

Overland Telegraph
150th Anniversary
1872-2022

Overland Telegraph Sesquicentennial Symposium

Thursday 21 July 2022
Allan Scott Auditorium
University of South Australia

Program

- 9:30** **Welcome**
Keith Conlon OAM, Chair SA Heritage Council, Adelaide
- 9:35** **Official Opening**
Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC,
Governor of South Australia
- 9:40** **Connecting the Colonies**
Richard Venus, Forensic Heritologist, Adelaide
- 10:05** **Building the Overland Telegraph Line**
Derek Pugh OAM, Historian and Author, Darwin
- 10:30** **The Overland Telegraph Construction:
Relations with First Nations People**
Susie Herzberg OAM, Urban & Environmental Planner, Adelaide
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- 10:55** **Refreshments**
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- 11:25** **Todd After the Great Work:
Meeting the Challenges of the 1870s**
Emeritus Professor Denis Cryle, Central Queensland University
- 11:50** **More Than an Infrastructure Project:
The Overland Telegraph as a Line of Enquiry**
Dr Philip Jones, SA Museum, Adelaide
- 12:15** **The Overland Telegraph Line – 150 Years On**
Andrew Crouch, Overland Telegraph Historian
- 12:40** **Book Launch: *Twenty to the Mile***
Julian Todd, great-great-grandson of Sir Charles Todd, Sydney
- 12:55** **Conclusion**
Keith Conlon OAM
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- 1:00** **Meet the Author: *Twenty to the Mile***
Derek Pugh OAM



Remnant of the 1872
Line at Frew Ponds
[Derek Pugh]

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Our Presenters



Richard Venus

Richard is a retired electrical engineer and post-graduate archaeology student with an interest in researching and writing about South Australia's engineering heritage. He has served as chair of Engineering Heritage SA and vice-president of the History Council of SA. In 2015 Richard was awarded Engineers Australia's John Monash medal. He has been instrumental in the national heritage recognition of both the Overland Telegraph Line and the East-West Telegraph and has followed the story of the OTL and Sir Charles Todd from the Outback to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.



Derek Pugh

Derek is a retired teacher and school principal with a healthy interest in the history of the Northern Territory that has resulted in 16 books, so far, on 19th century settlement in the north. A member of the NT Heritage Steering committee organising the commemoration at Frew Ponds on 22 August, Derek will be ceremoniously smashing a brandy bottle of cold tea against the "joining pole" 150 years after Robert Patterson did the same. Derek is currently working on a film with Director Andrew Hyde; called *Twenty to the Mile*, it will tell the story of the OTL.



Susie Herzberg

Susie has worked as an urban, environmental and strategic planner in government and private practice, and at the University of Adelaide. A Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Susie has served on boards including Koala Life (currently), the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium, SA Housing Trust, Nature Foundation SA and the State Cycling Council. Susie is a past president of the Australian Institute of Urban Studies (SA) and the Civic Trust (SA). As one of the many descendants of Charles Todd, and an inheritor of many family stories, Susie has long had an interest in the OTL.



Denis Cryle

Denis has published widely in the fields of Australian colonial history and biography, as well as on Commonwealth communications, telegraphy and the newspaper press. His books and edited collections include: *Behind the Legend: The Many Worlds of Charles Todd* (2017), *Murdoch's Flagship* (2008), *Consent and Consensus* (2005), *Disreputable Profession* (1997) and *The Petrie Family* (1992). He is an Emeritus Professor at Central Queensland University.



Philip Jones

Philip has been a curator in the SA Museum's Department of Anthropology since the 1980s. His doctoral thesis concerned the history of Australian ethnographic collecting. He has undertaken fieldwork with Aboriginal communities in Central Australia and the Simpson Desert, and has curated more than 30 exhibitions, ranging from Aboriginal art to frontier photography. His recent republication of Francis Gillen's journal, detailing his 1901-1902 ethnographic expedition with Baldwin Spencer, has sharpened his interest in the Line's networks of knowledge and enquiry.



Andrew Crouch

Andrew is an "almost retired" engineer. His interest in the OTL evolved while he lived and worked in Alice Springs. Initially, that involved searching for relics of the Line in Central Australia. In 2020 he published *Building the Line*, based on the diary of Thomas Frederick Smith. He has contributed a number of papers containing new insights on other OTL topics to the *OT150* website, and has transcribed the extensive private diaries of Robert Patterson. In 2021 he nominated a section of the original 1871 Line (containing a rich selection of artefacts) for NT Heritage listing.

Summary of Proceedings

(Note: The preferred date was 28 July, the date on which Charles Todd gave his long-awaited public lecture on the Overland Telegraph in 1873, but the venue was not available.)

The Symposium was facilitated by **Keith Conlon** OAM, chair of the SA Heritage Council.

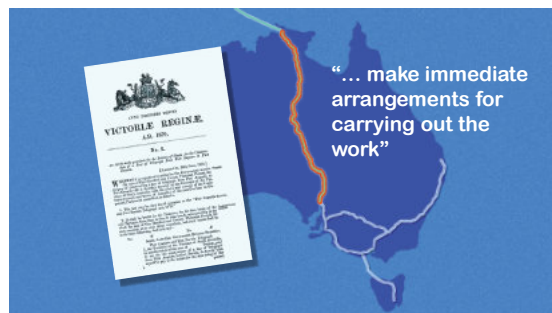
OPENING

Her Excellency the **Honourable Frances Adamson** AC, Governor of South Australia, opened the Symposium, speaking at some length in Kurna language. She referred to the importance of effective communication and the key role played in the OTL project by a number of her predecessors, especially **Sir Richard MacDonnell** (Governor from 1855 to 1862) who was a staunch and early advocate for South Australia taking the lead.

