NOTICE OF

59TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Society for 1985 will be held in the Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide,

Monday 25th November 1985 at 8.00 pm.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting, held Monday 26th November 1984, having been circulated in this Journal, to be confirmed.

3. Annual Reports from the President, Secretary and Treasurer.


5. Speaker:
   
   Mr Barry Craig, Anthropologist, will address the Society. The subject of his address will be:

   "The Sepic National Cultural Property Project."

   This project was carried out by the P.N.G. Museum and Slides of old objects still retained by the people, will be shown.

6. Supper will be served after the address.

R. Allison,
Hon. Secretary
c/o 120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

PLEASE NOTE THAT SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1986 ARE NOW DUE.
**Aborigines at Port Willunga: Reminiscences of Thomas Martin**

*By Steve Hemming, S.A. Museum*

**Introduction:**

This paper is based upon an interview with Mr. Thomas Martin and his son and daughter, at Point Parham in 1983. Steve Hemming and Philip Jones conducted the interview. The tape recording is being held in the Anthropology Archives of the S.A. Museum.

Norman Tindale, Curator of Ethnology at the S.A. Museum until 1965, received some notes containing similar information in 1955. They were written by Mr. Martin's father and passed to Tindale by Mr. A. Pridmore. Correspondence regarding this information is also housed in the S.A. Museum's Anthropology Archives.

I would like to thank the Martin family, and particularly Mr. Thomas Martin for the valuable information given to the Museum.

**Brief summary of the early history of the Martin family:**

Thomas Martin's grandfather and his name was also Thomas, came out to South Australia in 1840. In 1848, he obtained land at Pt. Willunga from the South Australia company. With his wife he built a hut near the beach out of clay from the nearby creek forced between wooden boards. They moved a large stone from the beach using oxen and it served as their hearth stone. It measured 8 feet in length and 5 feet in width. In 1858 Thomas Martin's grandfather built the Pier Hotel at Port Willunga.

Thomas Martin was born in about 1895. His reminiscences of the Aborigines at Port Willunga date to the period of his childhood and the Aborigines probably stopped coming to the area in about 1910.

**Seasonal movements and camp-sites of the Aborigines:**

Thomas Martin mentions two main Aboriginal camping areas near his family's property at Port Willunga. The first was in the coastal dunes just to the south of Willunga Creek. It is here that the local caravan park is now situated. The other was on a hill called by the aborigines *Dulil*, this site was to the south of Willunga Creek and on the coast. Mr. Martin does not say whether people were camping at both sites at the same time, or whether the same group of people alternated between the two sites. However, from the way he talks about the Aborigines it seems that there were at least several family groups.

He is very certain about the seasonal movements of the Aboriginal group that came to Port Willunga. They came from Port Elliot when the weather was too rough for fishing and they knew that the fishing was better at Port Willunga. He particularly mentions that they were after the mulloway (*Scaena Antartica*). It was in January and February and maybe for a little longer that the Aborigines came to Port Willunga. He says they used to come from Port Elliot every
year, camping on the coast at the creeks along the way. According to Mr. Martin’s daughter they also camped on the beach near Myponga, her mother had told her this.

Val Campbell in her article, Archaeological reconstruction of sites south of Adelaide, was interested in checking the possible summer congregation of Aborigines on the coast (Campbell, 1979). She asked the S. A. Museum’s Curator of Fish about the movement of fish up Gulf St. Vincent and the following conclusion was reached:

The Curator of Fish believes that there are seasonal migrations of fish up the Gulf. The “runs” generally occur in spring or early summer. Salmon, Mullet and Tommy Ruffs would be readily netted at these times. Mr. Evans implied that Mullahay is also more plentiful at this time, though available all year. (Campbell, 1979:7)

These runs do not fit exactly with Mr. Martin’s evidence, but their emphasis on the warmer months certainly does match.

Val Cambell goes on to argue that with the drying up of the small creeks along the coast, as summer progressed, people would leave the coast. She suggests that, “September and October were perhaps the most likely months for large gatherings in the dunes...” (Campbell, 1979:8). This pattern of movement does not coincide with the group of Aborigines described by Martin. Of course this group was living on the coast long after the first arrival of Europeans and they appear to have been Ramindjeri people of Encounter Bay not Kurna people, the group that Val Campbell is discussing and the group that most have argued inhabited the Port Willunga area (Tindale, 1974:213). This aside, Martin says that the group he knew came to the area predominately to catch fish and it seems that they had no difficulty in doing this until late summer and even as late as early autumn. He also emphasizes the ease with which they obtained water. When the Willunga Creek dried up or became too brackish the Aborigines used fresh water springs on the beach. Martin says about the creek water as it became brackish, that the Aborigines “could drink it like you could drink beer”. He describes a fresh water spring that was not far south of the jetty and during very high tides the salt water would wash over it. The Aborigines would dig down into the sand until the fresh water bubbled up, he goes on to say, “that’s all they used for water. The use of fresh water springs along the coast south of Adelaide would have been essential in summer and their significance is illustrated by the story of their creation; the Song of Tjilbuki (Tindale and Mountford, 1936).

It may have even been possible that the people Martin observed were following seasonal patterns in existence before the arrival of the Europeans. Tindale does suggest that cultural similarities and contact between the people inhabiting the coastal portions south of Adelaide and the Encounter Bay area was considerable (Personal conversation with Tindale, 1985). His published song of Njengari, a great man of the Kurna tribe, mentions a great fishing place at Wartbandok, near present day Yankalilla (Tindale, 1941:235). This song was sung to Tindale by Clarence Long, an Aboriginal of the Coorong, in the Encounter Bay language. This provides some evidence of contact between these two areas.

