



HISTORY ROOM

NEWS



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by Dawn Juers

THOMAS PAINE BELLCHAMBERS(1858-1929)



Thomas and a mate arrived in South Australia on 7th July 1876 on the ship "Lightning," a fine iron ship of 1248 tons. This was her first voyage to Australia. The lads, both from the village of Keymer in Sussex, England were among the passengers shipwrecked on Troubridge Shoal about 2am. Lifeboats were sent from the Troubridge lighthouse and Semaphore. All the passengers were saved.

[Troubridge Shoal is located in the south west corner of the Gulf of St Vincent, South Australia. The lighthouse built in 1855 was the 2nd built in SA.]

In one of his memoirs Thomas writes-

"JULY, 1876 found my mate and me in Adelaide looking for a job. We were straight from a stranded vessel in the Gulf. We had a drunken captain, and lively and exciting had been the experiences of the last few days. We were strangers in a strange land and when my mate told me of the work on a road contract he had acquired, we decided to stick together. Two days later saw us on top of a coach bound for Strathalbyn. Being dressed in the "old country" style, we were picked out as new chums all along the route and in some places we were greeted with most uncomplimentary language.

From Strathalbyn to Goolwa we continued by tramway (train) reaching the latter place fairly late in the day. I was up early next morning and got my first sight of the grand old Murray, on whose banks and bywaters so many of my after years were to be spent".....

Thomas' full article "*Hindmarsh Island Long Ago*" was printed in "The Register April 16, 1918," He published two books "Nature: Our Mother" and "A Nature- Lovers Notebook." He was also Vice President of the Nature Lovers' League, Adelaide.

Thomas established Humbug Scrub in the year 1905, where he became one of the most successful breeders of indigenous fauna in Australia.

In 1914, at Humbug Scrub he was the first person in the world to breed the mysterious Mallee Fowl in captivity. The fowl are noted for their large nesting mounds constructed by the males.

Thomas married Eliza Mary HARMER on 5th November 1887 at Mannum. They had ten children. Seven children were born at Mannum. Son Victor was a gunner in WW1, 27th battalion 2nd Div. Trench Mortars. He was discharged 1919 and died 1980.

Thomas Paine Bellchambers died 25th July 1929 at Humbug Scrub. His wife Eliza died 15th April 1939.

SNAKE PIE

I don't want to put you off after your sumptuous Christmas and New Year fare but I came across this story many years ago written by the above T.P. Bellchambers in his article "Hindmarsh Island Long Ago."

He writes “one day the boss, in talking about snakes (these reptiles were plentiful on the island) mentioned that they were good to eat. I asked him if he would be game to eat them, and he said yes he would. So one day, being short of mutton, I fetched him a fine big snake, from which I had cut off the head. This he proceeded to cut in sections after he had skinned it, and putting some fat bacon with it, made a pie.

Dinnertime came and we each had a helping of the pie, which I must say made a very passable dish, and if we had the bliss of ignorance we could really have enjoyed it. As it was, there was a fair amount left. Says the boss “What are we going to do with it?”

Now it happened that there was on the island an old couple, an ancient schoolmaster and his wife (possibly John and Sarah Margetson) to whom the neighbours were in the habit of sending food and other little helps. So, I suggested that as we would be passing there with the team that afternoon, we should present them with the pie and get at the same time an unbiased opinion as to its merits. This was done and the pie was much enjoyed. So, you see it is just prejudice that leaves the snake out of the everyday menu.

The old folks never would believe it was snake pie they ate with such relish.”



Apparently, cooking a snake is not all that unusual. An internet search brought up -

“Wiki How” - How to cook a snake—

1 snake, obtained from a trusted source or familiar environment; avoid the risk of eating a snake that has eaten a poisoned rodent.

1 box cornbread mix

1/2cup separated egg whites.

Cook in oil, by the time it starts to brown the snake will be overcooked.

There are more extensive instructions for those that are really into it.

“Let me know if anyone has tried snake pie?”

Happy Researching

Genealogy help is available by appointment. Please phone the Library on 8555-7000.

Dr Peter Barclay may be available by appointment.

Volunteers are in the Goolwa Library History Room on Thursdays 10-5 to help with enquiries.

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