The Creation of the Torrens:

A History of Adelaide’s River to 1881

by

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ABSTRACT

The River Torrens in Adelaide is a fragile watercourse with variable seasonal flows which was transformed in the nineteenth century into an artificial lake on a European scale. This thesis presents the reasons behind the changes which took place. The creation of the Torrens covers both physical changes and altering conceptions of the river from a society which, on the whole, desired a European river and acted as though the Torrens was one. The period of study ranges from the Kaurna people’s life, which adapted around the river they called Karrawirraparri, to the damming of the river in 1881. Being the major river for the city, the relatively higher population density meant huge environmental pressure; an inability to assess its limits lead to it being heavily polluted and degraded only a decade after white settlement. Distinct stages in the use of the river can be observed and a variety of both positive and negative responses towards it were recorded. By studying the interactions with, and attitudes towards, the River Torrens, and the changes it has undergone, we learn much about the societies that inhabited the river and their values towards a specific and crucial part of the natural environment. Race relations along the central area of the river, its use as a natural resource and issues of public health are examined. It was only after the river ceased to be the major water resource for Adelaide that its final “beautification” took place and its aesthetic and recreational function became primary.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed:

/ Sharyn Clarke
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"THE CREATION OF THE TORRENS": INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the destruction of the Torrens as a natural river ecology and its recreation as an artificial one. The natural river was destroyed through the pressures placed on it by a population that needed a river to support social and economic growth. It was destroyed by a society that, most of all, desired a European river and acted towards the Torrens as though it was one. The irony is that a European river – broad and wide, constantly flowing, framed by sylvan banks and shady trees, was eventually created – but only after the natural river was ruined and the vital functions it originally served were rendered largely irrelevant.

The historical study of rivers is an important one and nineteenth century ideas have in turn influenced our modern perceptions and use of river areas. Water is central to life and to society; and rivers are central to a city. Human settlement has always been shaped by the availability of water, we have built myths around it, used metaphors to describe it and societies have attempted to control it. All these facets of water and its manipulation and appropriation are evident in the history of the central area of the River Torrens in Adelaide. My aim is not just to analyse societies’ perceptions and use of the river but to also observe how the river in turn influenced society. I have considered the impact of politics, social structure, technologies and value systems on the river during the period of study. It is a time of immense change for the river area, ranging from the Kaurna people’s life, which adapted around the river, to white society’s creation of an artificial lake in 1881.

The geographical area of my investigation is the region of the Torrens within the city, an area known in nineteenth century cities as the central riverbanks. The perimeter of the area is that shown as bounding Adelaide in Light and Kingston’s plan of the city in 1837, and since recognised as the border between Adelaide and the near suburbs (see Figure 1, p.2). This study is thus specifically concerned with the interaction between the Adelaide community and the river, rather than being a history of the whole of the Torrens River. The distinction is a logical one to make. The central area has been treated as a separate entity since the beginning of white settlement and this has continued.
Figure 1: Kingston’s Plan of Adelaide 1837 with modifications by Kingston and Light, March 1837
In studying the history of the Torrens distinct stages in the use of the river can be observed.
For the very early settlers it was primarily a water source, a general natural resource, and a
living space, which they initially shared with the Aboriginal people of the area. As the city
developed, the industrial function of water and its use for the expulsion of sewage would
place an added burden on the river. Water is traditionally life giving; but it can also be life
threatening as the settlers found when they polluted the fragile stream, and through the many
drownings and floods that occurred. With the city’s development the environment was forced
to change, it was firstly destroyed, and then reconstructed. I have chosen 1881 to conclude my
analysis as it was at this time that the river was completely transformed into a lake. Although
its landscaping would take some time to complete, at this significant point we witness the
recreation and transformation of the river into something resembling its present form.

The Kaurna, the indigenous inhabitants of the river area, had a complex relationship with it,
and we can follow the same examination of values, economic structure and technologies in
their life along the river as we can with white society. The Kaurna’s beliefs concerning, and
relationship with, the riverine environment contrast with the ideas of those who organised the
settlement of South Australia and with the early settlers’ perceptions. Their occupation of the
area would also pose a dilemma to white society. The idea of the creation of the Torrens, both
physically and as a concept, plays an important part in my thesis. Dreamings were essential to
the Kaurna interpretation of the river environment and the settlers had ideals which they
would struggle to fulfil.

This analysis is partly concerned with how society reacted to a small creek, which dried up to
a few waterholes in summer, being the central river area in their city and how it came to be
transformed into a lake and parklands area and an object of civic pride. The Torrens is a small
river, a creek really, and its size has always been a cause for concern. One of the early settlers,
upon reaching the river designated as Adelaide’s central watersource exclaimed, “That the Torrens!”1
Another settler complained that not only was the Torrens a disgrace, but there was
not a proper river in the whole colony. These were not isolated cases, and the derision was to
continue. Settlers coming from well-watered England did not initially have words to describe
this Australian river which at some times was a chain of small ponds, at others a raging
torrent. The contrast in its seasonal variation was at odds with their previous experiences of
waterways, and its proportions a joke in terms of the size deemed respectable for a city’s
river. Importantly, the meagre dimensions of the river would provide problems in regard to
water supply, pollution and sewerage disposal. The hot, dry climate of Adelaide in summer

1 J.C Hawker, Early Experiences in South Australia, E.S.Wigg and Son, Adelaide 1899, p.7.
would place added pressure on the river. As the city grew aesthetic concerns and issues of civic pride would increasingly shape treatment of the Torrens.

The settlement of the Torrens shows the significance of inherited ideas, beliefs and practices. After the river ceased to be the major water resource for Adelaide its aesthetic function became primary and it became an object of civic pride rather than shame. There was always a recreational and aesthetic agenda behind the reservation of the river and its bank, but these did not come to the fore until later in the course of settlement. The predominant environmental aesthetic valued European and, more specifically, English landscapes. Those who wanted to transform the areas were strongly influenced by traditional ideas of what a city’s central riverbanks should look like.

While there were distinct stages of land use along the Torrens, there were also underlying and persisting issues that can be identified. For example, people’s perceptions regarding the healthiness of the area was an ongoing issue. The Torrens’ use for bathing and recreation oscillates in importance. Points related to gender also occasionally arise in relation to the river area. From the beginning of settlement, the summer heat was a great concern for settlers, and heat exhaustion was common. The desire for water’s cooling effects in the hot summers of Adelaide is one that develops in importance. The economic situation of the government and its ability and desire to maintain control over the area has also impacted significantly upon the region. A wide range of changing, and at times multiple uses, were imposed upon the river. These functions placed upon its limited means were often contradictory, the consequence being that, at times, none of them were met satisfactorily.

LITERATURE SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

What are the problems associated with doing a history of a river? In what field do I classify my study? Environmental History is the sub-discipline of history that posed itself as the obvious choice. Environmental History emerged in the late 1960s and has grown steadily. It is defined in *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* as being different to historical geography, as it has a closer alliance with environmental politics. There is “explicit engagement with the scientific insights and metaphors of ecology” but also a “determination to give the non-human world some agency in the historical narrative”. Environmental history is also seen more as a humanities discipline than the more scientific historical geography.

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The definition given by Griffiths in the *Oxford Companion* is a fairly narrow one. History of the environment is far more varied and not everyone places an emphasis on ecology as the over-riding system in their analysis. Moreover, there is much material that comes from scholars working in the humanities and seeking to analyse people’s responses to the Australian landscape. I have incorporated this approach into my work. I have not pursued the ecology metaphor, as I feel it tends to impose too much of a system or ideology upon the past for what I wanted to achieve. Others have had my misgivings. Opie points out in “Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities” that “the technique of ecology as a biological science pays scant attention to individuals in a community or species, or to individual differences or variations. Its attention is centered on groups, populations and species. This approach is filled with peril for the interests of the individual and the self.”

Moreover, histories of rivers have tended to employ a variety of approaches, depending on the author’s aims. The agency given to the environment, on the other hand, is very relevant, and the Torrens had a major impact on the Adelaide community.

There are other sub-disciplines of history that I have turned to in my study. For example, there are some aspects of regional history and social history which have informed my approach. If through regional history I may achieve Bolton’s aim for this area of making it “part of a dynamic through which our concepts of Australian society are tested and refined” then I have certainly achieved something worthwhile. I have aimed to do a social history of an environmental feature, looking at the interplay between the settlers and Kaurna society and the river environment in this region, but without ignoring the impact that the environment has also had upon the societies living near the river. My thesis sheds further light on the urban history of Adelaide in regard to how the city was influenced by the river. Finally, it also illuminates the environmental history of Adelaide, and settlers’ attitudes and use of the river area which resulted ultimately in its destruction and then rebirth.

Aesthetic perceptions of the river area are important to my thesis because they played an important role in shaping how the river was treated. A variety of responses to the riverine environment are in evidence during this period. Segments of English society who settled in South Australia had embraced the Romantic view of nature. As Thomas writes, “By the end of the eighteenth century...the old preference for a cultivated and man-dominated landscape had been decisively challenged.”

3 J. Opie, “Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities”, in *Environmental History*, 1985, p.2
influenced perceptions of the Torrens. Dunlap has pointed out in *Nature and the English Diaspora*, that people’s perceptions of the land can often become more important than the geographical reality. He defines landscape as the picture of the land that people see and emphasizes that it is a “continuing construction, shaped by each generation from the land, the culture, and the experience.”

This remains true of the Torrens River, where changing perceptions of the land had a considerable impact upon the river. Dunlap also points out that we “invest landscapes we see with significance because of what we know.” Settlers came from a range of cultural backgrounds, even within the limited geographical sphere from which they migrated. Thus a landscape that some perceived as Romantic, others may have viewed as wasteland, or looked at with eyes attuned to its economic significance.

Over the last fifteen to twenty years environmental historians have used rivers as the primary subject in significant histories of ecology, politics, culture and technology. While many histories of rivers have been undertaken in Australia and overseas I shall turn to some important examples from Australia. Seddon’s *Searching for the Snowy: An Environmental History* is one such account. Seddon divides his book into two sections: firstly, an examination of the high country, and, secondly, of the border region and ocean mouth. In his “Introduction” Seddon analyses the problem of conducting an environmental history of a river and decides to concentrate on a history of land use, while also analysing the human responses to the landscape and their perceptions of it. Seddon outlines four to five categories of land use, which are aligned to major events and changes generated outside the region. Seddon firstly identifies the hunter gatherers’ land use, followed by semi-nomadic pastoralism which developed slowly into a settler pastoral economy with towns, roads, railways and other services. This was succeeded by an urban industrial society which “thoughtlessly murdered the river and now uses the corpse for recreation.” The land use distinction is similar to that of Adelaide’s river although the progression between different stages is much swifter with the Torrens. In the second stage semi-nomadic pastoralism is by-passed as the creation of a city area occurs immediately with white settlement. This is an important distinction, the settlement had to cope with rapidly meeting the resource demands for a city area, while also acknowledging that there was a recreational aim behind the river area.

Of significance to my approach is *The Murray: A River and Its People* by Sinclair which is a cultural and environmental history of the River Murray. The integration of both culture and

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7 ibid., p.12.
9 ibid., xxii.
environment has also been used in my approach to the Torrens and, like Sinclair, I have aimed to investigate the richness of the river’s history. Sinclair’s aim was to uncover the “different views of the river’s past, present and possible future” and thus, in doing so, “settlement society” may be reminded that within their culture there are stories which will enable them to live in a sustainable manner with the Murray. Sinclair follows in the path of historians such as Schama who have not disregarded Western society’s interaction with nature as entirely negative, but rather have sought to reveal the “richness of our landscape tradition”. Sinclair writes about a river which has had generations of settlers living alongside of it. It is a river that still exists, although he concedes that there are now two rivers. The first is that which contains native species of flora and fauna which has adapted over thousands of years. The second is the modern regulated river of the twentieth century. In uncovering responses to the Torrens I have also found that there are many positive and varying reactions to the area; although in the case of the Torrens, only the modern regulated river remains.

One of the differences between Seddon’s and Sinclair’s investigations and mine is that they deal with entirely different kinds of rivers. Both deal with large rural rivers which were very important for the economy of the area; the Torrens, however, is a small river in the central area of a city. And this is how my thesis varies from many of the histories of rivers that have been written. In the multitude of books dealing with this subject, the majority deal with large rural rivers. Within cities, the higher population density means greater environmental pressure on its rivers and a hastened destruction of the environment. Along with this, the aesthetic importance of the river is heightened in an urban area.

While this is the only history of the River Torrens in the central area of the city there is some secondary material that deals with the river. The book edited by Warburton, *The Five Creeks of the River Torrens*, follows the history of the creeks along the upper section of the river and has scientific articles about the hydrology, botany, geography and the pollution of the area. There is also a collection of primary source articles from the Register about the flooding of the Torrens in *Historical Account of Flooding and Related Events in the Torrens River System from First Settlement to 1986*. As is stated in the introduction to this collection, no attempt is made to analyse the causes of the floods or their magnitude; it is simply an attempt to document and describe the floods as they occurred, and I have used this mainly as a primary

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11 *ibid.*, p.22.
source. In Water: South Australia, Hammerton looks at the history of the Engineering and Water Supply Department in South Australia and this touches on some of the early history of the Torrens River. In Pre-European Vegetation of Adelaide Kraehenbuehl surveys the vegetation of the River Torrens and gives some accounts of the early settlers’ descriptions of the river.

The primary sources I have used reflect my broad approach to the history of the Torrens River. Given my strong cultural emphasis, I have used a wide range of sources to uncover the larger society’s attitudes, not just those of power or influence. These sources have of necessity varied due to different foci according to chapter themes. Documents such as those from the South Australian Company, early explorers’ records, and William Light’s Diary have been useful for the first chapter. I have used diaries, published reminiscences and recollections, and other archival material, to identify early impressions of the river. Nineteenth century histories of South Australia have also been employed because they record peoples’ reactions, and descriptions of the landscape. Maps, pictures and paintings have been utilised throughout to analyse people’s impressions, and for geographical and explanatory purposes.

Specific diaries have been helpful for what they tell us about the Aboriginal people, such as Cawthorne’s account of the Aborigines, and the diaries of Lutheran missionaries. South Australia’s main newspaper, the Register, has proved to be a significant source. There was a great deal published regarding the pollution of the River Torrens, both by the editor of the Register and in letters to the editor, and the newspaper is also a chronicle of the changing attitudes to water supply. Significant debate regarding the development of the area as a parklands and lake also occurred in the Register and the Advertiser. Parliamentary papers have been examined regarding discussion of the 1856 Water and Sewerage Act and other relevant issues, and State Records archival material used. Council records, including the plans for the Torrens Lake by J.E.Brown, the Conservator of Forests, have been a valuable resource.

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GEOGRAPHY: INTRODUCING THE RIVER

Before exploring society's interaction with the river a summary of its geography and botany is needed. The River Torrens evolved many thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans and had undergone slow, subtle, geographical changes. The major rivers in the Adelaide plains are of considerable antiquity and there is evidence that the ancestral river Torrens already existed during the early Tertiary period, approximately fifty million years ago. The river has a complex history: it seems likely that the Torrens had reached an advanced stage of development prior to the uplift of the Mount Lofty Ranges in late Tertiary times. Evidence for this lies in the prevalence of meanders and other mature features.

The River Torrens rises near Mt Pleasant, close to the eastern escarpment of the Mount Lofty Ranges and flows west to reach the Gulf of St. Vincent between Grange and Glenelg. (see Figure 2) The striking contrast between the hills and plains of Adelaide has resulted from geological processes dating back over a thousand million years. It was a contrast that would be remarked upon by early settlers. The central area of the Torrens lies in the bed of an older river. However, the Mount Lofty Ranges are geologically young and the rivers that drain from them to the gulf show the youthful features of deeply incised, actively eroding valleys and interlocking spurs, waterfalls and rapids. The course of the river runs across a very fractured regional anticline, the principal faults running roughly north south. An early settler observed this rather poetically in 1839 when he pointed out that the hills of the Mt Lofty Ranges "rose up in gently swelling acclivities". The course of the Torrens generally runs across these regional anticlines so that in broad view the river

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20 Ibid., p.3
crosses over these faults although in some areas of the hills it does run parallel.\textsuperscript{22} Between the Hillcrest Defile and the city the river ran in an open shallow valley, with a distinctly terraced floor. The river here ran in a southwesterly direction around the exposed southern end of the Para Fault Block. The valley was asymmetrical and the northern slope is steepest.\textsuperscript{23}

One of the major changes that had occurred was in its western sections beyond the city where the Torrens crosses the Adelaide Plains to the sea. It at first ran along the southern slope of a large alluvial fan, the orientation of which shows that the Torrens formerly entered the gulf at Port Adelaide. However, as is common with rivers that are depositing alluvial materials, the Torrens choked and diverted itself, so that at time of settlement it ran westwards, rather than northwest. The diversion resulted in the river running into a triangular plain enclosed on the southwest by the Eden Fault Scarp and the associated alluvial fans; on the north by the Port alluvial fan; and on the west by coastal dunes. Cowandilla was the name given by the Aboriginal people to this low-lying swampy area behind coastal sand dunes; the early settlers referred to it as the Reedbeds. This flat swampy land and back lagoon behind the beaches stretched from Glenelg to the Old Port Reach of the Port River (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{24}

When Colonel Light began to organise the systematic land survey around Adelaide he referred to the Cowandilla plains as low grounds, subject to flooding. The river was prone to flooding, particularly the Reedbeds where the full force of the water spilled onto the plains. It has been estimated that at the time of settlement as much as 90\% of the River Torrens catchment was vegetated, thus lessening the effects of flooding.\textsuperscript{25} The Torrens River delivered the largest amount of water onto the area. Three other streams, in order of size, Sturt Creek, Brownhill Creek and Glen Osmond Creek, debouched independently upon the Cowandilla Plains. Along these four watercourses, together with the small tributaries of the Torrens River, known as the First to Fifth Creeks, the run-off of a considerable area of the Mt Lofty Ranges was passed through the Adelaide plains to be ponded in the lagoonal swamps. Openings to the sea at the Patawalonga Estuary and through the old Port Reach discharged the flood flows until summer and autumn when the combined water output could be entirely dissipated by evaporation from the swamp and marsh surfaces.\textsuperscript{26}

The flow of the river varied throughout its course. In Adelaide rainfall during summer is rare, and precipitation during January and February is most likely to result from thunderstorms.

\textsuperscript{22} D.L. Smith and C.R. Twidale, \textit{op. cit.}, p. v.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid.
There is a strong correlation between the mean annual precipitation and altitude but while the Mount Lofty Ranges are very important in inducing rainfall during the winter months, their effect is at a minimum during summer. The Torrens was dry in places in the summer months, and below the town ran for only a short distance, an early settler described it as a “chain of fresh water pools” in the Adelaide area. In a painting from 1836 the central area is depicted as completely dry in large areas. In areas such as the gorge, 10 miles from Adelaide where it enters the plains, the flow of the river did not cease. To the settlers, used to the more reliable English waterways, the Torrens appeared variable and treacherous.

Botanically the river area in Adelaide was rich with plants that had adapted to withstand some water deficiency. The river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), the South Australian bluegum (*E. Leucoxylon*) and probably some Drooping sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) were common on the banks of the Torrens. The sparse undergrowth on the plains consisted chiefly of acacias. The Torrens was the only area which had a dense understorey on the plains, although in the higher rainfall zone of the Mount Lofty Ranges a thick and almost impenetrable stringybark forest replaced the savannah woodland. On the north side of the Torrens there was a large pine-forest between what is now North Adelaide and Enfield. Along the river, tea-tree (probably *Leptospermum lanigerum*) which grew to about two metres, formed an understorey, this has tiny dark green leaves and white flowers like bottle-brush, and was often mentioned by settlers. River bottle-brush (*Callistemon*) also occurred in patches. Also common was the *Hop Goodenia*, a shrub of about 1 metre tall with yellow flowers and glossy leaves, and other understorey plants such as “blackboys” (*Xanthorrhoea semiplana*) and orchids (*Bursaria spinosa*); acacia also grew along the river in some places. Rushes flourished, including the tall sedge and the spiny flat sedge. *Danthonia*, *Stipa* and kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) were predominant grasses and a large number of semi-aquatic plants also occurred along the edge of the large waterholes.

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29 Register, February 17 1838, p.2.
31 D.Kraehenbuehl, *op. cit.*, p.81.
33 For a comprehensive description of the plants along the Torrens see D. Kraehenbuehl, *op. cit.*, pp.80-85.
CHAPTER SUMMARIES

My thesis has five chapters, ordered in basically chronological form, while also following a thematic structure. Chapter One, “Conceiving the Torrens”, is significant as it shows the ideas and values which would underpin white society’s use and evaluation of the area. I begin with an examination of the Kaurna’s interaction with the river they named Karrawirraparri, or river of the redgum forest. The Kaurna’s relationship with the river is important in its own right. However, it also serves as a counterpoint, both in the first chapter and throughout my thesis, contrasting with white society’s hopes for the river and their perceptions of it, while also standing in opposition to their ongoing use of the river area. After examining early British “myths” about the river, the question as to why Adelaide was sited along the Torrens is addressed. I examine the settlers’ response to the Torrens and its banks. Perceptions of the Torrens by early settlers were not all negative, many appreciated its pristine and gentle qualities and were influenced not just by economic ideals but also by Romantic ones.

Chapter Two, “Black and White” is a study of race relations along the central area of the river. It examines the interaction that occurred along the Torrens and the conflict between white society and the indigenous population over ownership and use of the river area. When the English arrived in Adelaide they resided along the south side of the Torrens, making this the main camping ground for the early settlers. A Native Location was established on the northern bank and the Kaurna people camped on this side, as did other Aboriginal groups who were displaced from their own regions and drawn to Adelaide. Aboriginal people were employed to assist settlers in distributing the river’s resources. Interaction between the two groups was high and settlers learnt from the Kaurna how to survive along the river. The development of the city of Adelaide impacted negatively upon the Kaurna and I examine their response to this.

Chapter Three, “The Destruction of the Torrens”, surveys the effects of settlement on the river environment. The material transformation of the river area was rapid and devastating to the fragile river environment. The effects of flooding were also worsened by the settlers’ practices. Settlers and the government exploited the river’s resources, destroying the ecology of the area. I analyse why this occurred, the responses to its exploitation and investigate the important issue of economic development versus the health of the river. Both the government and private industry used the river as a site for the expulsion of pollution. In opposition to all of these functions was the public’s need for a bathing and recreational area. With the Torrens used as the principal water supply and the main sewer, public health issues emerge.
Chapter Four, “Meeting the Demand for Progress”, is centred around the significant issue of how the demand for a “progressive” water supply affected the Torrens. Technology was to impact upon the river area in the form of the Thorndon Park reservoir, created in the upper regions of the Torrens in 1856 to deliver piped water to the people of Adelaide. This marked the final stage in the central area of the Torrens’ use as a water supply. Issues related to public health were behind a major campaign initiated from the early 1840s to enable clean and plentiful water to be supplied to the people of Adelaide. Far reaching changes in people’s attitudes towards water and a modern system of water supply was also seen as a sign of the progress of the city. However, a modern system of deep sewerage was not working efficiently until 1886 and, with the rapid growth of the city, the pollution of the Torrens increased.

In Chapter Five, “The Torrens Lake”, aesthetic and recreational functions of the river dominate in my examination of the motivations and circumstances behind the creation of the lake area in 1881. While the Thorndon Park reservoir impacted upon the flow of the Torrens, more formal or calculated changes also took place, culminating in the damming of the river, its “beautification”, and the widening of the banks to form the Torrens Lake in 1881. The Torrens Lake was created partly to hide the destruction of the river. Having exhausted its other uses, and destroyed the river, society now demanded a recreational area. The Torrens would be utilised for multi-faceted leisure purposes. Its establishment as a garden area is linked with improved Council control over the central riverbanks and greater prosperity in Adelaide society.
CHAPTER ONE: CONCEIVING THE TORRENS

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal people had known the river since time immemorial and developed a distinct relationship with it. It was a well-spring of not only economic life, but of religious life. Although the Kaurna were land managers, through their use of fire, for example, they worked with the river, its rhythms shaping their social, economic and religious world. Before examining the settlers’ relationship with the river we need to understand the Kaurna’s connection to it. Their relationship with the area is not only an important part of its history, but also serves as a comparison with the ideas of white society towards the river and its subsequent land use.

To this end, this chapter begins by describing how the Kaurna lived along the river before moving to the early conceptions and perceptions of the river by white society. The Kaurna’s life in the vicinity of the area varied according to seasonal movements and they worked with the environment, changing it very little. In contrast, the arrival of English society into the area heralded a time of transformation. On one hand we have a relationship that evolved over time in accordance with geographical conditions, on the other hand, the English had deeply entrenched views about rivers and their value for trade. The South Australian Company was a capitalist organisation that was so rushed in their efforts to establish the colony of South Australia, that the river was not even discovered before settlement began. Rivers were seen as a commercial commodity and the South Australian Company advertised a river which did not exist outside of their imagination.

The city, planned by Colonel Light, was placed along a totally different river system to that which the Colonisation Commissioners had envisaged and Light had to defend harsh criticism of the site. Upon their arrival in the new colony, the early settlers in Adelaide had their own preconceptions about what they wanted from a river. Many settlers responded enthusiastically to its variety and beauty, relying on Romantic and aesthetic ideals to interpret the landscape. Others were critical of this very Australian river which was almost dry in summer, and which did not meet their expectations or their anticipated requirements in regard to water supply.
KARRAWIRRAPARRI: RIVER OF THE RED GUM FOREST

Rivers were rich areas and of prime importance to Aboriginal people; camps were made by water sources wherever possible. Aborigines were familiar with all the places in their own country where water was found, ranging from waterholes and rockpools to springs, soaks, claypans and cavities in trees. All water sources were given names in the landscape, were enshrined in mythology, and in Aboriginal art geometrical motifs often represented waterholes or rivers. From an early age children were taught to memorise their locations and an individual’s knowledge of watercourses often extended far beyond his/her country. Rivers were an important part of Aboriginal belief systems, and one of the most common Dreamings associated with water sources was that of the rainbow serpent. The rainbow serpent usually inhabits waterholes, it is a symbol of water and life; sometimes it is an ancestral being. The powerful serpent is also the arching rainbow of the sky and is often depicted in terrifying animal form.

The Kaurna had probably occupied the Adelaide area for at least ten thousand years, although there are estimates of up to thirty thousand. The life of the Kaurna of the Adelaide plains followed a seasonal pattern of movement along the river which altered its ecology very little. The Kaurna had practical and spiritual knowledge of the area: it was a source of food, implements, water, an area where people gathered to celebrate. It was a crucial part of their myths with their belief system based on their interaction with the landscape. The importance of the river to the Kaurna is demonstrated in the different names given to it as it changed its character with the different seasons and in its distinct parts. In flood it was known as Yerrratala and on the coast it was called Wittoingga, place of reeds. West of Adelaide it was called Karrua Donga and north Karra Wirra. It was also named Karrawirraparri, or the river of the redgum forest, parri being the Kaurna name for river. While the Kaurna altered the landscape very little, there is evidence that they used firing as a method of encouraging new plant growth, which would then attract

3 ibid., p.6.
game. Fires were also used as a means of hunting animals. It has been suggested that the open grasslands so admired by the early settlers were a result of such firing practices.  

The Kaurna numbered about 300-1,000 and lived in a fairly narrow plain with a number of natural boundaries on every side. Their occupation of the area around the River Torrens is shown in Figure 3. There is debate as to the full area occupied by the Kaurna. In 1842 Cawthorne gives an early description of their territory: it was backed to the west by the steep slopes of the Mt Lofty Ranges, in the south it reached the hills near Willunga, and to the Gawler River in the north, while the edge in the west was coastal, bounded by high sand dunes. Tindale described their territory as having cultural boundaries that correspond to geomorphological and vegetational features. On this basis he held that to the west they were bounded by the shores of the Gulf of St Vincent, and this ran from Cape Jervis in the south to Port Wakefield in the north. In the northwest the boundary continued along hills now known as the Hummocks to as far north as Snowtown and Crystal Brook. To the east and southeast the boundary was defined by the Mount Lofty Ranges. Further north from here, another geographical boundary was the low-lying hills of the mid-north region. Tindale's definition of Kaurna territory is now generally accepted in Museum and Education Department publications and within the Aboriginal community.

Figure 3: Kaurna Occupation of the Adelaide Plains, 1836

7 ibid., p.112.
10 ibid., pp.114–115.
The availability of water influenced Aboriginal people’s mobility with those in the most fertile areas tending to be more sedentary. This is best demonstrated in the southeast of South Australia where abundant water allowed the development of elaborate systems of weirs and channels. Close to lakes and rivers where there was good fishing there were dwellings which employed stone in their construction. Contrasting with this are the Aboriginal people of the inner dry areas who moved around far more in search of water. In drier areas an exhaustion of the water supply meant that local groups sought refuge at permanent waters in the territory of neighbouring groups; kinship and tribal links facilitated this sharing of resources. Inland tribes in South Australia moved constantly from one water source to the next, exploiting the plants and animals in the vicinity of the water that appeared after the rains.12

The Kaurna were a fairly settled group, living in an area which was sufficient enough in resources that the main seasonal movements were the only ones they needed to make. They had visits from other tribes, having a close relationship with the Encounter Bay and Rapid Bay Aborigines. The Kaurna also had links with the Narungga people of Yorke Peninsula, and cultural and trading links with the people of the western Flinders Ranges. At the time of European settlement the Kaurna were the southernmost people practising circumcision ceremonies on their young men, considering their neighbours not practising this to be paruru, ‘uncircumcised’, ‘animal’.13 The Kaurna were the most southerly of the Central Lakes cultural complex, occupying a more benign and well-watered landscape than their northern neighbours, with whom they were culturally connected. Abutting them to the east and south-east were people of a quite different cultural and linguistic group, the River Murray people, who enjoyed a much more temperate and well watered environment.14 They were on something of an environmental and cultural frontier.

