ISSUE 57 – MARCH 2021

THE WAYFARER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE INC.

THE POET OF AUSTRALIA 1833-1870
WHO LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

In this issue

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Membership forms are available on our website:

https://adamlindsaygordon.org/

New memberships $20
Renewals $15

The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc.
(A0049425F)

PATRON SINCE 2010
JANICE BATE

PO Box 272
Yankalilla SA 5203
Australia

President's message

This new year brings my optimistic greetings to all members and supporters of The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee. We are all hopeful that 2021 can return to a more predictable normal which enables us to better organise our lives and our Committee activities.

John Adams has reluctantly decided it is now time to hand over responsibility for the production of *The Wayfarer*. The Committee owes John an inestimable debt of gratitude for all his fine work over many years with the Committee, the production of *The Wayfarer*, and having developed a fine database of information. Thank you, John, for all you have done, from all who have been members of The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc. We are fortunate to have a very able volunteer to produce future editions. Lorraine Day has kindly accepted this role whilst balancing a number of other writing tasks of her own. We all know the benefits of giving assignments to busy people! Thank you, Lorraine.

John Adams has built up an impressive library of books relating to Gordon which now needs a new home. Ultimately, the material would be available for display and public/student use. However, the Committee is intent upon ensuring that the material is secure, preserved, and carefully monitored. Arrangements are progressing regarding safe interim storage. Members are welcome to offer suggestions re long-term effective use and security of this material.

Gordon's grave

The right-of-burial holder documentation needs updating which will enable the committee to work in conjunction with descendants of the Low family. Beth Sampson from Port Lincoln, SA, is organising aspects of the documentation. She is a great granddaughter of Peter Low who married Gordon's widow, Margaret.

The Committee has approved two *Acacia howitii* (honey bun) wattles to be planted at the site. This dwarf form of Acacia is approximately 1 m x 1 m. A local gardening club has been sourced to find a volunteer willing to tend the grave. A number of gardeners have indicated their interest and we will hopefully also attract some new members.

New sources of funds for maintenance/restoration of the site are being pursued. Members who have any leads are welcome to contact me.

President's message (cont'd)

Meeting dates/Zoom

The Committee has approved our meeting dates for 2021 to be on the first Sunday of each month, except where there are significant clashes, such as the first Sunday of April is Easter Sunday, and the first Sunday of September is Father's Day. We are committed to Zoom, given the geographical distribution of our committee; however, this does not preclude normal meetings and social events. This aspect is entirely dependent upon the preparedness of members to be actively involved in Zoom and/or physical meetings. Feedback is always welcome.

The Committee wishes to trial the following format, starting on Sunday, 11 April – a Zoom meeting will be held between 4.30 pm and 5.30 pm (AEST). Members and supporters are encouraged to read poetry, raise an issue, or provide new information or relevant aspects of Gordon's life. The Committee also plans to include some regular poetry reading.

Want to be involved? Email your details to the Secretary (adamlindsaygordon@gmail.com) or phone the President (0400 825 220) a few days before the meeting to obtain the Zoom meeting ID and password.

Meeting dates for 2021 – 11 April, 2 May, 6 June, 4 July, 1 August, 12 September (Annual General Meeting), 3 October, 11 November, and 5 December.

Other significant dates this year

19 June – Country Race Day, Flemington – named event (TBC)
24 June – Gordon's death
15 August – Great Western Steeplechase, Coleraine, Victoria
1 September – Wattle Day
19 October – Gordon's birthday.

In conclusion, special thanks to the following key personnel:

Patron: Janice Bate;
Life members: John Adams, Elrae Adams, Allan Childs and Jenny Childs;
Committee members: Travis M Sellers, Lorraine Day, Vivienne Sellers, Jenny Odgers, Virginia Barnett and Joan Pretty.

Russell Harrison
President
algccpresident@gmail.com
0400 825 220

An afternoon of tea and poetry

JOHN SHAW NEILSON SOCIETY
Saturday, 8 May, at 2 pm
At the Louis Joel Arts & Community Centre
5 Sargood Street, Altona
RSVP by 1 May to Kim on
0409 382 510 or email
kimreilly58@outlook.com

Margaret Gordon's descendants receive 'royal' attention

In 2018, Beth Sampson, her daughter Feona Kirk, and cousin Yvonne Low, while on a tour of London, visited Westminster Abbey with the aim of visiting Poets' Corner and the bust of Adam Lindsay Gordon. Beth showed one of the guides at the Abbey a letter confirming her identity, and asked if she could have a photo taken in front of Gordon's bust (photos were not permitted inside), showing him the letter. 'Certainly!' was the reply. 'Come this way.' And he cleared the other people away. 'After waiting in line outside for two hours, the wait was well worth it,' Beth said.

