulary were thrust into limelight by this case and as a result of which great changes took place in policing and the police forces in the UK. Five years later their five forces were amalgamated into the TVP. We should remember that Jack Mills and Whitby suffered terribly as a result of this and in fact Jack Whitby the fireman died very young and Mills the driver was never the same person for the rest of his life.

Display items include: Drivers Licences; Switch; Ronnie Biggs mugshot; Monopoly Board on which the robbers played with real money from the robbery; white marks where fingerprints lifted.

Before we begin the next section – walk away or do not read on if it will disturb you.

Amelia Dyer was well educated; mother suffered from mental illness caused by Typhus; 1848 mother passed away; aged 24 moved to Bristol permanently and worked as a nurse in asylum; provided a home for young women ; a national social problem was created by the Poor Law of 1834; as common to find body of a child as a dead dog in the road; immense stigma associated with illegitimate children; mothers of illegitimate children left child to be raised; fees for this could be up to £80; Godfrey's Cordial which contained opium was used to calm children but in reality it enabled 'carer's to starve them to death; mothers who attempted to reclaim children encountered enormous problems; Dyer placed adverts in paper trying to create impression that she was providing a good home; actually strangled children; a doctor who was signing death certificates became suspicious and she was arrested and sentenced to 6 months hard labour for neglect; displayed suicidal tendencies; governess accused her so she tried to commit suicide by drinking two bottles of laudanum ; then moved to Caversham, near Reading (near where Colin lives) then moved into what was essentially the red light district in Reading; a woman placing an advert then saw an advert by Harding (a pseudonym adopted by Dyer); Evelina Marmon handed her child over in Cheltenham and went to station with her; extract from letter written by Dyer (Harding) saying everything was good; then went to her daughter's home in London and wrapped edging tape around Doris Marmon's neck; because of risk of obtaining death certificates Dyer changed her system and the children's bodies were placed in a carpet bag with bricks and dropped into river near a weir; in 1896 bargeman retrieved a package containing a body which had been dumped but without adequate weighting; police raided home in 1896; found masses of evidence including letters; clothing etc.; further bodies were dragged from the river and identified; museum has the actual charge sheet and many other evidence items; Dyer wrote a confession in gaol; Jury took just 4½ minutes to find her guilty and she was hanged in Newgate Prison. Subsequently a careful analysis by the police of all the pawn tickets and other evidence in the house plus interviews produced an estimate that she killed 400 babies making her one of the most prolific killers in Western history. The museum possesses a lock of her hair but from when and where it actually came there is no record.

TVP Website link is <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/aboutus/aboutus-museum.htm> where there is much of real interest.

Hardy E Wilson - Newsletter Editor