The people living along Karrawirraparri had intricate beliefs about their watercourse. The site of Adelaide was called Tandanya, named after the spirit Tarnda, who occupied this area. It was sacred land, with the area of the Torrens in Adelaide being a meeting place and a site of ceremonies. Here people camped, held corroborees, conducted tribal warfare, initiation ceremonies and funerals. A well-marked spot in the bend of the river in Adelaide “on a high bank

14 R.W. Ellis, op. cit., p.115.
and consisting of a huge spherical mound"¹⁵ was also used as a Kaurna burial ground. Burial ceremonies, particularly for important members of the Kaurna, were elaborate, and fires were lit to frighten death away. An ancient burial site also existed at the Reedbeds near Fulham and, east of the city, at the river near Kensington a burial site of almost an acre is recorded.¹⁶

The river played a key role throughout the Kaurna’s life and this was reflected in their spiritual understanding of the world. A feature of Aboriginal culture is the profound interrelationship between humans and their environment, which was given expression through their myths.¹⁷ As Ellis has pointed out, the Kaurna had “extensive myth systems within which man and nature were interwoven in narrative and symbol.”¹⁸ While their rapid dispossession from the land has made intimate knowledge of Kaurna myths difficult to obtain, the information available supports a close link with the river. In Kaurna myth the making of the rivers was dealt with, their dangers warned of, and taboos on the food caught there explained. In some accounts the Adelaide people considered the surface of the earth to have been formed without watercourses, and that these features were created by the spirit ancestor, Nganno, so that he could live upon freshwater crayfish and fish found in the rivers. One of the few Kaurna Dreaming accounts remaining deals with the arrival of Aboriginal people into the area. They were terrorised by an evil spirit called Muldarpi, who had the power to change people into animals, (paddling children were sometimes changed into ducks or fish). Two men returned to their own doctor, Warra Warra, to punish Muldarpi and he went about making a pungent fire which alarmed the spirits so that they hid in terror, hiding in waterholes and creeks where they have remained ever since, except on dark nights when they come out just a little. Warra Warra returned to his country but told others of its attraction.¹⁹ The river was a place to be respected and feared. A link with water can also be seen in Kaurna circumcision laws as newly circumcised boys were not allowed to eat fish. Circumcision is associated with rain-making, fish with large quantities of water, and therefore if they were to consume fish, unwanted rain might be threatened at a time when people were gathering together for ceremonial activity.²⁰

¹⁷ R.W. Ellis, op. cit., p.118.
¹⁸ ibid.
²⁰ R.W. Ellis, op. cit., p.119.
While for many Europeans the firmament was still associated with a spiritual realm, the Aboriginal people considered the firmament with its bodies as a land similar to that which they lived upon. In riverine areas it was common to view the constellations as rivers. The Milky Way was believed to be a large river along the banks of which reeds are grown, and called Woldiparri, the blank intervals are ponds, haunted by Yura, who first taught circumcision and was transformed into a sea monster.21 Water also played a part in their understanding of what was underneath them as the Kaurna believed that under the earth there were three layers of water.22

The Kaurna’s movement occurred along the river area. From the central area of the plains, groups generally moved west in summer and east in winter.23 The primary social unit of the tribe was a family band, often with relatives. During the summer months there were permanent freshwater springs and small rivers and streams along the coastal areas. The large catches of fish during the summer and spring months enabled the Kaurna to congregate in large groups and friendly tribes visited each other, and travelled about more than in winter. In autumn there were cold southwesterly winds along the coast, which, combined with the flooding of the rivers and creeks in winter, and swampy conditions, made movement somewhat difficult. At this time there was general movement towards the foothills. In the winter, creeks fed by the rains flowed and there were waterholes around which groups settled. The foothills were a well-timbered area, providing resources for firewood, and excellent conditions for hunting, as the inland forests where mammals could be found were easily accessible. It was also close to the food sources available from the swamps and creeks of the Adelaide plains. However, there was not a complete depopulation of the Adelaide area. In spring the Kaurna again spread over the plains to the extensive freshwater swamps and camped along the Torrens where the water was easily available.24

A larger cycle also operated. The Kaurna had, over thousands of years of study, developed a theory to prepare them for the river’s inevitable flooding. A tradition existed amongst them that the river followed a cycle, construed by the settlers as being every twelve years. During the dry period the rivers did not rise to any great height, this was then followed by a period distinguished

22 ibid.
23 R.W. Ellis, op. cit., p.117.
24 ibid.
by heavy rains and floods, causing the larger rivers and their tributaries to attain a great height and overflow their banks. The Kaurna accepted flooding as a natural course of events.

The Kaurna obtained a rich variety of food from the river. Freshwater fish to be found in the Torrens included small fish which were plentiful but forbidden to the young men, they were delicate and described as being in their size and appearance like smelt. The kaurka, a succulent freshwater mussel, lay about the sand in shallow places and was sometimes eaten raw; ngaul, a yabby, was also popular. Waterbirds such as ducks, swans and bustards, as well as their eggs, were eaten. Small birds were cooked whole without plucking by being placed on the fire. The capture of waterbirds was accomplished by sneaking up through dense reeds and snaring them with a noose at the end of a long stick, or by swimming beneath the surface, snatching the unwary bird by the feet and dragging it down into the water. Water and swamp rats, which were native to the river, were also eaten. The brush-tailed and ring-tailed possums, important food sources, were widely distributed on the plains, particularly along the creeks and watercourses where river red gums grew. The bokra (a small kangaroo rat) was eaten often, particularly during the summer months.

Scientists in the nineteenth century were to remark upon the deficiency in Australia of native edible fruits and root bearing vegetables. Schomburgk claimed that there were "none deserving the name". The Aborigines would have disagreed. A variety of vegetables grew along the river including the bulrush root, a staple food about the size of an onion that was roasted and while hot beaten between stones to form a cake. This was called rohrpumpe and when roasted was said by one of the early missionaries to be similar in taste to potato and very floury. In winter, a wild cabbage called birarri, with small succulent green leaves, was steamed and a small bulbous root, tilda, was roasted; in spring a type of native watercress also grew along the river. In summer the wild quandong, mistletoe and wild cherry flourished in well-watered areas. The wattles, or

zangarry as they were called by the Kaurna, growing along the Torrens and in other areas of the Adelaide plains, were important both as a medicine and its seeds used for food. Seeds of the river red gum were also soaked and eaten. Honey could be obtained from following bees from waterholes. An observant settler later described the complex technique involved. The bee was first squirted with water as it came to the waterhole. While it was in shock the Aborigine would then take some cockatoo down and with a little gum fasten it under the bee’s wings and put it on the ground or a leaf to recover. After a while the bee would begin to move, and head for home pursued by the hunter, who was thus be led to the hive.

The complexity of dwellings along the river varied by the seasons. In winter, groups sometimes sheltered in the cover of gigantic and often hollowed gum trees along the river banks, or at times used a fallen tree which they hollowed out. It was a hazardous practice, however, when heavy rains and floods destroyed their fires and flooded their sleeping places. Dwellings along the river were also made by the method of placing a few branches in a semi-circle around a tree. This was a simple task in summer but in winter, when more protection against the elements was required, the sides would be heightened, supported by a few sticks meeting at the top and covered with bark, earth and grass.

When water needed to be carried or stored in shelters, several kinds of containers were used, including large shells and the skins of marsupials which had been tanned. Nets used for hunting and fishing were made from animal tendons and vegetable fibres. The reeds growing by the river were put to a wide range of uses, including the construction of different types of baskets. The resources of the river area were also used for ornamentation and decoration. An ornament called a witjake was made of rushes. It was worn by men as well as women on the back or under the arm. From one of the rushes along the watercourses the Kaurna also made a round, coiled mat which was used as a type of ground cover or cloak. Willos, which were used for sport, were made from a small reed growing along the banks of watercourses. Willos were a kind of spear with a knob of small grass wound around the end to make them throw well, they were

34 R. Foster (ed.) Cawthorne, op.cit., p.58.
occasionally dipped in water to render them harder and firmer. The men played with it by standing without shields in two irregular rows, and throwing it in alternate volleys with the women and children often sitting at a distance as spectators. Settlers often observed the Aboriginal people playing such games along the banks of the Torrens, and practising their spear throwing with reeds taken from the river.\textsuperscript{39} For thousands of years the Kaurna followed a lifestyle that involved intimate interaction with their environment and with their watercourses.

**CREATING AN IMAGINARY RIVER**

In 1834, a group of capitalists in London who called themselves the South Australian Company decided to create a settlement in what is now South Australia. They had little knowledge of the general region, the Kaurna, or indeed of \textit{Karrawirraparri}. Nor would the Kaurna’s presence have concerned them, as it was believed in British society that land must be cultivated; the Kaurna’s use of the land was not considered to confer ownership. No white person had seen the river before the bold step was taken of establishing the settlement by Act of Parliament, two years before settlers landed on the shores of the Gulf of St Vincent.

While Kaurna “myths” concerning the area developed over generations, and had deep cultural significance, the ideas of the South Australian Company were commercially self-serving. Devious tales were prominent in the South Australian Company’s creation of an imaginary and plentiful river where the new settlement would be situated. For those planning South Australia in London, watercourses were a crucial element in the attractions of a new colony, an important resource for the white population, and part of the booty to entice prospective land buyers. The physical reality of the stream and its tributaries, winding its way down from the hills to the sea, was secondary. The prospective immigrants were beguiled by images of a grand river with ships floating down its centre. The colonisers speculated that the Murray would stream its way to the gulf. The river would be a channel of communication and trade through the interior of Australia. For the Kaurna the river was a source of life; for the South Australian Company a source of profit.

The river on which Adelaide is sited was not officially discovered by Europeans until late 1836, after the settlers had arrived. Colonel William Light named it the Torrens in 1836 after one of the

\textsuperscript{39} R. Foster (ed.) Cawthorne, \textit{op.cit.}, p.67.
colony’s entrepreneurial founding fathers, Colonel Robert Torrens, who had laboured in England for the birth of the colony. Torrens had promoted emigration in his book *The Colonisation of South Australia* (1835) and through his position as chair of the South Australian Colonisation Commission. Yet it was Edward Wakefield, an economic theorist, an unusual individual and something of a rogue, who gave the scheme substance and who envisaged the settlement alleviating England’s unemployment problem and giving wealthy investors the chance to make a quick pound. Wakefield had no particular place in mind and indeed was initially attracted to America. He was inspired by dreams of a system in which there would be the ideal balance between labour and capital. For those behind the scheme, economic ideas took precedence over geography; the site was a secondary consideration, the solidity lay in the theory.

The South Australian Company’s knowledge of the coast of South Australia was very limited, as was their information about the geography of the area. They had problems getting the Foundation Act through the English parliament for this very reason. The fortunate association with Sturt’s name prevailed and he was able to dispel many doubts through his visits to Downing Street, his correspondence, and by the publication of his account of explorations in 1833. Sturt’s influence was, however, based on a wrong assumption about the river. There was a belief that the Murray would stream its way through this area, entering the sea at the Gulf of St Vincent. Ever since the discovery of the Murray by Sturt in 1830, there were reports of a “magnificent river falling into the sea at Gulf St Vincent.” This vision was said to have cast a spell over the imagination of potential speculators. Speculators were apparently imagining the rapid progress of the colony due to its plentiful water supply.

Early commentators on Australia placed great significance upon the importance of rivers for progress. Wentworth, writing in 1819, was influenced by Macquarie’s vision of a huge transcontinental river which would flow from 2,000 miles west of the Dividing Range until it reached the sea at the NSW coast. The opening up of this vast river system, it was believed, would yield great riches as was occurring in the Great Plains of America. The “march of population” would inevitably follow the discovery of navigable water and it was this that would

42 *ibid.*, p.55.
43 *ibid*.
build the spirit of enterprise and industry upon which civilisation itself rested.\textsuperscript{45} Progress was seen as depending upon the discovery of outlets for the interior rivers and the advancement of trade. A powerful nation would not be laid out “until an outlet is found for our interior waters, whereby the produce of the varied climes of this immense island-continent may be carried easily and cheaply off.”\textsuperscript{46} Ironically, the settlers faced a continent where there was only one major river system, and even that is small by world standards. The reality is that Australia has limited supplies of water, and that over 50% of the continent would eventually be classified as desert.\textsuperscript{47}

The grand assumptions about the Murray River were even used as collateral by the South Australian Company. In the South Australian case it has been established that both the Commissioners’ letters and those of other contemporaries, such as Finiss, provide evidence that the Murray river with its fertile plains and certain water supplies was the “grand attraction” which obtained the land sale and the loan guarantee.\textsuperscript{48} The propaganda about the wonders of the Murray was to continue after the founding of the settlement. A correspondent to the Register in 1838 envisaged a huge settlement along the Murray, working on the theory that the larger the river the greater the city. He wrote that the River Murray marked out South Australia as superior to other colonies and that it would be the great highway of commerce: “the prowling canoe and the rank and unprofitable reeds of Lake Alexandrina will presently be surrounded by the busy hum of cities and the never failing results of cheerful industries.”\textsuperscript{49}

Before settlement, the explorer to venture closest to the Torrens was Captain Coett Barker who in 1831 investigated land in the vicinity of the Gulf of St Vincent and viewed the Port Reach.\textsuperscript{50} Sturt believed that the mangroves might conceal a connection with the Murray, even if no navigable channel existed to the river. In 1831 Robert Gouger produced a paper devoted entirely to the advantages awaiting early land buyers, and he chose the Gulf of St Vincent as the appropriate area for the new colony.\textsuperscript{51} The South Australian Company’s outline of the colony in 1834 claimed to include “an account of the soil, climate, rivers, &c.” They hedged their bets on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid., p.40.
\item ibid., p.39.
\item Register, 10 March 1838, p.3.
\item D.Pike, op. cit., p.55.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the site of the capital city and postulated that rivers might also fall into Spencer’s Gulf. 52 The Gulf of St Vincent, while possibly not having as many fresh water rivers was, however, compensated by the “probability that the waters of the Murray flow into it through a practicable channel.”53 They put forward the supposition that an inlet near Mt Lofty was one of the mouths of the Murray. Should this be so, practicable water communication of several hundred miles would be obtained through a country generally described as fertile.

It was no wonder that the South Australian Company was an object of ridicule for many in England. In their desire to attract immigration they imagined rivers everywhere. Even Port Lincoln, later found to be almost entirely devoid of a water supply, was portrayed as having bountiful rivers, due to the “beautiful valleys which appeared to indicate the existence of springs or streams of fresh water.”54 In “The New Colony of South Australia” Captain Johns extolled the fine navigable rivers of the colony, excellent harbours and almost interminable tracts of deep, rich soil. He claimed that these facts were “established beyond doubt; but as no settlers have yet reached the colony, of course there are minor points on which we must be for some time ignorant.”55 Although Johns had not set foot on the mainland he nonetheless had the kind of over-confident attitude that was desired by the Company for its advertising.

POSITIONING THE CITY

Light and his surveyors, given the task of finding a site for the city, faced a colony with scanty rainfall and a lack of large rivers. Their job was to find a site which met at least ten strict criteria given to them by the Colonisation Commissioners. The first three of these were: a safe harbour; fertile land nearby and a good supply of fresh water. Others dealt with the resources of the land, adequate drainage, and communication, although the colonisers did not wish to be too close to Sydney. The majority of Australian towns have developed along rivers or around a sea port and of the main six determinants used in the criteria for choosing a site the most important was the availability of water.56 Most founders also chose sites that had a reasonably deep anchorage

52 South Australian Association, Outline of a Proposed Colony to be founded on the South Coast of Australia, London, 1834, fasc. 1978, p.11.
53 ibid., p.10.
54 cited in M. Davies, op. cit., p.166.
55 Johns, The New Colony of South Australia: To small farmers and others, persons of skill and industry and possessed of some capital, but unable by the use of it to procure a comfortable livelihood, London, 1835, p.2.
nearby and moderate elevation to avoid floods and swamps. The choice for the site of the first city in Australia was at Sydney Cove on the Tank Stream, and the reasoning was clearly explained by Governor Phillip: “I fixed on the one (site) that had the best spring of water and in which ships can anchor so close to the shore that at very small expense quays can be made at which the largest ships can unload.”

Light arrived in Adelaide in August 1836, only 126 days before the arrival of the first settlers, and had made a tentative decision for the site of Adelaide a few days before Governor Hindmarsh arrived. After a quick survey of the coast in 1836 Light had chosen the site of Holdfast Bay before the River Torrens was actually discovered. He assumed, however, that there would be a river extending to the port. The later discovery of the Torrens (although it ended at the Reedbeds) and the existence of fresh water, confirmed this choice. Light still had hopes that the Torrens could be turned into a great commercial river and thus speed the advancement of progress. Upon choosing the port he wrote in his diary:

It was really beautiful to look back and see two British ships for the first time sailing up between the mangroves in fine, smooth water, in a creek...which at some future period might be the channel of import and export of a great commercial capital.

The plan of the city of Adelaide has often been commended, but the major work behind the plan is argued to have been carried out in England. It was thus a city marked out on paper without firstly addressing the realities of the actual landscape. Johnson and Langmead have placed the development of the plan with Kingston, rather than Light. While the issue remains unresolved, Kingston was employed as senior officer in the Survey Department in England between September 1835 and March 1836. His job was to complete three significant tasks. Firstly, he was to prepare designs for the town on a “permanent plan”. Secondly, Kingston was to report to the Commissioners on the method of surveying. Thirdly, he was instructed to “detail the plan recommended to be adopted in the survey of the colony with a view to ascertaining the proper site for the town.” This would be done by a rigorous study of the documents prepared from previous English and French explorations. Other evidence suggests that the plan for Adelaide was

57 ibid., p.9.
60 ibid, p.19.
formulated in England. For example, Light only took a very short time to survey and lay out the city. Finniss also stated in his diary that the plan was formed in England, and agents for prospective absentee landlords in South Australia were acting upon orders that could only have been drawn up in England and by reference to a city plan which had to be retained their for prospective purchases. 61

It was Kingston who discovered the river, although one settler claimed that it was Kingston’s dog who sniffed out the water and should thus bear the glory. 62 Kingston at first concentrated on the country near the coastal marshes where he jumped to the conclusion that a fresh water stream and the Port Adelaide tidal inlet joined. After discovering this to be incorrect he moved his camp to the south bank of the Torrens and for about three weeks explored the sides of the river, following its course into the hills. On Light’s return to the Bay on 17 December Kingston later recalled that it was he who delivered news about the probable site, informing Light that they would find an abundant supply of fresh water in the river, that the locality was well-wooded and that lime and building stone and brick earth were easily obtainable. He had chosen a position with an elevation above the river of about 100 to 150 feet and claimed that he felt that “no other spot would be found possessing anything like the same advantages as a site for the city.” 63 However, when Light published his own journal this conversation was omitted.

The topography of the river was to play a pivotal role in the choice of the site of Adelaide. Light wrote that he chose it: “Because it was on a beautiful and gentle rising ground, and formed altogether a better connection with the river than any other place.” 64 Light was pleased with the site, the prime element in its favour being the fact that water was known to exist there, writing that his choice of site was due to its combination of superior soil, an extensive plain and “the proximity of a plentiful supply of water.” 65 Light was aware of the possibility of low rainfall in summer, but surmised correctly that the Mount Lofty Ranges would aid in bringing rain to the area. 66 The other two sites in the running were Port Lincoln and Port Adelaide but these two contenders were ruled out by Light because of their lack of water, despite their superior ports. 67

61 ibid.
64 J. C. Hawker, Early Experiences in South Australia, E.S.Wigg and Son, Adelaide, 1899, p.20.
65 ibid.
67 ibid., p.102.
Light claimed that great ports developed because of flourishing towns, placing emphasis on navigable waters as being of importance in the growth of cities. The move from the abstract to the concrete was made very quickly, and despite their efforts in accomplishing this task, the site of Adelaide met with much criticism.

The pressure for the river to be navigable was high and Light’s proposal that it could be so suggests either an overly optimistic assessment of the river or an attempt to appease the Colonisation Commissioners. Light fielded his growing adversaries in a letter to the Colonisation Commissioners, by suggesting the extension of water transport by a canal: “A river runs close by the front of the town, which in time can be made navigable, if such a thing be necessary, for such ships as now come to the harbour, and connected with the harbour by means of a canal.” Light’s sketch of 1837 clearly shows this canal and emphasises the large harbour at Port Adelaide. He also mentioned the possibility of the plains extending to the Murray and the easy communication with the harbour. Light conceded that one of the main things that would be needed would be temporary wooden bridge over the river, either at the town or half a mile from it. By 10 January he was inspecting the area more closely and devising “the best method of laying out the town according to the course of the river and the nature of the ground.”

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68 ibid., p.103.  
69 ibid., p.110.  
70 ibid.  
While only a small river, the Torrens had a large impact on the plans for the city of Adelaide. The plans, presumably made by Kingston in 1835, were modified on site, and mainly to fit in with the troublesome river. The basic Cantaneo Plan drawn up in the abstract, with its rigid and rational grid with streets intersecting at right angles, was best suited to flat land. Nor had the founding fathers envisaged a river that was so small that it would be able to connect two sides of the city. So with ingenuity Light divided the city in half, adding North Adelaide and parklands on either side of the Torrens. The plans were significantly altered to fit in with a winding creek which would both connect and divide the city and which would provide a recreational area. While the irregular shapes of North Adelaide may have been generated by the topography, more significantly there were vistas across the river and much of it was close to water. Light was given few specific instructions about the amount of public space to be set aside in the city, although the Colonisation Commission had summarised this generally: “you will make the necessary reserves for squares, public walks and quays”. It may also be that he was influenced by the capital from which he came, also divided by a river, which had started to be seen as a recreational area. One observer, writing in 1862, claimed that the early officials and settlers were probably excited by the prospect of founding a second London, influenced by these “extravagant ideas” they thus placed the city on either side of the Torrens. Given that the nature of Adelaide’s foundation was partly for land speculation, and that the lots of land along rivers were those most prized and of most monetary value, Light’s positioning of the parklands is significant.

The possibility of flooding seems to have been of less influence on Light’s decision to place the parklands on either side of the river. While Light overestimated the potential of the river to be navigable, he underestimated the central area’s probability of flooding and seemed to feel that this area would be less prone to flood than a more westerly position. Moreover, Light had marked in a small section as an island on the western area of the river within the city boundaries to be used as a Botanic Gardens. The settlers soon realised that this “island” would be flooded in winter. The area within the high banks of the Torrens at this site would have been a very unfortunate choice for a Botanic Gardens.

72 D.L. Johnson and D. Langmeid, op. cit., p.27.
THE EARLY SETTLERS: REACTIONS TO THE RIVER

Thus the city was sited, along a river far different to the early settlers’ expectations of it built up by the Colonisation Commissioners. With expectations of navigable waters and a plentiful water supply, what were their reactions when faced with the real thing? No one has closely studied early settlers’ reactions to the Torrens. However, the early settlers’ attitude towards the South Australian environment has generally been discussed in Moon’s thesis, “Colonial Environment Perception and Appraisal”. Moon observed a quest for the familiar in the way early scenery was first described, claiming that this led to an idealised perception that was British in character and that many settlers looking at the river saw it from an aesthetic rather than a scientific point of view.  

Broader approaches to settlers’ environmental attitudes have been undertaken Australia wide. A view that tends to dominate public perceptions of the colonial period is that white society not only destroyed the environment but was also antagonistic towards it. As Rickard has pointed out, it is “an enduring cultural myth that Europeans found the Australian environment hostile, alien, oppressive, and that they had great difficulty in coming to terms with it aesthetically.” Authors such as Lines have argued that the early settlers hated the Australian country because of its differences to England. Lines almost forgets about rivers altogether, hardly mentioning them in his book, though they were an integral part of the landscape. He claims: “The unreal and contrary nature of Australia - its seeming sameness, trees which shed bark rather than leaves, droughts, floods and insect plagues - lacked ‘all the dearest allegories of human life.’” Others have claimed that the early settlers did not find the bush lovable or beautiful, and that the native trees and shrubs were “a reminder of the harshness of the untamed Australia.”

However, there are other views. Bonyhardy in his recent book The Colonial Earth challenges the traditional ideas. He claims: “While many colonists were alienated by their new environment, others delighted in it.” Bonyhardy points to the love of the eucalyptus and argues that colonists

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77 J. Rickard, op. cit., p.44.
came to feel deep affection for places that “satisfied their taste for the picturesque and the sublime.”81 For rural settlers these included fern gullies, waterfalls and mountains within their local area. Places that excited most colonists were within easy access of the cities. It has also been established that many settlers found the park-like scenery of some areas pleasing. Such landscapes were seen as more accessible, both physically, and because they accorded with a taste for pastoral order and harmony.82 It has been pointed out that, ironically, the colonists did not appreciate how much some areas, which included the plains of Adelaide, had already been “humanised” by the Aborigines use of fire.83

Certainly, disappointment and ridicule were not the only responses to the River Torrens. The evidence from diaries and reminiscences suggests that there were a variety of reactions to the river, and that many settlers were enthusiastic in their response to the aesthetics of the river region in Adelaide. As a water source, however, it found many critics. Coming from well-watered England, some were inevitably disappointed by its size. One gentleman had complained to Light in December 1837 that, “as to the river at Adelaide, he could drain it dry in a few hours with a bucket!”84 Hawker, upon reaching the river exclaimed: “That the Torrens!” 85 His party, which had eagerly travelled to see the famous river, could not believe that the “miserable dribbling current with an occasional waterhole” was really it. The individual who showed them the river was threatened with a ducking for fooling with them and the large number of fallen trees that blocked the bed of the river were also seen as a disadvantage.86 Another complained that nothing could grow in the eternal sand and drought: “There is not a river in the colony.”87 For Finlayson it was merely “miserable”.88 In 1839 another settler wrote that the Torrens was “an unnavigable country brook, as all small streams are – deep in one part and shallow in another.”89

It soon came to be seen as a disadvantage by some of the ‘experts’ who produced books for prospective immigrants and were eager to correct the Colonisation Commissioners’ propaganda.

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81 ibid., p.5.
82 J. Rickard, op. cit., p.51.
83 ibid.
84 D. Elder (ed.), op. cit., p.93.
85 J.C. Hawker, op. cit., p.7.
86 ibid.
87 J.Blacket, History of South Australia, Hussey and Gillingham, Adelaide, 1911, p.85.
James was the loudest and most colourful in his abuse, among other comments, writing: “In the few places where it runs at all there would be plenty of room for the whole of it to run through an Irishman’s hat... it may be stepped across without one’s knowing it”. He added, “a far better river is made every day in the London streets when the parish turncock opens a plug.” James argued that the city should have been placed elsewhere as the water available from the Torrens was insufficient to supply even the small number of settlers in Adelaide at that time (approximately 5,000), the site being “a desert; a wilderness.”

Dreams were dashed by reality. However, even after the Torrens was discovered, the Colonisation Commissioners continued to propagate their myth of a large river, deceiving the public in their advertising by publishing pictures which showed it as a substantial body of water said to be navigable up to Adelaide. The Torrens was sarcastically referred to by one early historian as being “poetically represented” by those in England. Blacket wrote that, “It was on this streak of water that could not carry a blackfellow’s canoe that an emigrant agent in the Old Country had pictured a large ship riding at anchor.” Many of the settlers had sketches showing the “barque” of the city at anchor opposite Government House. It was not uncommon for a settler to have brought frontage on a river which they understood to be large and navigable - only to find “not a single drop of water to be seen.” One settler recorded in his diary that many people expected that they would sail up the Torrens to the city of Adelaide and were very disappointed to find that the river ended at the reedbeds.

The dishonesty of the Colonisation Commissioners was expanded upon at length in 1838 by the outraged editor of the Register, South Australia’s earliest newspaper. Not wishing to see this “most gross and impudent deception” further prolonged, the editor explained what the Torrens was really like. The Torrens was not a river at all, but a “chain of fresh water pools”. Moreover, its running water in the summer months could be “spanned with the hand and sounded with the

91 *ibid*.
92 *ibid.*, p.15.
93 R. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p.32.
94 J. Blacket, *op. cit.*, p.77.
98 *Register*, February 17 1838, p.2.
The river, at the time of writing in February, had ceased to flow immediately below the town of Adelaide and on the western outskirts of the town became a “very formidable ditch”. The plan of the city of Adelaide which was displayed in the Commissioner’s office, and which was also presumably sent to England, was “wholly inaccurate” regarding the Torrens River. The editor explained that in this map the Torrens was represented as “a fine stream some seventy yards wide – not the insignificant and piping brook it really is.” While unable to believe that the Surveyor General was at the bottom of the deception, it was felt that the Commissioners had used his name in order to promulgate this belief. He proclaimed the continuing false advertising of the river a disgrace.