Three years after Gordon's death, Maggie married stockman Peter Low on 19 March 1873 at the home of Bradshaw Young in Robe, and they went to live on Cannawigara station. In due course, Maggie and Peter had seven children – Lindsay 'Lin', Bradhsaw, Alex, William, Elsie, May and Jessie. Lin farmed at White Flat on Eyre Peninsula, and he and his wife Nell had four children including Colin and Max. Yvonne's husband is Colin's son, and Beth is Max's daughter.

L-R: Feona Kirk, Yvonne Low and Beth Sampson at Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

To my soul

This is believed to be the last poem written by Adam Lindsay Gordon, about a fortnight before his death. The poem was passed on to the editor of The Queenslander *from the daughter of Mrs McGillivray, said to be one of Gordon's best and oldest friends.*

Tired and worn, and wearisome for love
Of some immortal hope beyond the grave,
Thy soul thou frettest like the prisoned dove
That now is sick to rest, and now doth crave
To cleave the upward sky with sudden wing!
The heaven is clear and boundless, and thy flight
To some new land might be a joyous thing,
Within this cage of clay there is no light;
Glimpses between its mortal bars there be
That bring a powerful longing to be free,
And tones that reach the ear mysteriously
When thou art wrapt in thy divinest dream.
Yet thou art but the plaything and the slave
Of some strange power that wears thy strength away –
Slowly and surely, which thou dar'st not brave
Because pale men in some tradition say
It is God that would not have thee 'scape
The torture that He wills to be thy fate.
'Tis but a tyrant's dream, and born of hate;
Then, soul, be not disquieted with doubt;
Step to the brink – this hand shall let thee out.

'Banjo' honoured at Yeoval

A 2.7 metre-high bronze statue of Banjo Paterson, sculpted by Paul Smits, was unveiled at Yeoval, NSW, on Wednesday, 17 February 2021. The ceremony included an honour guard by the 6th Light Horse Trundle Troop.

Yeoval was the childhood town where Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson spent the first seven years of his life; the statue is situated in front of the Banjo Paterson Museum.

Alf Cantrell,of the Yeoval Historical Society, said he and his wife Sharon were advocates for the Mulga Bill Bicycle Festival, to bring visitors to the town, and the opening in 2014 of the 'The Banjo Paterson ... more than a Poet Exhibition' by the Hon. Tim Fischer on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Andrew Barton Paterson in 1864; more than 30 years after Adam Lindsay Gordon.

Voices around the grave

The Graphic, 31 March 1888.

Compiled by Elrae and John Adams

At rest! Hard by the margin of that sea
Whose sounds are mingled with his noble verse,
Now lies the shell that never more will house
The fine, strong spirit of my gifted friend.
Yes, he who flashed upon us suddenly,
A shining soul with syllables of fire,
Who sang the first great songs these lands can claim
To be their own; the one who did not seem
To know what royal place awaited him
Within the Temple of the Beautiful.

– *Henry Kendall*

Mrs N Lauder, Avoca, Victoria,
June 23rd, 1884

Sir, Many thanks for your kind answer, enclosed £1 for the Sexton and I would like above all others one Wattle Tree with the beautiful yellow blossoms and a few Snowflakes, I have sent by train some Violets from my own garden (not for the value of them but simply because I have grown them).

Dear Gordon,
At 4 pm this afternoon I haven't the money to spare, or I would attend. Indeed I am penniless.
Yours truly, *Henry*

'In this household we are old admirers of Gordon's, and every poem you have mentioned is a favourite with us.'

– *Theodore Rooseveldt*

Mr Douglas Sladen has sent me on your question as to Lindsay Gordon's "position as a poet. This seems to me a matter for the future to settle. But when a man has served his day and his generation and the country of his love as Lindsay Gordon did and his work was stood up through a certain number of years, I should, personally, be inclined to thank Heaven for the loan of him and let it go at that. There is no advantage to looking a gift-horse in the mouth.