RICHARD VENUS

“Connecting the Colonies”

Richard set the scene by describing the efforts to trim relatively tiny amounts from the time taken to convey written messages by sailing ship, the only means of communication in the early days of the Australian colonies. Successive technological revolutions, first the steam-powered ships used on the packet mail services and then the electric telegraph, whittled this down from months to weeks and finally to hours. It took some time before Australia was ready to join the steadily-expanding overseas telegraph network and South Australia’s audacious offer to build the Overland Telegraph Line snatched the prize that Queensland believed was in its grasp.



DEREK PUGH OAM

“Building the Overland Telegraph Line”

Derek took up the story of the construction of the OTL, drawing attention to the logistical challenges of getting a large workforce and significant quantities of livestock (providing both transport and a food source) and materials into the heart of the continent. He highlighted the stories of several individuals: **Robert Patterson**, the railway engineer tasked with completing the troubled Northern Section; **Alfred Pybus**, a former OTL linesman whose lonely bush grave seems peaceful; **William Crowder**, the young cadet, a boy among men; and **Elizabeth Sweet**, wife of the captain of the government schooner *Gulnare* who didn’t recognise her own husband when she arrived at the Roper River depot. **Derek** concluded with a Cook’s tour of the OTL’s stunning landscape, encouraging travellers to explore for themselves the OTT – the **Overland Telegraph Trail**.



www.twentytothemile.com.au Facebook: *twenty to the mile*

SUSIE HERZBERG OAM

“The Overland Telegraph Construction: Relations with First Nations People”

As one of Todd’s descendants, **Susie** grew up with stories about her great-great-grandfather’s benevolent attitude towards Aboriginal people. Despite good intentions at colonisation, they had “lost much, and gained little or nothing” as European settlement spread. At the time the OTL was planned, the office of Protector of Aborigines had been vacant for several years. Planning for the OTL showed little understanding of, or respect for Aboriginal peoples’ connection to Country or traditional knowledge. Six of the “Instructions to Overseers in Charge of Works” dealt specifically with interactions with Aboriginal people to minimise conflict, delays and interference with the line. While much evidence indicates compliance with the “Instructions”, there were frequent skirmishes and no evidence that these were documented as required by the “Instructions”. Future relationships need to be based on respect and the principles of Reconciliation enounced in the “Uluru Statement from the Heart”.



www.ot150.net/library/monograph/first_nations.pdf

EMERITUS PROFESSOR DENIS CRYLE

“Todd After the Great Work: Meeting the Challenges of the 1870s”

Denis, author of Charles Todd’s biography, *Behind the Legend*, looked at events following the completion of the “Great Work”: along with praise and recognition, including Todd’s CMG, came insinuations about the stability of the line, not helped by remarks made by Patterson in Brisbane. In 1873, Todd gave a public lecture on the OTL and images were featured in the *Illustrated London News*. Work also began on replacing poles. Todd also had to deal with his responsibilities as Postmaster-General and the Commission of Inquiry which followed a robbery at the GPO in 1874. Following problems with the undersea cable now being managed by the **Eastern Extension Telegraph Company**, Todd recommended duplication of the cable in 1876 and, as a technical expert, was a key contributor to the Intercolonial Telegraph conference, held in Melbourne in 1878, which debated new connection points for overseas cables. Todd also continued his cooperative research with **Joseph Oppenheimer** to improve the insulation of telegraph lines.



DR PHILIP JONES

“More than an Infrastructure Project: The Overland Telegraph as a Line of Enquiry”

Philip said the conventional view of telegraph station personnel is that of facilitators, receiving and sending messages and servicing the Line. However, it is also clear that the stations played a key role in supporting exploring expeditions during the 1870s. Moreover, the scientific expeditions of the 1890s stimulated active enquiry and collaboration between station staff and visiting scientists. Prominent among these was **Frank Gillen**, stationmaster at Alice Springs from 1892, who became a recognised anthropologist. Telegraph staff became a point of contact with local Aboriginal people: Arrernte women, for example, were able to supply examples of small animals – which they knew as food sources, to the **Horn Scientific Expedition**. Telegraph staff, including **Charles Todd** himself, also collected word lists of local languages. It is possible to see the Line as a generator, not just a transmitter, of knowledge.



ANDREW CROUCH

“The Overland Telegraph Line -- 150 Years On”

Andrew, an “almost retired engineer” who worked in telecommunications, lived in Alice Springs for a number of years and showed some of the OTL relics he’d found – and left in place – after many hours spent searching in the bush. He also showed some examples of the rich documentary history “hidden in plain sight” in the State Library of SA, State Records of SA, and the Royal Geographical Society of SA: in particular, the personal diary of **Robert Patterson** – which Andrew has transcribed for the State Library – and which puts beyond doubt the time when Patterson made the final joint in the Line – 3:15 pm on 22 August 1872.

He concluded his presentation with a short film: the stunning footage projected onto the big screen as a drone flew along remnants of the original OTL was the next best thing to being there yourself and brought the Symposium to a most satisfying conclusion.



But wait, there’s more ...

Julian Todd, great-great-grandson of Sir Charles, first thanked the Symposium organisers and presenters and then, representing his father **Barry Todd** who had been unable to travel from NSW, launched Derek Pugh’s recently published book about the OTL, *Twenty to the Mile*, which has a foreword by SA’s previous Governor, the Honourable **Hieu Van Le** AC.