Evidence of disappointment is certainly strong. However, there were also many positive responses to the river by segments of English society. Nature had come to be seen as not only seen as pleasing to the eye, but also to the soul. Romanticism was strongest in the educated classes and perceptions of the Torrens were influenced by this. Rivers were thought to add beauty to a landscape. This Romantic view was explained succinctly by John Morrison in Australia as it is: “No landscape is thought perfect without water, and a river may be observed frequently gliding softly along.” There were distinct areas that were appreciated in Australia and river areas were one of these. The variety of colour and shrubs along rivers was one of their attractions. While Morrison could see monotony in panoramic scenes and describe the shade of the Australian forest as “oppressive, dusky, and sombre”, he greatly admired areas that had a “variety of vegetation” and “flowering shrubs of a varied and beautiful character”. The settlers to Australia were coming from Europe which supported 17,500 species of plants whereas Australia had 25,000 species. Well might Morrison exclaim that the whole continent might be called “Botany Land” because of the endless diversity in the flora. The Romanticism associated with river areas can also be seen in Teichelmann’s reaction to the Murray River in 1840. After travelling across “desolate country”, he found great solace in the river: “The arrival at the river,
after such a wearying journey...could provide the writer with material for volumes of long poems, which an untravelled prosaic pen could never copy."108

Like Morrison, Hamilton, a traveller to South Australia, saw monotony and restriction in some areas, such as at the Reedbeds where "the land was flat, swampy and not very picturesque."109

But in contrast he gave an almost rapturous description of the river in Adelaide in 1839, pointing out the variety of colour in its flowering plants and the attraction of the water areas:

The land in the vicinity of this river was well-timbered with noble trees, and its banks sloped down to the water in gentle undulations thickly clothed with grass. The river itself meandered through a tangle of tea-trees, rushes, reeds and many flowering weeds, here and there almost hidden by vegetation; but at intervals opening out into pretty ponds or tolerably large waterholes; along its banks grew in profusion the wattle (acacia) with its golden sweet-scented blossoms, as well as the noble eucalyptus, here at that time in great beauty.110

To conclude his description Hamilton, who had travelled more widely than most settlers, pointed to the Mediterranean similarity: "For a specimen of peaceful, quiet, sylvan beauty it was unparalleled, for my part I had not seen anything equal to it, not even in beautiful Sicily."111

Hamilton attempted to find ways of describing this new type of river, thus giving the reader several options in trying to picture it, either "pretty ponds" or "tolerably large waterholes". Hamilton was an amateur artist and traveller, his portrayal was Romantic and supports the argument that Romanticism positively influenced perceptions of the landscape. He looked with an artist’s eye and saw an abundance: a reckless "tangle of tea-tree", the "profusion" of wattle suggests luxuriance, the trees were "noble".112

Thomas has noted when studying Romantic perceptions of the landscape in England that the cultivated tourist often saw the landscape differently to those that lived amongst it.113 While the tourist took a Romantic view, those who lived in the landscape had a more practical perspective.

110 ibid, pp.67-68.
111 ibid.
112 ibid.
Thus the latter noticed certain attributes in terms of landmarks or boundaries, becoming more indifferent to their beauty, and “reluctant to adopt a mystical attitude towards wild, uncultivated scenery”. Hamilton was a traveller, and an educated one. As Thomas has pointed out, for such observers the streams were known, “only by their gentleness or their majesty”. The same may be applied, to some extent, to other observations of the river area by the early settlers as this was not scenery that they had lived amongst but a wild, uncultivated, new area.

The settlers saw the river in relation to the hills, viewing them as a backdrop. The strong nineteenth century appreciation of mountains and their majesty was prevalent amongst them. They were prone to overstate the size of the ranges and it was one of the most admired features of Adelaide. One settler, after describing the Torrens as “a succession of fine waterholes or pools, with beautiful shrubs growing along the water’s edge” commented that “the background of hills made it all very beautiful.” Hamilton, after his vivid description of the river also turned to the ranges.

It has been suggested that in the early years of Australia’s settlement the language used to describe the landscape was utilitarian, registering a process of improvement rather than interpretation. But some simply marvelled at the scenery before them. The natural untouched beauty of the river found many admirers. Helen Mantegani later recalled that the River Torrens when she first saw it in 1837 was very picturesque with high and steep banks on either side, closely covered with “beautiful shrubs of all sorts”. “Splendid” gums were also growing on the banks, the stream was narrow and deep, and small fish plentiful. The width of a river red gums, “which the arms of two men could not span”, was also remarked upon by Pastor Klose upon arriving in Adelaide. The odoriferous and aesthetic qualities were not lost on the romantic Pastor Finlayson. He also stressed the diversity of the landscape, commenting in 1837 that it was

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114 ibid.
115 ibid.
116 Education Department of South Australia, *The Kaurna People*, p.2.
a “very beautiful stream”, describing the deep banks and the “beautiful growth of tea-tree, with a great variety of aromatic flowers and shrubs, which delighted us who had been so long at sea.”

The writer of a letter in 1837 saw the plains of Adelaide as being part of the abundance of the country which he felt would be fully capable of contributing both to the comforts and luxuries of man. The river was an integral part of the plains’ park-like scenery, with the absence of scrub a positive factor as it did not obscure the view. The vision of gentleness and refinement and order is strong: “From the city no view can be more interesting - on a gentle rising ground of park-like scenery, covered with flowers of all hues - with a river, or reservoir of fine water, winding for miles, with as much wood as can be useful on its banks and no bush or scrub to interrupt.” The “green belt of foliage”, the ample vegetation, noble gums and gentle refinement all combined for the river to form part of a pleasing park-like area.

Qualities were imposed upon the river by the settlers. The small size of the river was seen by some as a reflection of its gentility, and theirs by association. It was common to anthropomorphise rivers, and travellers, faced with small rivers or streams often saw them as being gentle. A description from NSW in 1827 is quite typical: “a small stream, with ponds at intervals along its bed, stealing quietly through the narrow hollow”. Similarly in Adelaide: “Below you winds the quiet Torrens, fringed with its green belt of foliage on either side.” Schama has pointed out that people have sometimes associated rivers with the supposed characteristics of the people who live along them. Thus Macaulay, travelling to France in 1838 saw the Rhone as being a “revolutionary stream, by turns capricious and exhilarating.” In the River Thames he saw an alliance between abundance, liberty and moderation. Many early settlers preferred to see the river as gentle, rather than merely inadequate.

Light had chosen the site because of its moderate gradient and the river was perceived as being on two “gentle” slopes. Hawdon was not derogatory in his description of the Torrens as a “very small stream of excellent water”, indeed he felt that Adelaide was in a “beautiful and healthy

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situation". Hawdon was one of the few who had travelled to other areas of Australia and was able to draw comparisons between the Torrens and other watercourses. He recognised that its seasonal character was similar to that of all the small streams he had seen in other parts of the continent. While the mature Torrens was found gentle, the more youthful streams winding their way down the hills were often referred to as "tortuous", with the "dense vegetation" making the area inhospitable. Neither the Reedbeds, nor the mountain streams were those most admired by the early settlers, but the gentle park like scenery of the river on the plains.

Certainly it was in part a resemblance to England that early settlers looked for in the river, and a few descriptions of its monotony were present in their writings on the Reedbeds, a very distinct region, but these were not pervasive. In contrast to the swampland, the hills and gullies to the west of Adelaide were considered attractive, and while the river may have been hidden in the Reedbeds, it was an important aesthetic element in the plains of Adelaide with its gentle curves and ribbon of green foliage. The settler’s reaction to the Reedbeds contrasts interestingly with their observations of the rest of the river. The predominant nineteenth century view of wetlands is that they were wastelands. For example, in studies of the American wet prairies, it has been found that they were an area that travellers avoided, one which “repelled rather than attracted early observers”, although they were found useful to agriculture. Such perceptions may have something to do with whether people viewed the landscape as a healthy area. In America such wetlands were associated with malaria and thus stigmatised by this association. Stirling in his earliest explorations of the Swan River had marked its outlet merely as “unpleasant vegetation”. Reeds were deemed “rank and unprofitable” and the ecological significance of such areas not generally known.

Birds were seen to be an object of much beauty in the nineteenth century and while many shot those that they found in the Torrens river region, others expressed their appreciation of the new varieties, although some were disappointed with their song, which did not compare to the sweeter

noise of English birds. One settler, delighted with some of the species he saw, wrote of the Adelaide Parakeet: “It is impossible to conceive anything more beautiful.”132 Blacket also mentioned the huge number of parrots and flocks of white cockatoos along the river. An early column in the Register also published accounts of the birds and insects to be found in Adelaide. From November 1840 the first article occurred on “The Natural History of the Colony”, written by an avid bushwalker and amateur scientist. Although the articles mainly focused on Entomology, the author often went for walks along the river, watching the different bugs, and describing them in the column in tedious detail. The author also made reference to the birds to be found along the river. He found the birds to be very numerous, “near the shrub-covered banks of the murmuring Torrens”, recommending that “considerable amusement may be derived by watching them while in chase of their favourite food.”133 The Reedbeds were the major area for waterfowl and many living out there were astounded by the variety to be found.134

While the cosmopolitan Hamilton could liken the area to Sicily, Mary Thomas’ homesickness for her native land clouded her perceptions of the new. The water could not compare to England, neither was the air so bracing or refreshing. She hoped to return to “dear old England” and to end her days in peace and comfort. Thomas, did reflect on the amazing size of the gum trees and hills, however, and admired the resemblance of the Adelaide region to an English park. As for the river, however, she does not mention its physical characteristics, bar noting the mercantile value of the redgum wood.135 Others also looked with eyes geared to profit. Gouger was not interested in the vegetation at all, focusing his attention on its agricultural worth, but noting that the scenery from the river was above average and worthy of the residences of gentlemen.136

What is of significance in the settlers’ reactions is not their negativity, but that so many of them gave such positive and detailed responses to the river. Their descriptions emphasise its beauty, variety, gentle slopes and generally healthy aspect. The evidence concurs with Seddon’s observation that responses to the environment in Australia tend to show two distinct categories: those who take the picturesque view, and those who take a utilitarian view.137 Others have also

133 Register, March 5 1842, p.3.
134 P. Hope, Voyage of the Africaine, Heinemann, South Yarra, 1968, p.140.
proposed a scientific category. However, the scientific view was only marginal and this is also upheld in Moon’s overview. Responses to the river were far more varied than those such as Lines suggest and Bonyhardy’s view that some “delighted” in their new surroundings is certainly upheld. The river area in Adelaide was seen to be one of the most aesthetically pleasing areas in the Adelaide region, according more with settlers’ desires for gentle scenic vistas. Aesthetic distinctions were also made between the different sections of the river. However, the river area as settlers found it was to be destroyed by their activities and it would not be until the 1880s that river again met with aesthetic approval.

CONCLUSION

The Kaurna’s involved relationship with the land stands in opposition to those who conceived the settlement, those who planned it, and those who observed it. The Kaurna had lived with the area for thousands of years, they knew it intimately, and they restricted use of its resources. The Kaurna recognised the fragility of the area and moved along its banks according to the differences in the seasons. In contrast, lack of understanding and unsustainable use of the river would be the basis on which settlement would proceed.

Distinct ideals and responses can be observed in regard to the Torrens River area. For the Colonisation Commissioners it was important that a river area was navigable and that it provided an adequate resource for the colony. They speculated on the possibilities of a much larger river existing at the site for the major capital city. Prospective settlers and speculators were deceived with reports of the Murray possibly entering the Gulf of St Vincent. The reality was far different but Light and Kingston adapted to the circumstances they found themselves in. The attitudes of commercial interests towards rivers are perhaps exemplified in the suggestion of a canal to join the Torrens and the Port. As for being a channel for trade, settlers quickly saw that this would be out of the question. The city was surveyed and planned in an incredibly short space of time, with the river as an integral part. Light chose the site because it had a superior connection with the river and he thus divided the city into two with the river as both a link and a division between the two sides that would have important consequences for the city. Bridges would obviously be

required to connect the two, and it also showed the way to the creation of a park area around the river.

Its beauty also commended it to Light. The historical record reveals a rich variety in the settlers’ responses to the Torrens. Ironically, an area that was to be the source of so much aesthetic disapproval later in the settlement was initially found to be very pleasing. Settlers remarked on the gentleness of the area, the grandeur of the river red gums, the majestic mountains in the background and the variety of shrubs and birds. However, as a water source it had many detractors, and its deficiencies in this area would prove to be a major problem. During the early settlement, the river would both divide and join the Kaurna camped on the northern side of the river and the early settlers on the southern.
CHAPTER TWO: BLACK AND WHITE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the settlers' and the indigenous people's lives along the river in the early years of white settlement and the relationship between them. It is during this time that we witness the beginnings of the town of Adelaide and the conflict between the rights of the original owners and the settlers to the banks of the Torrens. At the beginning of settlement the Torrens' banks were the centre of the town's activity. This site, reserved for "public walks and for other public purposes"¹, was used by the settlers on the south side while the Kaurna and other Aboriginal groups who ventured into the city used the north. The banks of Karrawirraparri were, after all, a traditional place for the Kaurna to meet. White society initially encouraged this movement but immediately tried to concentrate the presence of the Aborigines at a Native Location, on the northern banks of the river. Given the small size of the river and the low water level at times, both sides of the Torrens were connected in the early years of settlement. Physically little separated the two races except the rushing torrent that was the river in winter, or the smaller pools that it became in summer. The river provided the division, but also the meeting place.

Initially, the settlers, like the Kaurna, lived an outdoor life and there was interaction between the two groups. However, by 1839 the social climate had changed. Most of the settlers had moved from the river bank, principally into the southern area of Adelaide. While the Aborigines were initially a curiosity and a resource, within a few short years they became a nuisance and a threat. The Aborigines remaining on the banks of the Torrens didn't fit in to the imagined landscape. This was to cause a dilemma: should they be allowed to stay?

EARLY INTERACTION: THE "PRIMITIVE" YEARS

The early years of settlement were a time when the Kaurna and the settlers were at their closest literally and metaphorically and, to a certain extent, shared common

¹ J. Blacket, History of South Australia, Hussey and Gillingham, Adelaide, 1911, p.137.
circumstances. The early immigrants, after arriving at Holdfast Bay, camped between the south banks of the Torrens and North Terrace. The surveying of Adelaide was delayed and the first town land was not available until 1837, consequently immigrants were forced to build temporary huts made out of the materials at hand. The River Torrens was central to the settlement, indeed its banks were the settlement. A rough sketch of Adelaide from 1837 signifies just how important it was. (see Figure 4) While the river is marked in clearly in the centre of the drawing as “River Adelaide”, the streets of Adelaide are merely a theoretical proposition in the foreground. Government house is a major landmark along the river’s banks.

One of the earliest paintings of the river is Martha Berkeley’s “Government Hut, Adelaide” c1839 (see Figure 5). This also shows the settlement as being centred on the Torrens River, indeed it is the river bed which takes up most of the painting. Berkeley had arrived in Adelaide in 1837 and lived with other settlers for eight months along the banks of the Torrens. ² Of a Romantic disposition, Berkeley emphasised the still sylvan quality of the area. The painting shows a heavily treed area with the river bed occupying most of the picture, the hut is nestled quietly in the background. The picture must have been painted in summer, as the river is almost dry, apart from a waterhole to which a cart with barrel quietly makes its way. The lack of water and the importance of it are stressed. More barrels are seen placed next to a tent where a group of settlers gather around. In the foreground a settler prepares his dinner on an open fire and a group of Aborigines stand by peacefully.

² J. Hylton, Colonial Sisters: Martha Berkeley and Theresa Walker, South Australia’s first professional artists, Art Gallery Board of South Australia Adelaide, 1994, p.12.
Figure 5: Martha Berkeley, "The Government Hut, Adelaide," c. 1839
Those immigrants who came from the same ship often pitched their tents or built their huts together. There was a "Buffalo Row" and a "Coromandel Row", the first standing near the Adelaide Gaol, with "Coromandel Row" a little to the east. A few settlers had wooden cottages brought out on ships, Berkeley's painting shows what is presumably one of these, but they mainly used the resources around them. Some dwellings were built of mud and branches, with a few reeds or a piece of old canvas for a roof, others were composed of turf and some entirely of reeds. The majority had an outside fire like their Aboriginal neighbours, with wood obtained from the gum trees, and, to reach the water, paths were cleared through the tea-tree. The river was often the first port of call for settlers arriving in Adelaide. One settler, after his first night in the colony, described how he quickly made his way to the river: "first thing in the morning I stood with one leg either side of the immense river and washed my hands and face."\(^3\) The north side of the Torrens was a traditional Kaurna ceremonial area and many camped near the ford, where the King William Road Bridge is now situated, and where water-carriers worked from in the 1840s. They were designated the "Adelaide tribe".\(^4\) Temporary bridges provided the passage across the river, a punt was also used before more solid bridges were made, \(^5\) and carts could also cross over at some places where the water was low.

It has at times been assumed that the Aborigines were not interested in white settlement or that there was initially a significant resistance. While this resistance grew as Aborigines encountered injustice, as Clarke has pointed out in his study of Adelaide, there was also an attraction to the white settlers' way of life, to the new experience, and to the "availability of a new technology".\(^6\) Reece, studying the settlement at Perth, has similarly concluded that accommodation with Europeans was something for which Aborigines strove in the early years of settlement, questioning the "dispossession-resistance interpretation of Aboriginal responses".\(^7\) In the Port Phillip District Aborigines who were determined to stay and make the most of the situation also seldom used outright violence.\(^8\) In Melbourne they congregated principally on their traditional


\(^{4}\) Chittleborough, J., "Old Memories", Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society of South Australia, vol. vi, 1903, p.60.


\(^{6}\) P. Clarke, "Adelaide as an Aboriginal Landscape", Aboriginal History, vol. 15:1, p.66.


\(^{8}\) B. Blaskett, "The level of violence: Europeans and Aborigines in Port Phillip 1835-1850", S. Janson
meeting grounds on the south banks of the Yarra. The history of settlement along the rivers chosen for city areas is far different to the development of the inland rivers where small parties of settlers and explorers, operating away from the confines of their society, battled with local inhabitants determined to defend their land.

The widespread belief that Europeans were beings returned from the dead, and even returned relatives, was also strong in South Australia, and thought to be the “universal impression”. This meant that whites were often treated in a much friendlier way than might otherwise have been expected, shielding developing settlements from hostility. In many instances it was the Aborigines who made the initial move, and exhibited their friendly intentions. The settlers feared resistance, but it did not eventuate. Even if the Aborigines had been more hostile, they were vastly outnumbered. By the end of 1837 there were around three to four hundred Kaurna compared to approximately 2,500 settlers, mainly congregated in the central location. The number of Kaurna had also been greatly reduced by smallpox, which travelled down the Murray River some years prior to settlement. One settler was to note that most of the adult Aborigines camping along the Torrens in 1839 were pitted with smallpox. By 1838 there were approximately two hundred Aborigines in the vicinity of Adelaide and the Register noted with some surprise that they “seem to have nearly abandoned the country, or at least to have made the parklands their headquarters”.

While co-existing along the Torrens during the first two years of white settlement, the relative peacefulness of the climate between the settlers and the Aborigines lay partly in their common circumstances. While the settlers were transplanting “a policy of individualism, hierarchy and inequality” this was broken down to some extent during this time. Settlers often commented that they enjoyed camaraderie in their time of hardship, that barriers between people were broken down and that they led an

13 Register, June 30, 1838, p.3.
14 H. Reynolds, op.cit., p.69.
independent, though arduous life. Not able to make do with just their own resources they were often reliant on others. As one wrote home, “we can all do a little of everything and are all willingly united, and can be happy with a little.” This levelling also applied to the hierarchy between men and women. One woman, writing back home in 1837, pointed out the absence of their usual domestic property and the greater sense of freedom:

You would smile if you were to see the way in which we get on. We have two cups and saucers, which have been lent to us, and six plates, two spoons, and everything else in proportion...I feel as much at home here as if I had been here for years, and so independent. It is really quite delightful.

The increased independence of women allowed them relatively free contact with the Aboriginal community in the early years of settlement.

The settlers’ experiences encouraged a different outlook on life and community. Occasionally they made conscious reference to their similarity to the Aborigines: they hunted, they built their own “wurlies”, and they cooked outside. The short term nature of the early settlement enabled them to see it as romantic: the cooking was “a la gipsy”, the camp was an “earthly paradise, with every prospect pleasing”. Pastor Finlayson on the banks of the Torrens in his “Gipsy Camp” described his rough tent adorned with tea-tree as assuming “the look of a sylvan bower”. Pastor Abbott imitated the Aborigines in his construction of a “kind of wurley hut”, made of light saplings from the banks of the river, grass and reeds and struggled on in the wet weather using umbrellas inside to keep off the drenching rain. Hailes described the huts as being of a “Robinson Crusoe” kind made with twigs and branches. One observer noted the savage look of their own structures: “a collection of as primitive - looking wigwams as can well be imagined”. The scene was irregular with each person building their hut on the spot that whim or

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15 ibid.
16 cited in J. Blacket, op.cit., p.80.
chance pointed out. Their appearance he found “amusing” and “extraordinary”.

What the Kaurna made of it we can only speculate. But with no prior knowledge of European settlements, they could have reasonably assumed that his was how white people usually lived.

Even in their “semi-savage state”, this “rudest state of nature”, the white settlers still aspired to some standards in their temporary abodes and longed for home ownership. Finlayson mentioned that he looked with envy on the row of reed cottages in the Buffalo camp. Hack longed for a kitchen. A satisfied settler in 1838 wrote home boasting that while their present dwelling was pleasantly situated their new hut would be “very commodious.” The Governor’s hut showed an attempt at a more dignified form of life, although it was described as “an extraordinarily uncouth and repulsive structure”. This was one of the more solid constructions, being made of mud, supported by uprights of wood, covered thickly with thatch, and placed on its own reserved land on the river bank.

The south bank was the hub of activity and temporary stores were soon established, the first post office was also situated in one of the huts. Adams mentions selling potatoes here, which were on one occasion cleverly stolen by the Aborigines. By early 1838 more sophisticated stalls had been erected, with one enterprising greengrocer selling apples, onions, preserved damsons and other fruit, young fruit trees and all kinds of garden seeds, ironmongery, wearing apparel and horse harnesses.

In the formative years of Adelaide the opportunities for establishing relationships between the settlers and the Kaurna were taken up. Not that this was a completely levelling experience between white and black, even during this time the Europeans were often cut off by their perceptions of the Aborigines as inferiors, heathens and the recipients of handouts. The experience of a completely different lifestyle and the

20 J.F. Bennett, Historical and Descriptive Account of South Australia, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1843, p.15.
22 Finlayson, op. cit., p.42.
25 ibid.
26 Register, April 28 1838, p.2.
hardships faced were foremost in their minds, but they were very willing to accept help and were interested in the exotic nature of the experience. The use of Aboriginal labour facilitated interaction.

The Aboriginal people, earning their living along the banks of the Torrens by carting water or chopping wood, were paid in bread or biscuits, with one settler commenting that a taste for the white people's food had been acquired from 1836. In this early period Aboriginal people played a significant role in the new settlement. Aboriginal labour centred around the river, and food soon came to be used for very uneven bargaining, sanctioned by those in authority. It had been proposed in 1835 that Aborigines might become the "lowest class of free labourers". The first judge in the colony advised the Aborigines to do menial tasks in order to help the white man and, by 1839, their principal source of paid employment remained fetching wood and water.

Labour at this time was scarce and expensive, and water carriers seen to be at the "bottom of the barrel" in society, such menial labour was also carried out by poor men with large families who were almost starving and thus glad to earn enough money for food. The motivations of the early settlers are easy to understand. In a report to the Directors of the SA Company it was pointed out that the Aborigines were "extremely useful", "they work for a long time for the sake of one biscuit". Their exploitation was proudly boasted of by Gouger: "A little sugar, biscuit or bread is a sufficient inducement for them to bring wood, water, or stone for building, and several instances have occurred of 10 or 12 working during six hours consecutively for an individual biscuit." Teichelmann's translation in 1841 of a common phrase gives a feeling for the number of Aboriginal people at the whites' disposal: "Who will fetch her two buckets of water - any person may come and do it." The close proximity of the Aborigines proved to be very beneficial for white society.

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27 J. Blackett, op.cit., p.73.
28 R. Gibbs, "Relations Between the Aboriginal Inhabitants and the First South Australian Colonists", Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, vol. 61, 1960, p.64.
29 J. Stephens, op. cit., p. 68.
30 Register, November 30 1840, p.5.
32 J. Stephens, op. cit., p.73.
While settlers were living on the Parklands the practice of Aborigines supplying them with firewood was established. When the water level was low the Aborigines would hew pieces from the tree trunks cluttering the riverbed, which were then sold in the city by the women for a few copper coins. In the traditional manner the Aborigines would take a tomahawk, climb the trunk and cut the limbs. Wattle was also chopped and sold to the Europeans and young cockatoos and possum skins exchanged for bread. Instead of violent resistance, the settlers found a cheap labour force used for the menial tasks of carrying water and chopping wood at a time when there were few services, when labour was of great importance, but very expensive and in short supply. However, the indigenous people were also to find that they could be easily discarded. The settlers never thought seriously about paying them a decent wage, thus negating the official desire to incorporate them into the community and teach them the “habits of civilisation”. Any rewards given were seen as a sign of their benevolence and charity. Advice printed in the Register from humanitarians in England on giving the Aborigines valued, regular labour with fair returns was ignored.34

Aboriginal people’s engagement in labour involved them in the settlers’ ultimate goal of transforming the area, which would impact upon their traditional lives. However, it was their traditional customs that the white settlers were intrigued with. In diaries and letters early settlers noted an interest in their activities. One early immigrant recorded his fascination with the native turkeys and platypus, conversed with the Aborigines about how the latter made a nest and described the manner in which they climbed trees to capture the “opossum”. Blacket pointed out that the walk along the Torrens was one which was attractive to the early settlers, and romanticised the activities of the traditional inhabitants who were also seen as being of “aesthetic” interest. “Here was one of the pleasantest walks that the early immigrants could take. Walking down the riverside they could see innumerable parrots and flocks of white cockatoos. Occasionally a native might be seen climbing the trees searching for a large caterpillar, a most toothsome morsel of food.”35 Their “friendly games” were also a source of interest.36 At the same time, Europeans also provided plenty of amusement for the Aborigines as they demonstrated their peculiarities. A definite lack of hostility, and a

34 Register, April 18 1840.
35 J. Blacket, op. cit., p.76.
willingness to empathise, can be seen in Beare’s reflection in 1837: “it was delightful to listen at night to the unrestrained laughter of the blacks in their wurlies as they compared apparently the method of the white man with their own.”

Women settlers and Aboriginal women came into contact much more frequently in the early years. There were no servants available so women had to do a lot of menial work. Aboriginal women often came over to the white settlement and helped with tasks, many of which utilised their skills, such as lighting the fire, or fetching native greens when few other sorts of vegetable were available. Women were keen to teach the Aborigines to be “civilised” right from the beginning, regardless of the desires of their “students”.

Mary Thomas recalled several visits from black women with their babies when she was camped in her tent, noting, to her eyes, the “haggard” appearance of the women. To a visiting young girl with a new born baby she gave a piece of flannel to wrap around it, considering her traditional materials inadequate. She mentions that a woman known as Black Mary established a strong enough friendship with her that she continued to call after she had moved further away. Another mimicked Thomas by wearing a small curtain ring on her finger. One female settler, concerned about the practice of infanticide, persuaded William Wyatt, the first Protector of Aborigines, to argue with the mother of a new-born baby to resist having it killed. Another young woman recalled a time when an Aboriginal woman demanded something to eat from her mother. Her mother treated her like an ill-mannered child, replying that if she entered in a “proper way” she would get something, but as she came in demanding it she would receive nothing. Her father though was quite happy to cook up a bullock’s head soup for the Aborigines, which they ate until they “lay down and groaned”. A mixed response was recorded by the female settler who commented that the Aborigines seemed “very much affected” by a funeral ceremony that was held, but complained that they were “very superstitious and very idle”. Women appeared to be quicker to adopt their traditional

36 J. Chittleborough, op. cit., p.60.
40 J. Blacket, op. cit., p.73.
“civilising role” than the men, who seemed to be more interested in the practicalities of how the Aborigines could assist them in building the town.

There was a racial divide between the north and the south banks of the Torrens. At this time there was the reassurance of safety in numbers at the settlers’ camp; but it could be a little frightening venturing alone to the other side of the river, particularly for women. Mary Thomas recorded a visit to North Adelaide facilitated by a log across the river bed. Unaware of the large number of Aborigines camped on the north bank, she was taken aback to suddenly come across “the whole tribe of the district”. She passed warily through the encampment which comprised nearly a hundred men, women and children. Their activities were peaceful though, a few men were throwing spears for practice or pastime and others were stretched out on the grass. Most of the women were seated near the fires outside the wurlies and Thomas observed that they “made their remarks on me as I passed, though I did not understand a word they said.” Upon reaching the end of her journey she breathed a sigh of relief: “When we got home Rio (her dog) seemed to be as glad as I was to find herself once more in civilised society.” The threat that Thomas perceived was not so much one of violence but one imposed by the physical presence of large numbers of Aboriginal people, and of her uncertainty about their reaction. This was something she could not control and did not understand.

Aboriginal men were said to be eager to go hunting with the white settlers who owned guns. Kangaroos were plentiful in the early years of the settlement, and could be purchased very cheaply. Black swans, wild ducks, quail, plovers, cockatoos and parrots were also available. The river’s stream was an area which both groups occupied, both black and white enjoyed bathing in the Torrens, although there is no mention of white women taking part. The Aboriginal women were said to be very fond of the water and of diving and swimming in a playful manner, and the children were taught to swim from an early age. Hack recollected that one of his prime pleasures was enjoying a dip in its

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41 E.K. Thomas (ed.), op. cit., p.76.
42 ibid.
43 ibid., p.77.
clear, deep, pools at the close of the day after working on his building operations. The Torrens was seen as an area of rejuvenation and recreation by both communities and was a life-sustaining resource.