Very sincerely yours, *Rudyard Kipling*

Marcus Clarke, Author of *For the Term of his Natural Life*:
'*The poems of Gordon have an interest beyond the mere personal one which his friends attach to his name. Written as they were, at odd times and leisure moments of a stirring and adventurous life, it is not to be wondered if they are unequal or unfinished. The astonishment of those who knew the man, and can gauge the capacity of this city to foster poetic instinct, is, that such work was ever produced here at all.*'

HM Green reviewing ALG's poetry:
'*We read Gordon, not for his fine phrases, but for the directness of some cry, and above all for the breadth and effectiveness of any utterance taken as a whole. And we read him because even if we ourselves are not hunters, sportsmen, soldiers, adventurers, he uncovers some underlying stratum of such men in us, opening up to us the road of adventure and blowing over it the wind of romance.*'

John Riddoch, friend:
'*... a moody unsociable man when his poetic fit was on – a great smoker. Often on arriving at the house he would go away into the bush and fend for himself rather than face company inside.*'

John Riddoch (presumably), 1869, when Gordon accepted an invitation to visit the Riddoch's, at Yallum:

'*On his previous visit he had taken a whimsical fancy to a gnarled old gum tree that stood in a sunny paddock a few hundred yards from the house. After breakfast he used to climb it, and sit in a natural armchair upon a crooked limb. There he would fill and smoke successive bowls of his clay pipe, and those who were curious might see him from time to time jot down lines in pencil on paper spread upon the branch, or sometimes on his hat. He never had any thought upon the time, and when meals came round he generally had to be specially summoned, whereupon he would slide down the trunk and apologise for causing delay.*'

William Trainor, friend:
'*Oh, Gordon was, I think, the noblest fellow who ever lived! Very queer in his ways, though. I have ridden ten miles with him at walking pace, and he didn't say a word the whole time, but went on mumbling to himself, making up rhymes in his head.*'

Gordon's English military instructor:
'*... idle and reckless, but I never heard of him doing a dishonourable action.*'

Rev. Julian Tenison Woods, friend:
'*He was subject to a restless sort of discontent. This Gordon explained was a sort of melancholy to which much of the finest poetry owed its existence. This conversation made a deep impression on me, for I connected it with those sad and moody fits which grew upon him more and more. He was very silent and thoughtful in these times, and often failed to hear half of what was said to him.*'

Oscar Wilde, reviewing his work:
'*Gordon is one of the finest poetic singers the English race has ever known.*'

Frank Maldon Robb:
'*And what shall we say of our debt to him?*
This at least – it can never be repaid. Centuries hence, when men go up beside the banks of the noble stream of great poetry, which we believe will one day gladden the city and humanise and fertilise and deepen our Australian national life, as they climb reverently to its source, they will find on a broken memorial column, in letters that cannot fade, the name of ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.'

***Manchester Guardian*, 5 August 1933**:
'*The centenary of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Australia's most famous poet, could have no higher celebration than a memorial in Westminster Abbey, and that this national recognition is to be given him should strengthen the bond between the two countries. For above all things it is a tribute to the spirit of Australia. Gordon's title to the position of representative poet of his adopted continent does not rest on the absorption into his poetry of the country's characteristic flora and fauna, or the distinctive features of its landscape and its seaboard. It does not rest even on the achievement in pure poetry. If he is the poet of the Australian people's own laurelling, it is because his poetry embodies the qualities that have made that nation what it is. He wrote as he lived. He lived adventurously, dangerously. He faced life with a daring and a gallantry, a passion for the new land's freedom and a love of its beauty; and equally with a heart in noble conflict with vast and formidable natural forces, with malign circumstance, and with hereditary melancholy in his own soul. His poetry was the poetry of action, of joy in movement, of glory in the strength of man and the swift grace of a horse. It had the kinetic quality of poetic vigour rather than the dynamic of poetic energy. Its own movement, though eurhythmically and musically ordered, was largely derivative. The dedication to Whyte-Melville is pure Swinburne. But it had no great breadth of humanity, it had a personal fire and force, a native dignity and pride, and an unconquerable courage that went straight to his people's heart. That it has found the heart of our own people, too, the Poets' Corner will now testify.*'

***The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October 1933** (opening lead story):

'*On October 19 a tablet to the memory of Adam Lindsay Gordon is to be unveiled in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. The date is the centenary of the poet's birth, but the tablet marks something more than that – it is a new landmark in our Empire history. Gordon is the first of the poets of the overseas dominions to be thus honoured. When the late Lord Forrest, Australian explorer and statesman, was called to the*

Peerage some criticism arose. But we realised, in a way we had never realised before, that we were joint heirs with Britain in the common heritage of the Empire, that not only did we share in all the glorious traditions of the past, but that there were no honours to which the sons of Britain overseas might not aspire in common with those of the Homeland. The Gordon Memorial brings this home to us in an even more striking manner.'