Fishing:

As already mentioned the Aborigines observed by Mr. Martin camped at Port Willunga in summer and they were there predominately to fish. Mr. Martin’s most vivid memories relate to men using a large spear to catch mulloway. They must have caught a considerable number of mulloway because when he was a boy, Mr. Martin often went to their camp on Dull Hill to collect, what he describes as the “tongue” of the mulloway, which he says looked just like a foot. The mulloway spear had three barbs carved out of the solid and was approximately 8 feet long and an inch in diameter. The men would go into the water up to their knees or stand on the rocks in the reef to spear the mulloway. The speared fish were sometimes 601bs. in weight. Mr.
Martin was struck by the fact that the fisherman always shared the fish amongst the rest of the group. The spear was always left behind by the Aborigines when they left Port Willunga and as a boy Mr. Martin and his friends would spy on the Aborigines to try and see where they left it. He imagined they buried it in the sand hills somewhere, but he was never able to find it.

The Kaurna people’s use of spears in fishing is mentioned only very briefly by Cawthorne, an early ‘ethnographer’ for the area; he provides little information about items of material culture used in fishing (Cawthorne, 1926:19). Clarence Long, the Coorong man mentioned earlier, made two mulloway spears for Tindale in 1936 and they are in the S.A. Museum’s collection (A26093,A26094). These spears are about the same dimensions as the spear described by Mr. Martin and they both have two wooden barbs carved out of the solid. The Aboriginal people who visited Port Willunga each year used a mulloway spear and it seems very likely that the people living in the area at the time of contact would also have used large barbed spears to catch mulloway.

Mr. Martin also describes the Aborigines use of fishing nets in the sea and in the creek. He says that they made small “dub” nets with wire around the top and that they used these nets in the shallows amongst the rocks; never in the surf. They used six foot long nets in the creek. They spread them out in the water and when they pulled them in the fish were caught in the net by their gills.

Women:

The Aboriginal women are mentioned on a few occasions by Mr. Martin in his reminiscences. They appear to have done at least their fair share of the providing. From rushes, they made mats and baskets for sale to the local whites and Mr. Martin says they were often a nuisance to his mother. The Aboriginal women would come to his house saying “Shillin mum, you buy em shillin” or “tea mum wantum tea”.

Mr. Martin also notes that the women carried a yam stick for digging up roots and grubs and that among the insects collected were centipedes, “nip his head off and down he’d go”. When moving from camp to camp it was the women who carried everything. The small children would be carried on their backs in a pouch made from a napkin.

Material Culture:

Several interesting descriptions of material culture have already been mentioned, such as the mulloway spear. However, Mr. Martin describes a number of other important items of everyday usage. He provides an account of the manufacture of string from the rushes that grew in Willunga Creek. The Aborigines first split the rushes and extracted the pithy centre. They would plait this material into ropes for “fishing lines and other things”. They also separated the pith into smaller sections and platted these together making long ropes. They tied up their belongings with this rope, when moving from place to place. Mr. Martin also says that they made string out of a sharp leaved grass or rush.

The Aborigines camping at Port Willunga made returning boomerangs, according to Mr. Martin and he often watched them making them. They usually made them out of bent roots and shaped them in the fire. Water was also used in combination with heat to achieve the final shape. Shred roots were usually used to make returning boomerangs by the people from the Lower
A very interesting stone tool was used to help smooth the boomerangs. Where the creek washed out onto the beach, particularly after floods, large smooth pebbles that Mr. Martin called "bottleles", were left lying. The Aborigines split these in half and used them for cutting fish, smoothing boomerangs and for any other purpose that suited.

Finally, Mr. Martin gives a brief description of the shelters made by the Aborigines. He says they often scooped away part of a sandhill and covered it over with sticks, brush and blankets.

Relations between the Aborigines and the Europeans:

Some interesting snippets of information are provided by Mr. Martin regarding the relations between the Aborigines camping at Port Willunga and the local Europeans. He went to school with a number of the Aboriginal boys and he says that they were quite intelligent, but that they often skipped school and went to the beach instead. He mentions the fact that the Aborigines received rations and that once a year they were given blankets. He points out that providing these hand outs was the task of the local police.

According to Mr. Martin his mother was scared of the Aborigines, but his father a J.P. often sorted out fights in the Aboriginal camp. On one occasion the local publican had given a local brand of "moonshine" to the Aborigines. It was particularly strong and probably close to poisonous and "the blacks went dotty". Old Jim who had become drunk on the liquor, split an old woman's head open with a tomahawk. It was Mr. Martin's father's job to go down to the camp to sort the situation out.

Summary:

It is hard to imagine that any one living can still remember Aborigines camping on the coast south of Adelaide. From Mr. Martin's account it appears that the Aborigines living at Port Willunga were still largely using their pre-European fishing skills and knowledge of the environment to survive. They were also using their own items of material culture more than would be expected for this period. The nets that Mr. Martin describes were probably European materials adapted to an Aboriginal design. However they were still making string and ropes from vegetable fibre, so it may have been possible that some of the nets were made of traditional materials.

Of particular interest is Mr. Martin's accounts of the seasonal movements of this Aboriginal group. Their ability to survive on the coast during the summer seems to support the seasonal movements of the Kaurna as argued by Tindale (Tindale, 1974:59). He argued that they stayed on the coast during the summer. It is also possible that the seasonal movements of the Aboriginal group that camped at Port Willunga each year, until early this century, were following a pre-European pattern. It would be interesting to investigate this further and it may be possible to discover a few clues in ration depot records and other archival sources.
References:

Campbell, Val

Cawthorne, W.A.

Tindale, N.B.

Tindale, N.B.

Tindale, N.B.
*Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Canberra, 1974)