Ceremonies, referred to as “corroborees” by the early settlers, were common and widely attended by the whites and were a frequent subject of early books written about Adelaide. There was an interest in the exotic nature of their practices. They were undertaken in the moonlight, whole trees were sometimes burned, producing a mystical air that often fascinated the settlers. Thomas only witnessed one, commenting that the women took no part but were spectators like themselves. She found it curious: the Aborigines “threw themselves into attitudes which we would not have thought possible”, a “curious sight it was”. Burials and other ceremonies also created interest. The Register at times published descriptions of important burials in the area, such as that of a woman, Warriato, buried in 1839. They described how her corpse was placed on a bier carried by 8 or 10 men which was moved around on the spot where she had died. The ceremonies were repeated the next day, when they touched all the places on the parkland where they had lately been encamped.

PROMOTING CULTIVATION AND CIVILISATION

The Aborigines were not encouraged to continue in their traditional way by the authorities. The behaviour they were expected to adopt was summed up in 1839 by the liberal and evangelical Governor Gawler in an address to the Aborigines on the annual Queen’s Birthday dinner celebrated since 1838. About 200 native men and women and their “piccaninnies” attended along with a large number of white settlers who had occupied the morning by promenading along the banks of the Torrens. Regardless of whether any one understood the translation, the general concepts of Gawler’s brief statement of the philosophy and rules of white society would have been mystifying to the Aborigines:

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46 “Diary of John Barton Hack 1836-9”, Mortlock Library Archives, PRG 208/7, p.70.
48 Register, March 19 1839, p.8.
49 ibid., May 25 1839.
Black men! We wish to make you happy. But you cannot be happy unless you imitate good white men, build huts, wear clothes, work and be useful.

Above all things you cannot be happy unless you love God who made heaven and earth and men and all things.

Love white men. Love other tribes of black men. Do not quarrel together. Tell other tribes to love white men, and to build good huts and wear clothes. Learn to speak English.

If any white man injure you, tell the Protector and he will do you justice.  

The Aborigines were urged to not only copy whites, but were expected to be better than them, to do what they had not accomplished: to love all men and not to quarrel. Above all, they were to be subservient.

Food was used as a means of winning trust. While the area had provided bountifully for the Kaurna in the past, competition for food sources was already occurring. James Cronk, the interpreter, wrote that although the Aboriginal people were initially wary of him, they gradually made contact when he offered them biscuits and sugar. Governor Gawler used food in much the same way when he gave the first dinner for the Aborigines on what is now the Parade Ground. Rounds of roast beef, rice, biscuits, sugar and tea were distributed. The Aborigines also received rugs, blankets, frocks, caps and a bright pewter plate each inscribed with a picture of the Queen and the letters of the alphabet. Gawler was well aware that while this was a display of generosity and goodwill, it was also a means of breaking down traditional ways.

The site for the civilising process outlined by Gawler was to be the Native Location, an area of 13 acres formed in August 1837 on the northern banks of the Torrens opposite the Adelaide Gaol. The white camp was a short distance to the east on the southern side. The Kaurna people had chosen the exact area themselves, a short distance from that originally designated for them, in a place known as Piltawaldi, meaning “possum
The site was thought to be useful for agriculture and for satisfying the Aborigines’ immediate needs. The Colonisation Commission also felt that living in separate locations, but in close proximity to whites, would hasten their advancement in civilisation. Progress and civilisation were the keynotes of the institution. The instructions issued to William Wyatt, the first Protector, were: to find out the number and strength of the tribes; protect them in their rights to the land, as long as they used them in an “especial manner”; encourage their friendly disposition towards the settlers; induce them to labour; and lead them by degrees to the advantages of civilisation and religion. The Aborigines would leave their wandering ways and set up their own gardens thus saving them from the supposed brink of starvation which was the assumed result of their traditional lifestyle. Native Locations were to provide shelter for the Aborigines “superior to those found in their rudely constructed huts” and were to be areas from which food and clothing would be distributed in exchange for labour. The banks of the Torrens were to be an area for change, their closeness to white settlers would prove beneficial.

The experiment in civilisation was poorly funded. In 1839 Lutheran missionaries opened the first Aboriginal school at the Native Location. They saw the Kaurna as being their tribe and mainly associated with them, and learnt only the Kaurna language. From its inception, life at the Native Location was a struggle. The missionaries were poorly paid, with barely enough money to keep themselves fed at times, thus relying on the few potatoes that the vegetable garden produced. The missionaries, and other settlers, not yet familiar with the seasonal variations of the Adelaide climate, experienced setbacks in this area. While the soil around the river would have been fertile enough, unexpected cold or heat often ruined the meagre crops planted. “My garden is a total failure” wrote Pastor Klose mournfully in 1841 after his potatoes succumbed to frostbite. Gum trees also had to be dug out by the Aborigines before cultivation could proceed. Progress was continually halted by lack of funds and even after the land had been worked by the

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54 Register, August 12 1837, p.1.
57 Ibid., p. 19.
Aborigines and the pastors, there were often no seeds to plant. Klose’s meagre diet was supplemented by wild mint collected from the river.\(^\text{59}\)

The Native Location was certainly not what attracted Aboriginal people to Adelaide. They preferred to settle in their own groups and camp in their traditional manner. Working for the settlers was also preferable to working at the official Location, where numbers were always few. As Moorhouse pointed out in 1839: “At the location we never distribute rations until an equivalent of work is done and then the food is of an inferior quality to that obtained from the town...unless the number of natives be so great that the town cannot supply them, we get no work done at the location.”\(^\text{60}\) Helping the settlers did not involve a definite commitment to the white people nor a complete break with the Aborigines’ traditional lives. The Aborigines could still maintain their independence and their solidarity to their own community as jobs such as water carrying and wood chopping did not tie them to one employer. Later a few indigenous people would move into regular employment, such as being domestic servants, but this initial labour did not necessitate moving into white houses, or adopting white ways.

While a “taste” for the white peoples’ food may have been acquired, the reasons for the Aborigines’ engagement in labour had more to do with the shortage of their own foods and the breakdown of their traditional movements. Resources initially would have been limited by the settlers’ own use of the food around them. The colonists hunted and cooked game: kangaroos, emus, birds such as parrots and quail, fish, crayfish and the occasional snake were all used. Moreover, the indigenous population did not have the advantage of the settlers’ guns and important game such as kangaroo were also pushed further out by white settlement. By 1838 a new Aboriginal proverb was reported: “whiteman come, kangaroo go.”\(^\text{61}\) While killing the settlers’ sheep was a natural compensation, this also had severe consequences, Aboriginal people also were not supposed to go on to white property, again on pain of punishment.

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\(^{59}\) ibid., p.17.

\(^{60}\) R. Foster, “Feasts of the Full Moon”, p.65.

\(^{61}\) Register, December 22 1838, p.4.
The large concentration of people in the town meant that by the early 1840s the Aboriginal people had been “stripped of all their means of subsistence”.62 The settlers were using yet another source of food, the wattle seed: “the famishing native, for the sake of a scanty pittance for the day is hired to destroy a principal remaining source of food.”63 By the mid-1840s there were reports of malnutrition.64 Furthermore, there was a decreased need for their labour in the 1840s as official water-carriers began to distribute larger amounts of water to the houses now further away from the river. By 1839 conflict resulting from the Aborigines need for support was being reported, and these would continue to cause problems. For example, Hack recorded that his nurse had her bonnet knocked off by an Aborigine because she refused to give him money.65 This occurred near the river, where Aborigines and settlers continued to come into contact with each other most frequently. Hack warned that if the situation did not come under control, “things will go from bad to worse”.66

The Aborigines refused to succumb to the restrictions and indignity imposed upon them at the Native Location. For the Kaurna, white occupation necessitated resistance more of mind than of body.67 Counter to white expectations, the Aborigines continued to find their ways superior to those of the whites and rejected their social institutions. At the Location, school attendance only grew during autumnal-winter months, when food became scarce in outer districts. Aborigines were then forced to come in and live on the institution, about half-a-mile from the huts, and share the rations. Pastor Klose lamented, “they come to school not from a love of learning, but for food.”68

In hindsight there is an irony in setting up an alien institution along the banks of the River Torrens for the indigenous population, an area they considered so important to their traditional life. By 1841 the numbers at the location had decreased, with less than a dozen people working in the vegetable garden, although there were many Aborigines about the neighbourhood. The school children, not surprisingly, preferred more outdoor pursuits to their restrictive schoolhouse lessons, with complaints that they were “running

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63 ibid., p.28.
64 Register, February 28 1844 p.3.
65 “Diary of John Barton Hack 1836-9”, Mortlock Library Archives, PRG 208/7, p.80.
66 ibid., p.83.
67 B. Blasket, op. cit., p.95.
about and paddling in the brook and laying about all day”. Another traditional pastime along the river was being frowned upon. Klose tried to civilise the practice, by offering soap to encourage the new virtue of cleanliness. The experiment in religion was rejected, with few adults ever attending the church services at the Location. Sunday services were unintelligible to them, but some appeared to come along for a quiet nap. The Register, critical of the Native Location, charged: “they would rather die at the foot of a tree than enter the kennels provided for them”, the only habits of civilisation they had picked up were drinking and smoking.

APPROPRIATING THE RIVER AREA

While the experiment in civilisation at the Native Location had few successes, the initial relations between the indigenous people and the settlers had been quite positive. However, by 1839 there was a reaction against the indigenous owners of the land. The close proximity to whites, rather than being beneficial came to be a cause for confrontation and exploitation. Elements of the community aimed to impose their control on the area, the council began actions designed to displace the Aborigines from their camps, and in 1845 the campaign to move the Native Location succeeded. It would take longer than this, however, for the Aborigines to be removed altogether. They continued to resist such attempts and deemed it their right to live by the river.

Why did these developments occur? The feelings of the settlers grew gradually more hostile, with complaints about Aborigines taking over the parklands. Concerns about the danger to health from the Aboriginal population were also raised, with accusations that they were polluting the river water. Safety issues related to the protection of white females would impact on the settlers’ attitudes towards the indigenous population and cultural criticism of traditional practices also grew. The Aboriginal people continued to very publicly disregard the conventions of white European civilisation in activities such as corroborees on Sunday, nudity, dwelling in their traditional manner and fighting.

68 G. Joyce (ed.), ibid., p.41.
69 Register, October 30 1841, p.2.
71 Register, July 27 1839.
Ironically, many of these traits were aspects of their life that had provided interest to whites in the first few years of settlement. Interest gave way to abhorrence.

While the banks of the Torrens were the site of peaceful interaction, they were also the location of the first violent clashes. The experiment in civilisation and co-operation between black and white was hindered by several killings of settlers by Aborigines in the Adelaide area. Between 1836-7 the settlers had been given few grounds for their suspicions of the danger that Aborigines represented. However, several murders occurring between 1838-9 fuelled their fears. The first killing, which occurred along the Torrens on 16 March 1838, was that of Thomas Pegler, a drunken 24 year old, who had visited a store in Adelaide near sundown and when attempting to walk to North Adelaide had insulted the Aborigines. The second murder caused even more trouble. This clash occurred in April 1839 when a shepherd, Duffel, was speared while working about seven miles northeast from Adelaide also along the Torrens. A recent study has concluded that both the killing of Duffel and Pegler were sorcery killings. Battles further inland, particularly the Maria incident, also had a negative effect. By 1839 feelings had reached such a crisis point that a meeting had to be held about the Aborigines. When it came to protecting their own, few were willing to understand the reasons behind the murders, or to penetrate the Aborigines own justice system. The Aborigines found guilty were hanged very publicly at the gaol along the Torrens' banks.

But more long term changes were taking place. Those in power in Adelaide were turning their attention to the Torrens. A city of sorts was emerging, activities in the parklands were being restricted and the recreational value of the area promoted. The values of European society were reasserted as the settlers began to be more established. Material progress and home ownership added a further distance between their lifestyle and that of the Aborigines. In 1837, the editor of the Register had predicted that the parklands would soon be cleared of temporary erections. The settlers were inordinately proud of their progress and the editor claimed that by the end of the first year the "testimony of respectable settlers" would vouch for its having assumed many of the characteristics of

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73 ibid., p.78.
74 ibid., p.79.
75 Register, 11 May 1839, p.4.
an “established town”. In 1839 the *Foreign Quarterly Review* was heralding the colony’s success in London: “The banks of the Torrens have been transformed from a valueless wilderness into a bustling and thriving town.”

The language used here to describe the original state of the Torrens is much harsher than the descriptions from many of the early settlers. Viewed from London, the banks are seen in a purely economic sense, importantly, the Torrens is viewed as the city per se. But meanwhile hundreds of Aborigines were living on the riverside between North and South Adelaide.

White society was dividing recreational areas from residential areas. During the first two years of settlement both Aborigine and European had used the resources along the banks of the Torrens as they wished. In early 1838 there were fears that the occupation by the settlers, begun as a temporary measure, might come to be seen as a public right. The first attempts to control the settlers living in the parklands began in October 1838 when Governor Gawler introduced an Act for improving the city of Adelaide and the parklands and public lands and for “preventing nuisances therein”. 2,300 pounds was paid by the Colonial Secretary to secure the parklands in 1839; and in the same year those camped along the Torrens were ordered to move and their huts cleared. Governor Gawler urged the reluctant settlers to cultivate their own land, rather than squat on the parklands.

Other improvements were occurring, including the erection of a new wooden bridge, which had been carried out by an unfortunate “pauper gang” in 1838, and the first attempt to lay out the Botanic Gardens. The river area’s official role as a parkland was used as a reason for eviction.

While the Aborigines had been employed as hewers of wood in the early years of the settlement, there were now complaints about the destruction of trees and concern that the lovely spot reserved for the park would be ruined, and in the summer months the

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77 *op. cit.*, p.110.
81 *Register*, April 7 1838.
settlers would look in vain for a shady walk. The government began issuing notices in November 1838 warning against the practice of lopping off branches and employing Aborigines to do so; in 1839 the population were told more specifically that the forbidden area included those trees in the parklands and in the bed of the river. The government specified the most troublesome areas in early 1840 as “those portions of the park lands which lie between north and south Adelaide, from Hindmarsh Town to the Botanic Garden, and on those which are situated between the Botanic Gardens and the East Terrace.” The move thus stopped the indigenous people from earning income, although the government did not at this stage impose restrictions on the Aborigines’ personal supply of timber. By August 1840, however, a further notice overturned this stating that the police and parkkeepers would now prevent the Aborigines from cutting wood in this area. The indigenous people were effectively being pushed out. How could meat be cooked, shelters constructed and tools made without the use of wood?

The land was no longer a free public space but one under the control of the government. The settlers were reluctantly coming to see it as a recreation area but objected to the Aborigines using the resources when they could not, with an element of jealousy present in their comments. This was stated outright: “I cannot see what right the natives have to the parklands any more than the settlers,” but also poetically:

It’s a downright and absolute shame,
Just to think of those elegant trees,
(And I don’t know what party’s to blame),
That the blacks cut whenever they please.

The poet’s attitude was ambivalent, he both wished for the time that he had been able to use it to as a source of wood, but also realised the attractions of a park region. Another complainant, “A Townsman”, was more reconciled to it being a park area and blamed

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82 ibid., June 30 1838, p.3.
83 The Government Gazette, September 12 1839.
84 ibid., July 16 1840.
85 ibid. August 2 1840.
86 Register, August 15 1840, p.5.
87 ibid., August 2 1843, p.2.
the Aborigines for defacing the finest trees in the park. Native Locations where being reserved in other parts of South Australia and he saw this as the perfect excuse to move the Aborigines out of Adelaide: "where is the use of appropriating land for them in the country districts, if they are allowed to loiter about our parklands doing nothing but mischief?" The emphasis on loitering was a sign of things to come, and of vagrancy laws that would be used against the Aborigines of Adelaide.

A painting by Hitchin in 1841 reflects some of the changing attitudes of society towards the river area and the developing city. Hitchin shows North Terrace as a distinct demarcation between the river area and the town. The town is shown as thriving, with many buildings near North Terrace, some artistic license may have been used here in the extent of its development. The river area is depicted as pastoral and picturesque in the foreground with a small flock of sheep being herded along, a couple standing somewhat romantically, and a man on horseback, talking to a fellow settler.

![Figure 7: Adelaide from North Terrace, 1841](image)

The riverbank is both casual meeting ground, recreation area and a place through which to travel. A small and orderly group of Aborigines are also very carefully placed as part of the exotic and picturesque. The Aborigines are to the far left of the picture, as far away from the town as possible, but also close to the river. As with many other paintings of indigenous people at this time, it ignores their transformation into a subordinate

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88 *ibid.*, August 15 1840, p 5.
89 *ibid.*
class, showing them idly sitting by the river in an uncorrupted state, rather than participating in activities such as water carrying or chopping wood. It has been argued that many artists in the first half of the nineteenth century "celebrated the impact that white settlement had on the land", and this is certainly the case with Hitchin’s picture, where the progress of the settlement is emphasised, and the new buildings stand as testimony to the growth of the colony.

In 1841 Adelaide had set up its own short-lived council free from any interference from England. In 1843 the parklands were being advertised as a pleasure site with the river area as the primary focus: “Along the river side, and to the east of the town, this affords delightful walks and landscapes even in its natural state.” It was assumed that the council would soon enclose the land and be in a position to lay out walks, and it would then “make one of the most delightful pleasure grounds in the world.” However, it would take some time for this to occur. The white settlers, who had now begun to settle down themselves and grow their own food, asserted forcefully that it was “labour alone...being that which gave a right to land.” The Register mounted a steady campaign to have the Location moved, and there was a general reaction against the indigenous people gathering in Adelaide. The curiosities had become an embarrassment. Moorhouse was blamed for the continuing presence of the Aborigines: “What the Protector is on about we know not. The Parklands are swarming with natives, under no control.” It was argued that they should be banned from the area: “That they are allowed to enter Adelaide at all appears to be a sad neglect of the proper business of the Protector.” It was also suggested that the government do all it could to stop them lingering about the town and prohibit the colonists from supplying them with food. Another concerned settler pointed out the “extreme impropriety” of allowing them to swim in water which was for use of the white settlers, or “the people of Adelaide”. The indigenous people were branded as unaesthetic and unhygienic.

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92 J.F. Bennett, op.cit., p.122.
93 ibid., p.122.
94 Register, February 25 1843, p.2.
95 ibid., February 6 1841, p.3.
96 ibid.
97 South Australian, 16 April 1840, p.7.
The topic “The Park Land and the Natives” was raised at a Town Council meeting in 1841. Now free from any interference from England, the justification of civic responsibility was used to remove the Aborigines from the parklands altogether. A variety of reasons were given to defend this: it was disgusting to see them; they were occupying too much of the parkland area; they insulted women; they bathed daily in the river thus causing the water to become contaminated; and they were also going about begging and naked in a state not suitable for a city area. The Aborigines had come to be seen as the prime nuisances in the river area. A resolution was passed prohibiting people from bathing in the area of the river between the First Creek and the Aborigines’ Location, which left the Aborigines with little choice as to where they could wash. While the resolution to prohibit bathing was for all citizens, the move was aimed at the Aborigines. A deputation from the Town Council was organised to visit the Governor to add force to their aims. The Council brought forward medical advice in 1843 that bathing was “a much greater evil than people imagined.” It was claimed that Aborigines were “labouring under the most filthy and abominable diseases”.  

The Aborigines were systematically prevented from engaging in activities in the Parklands and became a scapegoat when disease threatened the town. Little concern was shown about the Aboriginal people’s health. Ironically, while settlers aimed to remove the Aborigines from the town, the Aborigines were in fact being killed by their congregation there. Disease was transmitted much more rapidly in the town due to the large population and the Aborigines lack of resistance to the diseases of white society. Smallpox was thought to be the first disease to affect the Kaurna, and by the late 1830s syphilis and gonorrhoea had taken a heavy toll. Settlers feared contracting these diseases from the indigenous people and by 1839 vaccination programs for the settlers had begun against smallpox. Influenza killed many Aborigines in an epidemic of 1838 and weakened others; measles, whooping cough and the effects of alcohol inflicted further damage. An outbreak of typhoid fever caused by effluent into the Torrens, the Aborigines only water supply in Adelaide, killed still more in 1843. The life-sustaining properties of the river for the Aboriginal people had been tainted by white

98 ibid.
100 ibid., p.40.
society. Rather than finding a way to alleviate such tragedies, the settlers' reactions were to view the Aborigines as "dirty" and contaminated, albeit by their own society, and to add further evidence for the need for separation, this time for being a danger to the whites' health.

PROTECTING WHITE WOMEN

Removal of the indigenous people was also seen as necessary to protect white female settlers from the perceived threat of Aborigines in the river area. Females were said to be vulnerable to the large number of indigenous people, and their camps at bridges said to cause difficulty in passage from north to south Adelaide. In 1841 Moorhouse had informed the authorities that: "Frequent complaints are being made about the natives assembling at the waterhole, using abusive language to the female passengers and bathing in the river".\(^{101}\) The appeal to the danger to women and children posed by their encampments had become a frequent complaint in the early 1840s: "Females were perpetually insulted by them, and in fact, no woman would scarcely pass the bridge unprotected."\(^{102}\) The bridge, finished in 1839, had established a definite link between North and South Adelaide and an official thoroughfare; it was no doubt an object of pride and progress (although it would soon be washed away). The encampment near the bridge came to be considered not just a physical, but a moral danger.

Large groups chose to reside there. A painting by Robert Davenport in 1844, entitled "Adelaide from the North" (see Figure 8), shows groups of Aborigines encamped on both the northern and southern sides of the bridge. The Aboriginal people are almost sectioned off by a fence along the roadway, showing attempts made to order and partition the area. The bridge area is also depicted as busy, with a number of people crossing over in both horse and cart and by foot. In the background visible signs of the

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\(^{101}\) cited in C. Mattingly (ed. and research), *op. cit.*, p.6.

\(^{102}\) *ibid.*
Figure 8. Davenport, R., “Adelaide from north bank of the River Torrens”, c.1843.
cutting down of gum trees can be seen, and the town is orderly and neat. The gum trees in the foreground are in a sinuous style similar to John Glover’s landscape paintings featuring Aboriginal people, which have been described as conveying “a strangely Gothic and exotic quality.” There are tones of the exotic in Davenport’s depiction of Aboriginal people, (and in Hitchin’s), with them sitting in traditional manner, picturesquely along the river banks. The foreground and background show a contrast between the progress being made and the continued presence of indigenous people and reflect the tensions at work within the area. While the painting shows relative harmony, recorded evidence tells another story.

Those residing in North Adelaide were loudest in their objections to the Aborigines, and the editor of the Register inserted his own note at the bottom of a complaint, pointing out that those not living in North Adelaide could not understand what a nuisance their camps were. Another resident of the north side, calling himself “Civis”, complained in 1841 that every night Aboriginal people accosted him. He recalled an incident where one of them stopped him in the middle of the road, holding a waddy and demanding money. Women and children were held to be particularly vulnerable, and the glare from the fires was claimed to have caused several accidents. The “extraordinary ceremonies” near the bridge also came under attack. Another resident suggested that a bridge be made elsewhere as “ladies” would much prefer to cross at a different place. The Police Commissioner’s office also recorded numerous complaints as late as 1846 about Aborigines annoying settlers, “particularly children and females” who may have to pass their locations.

Females now needed society’s protection. The change from the outdoor life camping along the Torrens’ banks to settling in houses led to a decrease in the independence of women. McGuire in her article on the relations between white and black women, “Good fella Missus”, points out that female status in the nineteenth century was defined by the

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104 The foreground of “Adelaide from the North” has a striking similarity to Glover’s painting “The Last Muster of the Aborigines at Risdon 1836”, see ibid., p.125.
105 ibid., August 5 1840, p.5.
106 ibid.
107 ibid., January 30 1841, p.3.
amount of protection given to them by husbands, fathers and brothers. The males were the mediators between the exterior world and the domestic interior. Along the Torrens the large numbers of Aborigines were considered to violate this protection, particularly as they were encamped near a bridge that people had to pass over. This argument about the protection of women had not been used so blatantly in the early years of settlement, it was found that females could fend for themselves and did enter into relationships with Aboriginal people, although the large groups of indigenous people had always been something of a problem. But in the 1840s women’s roles in the city as the keepers of sentiment had grown stronger. The Aborigines “filthy and disgusting language” was seen as an affront to female sensibilities, as was their nudity. If they were to remain in the town, means had to be adopted to “induce” or “compel” them to observe decent behaviour.

One woman wrote to the Register in 1843, submitting a ten stanza poem about the Aborigines. Rather than interacting with them, she sat back and saw them as objects of pity. Her poem, obviously the product of a woman with some leisure time, is filled with pathos for the “doomed” native. While there is some recognition of Aboriginal claims to the land, both females and Aborigines are seen to be passive in the new society. An Aboriginal woman narrates the poem:

Now the white man proudly stands,
Sole possessor of these lands,
Grasping with unholy hands
Richest produce of our soil.
Lady, fair, then ask not why,
Sad and oft with tearful eye,
Plaintively I still should sigh
O’er loss of bygone pleasure.

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110 Register, January 30 1841, p.3.
111 South Australian, 16 April 1840, p.7.
112 Register, December 6 1843, p.2.
From the letters of Maria May between 1843-1845 we can gain one other individual’s impression of the Aborigines. Maria had taken several walks along the banks of the Torrens and in some parts found it very beautiful. She wrote that she now and then saw some natives but, “they seem quiet and inoffensive”. May was aware of disputes over food and thought that it was best to ignore them but not to give them food as they became angry if there was not enough and a lot of trouble had been caused by this. However, further on in her letters she describes an incident when she gave them a meal of pork, potatoes, greens, beer and plum and ground rice puddings, “all seemed to enjoy it very much”.114 After her offering she quietly returned home. Maria alluded to further racial problems, when explaining that the Aborigines didn’t like to be called “blacks”. The May family were Quakers and this may explain her tolerant attitude, her principles and habits would have differed from many of the general populace.

While Maria found little to be afraid of, there is evidence that other claims of danger to women were deliberately exaggerated. The complaints about the Aborigines camped near the bridge stirred up fear, particularly women’s anxiety about being accosted by large groups of Aboriginal people. The writer of an anonymous letter in 1840 played on as many fearful elements as he could, and demanded that the Protector act. The victim in his story, a lone and defenceless female, was left by the bridge late at night while her male companions went into town for repairs. Apparently some Aborigines accosted her, attempting to remove the goods from the cart she was minding. In this dramatic account the woman was almost overcome by terror, nearly fainting, and plagued by another female’s claim that she had recently been threatened at the same place. Finally she was rescued by the lamplighter.115 However, the story was soon corrected by the lamplighter himself, R. Charlesworth, who wrote in next week refuting the above account, realising its intention was to create antagonism and to frighten females.116 Charlesworth explained that the Aborigines had visited them both in a friendly manner, as they had desired shelter under the bridge, and had enquired after the woman, expressing curiosity about the luggage in the cart.117 Incidents could easily be exaggerated.

113 “May Family Letters”, Mortlock Library Archives, PRG 131, p.28.
114 ibid., p.39.
115 Register, February 25 1842, p.3.
116 ibid., March 1 1842, p.3.
117 ibid.
CULTURAL CONDEMNATION

What the settlers once found interesting many now found repugnant. Living along the banks of the Torrens allowed the Aborigines to continue their traditional ceremonies, although it did little to encourage them to take up agriculture. But corroborees, for example, were changing from being an object of interest, to an object of disapproval. A few with a scientific interest in the Aborigines found the situation advantageous as the rituals were undertaken in such an open area of the town and not concealed in churches or private areas.\textsuperscript{118} Artists such as George French Angas also found the geographical proximity of the Aborigines a great opportunity for painting and observation.\textsuperscript{119}

However, for many, their physical proximity was unwanted. Many of the “respectable citizens” were expressing their distaste of the Aborigines’ activities. In 1840 the editor of the Register insisted that something be done about the corroborees, describing them as not only untuneful but also sexually promiscuous, suggesting that they should be persuaded by the Protector to “celebrate their discordant orgies at some distance from town”.\textsuperscript{120} By 1844 the amateur ethnologist Cawthorne considered himself an anomaly for enjoying the corroborees: “What causes me to like that which most people put down as terrifying and indelicate which most people dislike and shun?”\textsuperscript{121} By 1843 authorities were clamping down on other Aboriginal activities near the Torrens. Many of the traditional battles were broken up and Cawthorne was denied the pleasure of seeing this “barbarous spectacle”.\textsuperscript{122}

However, some elements of Adelaide society encouraged Aboriginal activities such as corroborees, and also facilitated drinking, smoking, swearing and other actions condemned by the social reformers. As Cawthorne pointed out, the indigenous people were told two different things: “One party tells them that beer and wine is no good. Another contradicts them and tells them “Beer and wine very good.”\textsuperscript{123} The Torrens was

\textsuperscript{118} R. Foster (ed.), Cawthorne, \textit{op. cit.}, p. v.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Register}, August 15 1840, p.5.
\textsuperscript{121} R. Foster (ed.), Cawthorne, \textit{op. cit.}, p.55.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{ibid.}, p.26.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{ibid.}, p.24.
becoming an unsavoury area, although some may have called it a “bustling and thriving town”, and there were plenty of white men upon its banks, drinking near the Aborigines’ camps. Accounts were quite often given in the Register of drownings occurring partly due to intoxication. At times drunken revellers were rescued by Aborigines, others were not so fortunate.\textsuperscript{124} Settlers in a state of intoxication visited corroborees, “even men of some standing in the colony” who would offer money and alcohol as an inducement.\textsuperscript{125} Crowds of settlers encouraged the corroborees on Sundays, offering money to the Aborigines to make it more profitable to listen to them than to the Protector.