But Kendall did not dream that such a royal place awaited his friend as the famous Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. If Australia claims Gordon as her own, England claims him also. As it is with material things, so also is it with things of the mind and spirit; and this Westminster ceremony is but a manifestation, in all its fullness, of the 'oneness' of the Empire. Not only has England a right to claim him on that ground, but Gordon was born and educated in England. He was known as a rather wild youth, and his escapades make interesting reading, but the old Cheltenham school honours his memory and is celebrating the centenary of his birth with pride, even as we in Australia are doing.

'Slam poetry' is all rhyme no reason

(*Suggested by member Terry Maher, the following is an extract of the original article by Mary Harrington, which appeared on 17 February 2021 on the Unherd website.*)

Today's court poets reflect a society that's given up on shared values
by MARY HARRINGTON

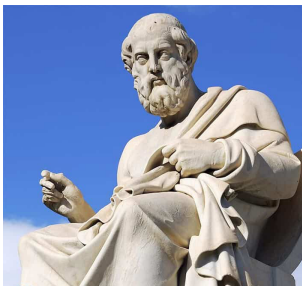
My first proper boyfriend wooed me on a damp campsite in northern France, with bad red wine and a reading of *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. I must have already been a TS Eliot fan for his technique to work, as Prufrock isn't really a romantic poem.

Despite my own susceptibility to poetry, I had always imagined that, in this age of mass media, it was as niche a phenomenon as lepidopterology or flag-collecting. Imagine my surprise, then, in 2016, when I was given a copy of Hollie McNish's collection of poems about motherhood, *Nobody Told Me*. Her short, intense pieces about motherhood spoke to me as a new mum. But here, too, was proof that poetry could be a best-seller in the 21st century, and poets could hold sell-out gigs and be venerated on Mumsnet.

If McNish is now a cult figure among mothers, poetry has climbed to still giddier heights since *Nobody Told Me* was published, most recently with the central role played by 22-year-old 'slam poet' Amanda Gorman at the inauguration of Joe Biden as US President. Gorman's poem (and her person, her attire, her youth and even her allegedly very empowering headband) have made her the subject of fevered discourse since her performance.

One can only imagine what Plato would have thought. In the Republic, Plato argued that by virtue of mirroring the messy temporal world, rather than the ideal one of metaphysical Forms, poetry drew human eyes away from contemplating the Good. Far from making poets a central part of presidential inaugurations, Plato thought they should be banned from his ideal republic.

His disciple Aristotle disagreed, though, arguing that poetry can in fact reveal better versions of the world we live in, helping us to direct our search for that Good. And whether or not you like Gorman's style, it's idealistic writing in its most unabashedly Aristotelian form.



[*For full version, see the Unherd website* – https://unherd.com/2021/02/slam-poetry-has-no-rhyme-or-reason/?tl_inbound=1&tl_groups%5b0%5d=18743&tl_period_type=3]

Tantanoola 'tiger' shot; but mystery continues ...

In 1884, a Bengal tiger escaped from a small circus travelling between Millicent and Mount Gambier during an overnight stop. Despite searching for hours in the dense scrub, they could not locate the animal and reported it to police on arriving in Mount Gambier. Police and volunteers continued the search for the escaped tiger but no sightings were made.

In the early 1890s sheep in the Tantanoola area started to disappear, with the still unsighted tiger being blamed. In 1893 reports of an unusual animal in the Tantanoola area started emerging, with many describing the animal as the missing tiger, or a large dog. One eyewitness claimed to have seen the animal carrying a full grown sheep in its mouth. The reports grew in number and exaggeration, with sightings from Robe to Bendigo. In the Tantanoola district, children were escorted with shotgun guards to and from school, with many homes keeping guns at the ready in case the tiger suddenly appeared.

