NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting will be held in the
MUSEUM EDUCATION BUILDING (Behind the Main Museum Building)
8.00 P.M. MONDAY, 25TH OCTOBER, 1971

AGENDA

1. Apologies


3. Tabling of Papers and Journals

4. Announcement of new members

5. Mr. Robert Edwards, Curator of Anthropology, S.A. Museum, will give an illustrated address on:

"A COMPARISON OF OVERSEAS AND AUSTRALIAN METHODS IN THE CONSERVATION OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS"

6. Date of next meeting: MONDAY, 22nd November, 1971

Members are reminded that this is the Annual General Meeting and that under the Rules & By-Laws of the Society, notice of the following business to be transacted at the Annual General Meeting must be given in writing to the Secretary at least four weeks prior to the meeting:

(i) Motions which any member intends to propose at the Annual General Meeting.

(ii) Nominations of persons as officers or council members of the Society, such nominations to be accompanied by a letter from the nominee agreeing to stand for the position.

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"CONSERVING EVIDENCE OF OUR PAST"

by W. Grant Inglis

Growing population and mobility have increased travel to and accessibility of parts of the State previously protected by distance, discomfort and inaccessibility. One consequence was increasing damage to aboriginal sites of various kinds. Much of this was unintentional because of a wish to make a permanent personal record of an intensely exciting experience, but rock-carvings were being chalked over to make them more photogenic, and some were even being chopped out of the rock. Some damage, such as the loss of canoe-trees along the Murray River by fire, was due to that simple stupidity or carelessness which causes more general destruction. Much, naturally, was due to greed or an unreasoning or boastful vandalism assisted by the technological advance of the aerosol paint can which is ideal for autographing rock paintings. All this culminated in the passing of the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act, 1965, the first Act of its kind passed by any State in Australia.

Among provisions of that Act specifying what can or cannot be done is one making the Director of the South Australian Museum ex officio Protector of Relics. Thus it came that I, a parasitologist, on arriving as Director of the Museum in 1968 discovered that I was also responsible for setting up an administration to control the preservation of Aboriginal and Historic Relics. Fortunately the Act also sets up an Advisory Board, under the Chairmanship of Professor G.H. Lawton, and the Museum had staff who were not only competent to give advice but were intensely interested in problems the Act is intended to overcome.

Less obvious but more startling was that a Museum had been given responsibility, although indirectly, for law enforcement. This is an unusual position although the Western Australian Museum also has similar responsibilities for Historic Wrecks in that State. Nevertheless, although this had some initial disadvantages because of our inexperience it had the advantages of existing records,
qualified and experienced staff and, possibly most important, the Museum was an information and educational organisation. Perhaps because of this bias, the initial approach has been to generate informed interest, to educate in the significance and fragility of the physical expressions of aboriginal culture and to stress the value of retaining and looking after relics and records of the early exploration and development of the State.

The Relics Act provides for the proclamation of Prohibited Areas (of which there are four) entry to which is rigidly controlled by a permit system, and for the proclamation of Historic Reserves, of which there are at present about 30. Entry to such Reserves is unrestricted but the relics they contain must not be interfered with in any way without specific permission. The physical and geographic range of such Reserves is instructive as an object lesson in the activities which the Act involves particularly as the Reserves are mostly sign-posted and are inspected regularly: the Old Toll House on Glen Osmond Road, Sturt Cottage at Orange, Overland Corner Hotel, the Paxton Square Cottages in Burra Burra, Koonalda Cave on the Nullarbor Plain, rock carvings on Moolawatana Station and at Innamincka, archaeological deposits and middens along the Murray River and on the Beachport National Park in the South-East of the State about 100 miles North of the Eyre Highway, rock-painting and engraving sites in the Adelaide Hills and the Flinders Ranges, among many others are Reserves under the Act.

The inspection, guarding, fencing and sign-posting, with all the other routine responsibilities are only possible with our small staff because of the great support and interest of the Honorary Wardens who, after accepting the responsibilities implied, are appointed by His Excellency the Governor. Over 100 such Honorary Officers have been appointed who keep an eye on sites, inspect and report on them and generally show their interest in the preservation of the State's history in a practical way. Assistance is also received from various Departments of the State Public Service, the National Trust of South Australia, the National Parks Commissioners and other organisations and clubs throughout the State.
"CONSERVING EVIDENCE OF OUR PAST"
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As well as the provisions covering specific areas and buildings are clauses covering the sale and damage of aboriginal artifacts of various kinds. For example, damage to or interference with carved-trees, rock engravings, stone arrangements and cave paintings of aboriginal origin is specifically forbidden. But there is no restriction on the collection of portable relics exposed upon the surface of the ground although such objects may not be sold without permission. In addition to this proviso the Museum inspects aboriginal artefacts of any kind prior to their export from Australia, on behalf of Commonwealth Customs.

In meeting the requirements of the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Act the Museum staff in general and the Curators of Relics and of Anthropology in particular are in one sense carrying out a logical extension of their longstanding responsibility to locate, study and report upon archaeological and historical relics of importance by now enforcing a reasonable control on the kinds of interference to which these objects and sites can be subjected.

More directly it is an extension of a Museum's role in collecting, conserving and studying objects of value and charm except that these are carried out in the field instead of within walls.

We have not overcome all the difficulties, we probably do not know what a number will be, but it is a fair claim that, with support of the kind we have had, we can look forward with optimism and the hope that the ideals of the Relics Preservation Act will be fulfilled.