Sexual intercourse between Aboriginal women and white men also occurred frequently in the Torrens’ area. Complaints were made in Adelaide, with one settler explaining that: “great evil is produced by the frequent visits to their huts at night of persons (to say the least) of light character.”\textsuperscript{126} Another inquired about an indigenous woman who had died of a “loathsome disease”.\textsuperscript{127} Aborigines protested about the double standards set by white society, which dictated to them that they should live in chastity while white men slept with black women.\textsuperscript{128} The position of the Native Location being so close to the other settlements around the river was also a problem for the missionaries. A house had been built where a woman employed by the Native Location lived with four Aboriginal girls who attended the Location. The four huts were used as “houses of lechery” and the woman who looked after them explained that “the adults would come in the evenings and take the oldest girls into those houses to satisfy their lusts.”\textsuperscript{129}

Aboriginal women tried to fight back by going to the authorities as they were told to, with assemblages of them occurring now and then at the interpreter, Cronk’s, house to voice their complaints. He concluded that the government should impose restrictions on trading between black and white to avoid such debasing evils.\textsuperscript{130} Cawthorne, much moved by the assistance of an Aboriginal girl when he was crossing the river, thought to himself, “there I am, a lone white, in the bed of a river and a naked virgin pointing me

\textsuperscript{124} Register, March 24, 1838, p.2; Register, August 24 1839, p.5.  
\textsuperscript{125} ibid., 15 June 1839, p.4.  
\textsuperscript{126} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{127} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{128} C.G. Teichelmann, “Christian G. Teichelmann Diary 1839-1846”, translated by Kreig, M., Lutheran Archives, p.14  
\textsuperscript{129} G. Joyce (ed.), op. cit., p. 60.  
\textsuperscript{130} Register, May 2 1839.
out the way, a few stray blacks in the distance. What pure innocence and where is the
wretch that would take advantage...the decency of the English is another name for
lewdness."\textsuperscript{131}

Others were also concerned. In general, evicting Aborigines from along the Torrens
River area was also supported by groups who considered themselves to be acting in the
interests of the Aborigines, who supported their moral claim to the land the colonists
were occupying, and who believed in their right to be treated with some level of dignity,
as befitted a fellow human being. The humanitarian and anti-slavery movement that had
grown in England influenced these people. However, their underlying view was that the
Aborigine should come under the influence of white religion and they felt that the
objectives of the missionaries were also being thwarted while they remained in
Adelaide. Rather than coming to the conclusion that the indigenous people were
incapable of civilisation, they argued that their settlements should be formed far from
the “contaminating influence of European society”\textsuperscript{132}

The Aborigines generally were said to be “a nuisance and a pest to the community”\textsuperscript{133}
In 1844 the huts built on the Native Location for the Aborigines were ordered to be torn
down by the Protector. Cawthorne recorded the enforced movement of Aboriginal
people in 1844 in his diary, including the burning down of their huts:

\begin{quote}
The other night (the Mt Barker tribe) were encamped above the bridge over
the Torrens a policeman came with orders to burn all the wurlies or huts,
which was done and the whole tribe had to de-camp and it was a rather
curious sight to see them all go - some angry, some laughing, some smiling,
some jeering the police.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Some of the older Aborigines turned to the policeman in disgust and criticised their
actions.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{131} R. Foster (ed.), Cawthorne, \textit{op. cit.}, p.54.
\textsuperscript{132} J. Stephens, \textit{op. cit.} pp.222-223.
\textsuperscript{133} G. Grainger, “Matthew Moorhouse and the South Australian Aborigines 1839-1856”, Flinders
\textsuperscript{134} R. Foster (ed.), Cawthorne, \textit{op.cit.}, p.30.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{ibid.}
Force continued to be used to carry out the law. By 1844 a policeman had been stationed at the Torrens Bridge to prevent the Aborigines from bathing and camping near the area. The Native Location was removed by 1845 and the Register lost no chance to incite anger against the Aborigines. Even the frivolity that many had enjoyed in the Aborigines was seen as out of place and in bad taste. A description of the Torrens in flood in 1845 depicted the Aborigines as heartlessly seizing melons and pumpkins washed downstream: “they seemed to enjoy the sport afforded them by the destruction of many a cherished waterside garden.”

Where once their laughter was “delightful”, it was now inappropriate and indeed offensive. By 1847 corroborees had been banned on Sundays.

Control of the numbers of Aborigines in Adelaide was also attempted by tightening up on the distribution of rations given on the river’s banks. While Governor Gawler, named the “Cockatoo Gentleman” on account of the plumes he wore in his hat, was regarded as a “bery good tuck-out Gubnor”, the monthly rations to the Aborigines had dwindled with the entry of Governor Grey and many were forced to beg. At the 1843 Queen’s Birthday dinner the menu had been reduced to bread only. The Governor, greatly “vexed” by the record number of 800 Aborigines that came to Adelaide for the 1847 dinner, refused to feed all of them. His aim of discouraging such numbers was partly successful. Aborigines from as far away as the Darling, who were turned away, empty handed, vowed to never come again.

By 1847 there was a stricter enforcement of vagrancy laws on the Aborigines in Adelaide. The council had burnt their huts, banned them from bathing in the river and from using the timber along its banks. While the council stopped just short of barring them from Adelaide, their policies and other moves conspired against indigenous occupation of the area. These included the decreased demand for their labour, the restriction of traditional activities, the decrease in rations and food supply and the vices and diseases picked up from white society.

137 *ibid.*
DEFENCE OF THE RIVER

What was the Aboriginal peoples’ reaction to these changes? As I have shown, they stayed and they continued their traditions, but they were also aware of injustice and of their perceived rights to the area. A certain amount of helplessness was also expressed. When in 1839 their rations were stopped, one man reasoned that: “You white man have taken our land and you have driven away our emus. We have no food but what you please to give us. We are few and weak, you are many and strong.”138 There were many complaints about Governor Grey’s scanty provisions from the Aborigines:

Cockatoo man (former Gov.) very good - long time ago come here - give lanty tuckout (feast) - lanty blanket - Lanty Bullocky (beef) - lanty sheep (mutton) - lanty very good. This man...no good, give piccanniny meat...piccanniny bullocky, piccanniny bread, piccanniny blanket, Gubnor Gay no good, Gubnor Gay bloody rogue !! 139

The large number of Aborigines from other regions who began to camp along the river complicates the history of early race relations. The river, once a source of resources and food, could no longer adequately provide for the Kaurna. Substitute employment was offered but this had few rewards; and the Native Location had too few resources and little support from either side. By the 1840s the Kaurna were not only faced with competition from the whites, but their enemies from the Murray. Between 1842-3 the total population of the Kaurna in Adelaide was estimated at about 150, while the Murray Aborigines visiting Adelaide numbered 200.140 This was Kaurna land though, and they were determined to defend it from the other tribes: “Before white man come Murray black fellow never come here...Let them sit down at this Murray, not here. This is not his country.”141 The reasons for the large influx are not entirely clear but Aborigines may have been seeking refuge from frontier violence and curiosity may have been a factor. Along the Murray there had been constant and brutal clashes in the late 1830s between Aborigines and overlanders droving sheep from New South Wales to Adelaide,

138 Register, 4 May 1839.
which may have been the cause of some migration. Sturt had also encouraged Aboriginal people to travel to Adelaide. Moreover, ration distribution along the Murray did not begin until 1847. Indigenous people from other areas were also encouraged by the Protector to come to Adelaide, to see for themselves that Aborigines and the colonists could live peacefully.\footnote{R. Amery, \textit{Warrabarna Kaurna}, Swets and Zeitlinger, Lisse, 2000, p.55.}

By 1843 nearly all the Mt Barker tribe had been camping in Adelaide for some time. The Mt Barker people were competitors for the land and determined to stay: "Long time ago me Mt Barker Man - me now long time set down at Adelaide, me now Adelaide Man."\footnote{R. Foster (ed.), Cawthorne, \textit{op. cit.}, p.10.} As Teichelmann pointed out in 1841, the Kaurna felt more entitled to the support of Europeans having settled upon their district than the natives of a distant tribe. The Kaurna continued to identify themselves with the river and were recognised as the "Wirra" people by the Lutheran missionaries.\footnote{C.G. Teichelmann, \textit{op. cit.}, p.21.} Fights between the Aborigines increased during the 1840s. During this time indigenous gatherings could reach about 500 on the flat on the North Adelaide side, and it was here that fights were held. No doubt this competition over the land around the Torrens served to reinforce views of the Aborigines as violent and uncivilised. In defiance of the settlers they continued to camp along the central area of the river in the 1840s. A huge number had gathered by then: "At every creek and at every gully you would see their wurlies and their fires at night; often as many as 500 to 600 would be camped in various places, some between North Adelaide and Hindmarsh; some behind the Botanic Gardens on the banks of the river; some towards the ranges; some on the Waterfall Gully."\footnote{Cited in J. Warburton (ed.), \textit{Five Creeks of the River Torrens}, Civic Trust of South Australia, Adelaide, 1977, p.48.}

Rivers were a site where sorcery sometimes took place. Human blood, and other substances were mixed in with river water to cast a spell, by means of which it would be injurious or fatal to those who drank it. The Aborigines from the north of South Australia were particularly adept at this and much feared by other tribes. After two more hangings in 1840 of Aborigines from further north, a medicine man came down to Adelaide. Identifying it now as a white man’s river, he proceeded to charm it, in revenge

\footnote{Education Department of South Australia, \textit{The Kaurna People}, p.24.}
for the hangings. But the Kaurna tribe was still conciliatory: “Charm not; it is now enough. The white man has and distributes food. Enough that these two men have been hanged; we are other men.” In 1844 sorcery was again being threatened in order to release a prisoner the Aborigines considered innocent.

The Kaurna’s reluctance to exact revenge may have been due to fear. In 1841 Teichelmann translated a sentence spoken by one of the Kaurna: “You must not kill a white man, lest you be hanged. Be afraid, why are you bold?”, others complained that plenty of Aborigines were hanged at the gaol, conveniently located near the Native Location. The Kaurna’s position also demonstrates their dependence on the white settlement and its handouts. Throughout the early contact, the Kaurna had been the most peaceful group. This was their land and they did not have the opportunity that groups such as those from the Murray had of returning to their own river. The Kaurna had their own means of resistance though. Teichelmann described how by 1844 they would leave their huts early Sunday morning and go into the country in order to avoid his services, and also reported on a general sense of resistance and superiority. They refused to accept his authority and identified themselves with the area, stating: “This country is ours, not yours.”

By the early 1840s there were more reports of threatened violence against the white settlers and hatred for their greed. Some Aborigines refused to work for the petty offering they were given by the “dam bloody rogues” who were abusing their labour. As Reynolds has argued, the land rights movement is not just a twentieth century phenomenon; it was strong in the 1830s and 40s, with Aborigines all over Australia asserting their ownership of the land. Obviously this took some time to develop in Adelaide, but by the 1840s, Adelaide settlers were being told straight out: “You go to England, that your country; this our country.” Cawthorne noted in 1843 that some Aboriginal people had told him they would charm them all dead because the white man

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147 C.G. Teichelmann and C.W. Shurmann, op. cit., p.67.
148 C.G. Teichelmann, op. cit., p.22.
151 W. Pedler, “Recollections of Early Days and Old Colonists”, Royal Geographical Society of
had taken away their country, driven away their sustenance and imprisoned their countrymen. They explained that the gaol and its inhabitants would be charmed first, then the Home Police, then the foot police. There were many threats of violence, with the Mt Barker people seeming to be the most vociferous and defiant. The Kaurna were primarily concerned with their land. Cawthorne, after asking a Mt Barker man why he had come to Adelaide, received the threat: “look after white man”. Another warned of blackmen coming from all over the state to “kill all white man, policeman, shentleman, white man, all! All! Black man spear.”

As the Aborigines were well aware, the battle lines were now drawn. Only a few isolated white individuals spoke out on their behalf, pointing to some noble deeds and the worthy examples of a few who had made efforts at civilisation. Such efforts, though well intentioned, did not address the mass of Aborigines camped along the banks of the river. Indeed, such settlers wished to separate the individuals from the general population of indigenous people.

CONCLUSION

The period from the arrival of white settlers to the mid-1840s was a transitional stage in the history of white South Australian society, but a crucial era in the history of the Torrens River and of the Kaurna people, its traditional occupants. The river area was central to the growth of Adelaide. Evidence supports the significance of the river area as a place where white and black interacted. Both societies were drawn to the river, an area that was a source of resources and water and was the traditional grounds for the Kaurna. The Kaurna, soon joined by other Aboriginal groups, moved in large numbers to inhabit the central area of the river. Barriers, both physical and social, were broken down in the early settlement along the Torrens and comments were made about the settlers’ similarities to the Aborigines. The settlers learnt from the Aborigines how to survive along the river and its life-sustaining qualities enabled the settlement to survive.

South Australia, vol.vi, 1903, p.65.
The river came to be a central site of dispute. The white settlers, although initially accepting of the Aboriginal presence, soon began to resent it, and labelled the indigenous people a threat and a nuisance. While women had initially interacted with the Aborigines, they were later viewed as having to be sheltered from them. Moreover, conditions in the town were harmful to the Aboriginal people. Disease was easily spread, and food sources quickly reduced. The river, which had always been a source of life for the Kaurna, now brought them sickness and death. The settlers had far superior weapons and numbers, and control imposed by their justice system and their police. Behind these they had the hunger for land of those founding their own colony, a system based on private ownership rather than mutual sharing and a belief in the superiority of their civilisation and their right to impose this on others.

The Adelaide Council, in the long term, saw the parklands as an area to be used for recreation. Later the river area would, by slow persistence, be forced into its official function as a civilised recreation and park region. Growing civic pride gave no room for compassion or a desire to share this area with the original inhabitants. Such a move would have involved a policy of reconciliation and would have required an understanding of the Aboriginal view and a value placed on their desires.

While the Aborigines were initially accepting of the white presence, they later came to resent the restrictions placed upon them, and on occasion, they tried to fight back. Their traditional weapons, such as spears or sorcery, were no match for nineteenth century white society. As the Kaurna struggled to maintain occupancy of the riverbanks, which were a traditional area, they were faced with a two-fold threat, from both white society and other tribes intruding into their space. While realising their lack of power before the whites’ numbers and technology they still tried to defend their area. They continued to cling to their area until many were forced out, or were killed by the diseases introduced into their land and even their drinking water.
CHAPTER THREE: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TORRENS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the impact of an emerging and struggling capitalist society on a crucial and fragile part of the environment that they claimed to own. A photograph taken in about 1860 shows the damaged state the Torrens was in. The banks were eroding, trees had been chopped and vegetation plundered, the river bed was hazardous and the river impassable in many areas. What it doesn’t show is the dangerous contamination of the water. It is significant that such a large amount of destruction had been inflicted in such a short space of time. Investigating just how this came to be is one of the main aims of this chapter.

![Image of River Torrens looking southwest, 1860](image)

Figure 9: River Torrens looking southwest, 1860

I shall limit my analysis to the period before the Thorndon Park Reservoir was built in 1857 as this is a time of distinct land use. During this time the river had two main and opposing roles: for supplying drinking water and for the removal of sewage. Light’s foresight in reserving government open space along the river spared the city the erection of private factories and houses along the central area. Nonetheless, the Torrens was used as a general dumping ground and its resources exploited by settler society. But there were protests. Many individuals in the community were concerned with the condition of the river and wrote in to the Press to express their dissatisfaction and to recommend government action. Some complained about the Torrens’ water quality because of the danger to public health; while others complained more generally about water scarcity. Protest also occurred regarding bathing in the river due to the pollution of the water caused by this practice and on grounds of its moral offence.
There were a variety of reasons for its destruction. Lack of knowledge and understanding of the river environment played a role, as can be seen when charting the response to flooding. However, the situation in Adelaide was also compounded by changes in control over the area. The populace welcomed the creation of a municipal authority or council, called the City Corporation, in 1840, but funds were extremely tight and the first council, which collapsed in 1843, was not to re-emerge until 1852. Funds were still in short supply. In this period the government in South Australia, which was overseen by a Governor appointed from England, was in a state of confusion, and its financial situation perilous, particularly in the early years of the colony when it became bankrupt. The exploitation of the Torrens was compounded by a lack of management and consideration of the colony’s own interests by the governing powers. Little priority was placed on rectifying the damage to the Torrens although a few failed attempts made to beautify its banks, signalled that its recreational value was not entirely forgotten.

DISEASE AND WATER SUPPLY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Settlers to South Australia followed the ideas and the traditions they had inherited from European society which had far different rivers and climatic conditions. The pollution of the Torrens followed the age-old use of rivers as dumping grounds for the refuse of cities and towns which dates back to medieval times. It was not until the industrial revolution, however, that pollution problems became urgent, as the appalling sanitary conditions, which existed in most major cities in England and Europe, placed an unprecedented burden on rivers. Factories were commonly built along rivers as the access to water could be used specifically for power, but they were also a resource in the production process, and used for the removal of waste products. Much of a city’s sewage found its way into the rivers, and the cities’ central riverbanks were often the filthiest areas in industrialised towns. Ironically, the area that was then meant to be a source of civic pride was often the most polluted, a situation that city authorities had to deal with in the nineteenth century, and which the authorities in Adelaide would also have to cope with.

The relationship between the pollution of cities’ rivers and public health was a contentious issue. In London the region of the Thames was one of the main areas from which disease spread, it was referred to as “the Great Sewer” and sites upon its banks were shunned by those who could afford to go elsewhere. By the late eighteenth century the Thames was claimed to contain not just human excrement but also industrial pollution, and the putrefying carcasses of beasts and men.1 Its

physical manifestations were powerful, and apart from the visual mess, the smell could often be unbearable. Engels described Manchester in 1845:

The most disgusting spot of all is one which lies on the Manchester side of the river...and is called little Ireland. It lies in a fairly natural deep depression on a bend of the river and is completely surrounded by tall factories or high embankments covered with buildings...Heaps of offal and sickening filth are everywhere interspersed with stagnant liquid.²

Cities’ social geography thus adapted around the river, with wealthy people often living higher up on the slopes above the river and slums situated below on their banks.

It was difficult to turn a blind eye to the detrimental changes to rivers in cities brought about by the industrial revolution. Nonetheless, concern about water quality and sanitation found little support until the onset of water-borne diseases in Europe forced the attention of the public. Illness was rife in early nineteenth century Europe, but it was cholera, which swept through Asia and hit London in 1832, that caused the most anxiety. Detailed investigations into the causes and spread of disease occurred around the time that South Australia was settled. Edwin Chadwick’s Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, published in 1842, pointed out problems associated with inadequate sanitation, such as the increase of infectious diseases and plague. He suggested ways in which public health could be improved by implementing systems for the removal of all waste and the supply of clean water to the cities. The huge cholera epidemics were said to be the result of the inadequacy of sewers, thus the germ was spread by the polluted rivers or seeped into wells and springs contaminating the water supply. The report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns in 1840 emphasised that measures were urgently called for, not just because of the welfare of the poor, but because disease harmed the industrial economy.³

The widespread scientific acceptance of germ theory did not occur until the 1880s, after which connections between personal cleanliness and disease would be more clearly understood. In South Australia, the concern for the Torrens’ stagnation in summer became mainly associated

with the miasmatic theory. The link between disease and water supply was not based so much on hard scientific evidence about the spread of germs, as it was on the belief that health was affected by the state of the physical and social environment. The theoretical basis for the miasmatic theory has been linked to Hippocrates’ emphasis in *Air, Waters and Places* on the role of environment in determining public health. This theory, popular in England, Australia and America, held that air became contaminated with miasmas, “poisonous vapours given off by putrefying organic matter”. The health of the river would be partly assessed on these grounds. Organic matter in the Torrens’ water was believed to undergo a process of putrefaction giving rise to the formation of “poisonous bodies”. Disease was spread by miasmas attacking the body. As one historian put it, Chadwick and his collaborators behaved as if all smell was disease.

**DESTRUCTION OF THE RIVER ECOLOGY**

South Australia’s advertised natural wealth was pivotal to the foundation of the colony. Based on a profit making enterprise, businessmen were invited to share in the spoils of the colony of South Australia and to become involved in a venture which would promote the growth of industry. The society exported to South Australia was based on the capitalist model of exploitation of natural resources by industry to produce profit. A high degree of utilisation of resources was also needed for the survival of the colony in its early stages. Thus, not surprisingly, from the onset of white settlement the natural resources of the Torrens were used in an unsustainable manner by both settlers and the government. There was no overall scheme and little management in regard to the river; the antithetical actions of drainage of waste into the river and its use as a water supply were pursued simultaneously. With the initial industries in Adelaide also being located along the river’s banks or those of its streams, the possibilities for pollution were dangerously high.

In the early years of the colony, settlers were allowed to camp along the riverbanks of the Torrens and its resources became a valuable and free commodity for the community. By 1839 the government, under the direction of Governor Gawler, started to attain greater control. Citizens were informed that they were no longer allowed to remain in their camps; brick making was removed, and regulations passed about the use of resources. While the government did not ban

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5 L. Abell, “Holidays and Health in Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century South Australia,” *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, No. 22, 1994, p.82.
6 Register, February 10 1849, p.3.
using the Torrens' natural resources altogether, it restricted their use and allocated specified areas where material could be deposited and wood removed. However, by 1840 the water had already lost its purity and the government inherited a reduced asset only four years after settlement.

How did this occur? From early in the settlement private and public brick making had been extensive and contributed to the pollution of the water. Depasturing of cows, goats, sheep and ducks also occurred. Poaching of materials for housing was common. Reeds from the banks of the Torrens, near the city or at the Reedbeds downstream, were used to thatch the cottages. River frontages provided easy access to water, saving the expense of well sinking. The river continually became muddied by this constant activity as its products were in high demand for the growing city. The site selected for the S.A. Company's brick-making business was in the eastern corner of the Parklands where it was intersected by the Torrens. In 1837 it was reported that even at this early stage, when only two Companies were working, about 40,000 bricks had been made. By mid 1838 there were at least five or six brick-making groups along the river within a three kilometre stretch west of the Governor's dwelling, and another group to the east.8 There were claims as early as 1838 that both the river and the air of Adelaide had been "poisoned" by such activities,9 with the South Australian Corporation and private brick-making activities coming under particular scrutiny.10 The settlers exploited the environment, using this free resource with little regard to the consequences.

The natural beauty and ecology of the river quickly deteriorated. By 1840 the distinctive shrubs, trees and vegetation that had formed the landscape along the river had already been significantly altered. Trees had been cleared or lopped in most areas of the city parklands, the only part of the parklands on which the prized river red gums had been reserved was near the Aborigines' camps along the Torrens. However, the Aborigines were blamed for using the only fine trees that were left.11 Vegetation such as tea-tree was cleared to ensure ease of passage to the water and for the building of makeshift shelters, while wattle and reeds along the Torrens were used as a material for housing.

As early as 1840 the combined effects of such activities had damaged the condition of the river in a variety of ways. With the understorey depleted, water could not soak into the undertable as

9 Register, August 11 1838, p.3.
10 ibid.
11 ibid., August 15 1840, p.5.
efficiently, therefore creating more run-off; the reeds had provided an environment for bird-life and a filtering device; the clearing of many of the river red gums had aesthetic and ecological effects, harming both the appearance and health of the river and reducing the habitat of small mammals such as possums, and the birds which lived there. \(12\) Logs removed from the river altered the river's flow, lessening the number of pools which had established a protected habitat for fish spawning areas, amongst other uses. Logs had also helped to control stream velocity and to stabilise the river banks. Driftwood had provided nutrients and a variety of foundations for biological activity, dams allowed time for microbes to colonise the debris and for insects to process it.\(13\) The bird life, depleted by the clearing of their habitat, had a further, more immediate enemy in those who went shooting along the river. The clay taken from the riverbed also altered its natural shape.

**WATER SUPPLY**

The damage to the ecology of the area was not a major concern for the settlers, but what they did find disturbing was the pollution of Adelaide's main water supply. The pollution of the Torrens persisted and even intensified after the government gained control over it. With the growth in the population the contradictions inherent in the use of the Torrens as an area for both water supply and sewerage disposal became obvious, but little action was taken. The city's drainage system was simple: effluent was dumped into the streets, and made its way in drains of arched masonry into the river. Effluent from horses would also have been significant. The river was receiving bad press even from overseas with a report published in England in 1840 denouncing the quality of the Torrens' water.\(14\) The smell of the water was offensive, it was dirty and when delivered at an exorbitant price people's only option was to boil it and hope that it was safe.

Compounding the problem was the Torrens' natural limitations. The Torrens use as a principal water supply was tenuous: it was a small river, in a climate with very hot summers, supplying a growing population concentrated principally in the city. The rising population density increased the demand for water and thus placed further threats on its purity. Other geographical features accentuated the problems. The strong clay subsoil prevented normal soil drainage and Adelaide is also prone to long rainless periods, particularly during summer, where completely rainless


\(14\) Register, August 29 1840, p.2.
months are not unknown. To this we must add high evaporation rates. In January and February, Adelaide’s warmest months, the mean maximum temperature is around twenty nine degrees Celsius, with on average three recorded days each year in excess of forty degrees Celsius. The river’s flow not only decreased during summer but at times became still in some places, meaning that waste products were not removed effectively, instead becoming concentrated due to the decreased water supply. As the town grew, the light shower of effluent became a deluge. Because the breakdown of effluent requires an appreciable amount of oxygen, the water would have become deficient in this vital gas. Initially, the large fish would have been affected, and then all animal life in the river’s stream.

The citizens of Adelaide had little support from the government in regard to their water supply. While some people may have been able to rely on private wells, the majority of the population was dependent upon the Torrens for all their water requirements, and on private enterprise for delivering it. Following the principles of a laissez-faire economy, the government gave water carriers a free reign and there were no regulations on the prices charged. The water for Adelaide was collected at the ford between Morphett Street and King William Road where the bed of the river was gravelly and thus did not become as muddy as in other areas. There was a fairly steady flow in this spot, and the hard bed also enabled water-carriers to safely obtain supplies. From there, they transported water in their carts up Morphett Rd or King William Rd - distributing water by the barrel to the inhabitants of the city. Carting water to North Adelaide was even more difficult as the barrels had to be rolled uphill. During this period approximately 65% of the population of the colony lived in the city and nearby suburban allotments. By 1848 it was estimated that there were approximately 30 water-carriers in the city area, distributing an average daily supply of more than 38,880 gallons. A painting from 1845, showing water carriers on the far side of the bridge, demonstrates both the primitive method of collection and the low level of the water. In this area, at least, there appears to be a quite large number of redgums remaining.

Among other difficulties in regard to water supply there were complaints of overcharging. It has been estimated that, in real terms, water delivered to premises cost approximately two hundred times as much in the late 1840s as it cost in the 1990s. As one citizen wrote, every person has, if they are able to pay for it, three meagre gallons daily of an “insipid, impure waste” carried

16 Register, October 14 1848, p.2.
through the streets in temperatures as high as 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Water carriers were also prone to strike if conditions did not suit them. One water carrier who had tried to carry out his principles of social justice in regard to water was punished severely for his generosity. "Worthy" George Nicholls, a socialist who would frequently deliver loads to the poor in Adelaide, was assaulted by his fellow water-carters who eventually destroyed his cart and stole his horse. Water was under the control of private enterprise, and the water carriers had no illusions about the profit motive; they were not a charity.

An amateur poet summed up the situation as he saw it:

Water

The water’s out, the water’s out,
I dare not go and ask,
When was the last unhappy time
That Dalwood filled my cask.

Two shillings is the price I give
For every blessed load;
I tremble when I see the cart
Come groaning down the road.

18 Register, January 21 1850, p.3.
'Tis cruel thus to pay for drink,  
When that drink isn't beer,  
Oh! Place me on the Torrens brink,  
Or bring the river here.20  

In Adelaide the scarcity of water and high value placed on it meant that properties adjoining watercourses were often sought after and only available to the privileged few. The issue is summed up in a letter to the Register in 1855. Referring to farms upstream, the writer explained how crucial even a small creek could be in determining a farmer's fortunes: "many a landholder would willingly give every gum tree he possessed rather than lose the narrowest thread of water ever dignified with the name of creek."21 In 1854 it was claimed that the majority of the population faced severe shortages and were "compelled to economise water with nearly as much exactness as when on board ship."22 Given the high cost of water, sites near the river were highly prized with the most valued sites those close to the river on North Terrace; water prices and availability rose in proportion to distance to the river. Wells were sometimes sunk but these were expensive and with mixed results. Sometimes a well would be sunk to a level that produced drinking water, but it was difficult to reach a level where this could be found, it was explained that, "Nothing in Adelaide proved more whimsical than underground water".23 However, for those fortunate few who did have a well, it provided them with a safeguard when diseases were carried in the water supply from the Torrens. In times of shortage water for washing was out of many people's reach and even water for washing one's hands may not have been available. In many houses there were no facilities for keeping them clean and hygienic and six or seven families shared one watercloset in the poorer parts of the city, emptied on average about once a year, during the hot months. The condition of the poor in regard to water and sanitation was said to be "wretched in the extreme".24  

Along with the pollution of the water supply went sickness and death amongst the town's population. If you were a poor citizen of Adelaide, your chances of sickness such as typhoid and dysentery were much greater. Dysentery and diarrhoea, a severe problem amongst Adelaide citizens particularly in the summer months, were blamed on the immersion and storage of  

20 Register, August 2 1843, p.3.  
21 ibid. June 22 1855, p.3.  
22 ibid., January 27 1855.  
24 Register, February 24 1847, p.2.
sheepskins and rawhide in the water. Medical fears were awakened in 1839 by a typhoid outbreak at the end of summer which killed a number of people, and by the death of at least five children from dysentery. Deaths from dysentery and typhoid persisted throughout the 1840s with infants particularly susceptible; infant deaths accounted for 50% of all of those in the colony. With little hope of the government launching a serious attack on the cause, citizens suggested their own remedies, such as a tumbler of water mixed with flour, and drunk several times during the day. Many Aborigines also died from an outbreak of typhoid in 1843 and outbreaks continued throughout the summer months in the 1840s. South Australia’s infant mortality rate remained high throughout the 1850s. In the late 1850s fatalities from dysentery reached 116 people in one year and 21 from typhoid.