In November 1891, in the rough country about 30 km north west of Mount Gambier in South Australia, a mysterious animal was reportedly on the prowl. Aboriginal shearers working on grazier John Cameron's property at German Creek came running to him, saying they were scared by a strange wild animal they said didn't belong in Australia. Even their frightened dogs were cowering in their hut. The next night it happened again. This time, John Cameron found tracks and, while they looked like that of a dog, were far larger, measuring at least 4 inches across.

The man leaning against the tree is believed to be Tom Donovan, according to Allan Childs, former caretaker of Dingley Dell Cottage. Some time prior to 1922, Tom was living at the cottage while building his own house at 'Donovan's Landing', alongside the Glenelg River near Nelson.

Nine months later, also at German Creek, sheep station manager John Livingstone was told by an Aborigine of a strange animal stalking the property.

Then, in December 1892, at the nearby town of Tantanoola, Walter Taylor and his wife were driving home in their horse buggy when they saw a strange animal slinking across the road ahead. This beast was brown, with stripes, stood more than 2 ft tall and was 3 ft long with a long sweeping tail that brought its overall length to about 5 ft. The animal, which he swore wasn't a dingo, disappeared into a stand of thick bush known as Nitschke's Ti-Tree.

Tantanoola Tiger!!

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Tantanoola Tiger Reward, posted in 1892.

In mid-May 1893, property manager John Livingston, who believed the sheep station he managed was at the centre of tiger activity, convinced nearly two dozen men to join him in a search of the German Creek area, leading them to Nitschke's Ti-Tree. They broke into small groups and took up positions all around this patch, while riflemen were posted at strategic points waiting to shoot the tiger.

The men walked into the ti-tree from the south and beat the grass from the north, shouting and yelling to scare anything towards the rifles.

A dog with one of the groups got the scent of something and ran into a thicket. Then it jumped back in fright. There was something dark moving in the bushes.

The excited hunters closed in … and found a black swan on its nest. Another group of men set a small fire to scare the tiger out of hiding. Wallabies bounded ahead of the men and flame but nothing else tried to escape.

On arriving back in town, the search was declared a failure.

Then, in October 1893, the nightmare appeared to be over when Kenny Mathieson from Millicent reported he had succeeded in poisoning a huge feral pig that he reckoned had killed 200 sheep a year on his property alone. It had even completely skinned one of his horses from the chest to the knee. Mr Mathieson said this pig had hidden in ti-tree scrub by day and hunted livestock by night. After many unsuccessful attempts to shoot and poison the beast, he finally got it by mixing a paste of flour, sugar and phosphorous and pouring it over a dead sheep. The boar, he said, was more than 8 ft long from snout to tail and had sharp nine-inch tusks.

A month later, in September 1893, farmer William Johns, of Vulcan Park, was woken at 2 am by his dogs and chickens going crazy. He found big paw prints – measuring 4 inches across – and a policeman the next day took plaster casts, which he sent to the Adelaide Zoo. A zoologist compared them with those of a tiger and a Saint Bernard and found it was likely whatever was stalking the Tantanoola countryside wasn't feline but canine.

However, something was still killing sheep and weak cattle, and leaving big paw prints.

In August 1894, John Livingston's 17-year-old nephew Donald Smith was riding the German Creek property near Lake Bonney when he noticed a flock of sheep in distress. Investigating, he saw – at a distance of just a few yards – a large strange animal, walking firmly towards the ti-trees, with a full-grown sheep struggling in its mouth. Smith had never seen a tiger but felt sure he was now looking at one. It stood about 2 ft 6 in off the ground, was more than 4 ft long and had dull stripes all over its light brown body, with much more distinctive stripes on its head and face. Frightened, Smith rode to his uncle's house at Burrungule, and John Livingston sent him to the Mount Gambier police to demand they do something. The inspector in charge believed the claim and dispatched two mounted constables and a black tracker to search for the tiger. These men returned to the ti-tree stands and spent a day beating the bush. While the search the year before had been a farce, this one yielded something tangible near a spot where Donald Smith had seen the tiger. The soil showed claw marks and evidence of a struggle. Following tracks, the policemen and the black tracker found small tufts of bloody wool hung up on ferns, leading them to believe the beast had carried a sheep this way. They also found a big paw print, measuring 5 inches wide, and deep enough to suggest the animal was heavy.

Through 1895 there were sightings of the Tantanoola Tiger every month or so, including several around German Creek's Duckhole Swamp. In response, John Livingston sent two men and a blacktracker to stake out the area for a week. But they had competition.