WATER SUPPLY: GOVERNMENT FAILURE

What were the authorities’ reactions to the dangers from Adelaide’s water supply? They grappled with problems as they occurred, trying to cope principally with the rapid development of the city. However, the question of water quality was one too important to be completely overlooked. Five deaths from dysentery in one day in 1839, attributed to the Torrens’ water, forced the government into action. Governor Gawler’s response was to prohibit the throwing of dead animals into the stream, the washing of clothes within one mile of the town, and also the practice of bathing between First Creek and the Aborigines Location. The policy was initiated of not allowing water to be polluted at the spot where it was collected, or just before it.

The implementation of even this small amount of protection proved difficult. The Governor’s job was made even harder by mismanagement from the Colonisation Commission which was partly to blame for the colony’s bankruptcy in 1840. In 1842 South Australia became an ordinary Crown Colony, like its neighbours, but it was not until 1844 that the Government budget was anything like balanced. The colonial government was perceived to be dictatorial, inefficient and

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25 ibid., February 9 1839, p.4.
26 J. Warburton (ed.), Five Metropolitan Creeks of the River Torrens, South Australia, Civic Trust of South Australia, Adelaide, 1977 p.73.
27 Register, March 23 1844, p.4.
30 W. Hammerton, op. cit., p.3.
31 ibid.
unresponsive to what the colonists desired and needed. In 1840 the election of the City Corporation was a popular move. However, it had very few funds available to it, being only able to spend 2,000 pounds per year. Furthermore, the Corporation was not allowed to spend money on anything which was classified as "extensive improvements" or of "an unusual description." The Corporation collapsed in 1843 due to inadequate funding and mismanagement and during the next six years the colonial government took over the control of Adelaide's municipal affairs. The populace again considered the Parklands their free resource and a great deal of damage was done to established trees in all areas of the Parklands, including near the Torrens. This was sometimes undertaken under the cover of darkness, with reports of the "midnight axe of lawless predators." However, there were far more urgent problems for the government to try and manage. Something of the state of the city can be seen in an editorial in 1844. Several bridges were in urgent need of repair, as were fences and embankments surrounding the parklands and in front of Government House. In addition, many streets were impassable, and other parts of the town were in a similar state of disrepair. It was not until June 1852 that a proper Council was reconstituted, but it was still unable to raise loans for urgent capital work. Pollution continued and the Torrens was not seen as an important consideration, when the Council were unable to even get the money to erect a bridge across it. They faced the very difficult problem of how the town was to develop without adequate funds.

Government regulations safeguarding the water of the Torrens were achieved slowly, incompletely and only after the water quality had visibly deteriorated. It has been postulated that in the nineteenth century, "what looked to be clean was often taken to be clean, particularly water" and this over-confident attitude would seem to be the government's initial guide. As we shall see, citizens in Adelaide voiced their protests not only about the poor quality of the water, but also its outrageous price. Soon even the government could not pretend that the water of the Torrens was clean, given the debris of society that floated on its surface and decomposed on its bed.

While the government did little in regard to the pollution of the water, it did make some effort to

33 ibid.
34 ibid.
36 Register, June 4 1845, p.2.
37 ibid., February 14 1844, p.2.
control private industries. In 1841 the idea of using the river for reservoir purposes was explored by an ambitious milling company who proposed to erect a dam on the western edge of the parklands but Governor Grey refused this request.39 Applications continued to appear in the 1840s from citizens requesting the use of the water for activities such as washing wool in the central area. Perhaps because of previous complaints linking the practice with disease, the Colonial Secretary gave a firm “No” to a proposed location above the spot where the water was collected for the town, but allowed it at a site just below the central area, even though this may have contaminated the water for the people of Thebarton.40

Despite this, pollution from upstream affected the central area of the Torrens. Beyond the parklands, to both the east and west of the city, more factories were being built. Light’s plan had made the most of the Torrens’ banks in these regions, ensuring that as many properties as possible had water frontage. Significantly, there were no controls on these properties as this would have been in opposition to the spirit of free enterprise on which they were designed. No legislation existed to control their waste, thus matter was carried down to the city area from upstream. With greater development came increased problems. Pollution from brickyards in suburbs such as Kensington, Norwood and Magill went firstly into the creeks and then into the Torrens. Vegetable matter, fertilisers and animal manure from market gardens were washed into the river; wineries, distilleries and breweries were located along the creeks and were intensive users of water; tanners, fellmongers and soap and candle manufacturers used the water and then returned it to the streams in an acidic condition.41 Iron ore from mines in the upper reaches was also being washed in the Torrens.42

Bathing was policed, despite that fact that this would have impinged heavily on people’s ability to maintain personal cleanliness and was most disadvantageous for the Aboriginal population who had no other alternatives. If citizens were being discouraged from bathing in this area of the river and from developing private industries, was the government then setting up the central area as a parklands or an area for the recreation of Adelaide society? Such a vision was not important in the government’s plans at this stage. The impecunious government set about exploiting the river area for its own advantage, with the erection of its own establishments soon occurring along

40 “Police Commissioner to Colonial Secretary,” No. 20, 1848, State Records Department, Chief (formerly Colonial) Secretary’s Office, GRG 24/6.
42 Register, January 10 1845 p.3.
this valuable area. While the claimants on the river's resources lessened, the same basic principle of exploitation followed. Moreover, there was little attempt at this stage to "beautify" the area.

The government quarry was established near the site of the City Bridge. Timber from the parklands was still used for government construction, as when the New City Bridge, built in 1845, was made of timber cut solely from nearby. The government also continued to grant concessions to the eager settlers, allowing logs to be collected from the riverbed, and the dumping of material on the parklands. The area of parklands on the low land between the bridge over the Torrens and acre 12 in North Terrace was a general dumping ground. Here, earth, clay or rubbish of any kind could be placed, including earth from digging cellars or wells. Given the amount of building and excavating in Adelaide at the time, the rubble would have been substantial.

Some public institutions were placed in the parklands from the very outset thus ensuring their access to water. The Adelaide Hospital, built along First Creek in 1840, discharged its waste directly into the water, which then ran into the river and into Adelaide's drinking supply. The Lunatic Asylum did the same. An area of the river banks also held goats and sheep in an attempt by the Council to raise revenue, they often escaped though and there were complaints that they damaged trees in the area. Manure from such grazing of animals would have also washed into the river and, added to this, all the stock in Adelaide was taken to the Old Bridge to water and wash. Despite government regulations, dead animals continued to be thrown into the stream: a noticeable and offensive form of pollution. It was also common for the citizens of the city to throw putrid meat and other offensive substances into the water above the area set aside for its collection.

The government must be held responsible for another major source of pollution: the government slaughterhouse. In early 1840 the proposal was put forward for a slaughterhouse in the populous part of North Adelaide. Not surprisingly, public pressure against this quickly arose from residents who already perceived the area as exclusive and argued that it would become "a disgusting and pestilential nuisance to the numerous respectable families settled in that quarter." An order...
published on 6 August 1840 announced that a slaughterhouse and public stock market would be positioned on the parklands immediately eastward of the Botanic Gardens.\textsuperscript{48} The government found no objections to using the banks of the Torrens for this purpose as no private property interests were affected and they could also profit by charging a levy for its use. At the time of its erection there were eight butchers in town, with an average number of eight cattle being slaughtered by each per week. In 1847 this had increased to 27 butchers with weekly slaughtering of 40 cattle each.\textsuperscript{49} The situation was convenient as after meat was washed in large pits it could then be immediately taken into the city to be sold. A drain from the slaughterhouse carried blood and filth into the river. The location of slaughterhouses along the river allowed the offensive matter to be quickly removed and in this respect followed a practice that had changed very little from seventeenth century Europe.\textsuperscript{50} The extent to which this was common can be seen by the fact that by the late eighteenth century, the Thames was polluted from over 100 slaughterhouses.\textsuperscript{51}

However, public outrage meant that this was one area that did come under some investigation. The short-lived City Commissioners investigated this in 1850 and found that the water in the wells was in very bad condition. At the bottom of the well it was "quite black and most offensive",\textsuperscript{52} blood had also thoroughly saturated the ground between the blood wells and the water wells. The City Commissioners ordered the wells to be cleaned out, making sure that the blood ran more freely into the water. This lessened the smell, which residents near the slaughterhouse were directly affected by and which they had complained about. Such an order may seem strange, but the concern with odour is in accordance with the miasmatic theory, and the effect of miasmas on the public’s health. It would have done little to improve the Torrens’ water.

The appointment of a Conservator of the Torrens had been suggested by one of Adelaide’s doctors in 1849, in order to monitor the river until a different means of water supply was established, but no action resulted.\textsuperscript{53} The only other appointment relating to the environmental health of the city was that of an Inspector of Nuisances in 1850. This job was concerned mainly with abuses arising from private property owners and there were complaints from the public that

\textsuperscript{48} South Australian Government Gazette, August 16 1840.
\textsuperscript{49} Register, January 30, 1847, p.2.
\textsuperscript{50} C. Cipolla, Miasmas and Disease, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1992, p.23.
\textsuperscript{52} Register, December 1 1850, p.4.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid., February 10 1849.
little was done about any nuisances. The Nuisance provisions introduced in South Australia gave little protection against water pollution.

Nuisance laws had been applied in England since medieval times and operated to protect private property interests against the actions of others. While the nuisance laws did apply to river regions, the legal system in general in the nineteenth century tended to facilitate industrialisation. It has been observed that a deterioration in the quality of the water and air and a much higher noise level were prices the system was willing to pay for industrialisation.\textsuperscript{54} Not until after 1850 were there reports of action overseas against industrial polluters, but even then courts would only intervene in very extreme cases. For example, in the case of a private gas company in England accused of polluting a river and destroying the fish, the subsequent unemployment of many fishermen was held inadequate to sustain a prosecution. Otherwise, "every successful speculation in trade might be the subject of prosecution."\textsuperscript{55} It has been recognised that nuisance laws were "manifestly inadequate" as a system of pollution control in an industrialised society. Victims of pollution had to not only prove that they had suffered damage, but had to risk large sums of money in litigation.\textsuperscript{56} Moreover, complaints about "nuisances" in Adelaide revolved mainly around industrial pollution of the air, rather than the waterways, such as the offensive smell emitted by factories and slaughterhouses.

The Council did make attempts at monitoring the Torrens. A Park Ranger was appointed when the Adelaide Council was reinstated in 1852 and was given the job of monitoring the whole park area in the city, including the river. Not surprisingly, given his duties, the policing of the area around the Torrens was reported to be lax. By 1853 this momentous task included taking charge of fences, buildings and bridges, the prevention of any removal of sand, gravel or wood from the Parklands or the "committal of other trespasses or depredations".\textsuperscript{57} He was also given the tasks of patrolling the banks to issue sand licences, to prevent any unauthorised encroachments on the river banks, to stop any depositing of rubbish in the river bed, and to report any persons bathing within the prohibited limits, or fishing in the river without the written permit of the council. He was also to impound any cattle found roaming on the slopes of the river. The closest any-one

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ibid.}, p.421.
\textsuperscript{57} Register, February 17 1853, p.3.
came to monitoring the river was when a Conservator of the Torrens was established in 1855. His duties related more to the issuing of licences for fishing and other activities such as the removal of sand along the river rather than specifically to health hazards. These many duties were, however, not considered enough for one person and by 1856 the position was combined with that of the Park Ranger.  

PUBLIC PROTESTS

The public were concerned about the dangers to health from the pollution of the Torrens and increasingly voiced their objections. Slaughterhouses, bathing, pollution from factories and from sewage were just some of the complaints. As early as 1838 there were protests regarding the poisoning of the water by public and private brick making activities. In 1839 there were remonstrations about its stagnation for nine out of twelve months, reputed to be worsened by exposure to the hot Adelaide sun and contamination by dead insects and unwholesome rubbish. In 1840 one irate citizen proclaimed the water “execrable”, while another observed that the water was so full of “animalcula” that in hot weather it had to be used almost immediately. By the late 1840s the situation had become grave and the water was said to be regarded with an “unavailing expression of disgust.” A letter to the Observer in 1843 queried the government’s inaction: “It does appear strange to me that no steps are taken to supply the town with clean wholesome water.” A “Water Drinker” in 1854 attacked the short-sightedness of the government in regard to their lack of pollution controls. He observed that while they penalised bathers they were doing nothing about the “odure and other filths” discharged from the Lunatic Asylum and the Hospital, or the refuse from the tanyard and cattle factory that entered the First Creek and then the Torrens above the spot where the city water supply was obtained. The writer had noticed the “very discoloured and offensive” condition of the water in the creek and traced it to the barrel drain of the public buildings. He pointed out: “We are absolutely daily drinking the most horrible mixture which man can possibly imagine the sewage of an Hospital.”

58 “Records of the Department of Parks and Gardens”, Adelaide City Archives, Context Unit 51, p.4.
59 Register, August 11 1838, p.3.
60 ibid., November 30 1839, p.5.
61 ibid., August 29 1840, p.2.
62 J. Blacket, History of South Australia, Hussey and Gillingham, Adelaide, 1911, p.85.
63 Register, February 24 1847, p.2.
64 Observer, 25 May 1843.
65 Register, February 6, 1854, p.3.
66 ibid.
Other letters also drew attention to the habits of horses and their riders, and of stock, washing in the only part of the river where water carriers could easily obtain their supplies. The river was perceived as being in danger of becoming the “common sewer of the city”.\(^{67}\) Mining companies washing ore in the river were also criticised for polluting the water used by the people of Adelaide. Knowledge of the danger caused by such practices in England was cited and the government’s responsibility advocated.\(^{68}\)

The city slaughterhouse was the cause of most concern. By the late 1850s there was a push to ban slaughtering within one mile of the city, although this was strongly opposed by butchers and their supporters.\(^{69}\) There were also complaints from citizens at Thebarton about contamination of their water from the city's slaughterhouse. One local claimed that the stench the day before had reached its climax: “So bad was it that the water was rancid in its cask. All the inmates in my house suffered more or less headaches, sickness, & c.: and during the night one of my children was attacked with violent sickness and purgings.”\(^{70}\) A further letter in 1857 complained of the smell, suggested deodorisation measures and demanded more thorough drainage of the matter from the slaughterhouse to the sea.\(^{71}\) Concern about slaughterhouses near cities’ rivers was also common in other capitals around this time. The situation of the Yarra was just as bad, if not worse, and was described as “one of the most shocking and disgusting scenes that can be conceived”\(^{72}\). There were business interests behind cattle slaughtering, however, and even as late as 1862, when the Cattle Slaughtering Bill came before Parliament, one politician argued that he never saw any evil effects from it. He was no believer in the fearful epidemics that arose from slaughtering near rivers, and that there was the injurious effect upon butchers that needed to be taken into account.\(^{73}\)

Letters in the late 1840s drew attention to the piles of rubbish, carcasses and filth littering the Parklands between the river bank and Trinity Church. Some concern was based on the contamination of the atmosphere. Adelaide should not become like London, wrote one concerned citizen, already the atmosphere was changed by “stagnant water” and “innumerable sheep-yards,

\(^{67}\) *ibid.*, June 4 1847, p.2.  
\(^{68}\) *ibid.*, January 10 1845, p.3.  
\(^{69}\) *SAPD*, October 15 1858, p.372.  
\(^{70}\) *Register*, November 17 1849, p.4.  
\(^{71}\) *ibid.*, April 11 1857, p.3.  
\(^{73}\) *SAPD*, May 20 1862, p.86.
cattle-yards, unburied sheep and cattle lying about, water-pools for sheep washing &c, &c.”74 Others pointed out the direct danger to the water quality. The author of an article in 1853 sarcastically commented that it was impossible to walk down the riverside without coming across a dead dog or two. A bullock had also been “luxuriating” on the eastern section of the river near the Company’s Bridge.75 A dead horse, minus its hide, lay near the pool at Frome Rd, where water carts loaded for the east part of the city, and “suspiciously close” to the Mounted Police Barracks. The question was posed whether this would “improve the flavour of the tepid stream”.76 Accusations about the Corporation’s lack of attention to their responsibilities were common. “Olfactory” in 1857 complained about the body of a dead dog near Government House and inquired if this wasn’t the responsibility of the Inspector of Nuisances. Others agreed but asked: “How can the parties be made to do their duty?”77 The element of sarcasm and irony in these letters reflect that people had little faith in the authorities’ willingness to act.

Some complaints related to natural debris found in the water. While driftwood and logs had contributed to the health of the Torrens in its natural state, the decaying logs in the river were also an object of protest as they contributed to “an abundance of vegetable and animal matter” held in solution in the water.78 There was apparently “thousands” of decaying logs, many in the last stages of decomposition, and therefore of no use to the settlers. While suggestions were given toremedying this matter, such as reserving a space free from contamination, it was again lamented that there was little hope of these things occurring.79 Condemnation of the government for their lack of intervention regarding clean water increased during the summer months, but again people showed little confidence regarding a response to their calls.

RESTRICTIONS ON BATHING

One main area of public contention was the restrictions on bathing in the river. In this instance, there was more to it than simply pollution control. The issue of Aboriginal use of the river was one source of controversy, but there was also a class dimension. While for some years workers could bathe in the Torrens after a hard day’s work, this came to be frowned upon. Overall, those who were wealthy in society were screened from the worst problems due to the Torrens’ water.

74 Register, March 28 1849, p.4.  
75 ibid., March 7 1853, p.3.  
76 ibid.  
77 ibid. October 1 1857, p.3.  
78 ibid., March 7 1849, p.4.  
79 ibid.
Not only were they able to use their own wells, but with water at such a high price, only the privileged few could have afforded to use it regularly for washing. Moreover, those with enough money could also take a coach to Glenelg each morning and bathe, before returning to the city by 9 a.m. In summer a coach also ran in the evening. This had been established from early in the settlement of the colony and at Glenelg there were also provisions for women to change in seclusion and to bathe in a separate section. 80

Bathing in the Torrens was one of the first issues to attract the attention of authorities, while far greater crimes, particularly those made by industry and by the government’s own practices, were uncommented on and unpolic ed. Bathing was banned in large areas of the river from 1841, so that swimming in the river became not only a danger to one’s health but also carried the risk of a hefty fine. There was strong support for removing the pastime, or at least from the central area of the city and opposition to Aboriginal bathers gave a greater push to the bans. Social disapproval was not based merely on the pollution factor, but also on a strong distaste for its “offensive” nature, and the desire to find a scapegoat for the poor water quality. Decent citizens were apparently appalled by the fact that the bathers were naked within sight of the city’s walkways. 81 By the late 1850s the editor of the Register was complaining of the summer bathing activities of the working class in rather virulent language: “What professional warnings are ever addressed to the reckless and ignorant classes of the population, who are daily and hourly sapping the foundations of vitality by living in flagrant violation of all sanitary arrangements and physiological laws?” 82

In a poem entitled “The Bather” (1844), written “By one who washes at home, and would fain swim in the Torrens”, it was assumed that those bathing in the river were of a lower class, and had generally filthy habits. By their practice they were polluting the water for more refined people, who washed in a genteel manner. It was claimed that “the bather”, who only washed once a week, wore “seedy clothes”; his body was offensive and smeared in black grease; his “grisly chin was “bristling black”; his “digits the nail-brush sadly lack”. What’s more, after polluting the river, the author had to drink tea from the very same water! 83

80 J. Daly, Elysian Fields, Adelaide, J. Daly, 1982, pp. 74-75.
81 ibid., p. 74.
82 Register, February 2 1858, p. 2.
83 ibid., February 3 1844, p. 3.
Scrubbing with soap his filthy hide,
Then fouling the river's lazy tide,
Swimming away at a rapid pace
(His course, the dirt and soap-suds trace)...
And home returning to your tea
(From Torrens' water it should be)
Sip the hot cup and swear,
"How marvellous sweet these soap suds are."84

There was considerable confusion as to where bathing was allowed, with people being taken to the police station in the middle of enjoying their early morning dip, and subsequently being charged with defiling the public waters.85 However, bathing continued to be popular, the main bathing pool was often crowded and the military, who lived nearby, were cited as one of the frequent users.86 One resident regretted the time it took to reach the Torrens' "universal bathing place" which was on the other side of the Company's Mill. Upon reaching the spot there was little room for movement or preparation, and all he could do was to get a quick dip and then get out. The walk back completely negated any refreshing benefit. He proposed a public bath situated near the water works as being "conducive to the general health of the town" and emphasised that this was needed by both sexes.87 Not only would a public swimming bath of about 150 feet be healthy, but it would reap returns to the Council.88 Another concerned citizen suggested a public bath might be situated near North Terrace at little expense.89

DANGEROUS WATERS

While bathing posed a potential risk to health, and to one's hip pocket, there were other dangers posed by the Torrens. The settlement grappled with the Torrens' variability; not only was water scarce at times, at others there was simply too much. The extent of damage caused by floods was also something that settlers and the government were unprepared for. The replacement of bridges placed even more financial pressure on the government and the frequent division of the city threatened its financial growth.

84 ibid.
85 ibid., February 1 1854, p.3.
86 ibid., December 30 1843.
87 ibid., March 6 1854, p.3.
88 ibid.
89 ibid., December 23 1854.
In general, the conditions in Australia mean that the incidence of flooding is high. Australia’s variability in rainfall and runoff from catchment areas is the highest in the world and significantly higher than where settlers originated. South Australians inhabit the most arid colony in the country, with the driest Australian capital city. There was very little knowledge of the likely rainfall and even less of its variability. Labelled a “treacherous watercourse” because of the power of its floods, the authorities were at a loss as to how to deal with the unpredictable river.

Visitors to Australia noted the amazing seasonal contrast in the rivers, with empty channels in summer becoming in winter “furious and rushing torrents” which blocked roads and destroyed bridges. There was some speculation about this by those who had been in Australia longer. One commentator had observed that in rural NSW in 1827 that the terrible floods that occurred were due to the “conformation” of the country and the river. While flooding caused damage in the rural environment, in a city the effects were even more noticeable and included the division of the city on occasion. Moreover, one of the consequences of the flooding was the further degradation of the river ecology.

In 1838 the Register expressed its uncertainty over the capability of the Torrens during winter: “what the Torrens may be capable of performing for a week or two of the rainy season beyond sweeping down to the swamp the summer filth of Adelaide we cannot guess.” Its potential would soon become apparent. The flood of 22 September 1844 was the highest experienced in Adelaide in the short time of settlement, causing widespread destruction along the river and damaging the Frome Road Bridge. The Government Gardens were under water and on the outskirts of the central area Shand’s Brewery, which adjoined the Gardens, collapsed after a great portion of the bank eroded. The people of Adelaide were left wondering how to predict the onset of flooding: “Since 1837, the Torrens has not risen so high as on the present occasion, and yet, strange to say, the fall of rain in Adelaide, during the two days preceding the flood, did not exceed half an inch.” In 1846 the Register again admitted the difficulty of estimating the

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91 ibid., p.195.
92 Register, July 4 1873.
96 ibid., p.7.
97 ibid.
Torrens’ potential for damage: “It is very difficult to calculate or estimate the immense power of the waters of a river accumulated so rapidly by the mountainous streams which pour into it…”

The flooding of the Torrens river system caused environmental problems such as erosion and damage to trees. In 1847 the Register reported on a severe flood after which large portions of the Torrens’ banks continued to fall into the river due to being undermined by its force. In 1851 the people of Adelaide not only had to cope with a severe water shortage in the summer of 1850-51, but the “Great Flood” of August 1851 caused avalanches of alluvial soil and uprooted a large number of trees. In September of the same year a flood had also brought down large trees and washed away a considerable portion of the road at the back of the Governor’s House and wrecked the Governor’s Garden. In 1852 it was reported that since 1839 about two acres of land had been eroded at Hackney due to the southerly migration of the Torrens near the Company’s Bridge. After floods, concern was expressed because the banks of the Torrens were falling in many places.

Rather than being passive, the river played an active and even destructive role in the life of the city. The Torrens was branded “uncertain, dangerous and deceptive”. Many fatalities occurred due to the unpredictable pools and currents, particularly the deaths of children, and of people who had been drinking. Animals also fell prey to the unpredictable current. Its fords were on the brink of its deep pockets and the danger was furthered by the many sunken logs and branches and by projecting banks which obstructed the path of any one who had fallen in to one of its “dark caverns” and “fatal depths”. Indeed, one of the Protectors of Aborigines was an early victim of the Torrens’ hazardous torrents. In places the banks were elevated and precipitous, and it was known for people to be buried alive in them. The high northern banks were particularly dangerous with steep embankments overhanging the river. With floods came even further danger. Aborigines, having a far better understanding of the torrents in the river, had often come to the assistance of struggling settlers in the colony’s first decade. The lack of safe bridges also

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98 Register, August 12 1846.
99 ibid., July 22 1847, p.5.
101 Register, August 20 1851, p.3.
103 ibid., p.24.
104 Register, January 20 1844, p.3.
105 ibid., January 20 1844, p.3.
106 ibid.
107 ibid., May 19 1838, p.8.
contributed to the fatalities. Significantly, the area upon which the Torrens Lake was to be situated was known as the Death Hole.

Sporadic attempts by the Council to defend the town against the Torrens met with little success. A railed fence with a chain had been erected on both banks of the river near the ford as early as 1839 after several accidents had occurred. In 1844 it had been suggested that a few coils of rope should be deposited at nearby houses as then any one could help to assist those who had fallen into the river. It was pointed out that in many waterholes only experienced divers would dare venture. Rewards were also proposed for those who had risked their own lives to help others, lighting was suggested in dangerous areas at night, and fencing of the northern banks proposed. The issue was an emotive one, and the government was attacked for its negligence in regard to public safety across the river. To the settlers the uncertainties of the river’s flooding were a problem. In 1845, after a particularly bad flood, “the bosom of the Torrens was anything but a peaceful scene”, the Register sought advice from the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area, to try and gauge if there was any pattern to flooding and to attempt to assert some feeling of security.

Bridges were continually being erected, but also destroyed by floods. The necessity for sturdy bridges was emphasised, given that the creek was a “treacherous watercourse and has a large watershed.” In 1841 the bridge being used over the area near the gaol consisted of two trees placed over the stream and a handrail formed on one side. However, even these had been destroyed and the chain lay corroding in the water. Given the desperate situation, subscriptions were asked for to build a new bridge in 1843 and the people of Adelaide had subscribed 105 pounds towards the venture, the list of subscribers filling a full column on the front page of the Register. It was hoped that the bridge would be built quickly before the onset of the rainy season. The Register called upon the government to adopt a remedy to prevent flooding and thus the costly destruction of bridges.

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108 “Reply to Colonial Secretary”, 1839, State Records Department, Chief (formerly Colonial) Secretary’s Office, GRG 24/4/ p.192-3.
109 “Police Commissioner to Colonial Secretary, State Records Department, No. 501, 1844, State Records Department, Chief (formerly Colonial) Secretary’s Office, GRG 24/16.
111 ibid., p.51.
112 Register, May 3 1843, p.2.
113 ibid., May 10 1843, p.1.
The 1847 flood was particularly bad, the New City Bridge, situated in a direct line with Morphett Street, was washed away before it was even completed. The South Adelaide abutment of the Frome Bridge also gave way, and a “portentous chasm” rendered the river impassable as “angry billows” streamed their way down newly made channels. In response, the Register was scathing about the practise of building expensive bridges only to have them washed away, and suggested the “common sense” approach of using a few unpolished logs across the river: “In the bridge-building branch of Government affairs, the authorities must confess themselves in the position of juvenile academicians who have failed to learn their lessons.” Passage of the river at this area was made after this by using the ford, possible only in dry weather. A temporary footbridge was erected but, despite public outcry, no further attempts were made towards building a substantial bridge at this site until the Victoria Bridge was built in 1869.

In 1853 a new City Bridge was proposed. In opposition to the Register’s advice, a potential tender suggested that more sturdy bridges were needed, citing the seven bridges already swept away within the range of the Park Lands, and the average of two people drowned per year. In an attempt to understand their situation the Register at least realised that what the government was doing was not effective. “Gentlemen – our bridges are costing us thousands annually, and are annually swept away by the floods of a country almost without rivers, but abounding in mountain torrents.” The 1867 flood washed away a newly erected city dam while 1873 again saw the Torrens labelled as a “treacherous watercourse”: further damage was inflicted upon bridges and extensive erosion of the Torrens’ banks occurred. By 1878 three bridges existed over the River Torrens, two of them new. A critic from Melbourne observed that more money had been spent on girders along the Torrens, than on the beautification of the entire Thames in London.