In August 1895, Thomas Donovan, a local crack shot and sportsman, left Nelson with William Taylor, both men being well-armed, and reached the Mount Salt station (a part of the Mount Schanck estate) early in the evening. On arrival there they asked Mr RG Watson, the manager, if he would engage them to hunt the tiger. He declined, and then they asked him to allow them to look for the brute on their own account. He agreed to that and, at their request, directed them to a range four miles west of Mount Salt, on which young Houston recently reported seeing a strange beast which, he said, was not very unlike a tiger. They went there and camped for the night.

The stuffed 'Tantanoola tiger' – State Library of South Australia, B 13741.

Before sunrise they were on the look-out, and saw a mob of sheep rushing about and very much agitated. The country was clear of timber, but somewhat ferny. The sheep were about

300 yards away, and they observed that the cause of their agitation was what appeared to be a large fawn dog, which was amongst them. Then it singled out a sheep, and caught it, knocking it over with its paws three or four times, rendering it quite stupid. Then it sat on its haunches and looked at the tortured victim.

Meanwhile, the huntsmen were creeping up stealthily and, when about 100 yards away, while it was sitting on its haunches, and nearly facing him, Donovan fired his rifle at the brute. It was evidently severely hit, but ran more than 200 yards before it fell. Then the men, rushing up, found it dying, having been shot through the heart, the bullet passing through the body. They brought it to Mount Gambier at once, calling at Mount Salt on their way, and showing their trophy to Mr Watson, who expressed his great gratification that the destructive beast of prey had been shot.

Donovan placed the carcase in the hands of James Marks, a taxidermist, to have it skinned and stuffed with the object of exhibiting it for money. Mr Marks and several other good judges pronounced it a pure wolf of the common European variety (*Lupus vulgaris*).

In those first few days after he'd shot the wolf, some who'd been the most vocal believers in a beast roaming the countryside now didn't believe this was the creature. John Livingston wasn't satisfied it was the same animal described by so many witnesses. Mr Unger, a witness who'd followed the creature, was absolutely sure it wasn't the same animal. So, too, was Mr Houston, who'd seen it just a few weeks ago at Duckhole Paddock. However, Mr Maclay, who'd also spotted it in that area, reckoned it was the same beast. As did young Donald Smith.

The *Border Watch* sided with the doubters. 'However frightened one might be at it, it seems inconceivable that the idea of a tiger should come to mind', their correspondent wrote ... 'It is highly improbable that two such animals as a wolf and a tiger should be roaming in the same locality in this district.'

Unless, of course, what some witnesses had seen was actually a Thylacine – the Tasmanian Tiger believed extinct on the mainland. Many – most – descriptions more closely matched the marsupial wolf.

Back then, though, conversation centred on how a wolf had wound up in the South Australian countryside. One theory was that it had survived a shipwreck on the rugged coastline. Another – offered by the Adelaide Zoo's director – was that it was a crossbred wolf that had escaped from a Victorian zoo, where several such specimens had once been kept.

It might have been stuffed, but the Tantanoola Tiger was still on the prowl. On the very same day the wolf was first exhibited, a youth named Mounce, working for a Mrs Wehl on the range between Tantanoola and the coast, said he saw the creature in broad daylight. The animal was, he said, unquestionably a tiger and not a wolf or dog.

In the next few years, the Tantanoola Tiger would be seen repeatedly in the district. But gradually memory of the tiger began to fade after the turn of the century, revived only now and again by sightings of what were called Tantanoola Tigers, in Victoria and even in New South Wales.

Then, as the first decade of the 20th century progressed, Tantanoola's graziers were suddenly again losing sheep in huge numbers. One, James Chant, reckoned he'd lost as many as 200 a year for the past seven or eight years. In December 1910, three hunters from Tantanoola drove down to the Lake Bonney flats for day of snipeshooting on Mr Chant's land. The men started working a big scrub paddock but as a south-west wind picked up they were hit by a dreadful stench coming from a dense stand of ti-tree about half a mile away. They had stumbled upon a hidden, but well-worn, path into the labyrinth. About 75 feet into the ti-tree he beheld a chamber of horrors. Someone had carved a yard out of the middle of the thick ti-tree. All around were freshly-killed sheep and lambs, and more rotting carcasses besides, while overhead on wires hung long lines of bloody sheepskins. Another of the hunters arrived and the two men were astounded to find a second hidden yard, larger than the first, which contained 42 recently slaughtered sheep and lambs piled two and three deep – all which bore the brand of Mr Chant.