There was an increase in environmental damage caused by floods due to the settlers’ land practices, particularly the clearing of trees. When the government did try to manage floods it was attempted in a superficial manner, such as in 1850, when a channel was dug into the river to divert the great mass of water during floods. However, this channel cut flowing water off from the spot where water carriers usually obtained their supply, thus furthering the problems caused

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115 ibid., p.13.
116 ibid., p.26
117 ibid., p.16, (1847).
118 Register, July 4 1873.
119 ibid., June 6 1871, p.6.
by its stagnation. The government was compelled to allow the water to flow as it had previously done. \(^{120}\)

One correspondent to the *Register* attempted to educate his fellow citizens about how the changes to the river increased the damage wrought by heavy rains. He explained after the 1851 floods that there was nowhere for the water to escape now, the decrease of herbage, and the removal of logs from the watercourse had increased the flow of water so that after heavy rains the accumulated body of water reached Adelaide fifteen minutes sooner than before. \(^{121}\) Another settler wrote in complaining about the Corporation's lack of intelligent flood management policies. It was pointed out that when settlers had first arrived in Adelaide the Torrens was just a mere chain of ponds. However, it had become larger in width, due to the decrease of grass and the removal of timber; these changes meant an annually increasing flow of water. Thus, when flooding did occur, the force of the water was much greater and the increased water flow washed away much of the earth on its bed and formed larger banks, necessitating the building of bridges, when previously this had not been necessary. \(^{122}\) This showed a relatively sophisticated understanding of the changes brought about by settlement. While his insights may have been based on observation, studies had been done in Europe which pointed to the increase in torrents due to the destruction of vegetation. It had been argued that when the woods are destroyed, water couldn’t be absorbed into the soil as fast as it accumulates, and without shrubbery the torrent’s course was not broken up or divided. \(^{123}\)

**NO LONGER A “PRETTY STREAM”**

Attempts to rectify some of the damage to the banks of the Torrens were not a priority for the authorities, although the Adelaide Corporation had not been totally silent, or inactive, on the subject of the Torrens’ need for beautification. It had, however, been hampered severely by lack of administrative control over the area, inadequate funding and a limited knowledge of the South Australian conditions. In fact, the first plantations along the river banks were instituted by Governor MacDonnell. These were on the north side of the river and east of the City Bridge Road and included varieties of eucalyptus, cypresses and pine and several English shade trees. \(^{124}\) Some

\(^{120}\) *Ibid.*, April 29 1850, p.3.


\(^{122}\) *Ibid*.


endeavours to ornament the parklands and the River Torrens were also made in the 1850s. These attempts made by the Corporation to replant the area were subject to problems partly due to their poor knowledge of the soil and climate. Shrubs and trees were planted at the wrong time of the year and in the wrong places.

People also continued to plunder many of the remaining established trees. The planting in the parklands in the 1850s included enclosures for trees along the Torrens' banks but these were unfortunately combined with the grazing of determined sheep and the vandalism of youths, the combined efforts of both leaving little to show. An astute observer in 1857 had also recognised that the trees, grasses and hedges planted in the parklands should be suited to the climate and to the soil conditions. Otherwise the Corporation was merely digging holes as graves for plants which were not suited to the locality. Concern was expressed about the gum trees which were dying in places where the ground was pressed hard. Some people at least were learning more about the native vegetation, as was pointed out, gums trees had to be planted at the proper season, in May and June, so they had a chance to settle in over winter. By 1857 ornamental lakes had been built in the Botanic Gardens, the latter area was flourishing, but the river continued to be a place of ridicule.

Those who were not very early settlers saw a river much changed, and not for the better. One "very early colonist", signing himself H.W., confessed an attachment to the gum trees under which their first habitations were fixed and to the cockatoos that had lived there. He complained that the parklands had "lost its sylvan character". H.W. derided the Corporation for obtaining an income from the last few remaining old gum trees. However, just as many settlers expected the Aborigines to die out, he also felt that the gum trees were now a matter of history, as were the cockatoos that used to frequent them. Thus, helpless before the onslaught of English society, the noble gums would be replaced by European trees which, he grudgingly accepted, would provide much-needed shade for future generations.

By the 1860s the river area was no longer the pleasant stream that the first settlers had witnessed. Sinnett, when writing his Account of South Australia in 1862 spoke of the first settlers' reports of the river as something of historical interest. He had uncovered a reference to the Torrens as a

125 Register, February 5 1857, p.3.
126 ibid., July 3 1865, p.3.
127 ibid., July 13 1853, p.3.
128 ibid.
“pretty stream” in some Parliamentary Papers, and this was upheld by those who had first seen the river: “Some old colonists even now confirm this view.”\textsuperscript{129} As Sinnett explained, those who had seen the river in its pristine state bore testimony to its deterioration. He recounted their explanation of the changes:

Some old colonists...say that its appearance has much altered for the worse since those days - that it has worn a deeper channel in the soft soil of the plains – that its yielding earthy banks are far more precipitous than they were – that in summer the wide chasm of river bed is more out of proportion than it used to be, with the slender rivulet that trickles along its centre.\textsuperscript{130}

One such “old colonist” confirmed that the river was much damaged: “Persons who now look at the Park Lands and River can have no idea of the beauty of either in their natural state. The River then was very pretty – a chain or large ponds or waterholes, with trees, reeds, rushes, and shrubs growing all round the edge.”\textsuperscript{131} F.R.Nixon was also to later complain about the destruction of the river environment. Looking back, he recalled that when he had first seen the River Torrens it was much more charming, “its banks were clothed with a rich carpet of grass and shrubs...The trees, too, along its margin, had not then felt the devastating effect of the saw and the axe...The drooping foliage is gone: the beautiful geraniums \textit{[Lavatera plebia]} are destroyed; the stately gums have disappeared.”\textsuperscript{132}

Helen Mantegani, who had arrived in Adelaide in 1836, had been immediately impressed with the beauty of the Torrens. Mantegani was one of the few to express concern, she later explained some of the problems that had occurred and showed awareness of how society’s unconsidered changes affected the ecology of the region:

some stupid people cut away the shrubs and trees that held the banks together. Consequently the soft alluvial soil fell away, and the river became broad and shallow and very ugly. After this winter floods carried away the banks that remained making it a most

\textsuperscript{129} F. Sinnett, \textit{An Account of the Colony of South Australia}, Government Printer, Adelaide, 1862, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{130} ibid.
unsightly spot for many years, and entailing an enormous expense to restore it to anything like beauty, though it will never be as picturesque as Nature made it.\textsuperscript{133}

White settlement resulted in the destruction no only of the ecology of the area and the water purity, but also its beauty which many had admired.

**CONCLUSION**

Settlers to Adelaide were faced with an alien environment they did not understand and the aim of building up a city and an economy based on private ownership of resources. Initially, however, the resources of the river were free for them to use, and they did so. When the government gained control of the river area they also utilised it freely, with little thought to the consequences. The changing governments in Adelaide were the caretakers of the area, just as the Kaurna had been. However, they saw their role very differently and were not guided by any philosophy that saw nurturing the environment as a primary aim. For the health of the river the laws surrounding its use needed to be revised and harmful practises outlawed. But the government's main aim was to build up the colony of South Australia and make it a financial success. This meant initially that people had homes and access to basic resources. The government allowed the river to be destroyed in order to build the city. But what could the governing bodies do? Deny people water or bankrupt industry?

However, the City Council and the Government's actions regarding the Torrens can hardly be regarded as good economics or sound resource management. Even by the standards of the day they were found lacking. They allowed the major resource in the city to be destroyed. They simultaneously pursued a policy of sewerage and pollution disposal into the river, thus poisoning their own drinking water. They built bridges that were not able to withstand flooding. Settlement damaged the ecology of the river, and increased the impact of flooding, the shape of the river bed was changed and its banks became eroded and dangerous. The impact of settlement also had aesthetic consequences, with what was once a pretty stream becoming an ugly eyesore. The first river died. The destruction of the Torrens that had adapted over thousands of years occurred very rapidly. The ultimate consequence was that only one Torrens River remains and that is the river which was re-created, in the nineteenth century, after its destruction.

\textsuperscript{133} H. Mantegani, “Recollections of the Early Days of South Australia from 1836”, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia*, vol. v, 1901-2, p.74.
The deterioration of the Torrens was an extremely visible problem. It was an area through which many people travelled on journeys to North Adelaide, or when travelling to other areas of the city. By 1850 there were numerous paths which the public had made along the Torrens banks. Whether on horseback or on foot, one could not help but notice the foul rubbish that littered its banks and polluted its water, or the degradation of its banks. The Torrens had also been used for bathing. Disapproval of this grew, and thus the main policing that was done in regard to pollution was pushed mainly by moral reprobation which worked against the working classes and the Aborigines. As was pointed out in 1845, hundreds of people lived cooped up in their houses with no restorative effect after a hard day. Their only recourse apart from a “dry polish” from a basin of water was a bathe in the Torrens which might cost them their lives if they were not good swimmers, or a fine if they did not know the correct boundaries to swim in.

The early pollution of the Torrens is not an isolated case in Australia’s environmental history. South Australians did not heed the warning from Sydney where the original water supply had virtually disappeared and was transformed from 1788 to 1826 into a sewage drain. No longer able to be used as a water source, the population simply looked elsewhere. The Yarra was also heavily polluted by the early 1840s, resulting in fatalities among horses and sickness amongst the population. Given the small capacity of the Torrens, there was little hope of sewage being effectively washed away from the central area where water was collected. While settlers may have inherited negative practices from Europe, the government also gave them little alternative, instead contributing to the pollution problem by their lack of control over the situation.

134 Register, January 23 1850, p.3.
135 ibid., June 14 1845, p.3.
136 ibid., May 14 1842, p.2.
CHAPTER FOUR: MEETING THE DEMAND FOR PROGRESS

INTRODUCTION

The greatest single decision to impact upon the Torrens occurred in the very first year of the colony’s responsible parliament when the Water and Sewerage Act was passed. In this chapter I shall examine the motivations and ideas behind the Water and Sewerage Act of 1856 and its consequences for the river. Behind the passage of the Act lay an extensive campaign initiated by John Stephens, editor of the Register, Adelaide’s major newspaper which had a wide readership. Shocked by the danger to health posed by the Torrens’ water, Stephens called out for the protection of the Torrens’ river water and drew attention to the gross pollution that was occurring. The campaign was continued by some members of the public, including many in the medical profession. Considering the high level of public debate, there existed potential for a program of rectifying the pollution problem of the river in Adelaide, but it was the need for plentiful water that was given priority by the South Australian government. Progress was to play a key role in Adelaide’s search for clean and plentiful water; protection would be applied only irregularly.

The Act placed command of these two important concerns in the hands of the state, enabling the government to have complete control over a sophisticated system of water supply, which was transported by pipes to people’s homes from a reservoir further up in the Torrens’ Gorge area. Water supply became domesticated and controlled. Western societies have found water more useful when it is tamed, channelled and directed. It is generally accepted that, “Control and appropriation of water have been fundamental to the building of human cultures and civilisations.”¹ The new reservoir was seen as a symbol of the progress of the city of Adelaide. But the reservoir had severe consequences for the river system. A system of deep drainage for sewerage disposal was given less priority and the state of the river continued to deteriorate. By 1872 the Torrens had been labelled a “nursery of death”² and it would take until 1886 for effective system of drainage to be completed.

² ibid., March 22 1872, p.5
CHANGING ATTITUDES TO WATER

To fully understand the reasons behind the Water and Sewerage Act of 1856, we need to comprehend the changes that were taking place in people’s attitudes towards water. The Act was passed during a time when industrial societies were in the process of controlling and reinventing water. It has been suggested that, just as with other conquests of nature by industrial society, there was a “conquest of water”. The industrial age overturned the old attitudes towards water, and its preoccupation with water was “one of the subdivisions of the religion of progress.” The values emerging at this time have persisted and are still very relevant to our current society. The health-giving and even spiritual qualities of water were considered, with plentiful water coming to be perceived as a social good. During the 1840s and 1850s there was an increasing demand for a more democratic supply of water whereby this basic necessity would be available to all regardless of their wealth or their geographical proximity to the river. Influenced by an environment that was more naturally endowed with water resources, people began to demand not only clean water but also an abundance of it.

There had been some emphasis on the purity of water from the beginning of settlement. When she came over in the Buffalo in 1836 Mary Thomas had brought a water filtering device with her and she recounted in her diary how she demonstrated the device to the Aboriginal people while camped at Glenelg, much to their amusement. Towards the end of the 1840s, demands for a plentiful supply of water seen as essential not only for sanitary purposes, it was seen to be a necessity for the middle class, as witness to their virtue and civilisation. The movement towards redefining the role of water in society had both a spiritual and physical aspect. Water had long had a sacred, purifying role and this continued despite the industrial revolution. The impact of Romanticism is prevalent in some perceptions of water, and was strong in the 1840s. The Temperance Society also pointed to the essentially pure qualities of water, which had not been improved, but rather tainted by industrialisation. The spiritual qualities of pure, sparkling mountain water were related in a poem published by the latter and entitled “Song of the River”. Water springing from the mountain stream was deemed to be “sparkling, pure and bright”. Moreover, it was:

...the only drink that was given
To man when pure and free;

4 *Ibid*.
Return then, to the gift of Heaven
You’re safe when drinking me.\(^5\)

Throughout Adelaide’s early history a battle had been waged between temperance groups and those who indulged in the cheap and plentiful alcohol available in Adelaide. The Governor sanctioned the moral position of the Temperance Society when he cited the advantages of clean water over alcohol when introducing the Water and Sewerage Act, and Parliament was to accord with this principle.\(^7\)

Mountain water may have been “safe”, but the water collected from the Torrens was not. Aligned with the promotion of “sparkling, pure and bright” water was a growing abhorrence to water from the Torrens’ ford, which affronted the ideal of cleanliness. While pollution was a common complaint, criticism of its stillness and its “stagnant” condition went beyond matters of public health, as they also suggested a lack of spiritual freshness. The river itself was found to be at fault in the late 1850s, and apparently lacking in energy, with the “river’s lazy tide” being criticised.\(^8\) With the approval of industry and enterprise at this time, the label held quite a sting. In the 1840s a proposed Water Company also hoped to remove the stigma of drinking from the “stream impure” by using a steam engine to extract water from the Torrens.\(^9\) A writer, calling himself, “Aqua” demanded that a supply be found from a “purer source” than the “so-called River Torrens.”\(^10\) By 1850 it was claimed that among the population of Adelaide there was a “very general prejudice” in favour of mountain streams as sources for the city’s supply of water.\(^11\)

The domestication of water during this period refers to it not just coming under government control, but also its changing place as a resource which came to be seen as intimately connected to domestic life, and which became available readily to households. It was reported in 1848 that even before the introduction of piped water South Australians were using more water.\(^12\) If this was the case, middle class South Australians emulated social changes occurring overseas, following the ideas made practical by the new technology in advance of its introduction. A Baths and Washhouse Act was passed in England in 1846\(^13\) and in London it was noted in the 1850s that: “The constant supply of hot water has now become almost a

\(^{5}\) Register, May 23 1846, p.4.
\(^{7}\) SAPP, 1855-6, “Governor’s Speech to the Legislative Council”, p.7.
\(^{8}\) Register, February 3 1844, p.3.
\(^{9}\) ibid., October 1848, p.14.
\(^{10}\) ibid., June 9 1847, p.2
\(^{11}\) ibid., March 25, 1850, p.4.
\(^{12}\) ibid., October 14, p.2, 1848.
necessary in all well-regulated families whose wants in this respect (baths) demand a daily and liberal allowance."\(^\text{14}\) in other countries bathing was also growing in popularity with a bathroom, often provided with hot water, becoming part of modern living in America. Throughout Scandinavian countries the practice of taking a sauna was common.\(^\text{15}\)

The \textit{Register} approved of the emphasis on personal cleanliness, noting in 1848 that the increase in water use was partly due to the "rekindling of that laudable desire heretofore expressed for opportunities of more frequent and more effectual personal and local ablutions."\(^\text{16}\) The emphasis placed on public baths as essential for society further demonstrates a desire for water's domestication and control and stresses its edifying qualities. The call for facilities for bathing included requirements for both domestic and public bathing, with the latter tending historically to be used more by the working class who could not afford a bath of their own.\(^\text{17}\)

Public baths would later be included as part of the development of the Torrens' banks. But only four years after the settlement of Adelaide an article appeared in the \textit{Register} advocating them.\(^\text{18}\) It was anticipated that speculators might take this up, possibly due to the fact that government authority was so deficient at this time and its finances weak. Baths in town were seen as the most desirable option to alleviate the hot summer heat and for the prevention of disease and were considered particularly important given South Australia's hot climate. It was suggested that in the meantime an easier option might be to erect a public bath in the river itself by making a platform over the Torrens with a well for a plunge bath and an area for changing included. Hopefully this would disguise the fact that people were bathing directly in the river, and was anticipated to be safer, healthier and more comfortable than the river itself.\(^\text{19}\) Others also suggested that the "proper use of bathing" be undertaken.\(^\text{20}\) Members of the middle class in Adelaide were very class conscious and held themselves up as models to the labouring poor.\(^\text{21}\) Their crusade was one which they hoped would filter down also to the working class. While washing may have been on the increase, this was best done in public baths, or in the privacy of one's own home. The first public bath in Adelaide was established just after the introduction of piped water in 1861 near the Torrens where people had first bathed, with fountains established at the same time.

\(^{15}\) \textit{Register}, April 18 1850, p.3  
\(^{16}\) \textit{ibid.}, October 14 1848, p.2.  
\(^{18}\) \textit{Register}, January 11 1840, p.6.  
\(^{19}\) \textit{ibid.}  
\(^{20}\) \textit{ibid.}, February 2 1858, p.2.  
Public baths were seen to be a sign of progress and their installation was in accordance with a general trend, common in nineteenth century English society, of following the model of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had established reservoirs, and baths and fountains in their towns and this was compared with the situation in Adelaide: the aqueducts had supplied about 20 gallons of the purest fluid daily to every citizen. Those in Adelaide, however, had to make do with “impure, unwholesome water, carried in little casks, in a burning sun, through the town”. Instead of paying a fortune for their poor supply, by the implementation of a technique used centuries ago, they could have the “purest and freshest water in abundance”.

Roman civilisation emphasised control over nature by the government, with their straight roads, for example, through the countryside. There was an existence of a strong urban tradition, and an affection for the city as a superior creation of man in the Mediterranean world and a sharing of this in Roman times. Life in the city was seen as a natural existence for people. South Australia was also a highly urbanised society. As people sought to improve and develop their city, and in some ways became more estranged from the natural world, they appeared to turn to examples of a civilisation that would provide an example for them.

An obsession with abundant water prevailed around the late 1850s and early 60s as citizens eagerly awaited the new luxury. Fountains were advocated as a sign of civilisation and said to be prominent features in all oriental cities and: “considered absolutely necessary to health by every people above a state of barbarism where the summers are as hot as they are here.” In an article about the Waterworks in 1860 the Register fell to the depths of its gushing and imagined a transformation of Adelaide’s dry climate: “Water! How delightful the copious supply; copious in our houses for luxurious ablutions; copiously jetting forth from public fountains in our thoroughfares, and reviving man and beast with its sparkling streams and copiously besprinkled upon our heated and dust creating streets. And before the close of March - less than three months from this presents exhausting and oppressive drought - all these delight may be ours in Adelaide.”

When the water supply arrived it was deemed to be worth the expense. A letter in January 1862 emphasised the beneficial change, particularly in summer time: the streets were now

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22 Register, January 21 1850, p.3.
23 ibid.
24 ibid.
25 C.J. Glacken, op. cit., p.33.
26 Register, February 4 1859, p.2.
watered, drinking fountains erected and a continuous supply available in the stores and houses in almost every street. The public baths were also celebrated and now seen as a necessity in a climate such as Adelaide: “In a climate like ours, where the summer heat is so intense, and the clouds of dust so trying and penetrating, plenty of cold water is an essential of health and life.” Obviously water was intended to be used copiously, despite, and indeed because of, Adelaide’s dry climate.

**STEPHENS’ CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN WATER**

Against the background of these changing attitudes to water a sophisticated and extensive campaign was launched by John Stephens. Entitled “The Water Question”, Stephens’ campaign initiated discussion regarding the possibilities for Adelaide’s water supply. It was composed of two linked parts: one being the quality of the water; the other its means of distribution. Stephens began to argue for clean and plentiful water around the time of his takeover of the Register in 1842 until his death in November 1850. To advance his crusade Stephens used ploys such as instilling fear and appealing to people’s moral sense in order to initiate change.

There is an urgency to Stephens’ writing that shows genuine concern for the river water and the consequences of its pollution on the population of Adelaide. Stephens’ overall awareness of the importance of a healthy environment, and the need for clean water and pure air was garnered from his knowledge of the public health movement in England. He tried to awaken Adelaide’s conscience to the diseases that threatened it, to the “deadly offence underneath” the surface of the Torrens River. While the Register’s campaign may be considered the first environmental campaign in South Australia, it did focus mainly upon public health. The pollution of the river affected people’s health, and because of this it needed to be dealt with. Only much later would conservation movements focus upon the health of rivers for their own intrinsic value and for the sake of the ecosystem.

It has sometimes been assumed that environmental controversy is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. However, for over a decade a press campaign ran, based around improving the water supply from the Torrens River. The print media was the main avenue for engaging public opinion at this time and the Register Adelaide’s main paper. It’s of interest that a

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29 *Ibid.*.
fellow journalist, Benjamin Franklin, also printed the first recorded protest about water supply in America. In 1793 Franklin and a group of merchants had petitioned the state assembly, asking that slaughterhouses be forced to locate out of town as they were polluting the towns' water, and making it a breeding ground for disease.32 Both Franklin and Stephens were in control of a newspaper and thus able to voice their opinions and their environmental protests.

Stephens' newspaper was run along different lines to twentieth century ones and he had a large amount of licence over what was printed, even for those times. Operating in a social and political environment where there were no major political parties such as we find in the twentieth century, he saw the newspaper as something of a pulpit from which he lectured to the unenlightened. He did not merely follow the trends of society but tried to shape them; he was famous for his championing of social causes and exposés of the abuses of the system.33 Lengthy editorials were Stephens' principal weapon, but he also presented a large amount of educational material on the topic of water supply and pollution. As he announced to Adelaide, he meant to enlist everybody and "every available and lawful consideration" in order to improve the sanitary condition of the city and of its water.34

Worldwide, the sanitary movement had a strong awareness of developments in other countries.35 Stephens' aims saw him drawing upon diverse articles often from overseas sources. In South Australia the Register took its cue mainly from England, the most industrialised country in the world, where various groups had formed to fight for sanitary reform and the Health of Towns Association was formed by the early 1840s. As in England, Stephens' proposed revolution in public health included not only changes to the physical environment, but also to the City Corporations. Preventative measures were emphasised over medical treatment; and the sanitary movement endorsed over mostly helpless doctors.36 Stephens perceived that much of the sickness in Adelaide was due to the quality of the water from the Torrens, particularly during summer.37 He charged the government with "gross and dangerous neglect" of public health.38 Stephens believed that diseases could be "ultimately suppressed" by societies' advancing understanding.39 This particularly nineteenth century view of the power of rational thought and the ability of society to overcome obstacles was one

32 W. Kovarik, op. cit., p.3.
33 J. Blacket, History of South Australia, Hussey and Gillingham, Adelaide, 1911, p.142.
34 Register, April 22 1848, p.2.
36 Register, January 29 1848, p.4.
37 ibid., June 4 1845, p.2.
38 ibid., January 3 1850, p.3.
39 ibid., May 20 1848, p.4.
which presupposed minimal conflict between capitalism and public health issues. The only obstacle was public apathy and the reluctance of the government to initiate change.

The need for a city’s central river to be clean and an object of pride was a theme that Stephens emphasised, citing the harm to the Torrens’ reputation, which reflected upon the whole city’s status. Much had been made of Adelaide’s healthy climate by supporters of the city, one of the attractions of new colonies being that they were untouched and with plentiful resources. Here though was a major resource that was clearly deteriorating and he urged something be done quickly to halt the ridicule. Using his eclectic approach, the case of the Rhine in Cologne was cited as an example of the Old World and its dilemmas.40 The Thames was also an object of frequent scorn in the Register and the stench from its sewers mocked, one article published is exemplary in its description of the “fetid squalidity lying ill-concealed beneath the splendour”.41 Closer to home, the poor state of the water in the Yarra was derided and said to have caused widespread disease. The public’s personal responsibility was pointed to, and their civic duty invoked: “A filthy town is a disgrace to every-one who resides in it.”42

Stephens’ complaints included many of those issues already voiced by the public.43 However, what is important is that he went further in his objections and accusations regarding greater government responsibility. He also pointed out the dangers to those using the water downstream, a problem that was often ignored, and emphasised that a “perfect system”44 of drainage was needed, a requirement that would initially be overlooked by the government. Stephens sought a much more comprehensive answer to the issues faced and showed a broader environmental awareness when complaining about the destruction of the old native gums along the river and the need to maintain the flow of water.45 He also provided a powerful argument for social equity in water supply and was to articulate many of the arguments that would subsequently used to justify a piped water supply.

So passionate was Stephens about the topic that he gave a public lecture on “Sanitary Reform” in 1849. Here he argued that the government should handle such an important resource because the need for a clean water supply was in the interests of the whole population. He defended the poorer classes against those who frowned upon them as not caring about their cleanliness. While they were labelled the “the great unwashed”, a label that

40 ibid., April 22 1848, p.2.
41 ibid., February 27 1850, p.4.
42 ibid., April 22 1848, p.2.
43 For example, his accusations against the government’s inaction; the bathing issue; and his concern about the effect of the slaughterhouse on the Torrens’ water.
44 Register, June 4 1845, p.2.
45 ibid., April 2 1850, p.2.
many of the middle classes in Adelaide appeared to concur with, he pointed out that they were not able to procure water easily or cheaply and that it was the duty of the government to enable this.\textsuperscript{46} Comparing the situation of Adelaide to that of cities in England, he criticised the housing conditions and the "'backslums' totally unfit for human habitation."\textsuperscript{47}

Stephens emphasised that it was in London, the richest city in the world, that suffering was occurring, thus emphasising the disparity between rich and poor. Amongst other aims for a healthy environment in Adelaide he proposed cheap and accessible public baths and access to parks. A recent inquiry in London into the water companies had recommended that water supply be turned over to local administrative bodies to manage sewerage, drainage and water supply. Edwin Chadwick had also suggested that a system was needed where the distribution of water would be under governmental control and Civil Engineers in England had pointed out that the poor would only learn healthy habits if they had the facilities to do so.\textsuperscript{48} Stephens condemned water companies as monopolistic and believed that water here should be under the control of a centralised local polity, which would act in the interest of the general population rather than for commercial gain.\textsuperscript{49}

The early 1850s were a time of social upheaval in Europe, there was a reaction against the excesses of unbridled capitalism and in Adelaide there was also a desire for the government to gain control of essential resources. Debate about social reform was common in the pages of the \textit{Register}. The spirit was moral and supported by religion, reform was deemed to incorporate the basic message of practical Christianity which was "do unto others as you would be done by."\textsuperscript{50} Stephens found an editorial was needed in 1850 to explain his ideas in depth. Not only was drinking water important, cleanliness was vital and a moral duty. Stephens argued that water should be listed along with light and air as one of the basic necessities of life which God had handed out to all unsparingly and ought to be available to all, "untaxed, unlimited and unsold"\textsuperscript{51}. Others were to echo his concerns. However, the idea of an abundant God who was able to provide for all is at odds with the actual situation in Adelaide and the fragility of its water resources. Stephens was rather romantic, when water supply did arrive in Adelaide it was partly paid for by water rates. Nonetheless, his claims demonstrate the plentiful amount that was expected as people's right and which would underpin the developing society's ideas about water use.

\textsuperscript{47} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{49} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Register}, January 29 1850, p.2.  
\textsuperscript{51} ibid.
Stephens gave another justification for the vital importance of improving Adelaide's water supply: the importance of a modern system of supply to the development of the city. He believed that the population of Adelaide should not be restricted in any way nor their prosperity retarded, by the want of water. Previously Stephens had pointed out the costs involved to the colony's prosperity: "internal sanitary arrangements ... are the safeguard of nations". This emphasis on progress would be a recurring theme employed by the government in promoting a plentiful water supply.

Stephens not only appealed to people's logic, their morality, responsibility and civic pride, but also to their emotions. Poems were deliberately used to incite an emotional and fearful response, particularly in regard to cholera. He certainly had a large pool of literature to draw on when referring to cholera, as there was a huge amount of international writing on the topic. Cholera was a frightening disease, both in how rapidly and violently it struck, and in the quickness with which it spread. Its transmission throughout Europe, Asia and Africa was through large ports, and sailors coming from Melbourne were rumoured to have infected the population of Adelaide. While there is no evidence of the transmission of the disease to South Australia, Stephens saw premonitions of tragedy ahead, sternly warning his fellow citizens that they "may even now be liable to the same evils, which have attended crowded communities elsewhere", and that they may have to face with "unavailing sorrow, the serious and fatal consequences".