While the police tried to keep the story quiet, details leaked out and the killing ground became a morbid tourist attraction. Meanwhile, locals at the Tantanoola Hotel were amused by the appearance of a tramp called 'Weary Willie' who'd recently arrived in town and who seemed to be asking a lot of questions.

Locals were also getting fed up with the police, who didn't seem to be making any progress in bringing the sheep-killers to justice.

Then, in the hotel, on the evening of 5 January 1911, all eyes were on the tramp – as he led a cadaverous middle-aged Tantanoola creep named Robert Charles Edmondson through the bar in handcuffs. The hobo was in reality Detective Herbert Allchurch, sent from Adelaide in disguise, to snoop around and find out who'd been selling sheep skins on the sly. Allchurch had elicited more information and discovered five other concealed slaughter yards and shearing stations.

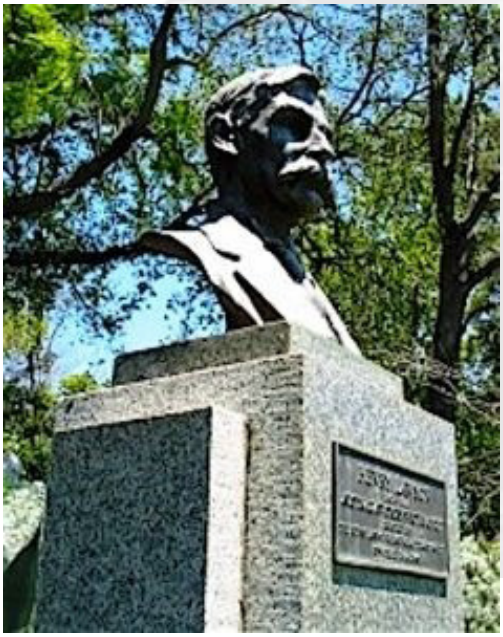
The committal hearing of Robert Charles Edmondson was held on 18 January, and he was charged with having killed 76 of Mr Chant's sheep. The accused's accomplice – 20-year-old labourer James Bald – made a full confession. From September 1910, he said he'd made good money helping Edmondson round up, kill and skin sheep. But, in December, when their lair was discovered, the older man had threatened to blow his brains out if he said anything about their crimes.

When Edmondson went to trial in April 1911 in Mount Gambier, he pleaded guilty and also admitted to having been sentenced to 12 months for sheep stealing in 1899 in Horsham, Victoria. He was sentenced to six years hard labour.

At the Tantanoola Tiger Hotel, the taxidermied beast still holds pride of place in a glass case.

However, many locals have since reported seeing a strange dog-like animal, including Allan Childs, when he was a young man travelling from Blackfellows Caves, remembers seeing a strange animal in the district on several occasions. Tiger?... or thylacine, perhaps?

References: Michael Adams, 'The grisly mystery of the murderous Tantanoola Tiger', news.com.au, 24 February 2019 (with permission); The Narracoorte Herald, 23 August 1895 (Trove), p. 3; Federation University Australia Historical Collection (Victorian Collections) - https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/503ff2562162ef0d48a1904b.



Henry Lawson annual tribute in 2021 goes ahead but 'less formal'

Once a year, the Henry Lawson Memorial and Literary Society gather in Footscray Park to celebrate Henry's life with renditions of his works, performances of singers and other poets and prose, making it a thoroughly engaging afternoon.

This year, due to Covid uncertainties, the society decided on a 'less formal' get-together for 7 March, with a few members wanting to keep the tradition alive by meeting in the Gazebo in the park from 1.30 pm onwards, for a chat and some poetry.

Members originally congregated around the statue erected in Henry's honour in 1960 in Footscray Park but, due to the uneven terrain, they now gather at the Gazebo, situated to the extreme right of Henry's statue location from the Ballarat Road entrance.

Are you the plumber?

'Are you the plumber?' asked Mrs Jones.
'Yes, madam, I'm the plumber right enough.'
'Well,' she replied. 'I just wanted to caution you to exercise care when doing your work. All my floors are highly polished and in perfect condition.'
'Oh, don't worry about me slipping lady; I've got nails in my boots.'