Perhaps it was frustration from what he perceived as the public's lack of response that contributed to the Register's aggressive tactics. Cholera was a favourite topic for the Press abroad, and it was often accused of magnifying the disease's danger. The European cholera epidemic of 1848 was a powerful and potent force for change, the 1848 Public Health Act in London was passed as the cholera epidemic swept closer to the city. Sanitary reformers in Australia at times expressed a wish that there would be an outbreak to rouse public opinion and force change. As a Melbourne doctor wrote in 1861, an "unsparing pestilence" might be needed to bring about preventative health measures. Throughout the 1850s, after Stephens' death, the Register continued to play on fears of large plagues such as cholera and typhoid, using poems and other emotive material to accentuate their point.

52 ibid., May 20 1848, p.4.
53 ibid., June 4 1845, p.2.
54 ibid.
55 ibid.
But there were inherent contradictions in Stephens’ ideas. He wanted a progressive supply of water but also wanted to protect the environment. Towards the end of his campaign he began to think more about other ways that society controlled and changed the river, to its detriment. He expressed concern about interference with the river and its natural flow and showed awareness of the fragility of Australian streams and the need to preserve them in their natural state. At the same time that Adelaide was moving its water supply further upstream, the American George Marsh was compiling his thesis against man’s subversion of the balance of nature. He wished to show how people had changed the earth, to suggest means of conservation and reform, and to show just how powerful man can be. *Man and Nature* included a large section on the changes to rivers and streams. Marsh argued against the damming of streams, pointed out the damage to the environment by pollution and criticised aqueducts, reservoirs and channels because of their geographical and climatic effects.\(^{57}\) For Marsh, the aqueducts were not an example of progress to be followed, but a procedure that was injurious to the adjacent soil and reduced land to barrenness.\(^{58}\) Stephens also argued against the application of the then current methods of science to reduce the flow of the Torrens, protesting against turning the “comparatively wholesome rivulet into a pond of still water”. He had the following to add to his argument:

> We rejoice indeed that the Park Lands laid out along the river secure us against a close and filthy neighbourhood growing up along its course, but for all that we shall not the less vigilantly watch of and oppose any attempt to retard its current, or to defile its water — for both these requisites, of cleanliness and motion we conceive to be essential to the salubrity of a stream in an Australian climate.\(^{59}\)

John Stephens did not get to see an Act passed in Parliament for the supply of clean water. He died in November 1850, aged 44 years. Stephens liked to think of himself as the champion of that section of the wage earning classes who aspired to respectability and independence and after his death the *Register* ceased to champion the cause of the aspiring lower classes. Articles still appeared on water, but they now tended to advocate more general concerns. While Blacket later recalled him as being remembered mainly for the causes of the abolition of State aid to religion and the struggle for responsible government,\(^{60}\) one of his major campaigns was his effort to awaken the public and the government to the abuses and danger of their water supply. Stephens drew attention to the importance of a clean river in the centre

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\(^{58}\) *ibid.*, p.305.  
\(^{59}\) *Register*, April 2 1850, p.2
of Adelaide: rather than leaving the situation until it was too late, he urged the government to take up measures to clean up the river at once. His ideas continue to be relevant in the twentieth century where progress often continues its domination over the protection of river systems.

FISHER’S CAMPAIGN

In 1849 others became involved directly in the campaign for a clean and abundant water supply. However, little concern was shown for the river’s health. J.H. Fisher aimed to gather medical opinion and support behind a move to tackle the problem with practical and extensive measures, the Public Health Act of London again was cited as a precedent. Fisher had come to South Australia as the original Resident Commissioner and after serving for two years was granted an immense estate. He liked to be called a “genuine representative of the real, old English gentleman” and to preside over important meetings. In 1849 he organised a circular on the question of Sanitary Reform, sending this to fifteen of the doctors in the colony. Six questions were listed on the topic of the sanitary state of the city which included whether the absence of surface cleaning, underground drainage and a regular supply of water had any influence on the general health of the public. The means of achieving a reliable water supply had become an important and much discussed issue, with one public spirited person proposing in 1850 to offer a reward for the best essay on the topic.

The danger of epidemics was to be picked up by those doctors who continued the campaign for clean water in 1849. The general consensus at their meeting held in 1849 was that the sanitary state of Adelaide required immediate attention as they were “literally living on a dunghill of thirteen years’ standing.” One doctor saw the town as being like a fixed camp, with epidemics being common in such places. Doctors were particularly concerned about disease during the summer months, given Adelaide’s hot climate, because piles of rubbish decomposed and evaporated during this time and they believed the stagnant water gave rise to miasmata. The increase in population and its attendant problems were referred to and the claim was made that, “above all, a pure supply of water was urgently needed in the present state of Adelaide.” A paternalistic note was sounded when Fisher observed that more of the wealthy class should have been present, to take action on behalf of the working classes. He planned the introduction of the topic into the Legislative Council, beginning with an inquiry.

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60 J. Blacket, op. cit., p.452.
62 Register, May 7 1850, p.2.
63 ibid., February 10 1849, p.3.
64 ibid.
into the sanitary state of the city. It was also passed that a health officer be appointed to check for diseases on ships reaching the colony. A resolution urged the government to re-establish the City Council and to give it powers over public health. Participants resolved that it might be better to attack the issue through both fronts.

There was an attempt by Parliament to allocate funds for waterworks at this time but the financial ability to pay for them was a crucial consideration that was not met. By July 1850, just fourteen years after settlement, Parliament moved that a loan of 30,000 pounds be granted to the City Commissioners for a supply of pure water to the city and an efficient system of drainage. However, the proposal was eventually defeated. Hammerton gives an account of the lead up to the Water and Sewerage Act in her book Water South Australia. She explains that the 1850 motion was organised by Captain Freeling, Colonial Engineer and Chairman of the City Commission. However, among other things, he had no experience of dam and pipe engineering and this contributed to the proposal’s rejection. The position of Colonial Engineer was abolished and the Government advertised for tenders to propose plans for a water-supply scheme. It was also suggested in the Register that the lack of available labour due to the goldrushes thwarted the plans at this time.

The Register made the link between the available money and the need for a healthy water supply and system of drainage very clearly in 1854. They emphasised the importance of both a pure supply of water and adequate drainage and the need to forgo any reluctance due to the high costs of labour, especially considering the prosperity that gold had showered upon the economy. An editorial asked: “whether money is to be set against human life – whether an undrained city and an impure supply of drinking water are to create a devastating pestilence – or a treasury overloaded with wealth is to disgorge a portion of its funds.” Classic economic tradition holds that a government’s main aim is to provide goods that cannot be provided adequately through the market mechanism. This was certainly the case with water supply. The limitations of the Torrens River’s water supply and the severe situation regarding water that the community found themselves in accelerated the need for government intervention.

Supplying abundant water to the citizens of Adelaide was coming to be seen as the government’s moral responsibility. In 1854 Fisher, now Mayor of Adelaide, initiated another Bill and the Register put its support behind the move. However, they would have to wait, as

65 ibid.
66 ibid.
68 Register, February 1 1854, p.4.
69 ibid.
this Bill was withdrawn when the government promised to attend to the question in the following year. The new Governor, fresh from England, Sir Richard MacDonnell, accelerated the discussion of water supply and drainage in his opening speech to the Legislative Council in 1855. Fisher and MacDonnell were supportive of each other.\textsuperscript{71} MacDonnell also tended to listen to the advice of large landholders, a point in Fisher’s favour. A man determined to make improvements, it was emphasised during the election campaign that he wished to show the colonists some of the issues that confronted them. Goldrushes had brought the funds needed to effect change. In MacDonnell’s speech to Parliament, he argued that the risk to health, and also to property because of the danger of fire, rendered such an undertaking almost a moral obligation imposed upon the Legislature.\textsuperscript{72}

Stephens had not seen the danger from fire as a significant issue. However, many of the colonists perceived it as a major problem as they would demonstrate in their petition in 1856. By this time the means of fighting fires were still deficient, but the potential for them great. In the early decades of Adelaide many of the houses were made of wood, with thatched roofs and cooking done by open fire. Candles and kerosene lamps were used for lighting. Certainly, many houses became sturdier and of more resilient materials as the city grew, but fire hazards were still high and thatching still used.\textsuperscript{73} The few immigrants with money had quite substantial dwellings, while the large majority had to be content with inferior materials, including many flammable materials.\textsuperscript{74} Such houses not only were a hazard to the owners, but to their neighbours.

Until the 1860s water carriers were required to have their carts standing by at nights with barrels filled with water. Upon hearing a fire bell water carriers would harness their horse and the water carts would go racing down the streets.\textsuperscript{75} A fire engine, with men running to lead the horses, would arrive and the water carriers kept it topped up with water.\textsuperscript{76} By 1856 four small insurance companies operating at a loss continued to maintain two fire brigades and the government also had one fire engine housed at the Mounted Police Barracks. However, even though a fire engine may have arrived at the scene, the supply of water would often be too

\textsuperscript{71} Fisher had come out in favour of MacDonnell’s constitution during the 1856 election, and while Fisher failed to win the seat of West Adelaide, he got in to the new Council by MacDonnell’s nomination.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{SAPP} 1855-6, p.7.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{South Australian Government Gazette}, June 18 1840.
\textsuperscript{76} B. Paxton, \textit{“Take care of your fire and candle…” A history of Unley Fire Services and Fire Station}, Adelaide, 1989, p.3.
small to do anything effective. The danger to property interests thus became an added tool in the campaign and certainly would have helped to get the bill passed.

THE WATER AND SEWERAGE ACT

On the eve of the granting of Responsible Government for South Australia the Water and Sewerage Act was passed. 19 June 1856 was the day of its passage, a time before full elections of Members of Parliament were held, with the Governor passing a large number of Acts during this period. The Act provided for water “on the principle of constant supply at high service” and for the drainage of the city by a sewerage system. A system of surface drainage was initially favoured, which was to be collected and deodorised in the parklands. Governor MacDonnell had enough nominated and elected Members of the Legislative Council to push the Bill through in just over two weeks. On 24 June 1856 Responsible Government was proclaimed by MacDonnell. A piped water supply was achieved relatively early in Adelaide, the project being initiated only twenty years after the settlement of the city.

The Water and Sewerage Act of 1856 approved measures for building a dam further up the river at Torrens Park and installing piped water to the residents of Adelaide. The possibilities of using Brownhill Creek had been investigated but rejected as insufficient and the upper region of the Torrens chosen. The Report of the Select Committee into Water Supply and Drainage of the City of Adelaide had surveyed various options. Some of these were low-cost proposals, such as the erection of reservoirs at convenient locations in the city from which the water-carts would then continue their distribution, and Wyatt’s similar scheme based on the construction of a well. However, government control won out over privatisation.

The proposal accepted was the one put forward by Hamilton, a Civil Engineer employed by the government, and supported by engineers with experience in rail construction. Hamilton’s project involved the construction of a reservoir capable of holding 60 million gallons of water, which would pipe water to the street mains. It had a proposed completion time of 18-20 months. By far the more expensive project, the large sum of 280,000 pounds was approved to be raised for waterworks and sewerage, but the completed waterworks would end up

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77 ibid., p.5.
79 SAPP, “Act No. 28 1855-6”, 1853-6, Clause Number 6.
80 W. Hammerton, op. cit., p.6.
81 SAPP, “Report of the Select Committee into Water Supply and Drainage of the City of Adelaide”, 1856.
82 ibid.
83 SAPP Act No. 28 1855-6.
costing even more than this. The reservoir promised to lessen the problems caused by flooding through the use of the river weir and sluices. Concern over the rapid growth and decay of vegetable matter, and the fouling of water through exposure would be rectified by a very deep reservoir and by the continued agitation from the influx and efflux of water. Water was to be filtered before it entered the reservoir and sewage carried away from Adelaide before being deodorised.\(^{84}\) While not all of these plans would be immediately implemented, the grand nature of them was seen as symbolic of the city’s progress and prosperity.

In South Australia no one water company had achieved a stronghold on the industry. The water carriers were small private operators and it was simple for the government to secure control. The question of payment was raised and some politicians thought that the public expected a free service, or at least not to pay for the cost of the waterworks. MacDonell concluded that the cost of such a public undertaking should be divided between those who constructed them and those who benefited from it. He also expected a large amount of funds for it to be raised on the security of the water-works.\(^{85}\)

Once the government had decided on its course of action, the case was closed. Scientific experts were called in to give their opinions on the quality of the Torrens’ water but the government chose to ignore unfavourable results. Professor J. Smith from the University of Sydney tested two samples in 1857, his conclusion being that the water had a large proportion of lime and magnesiuim: Adelaide should look for a different supply. He suggested individuals rely mainly on rainwater tanks, using the river water only as a last resort.\(^{86}\) Rejecting this advice, the government instead chose to rely upon the tests conducted by scientists in Adelaide, Davey and Parkinson, who came up with the preferable results. Worthy of recognition is one citizen, ahead of his time, who wrote to the Register complaining of the analysis by Davey and Parkinson because it was taken from Gumeracha, not from Paradise where the waterworks were being constructed. He argued that there was no mention of the organic matter in the water and that at present there was a large amount of saline matter showing on steam engines in Adelaide due to the condition of the Torrens’ water. Interestingly, he suggested that as a railway was being constructed along the Murray, it would thus be cheaper in the long term to have a supply from there by means of pipes.\(^{87}\)

The reservoir stood a much greater chance of providing plentiful clean water for the growing number of residents of the city than the water from the central area of the Torrens, and thus

\(^{84}\) *SAPP*, “Report of the Select Committee into Water Supply and Drainage of the City of Adelaide”, 1856, p.4.
\(^{85}\) *SAPP*, 1855-6, pp.6-7.
\(^{86}\) *Register*, May 12 1857, p.3.
the reliance on reservoirs and piped water began. The Water and Sewerage Act imposed penalties for people bathing in the reservoir, for washing animals, throwing dirt or rubbish into it, or allowing any drainage to flow into it.88 The legislation had a much greater chance of being successful against polluters as the reservoir was located away from the city and the accumulation of population and because water supply was its sole reason for existence. However, legislators did not take into account the water that went in the reservoir from further up. Thus despite the reservoir being an official structure for water collection, the Thorndon Park Reservoir also had some pollution problems. The creeks feeding the Torrens were heavily polluted from the farmers upstream. Manure, sewage from open drains on the farms and the waste from chicken and pig farms and offal from albeit smaller slaughtering operations ran into the water.89 After piped water was introduced people were still warned that they would need to boil or filter their drinking water.

There were a variety of justifications given for the passage of this Act. The issue of public health, specifically the dangers of cholera, were cited as a reason. Later, when the slaughtering of cattle was banned in the city, politicians again warned of the “epidemics raging elsewhere, and of cholera committing its ravages and it might find its way here.”90 Rivalry with other cities in Australia was another factor. Melbourne had installed their reservoir before South Australia. The Register reported the recent completion of the Yan Yean Reservoir and opening of the Melbourne Waterworks, describing the “tantalising news that the gutters of that city are kept constantly running”, and announced “the probabilities of our being able ere long to rival our Victorian neighbours.”91

The broad community support for the Water and Sewerage Act was demonstrated when members of the public endorsed MacDonnell’s initiative with a petition signed by 339 people in January 1856. The petition gave several main reasons why there needed to be a regulated supply of water for Adelaide. Firstly, the present supply was totally inadequate to meet the needs of the inhabitants. This was argued to affect the “health and comfort of all classes of the community”.92 Related to this was the need to establish public baths, to irrigate the streets and to provide fire protection. The petitioners pointed out that there were many buildings in Adelaide that were fire hazards, and made reference to “buildings of an unsubstantial and

87 ibid., June 4 1857, p.3.
89 J. Warburton (ed.), Five Creeks of the River Torrens: an environmental and historical study, Civic Trust of South Australia, Adelaide, 1977, p.73
90 SAPD, May 20 1862, p.86.
91 Register, January 19 1858, p.2.
ignitable character allowed in the neighbourhood of other buildings."\(^9\) They claimed that the frequency of fires in Adelaide also increased Insurance Companies' premiums. It was asked that the government pass measures establishing waterworks in Adelaide and that there be efficient control over the erection of buildings in the city so as to lessen fire hazards.\(^4\)

The wording of the Water and Sewerage Act reflected the ambitions and desires of middle class society for abundant water. For example, clause 6 of the Act stated that: "The water supply shall be on the principle of constant supply at high service."\(^5\) Clause 25 stated that the water from the pipes would be "pure and wholesome", that citizens had a right to the water, that they "shall be entitled to demand a supply" and that such a supply "shall be constantly laid on".\(^6\) It was also emphasised that a supply of water was to be kept for cleaning streets and drains and for other public purposes. Water would also be apportioned for public baths and wash houses. By 1857 South Australia had attained self government and an Adelaide Council. The powers of the government had grown and its people had resolved that such an important resource as water should be under government control.

While the populace presented practical reasons for the Water and Sewerage Act the government also made reference to the ideas behind the initiative and how it would reflect upon them. It was felt that sanitary provisions were considered important for a nation's strength and this was recognised abroad, in Europe and America. Extension of the waterworks to cities in America was anticipated to produce a rapid increase in the population. In 1850, Boston expected its waterworks to quickly add 20,000 people to its population. In London in the late 1850s a nation's physical strength was argued to be directly proportionate to its national prosperity.\(^7\) The idea was summed up in the catchcry: "public health is public wealth".\(^8\) Similarly, in Adelaide, letters to the editor had suggested that the move would bless the government with "a race of healthy and robust people."\(^9\) The Attorney-General supported this idea, adding his weight to the passage of the Act in 1856, and amplifying its consequences: "the healthy condition of the whole of the colony was involved in the sanitary state of the city of Adelaide. In the event of any fever or malady becoming an epidemic in Adelaide it was impossible to suppose that the effluvia caused by 20,000 to 30,000 people could not affect the population of the entire country."\(^10\)

\(^9\) ibid.
\(^4\) ibid.
\(^5\) SAPP, "Waterworks Act No. 28" 1855-56.
\(^6\) ibid.
\(^9\) Register, 21 January 1850, p.3.
\(^10\) ibid., 12 February 1856.
The Waterworks measures that were approved were based on a belief in the power of technology. Rosenberg has mentioned "the parallel and inter-related pattern of economic, technological, scientific, and institutional growth" and the importance of this in the erection of improved sanitary measures.101 All these elements had developed to such a standard in South Australia that Waterworks were now possible. The Governor compared waterworks with that other public undertaking considered so important to the growth of industry and of prosperity: the railways.102 The Adelaide Government having built up its infrastructure and having acquired the technological prowess to institute a railways project now embarked on its next endeavour.

Of importance to the transformation that occurred in water supply, and to people's ideas, is the period in which Australian cities developed. Australian cities grew up in the nineteenth century, where the technological, social and ideological revolution had consolidated the nation state with its centralised authority.103 This would be crucial in determining who would ultimately control Adelaide's water supply. It has been recognised that the disposal of sewerage and provision of water were two of the most pressing concerns facing Australian cities after the 1850s.104 Developments in water supply in the nineteenth century are connected closely with the idea of the progress of one's society. Emerging at this time was the move towards a more technologically advanced society. Moreover, the public health movement had stimulated a search for technologies to deal with the waste problem and the demands for clean water. The two movements interlocked, and development and water have been associated in Australian policy since the nineteenth century. Indeed, they have been seen as "virtually synonymous", a relationship that continued until the late 1960s.105

This was a time during which nineteenth century attitudes towards water and its uses were formed, attitudes that would continue to be have influence long after the turn of the century. As Powell has outlined, the historical record in the settlement of Australia demonstrates the importance of human values in the development of water supply. Of importance is the "popular appraisals of water" and the pressure applied both by the community and prominent individuals.106 He summarises that the understanding of the "nature of water" in Australia is

101 Rosenberg, op. cit., p.455.
102 SAPP, "Governor's Speech to the Legislative Council", 1855-6, p.6.
103 J. Daly, "Urban Development" in P.N. Troy (ed.), Urban Redevelopment in Australia, Australian National University, Canberra, 1967, p.23.
106 ibid.
intimately connected with the understanding of human nature. His insights are particularly important in the study of the water supply from the Torrens River. Both changing community attitudes and the pressure from individuals were crucial in transforming government policy.

“A NURSERY OF DEATH”

What were the consequences of the Water and Sewerage Act for the river? The creation of a reservoir upstream and a piped system of water resulted in the central area of the Torrens now being divorced from its primary role as a water supply. This meant a corresponding change in people’s activities and ideas in connection with the river. Take, for example, the ideas presented in a letter to the Register in 1860. The writer, “Blue Shirt”, was a drover and a frequent correspondent to the Register, often advocating the rights of the working class. As he eagerly awaited the new water supply he observed that there would be a shift from travelling to the river upon entering Adelaide, to heading straight for the fountains in the city. The Torrens would no longer be such a geographical focus. “Blue Shirt” extolled the delights of abundant water in words as overflowing as the vision he depicted: “How delightful it would be for poor fellows like myself after a long journey with their teams, to find right in the middle of the cross roads of Hindley, Rundle and King William streets, fountains of cool water sparkling in the sunlight, while at the top of each erection there was a lighted lamp at night to guide the thirsty wanderer to the spot where he might drink freely; and, oh - delight most rare with those who drink - nothing to pay!” Not only would water be available without going down to the river, it would be available free to “poor fellows” like himself. In a later letter he claimed that: “Water, like light and air, is the common gift of God to man, and cannot be made a property of.” Water was being acknowledged as one of the “primal necessity of life”, echoing Stephens’ belief that water, being a common property and blessing, ought to be available to all “untaxed, unlimited and unsold”.

Many people, including the Attorney-General, had argued that an abundant supply of water to Adelaide without a proper system of drainage would render it one of the most unhealthy places in the colonies. This advice was ignored. The situation was exacerbated by the rapid growth of the population in Adelaide, which doubled between 1861 and 1881 from 18,303 to 38,479. Development of the colony in the second half of the nineteenth century also meant

[107] ibid., p.21.
[108] Register, January 24 1860, p.3.
[111] ibid., February 12 1856.
that there was an increase in industrial activities along the river. Progress continued to have a very negative impact upon the river. It has been postulated in other cases that while a city’s plentiful water supply advertised a city’s economic development, sewerage disposal did not have the same economic return.

With sewage continuing to be poured into the Torrens after the creation of the Thorndon Park Reservoir, the lessened amount of water in the city area made the pollution situation even worse. By the mid 1860s the system of sewage removal consisted of earthenware pipes just below the ground, which ran to absorption grounds near the river. Even the temporary creation of an ornamental dam in the Torrens in 1865, did nothing to speed the city authorities into action. Sewage also affected the creeks around Adelaide which fed from the Torrens. In the Botanic Gardens artificial lakes had been created which used water from the Torrens, but drainage from East Terrace fed into these, rendering the area not only offensive but also dangerous. The water here was covered with a thick scum from the refuse of tanneries, soap boiling establishments, public houses and backyards and was said to kill fish and birds who drank from it.

Throughout the 1870s effluence continued to be dumped into the Torrens. Right next to a sewer into the river, the Corporation had set up a rubbish heap, into which any quantity of old rags, bones and various classes of dead animals were thrown. It was a dangerous and smelly journey to pass this way between North and South Adelaide, and was said to “remind one of Rimmel”.

In 1871 the city sewage eventually flowed into the Torrens at the end of Morphett Rd and also from King William Street. On one side of the Frome Bridge a sewer drained into the Torrens and the entire sewage of some large businesses in King William Street also made its way directly into the river. Stevenson has calculated that in the early 1870s only two thirds of the 7,000 gallons per hour draining from the city onto the absorption plot in the parklands was soaked up by the soil, some evaporated but most made its way into the Torrens, either by runoff, or by sub-surface seepage. Pollution from industry also continued to grow. For example, the pollution from a soap and candle factory, allowed to flow through an open drain into the Park Lands, was singled out and the ducts on the East Park Lands also mentioned, the stench being so great that people used the road rather than crossing

113 ibid., p.134
115 J. Warburton (ed.), op. cit., p.75.
116 Register, June 28 1871, p.6.
117 ibid., April 7 1865.
the Park Lands. The streams of pollution, including sewage, would pour into the street gutters and fester in the sun until rainfall arrived sweeping it all into the river.\footnote{119 J. Warburton (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p.76}

The area around the river was an important thoroughfare for the citizens of Adelaide. Near the Victoria Bridge the ground on the plantation on the left side of the road was thickly strewn with rubbish. On the parklands near the rear of the Gaol a huge dirt heap composed of waste paper and other light material accumulated and was considered: “objectionable, offensive both to eye and smell.”\footnote{120 Ibid., November 30 1874, p.5.} By 1875 the rubbish had increased, with plantations in the parklands between the Victoria Bridge and Montefiore Hill being disfigured by rubbish blown there from the depot behind the Gaol.\footnote{121 C.R. Twidale (et.al.), \textit{Ideas and Endeavours}, Royal Society of South Australia, Adelaide, 1986, p.218.}

Agitation regarding water supply had always had a seasonal quality and after the Thomdon Park Reservoir it continued to occur, particularly in the summer months. In 1866 the Adelaide Philosophical Society took an active role in formulating a memorial to the City Council to initiate a modern system of sanitation.\footnote{122 \textit{Register}, November 17 1873, p.5.} By the early 1870s some complaints were quite sophisticated. It was reasoned that South Australia’s civil engineers were educated in a different country and climate. Towns in the British Isles were almost always near a deep or rapid-flowing stream or river. When filth became intolerable the answer was to wash it into the river or send it off. However, the Torrens was not capable of doing this.\footnote{123 \textit{Ibid.}, January 17, 1872, p.6.} While piped drinking water was available to many by this time, the situation still posed a danger to health, not to mention being highly offensive. A crisis point was reached in January 1871 when a deputation petitioned the Mayor, demanding action about the rubbish and decomposing matter in the city and suburbs and the problems with drainage of Hindley, Kent Street, East Terrace and Rundle Street and Morphett Road.\footnote{124 \textit{Ibid.}, March 22 1872, p.5.} One citizen appropriately labelled the Torrens a “nursery of death”,\footnote{125 \textit{Ibid.} \textit{ibid.}, March 26 1872, p.6.} pointing to the Morphett St Bridge region and lower down as a particular problem: “we are nursing the germs of desolation and death, and they may burst into a veritable crop some fine day”.\footnote{126 \textit{Ibid.} \textit{ibid.}, March 26 1872, p.6.}

Images of sickness continued to be used in relation to the river. A letter in 1872 entitled “The Drainage Question” drew attention to the mouth of a sewer on the Frome Bridge “which vomits forth all manner of solid and liquid abomination.”\footnote{127 \textit{Register}, March 26 1872, p.6.} On the other side of the bridge
the Corporation had proclaimed a rubbish heap into which old rags, bones and dead animals were thrown. These were both considered to be breeding grounds of disease and the Corporation’s role in promoting this were specifically pointed to: they were “kept active under the fostering care of our civic rulers”. The Register also continued to argue strongly for an efficient and healthy system of deep drainage, suggesting that sewage be transformed into manure and thus used productively, rather than “wasting it by pouring it into the Torrens, to concentrate, perhaps, the evil which its removal is intended to remedy.” The river was referred to as “little better than a cesspool.”

Due to public outcry, A “City Drainage Committee” was initiated in March 1872, which found that especially during the summer months, the Torrens was incapable of discharging the sewage, and recommended a system of drainage. The Council refused to take responsibility, claiming it was the government’s fault:

That as the Government buildings and properties within the city cover a large area and a large quantity of sewage at present, it is evident that the country should bear some portion of the cost of the main sewer.

Throughout the 1870s a number of legislative matters impacted upon the Torrens. However, little was done until 1878 even though mortality rates continued to be high. The Public Health Act of 1873 established a Central Board of Health with local boards for all district councils and towns. Its subsequent report in 1875 found that there was an increase in death which was preventible. Still nothing was done. In 1876 a Sanitation Commission was formed and the first definite steps towards effective sewage disposal were taken in 1878 when Parliament reached a consensus about the sewerage issue. The 1879 Sewers Act included a report into sewerage requested by the City Council which included detailed plans for a system. It excluded surface drainage and allowed for a sewage farm near Hindmarsh and discharge of the city’s main sewer into the sea.

In 1880 Adelaide had a mortality rate far above the rest of the colony and was in excess of cities such as London. In some years, it was 60 to 80 per cent higher than the rest of South

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128 ibid., March 26 1872, p.6.
129 ibid., February 3 1871, p.5.
130 ibid., March 25 1872, p.5.
131 ibid.
132 ibid., March 28 1872, p.10.
133 ibid., February 27 1875, p.11.
134 T. Stevenson, op. cit., p.130.
Australia. An 1881 report from the West Torrens Local Board of Health shows that sewage matter continued to flow into the river at this stage. At the easterly side of the Railway Bridge a stream issued from the sewage drain into the Torrens. While this situation was eventually to be fixed, and the sewage diverted to the main sewer leading to the sewerage farm, change occurred slowly. Meanwhile, cattle grazing along the area prior to being slaughtered drank from the heavily polluted river and people also continued to bathe in the rank water. The corporation slaughterhouse, for so long an item of complaint was not even connected to a sewer until 1884. It was not until 1886 that the system was working well. Until the late 1880s the Torrens remained a permanent disposal area for the city's effluent and an eyesore in the middle of the city.

CONCLUSION

A wide range of ideas existed about water supply and rivers during the period under study. Stephens' campaign places the push for a healthy urban river very early in the history of Adelaide. While Stephens' campaign was significant it was not until politicians and those with greater power became involved that the situation changed. William Kovarik, co-author of Mass Media and Environmental Conflict has argued that journalists have often allied themselves with public rights, rather than private rights. While Kovarik concentrates on American history, the proposition remains true in the case of Stephens. For Stephens, like other journalists, the chief need was "to arouse public opinion". Stephens was dedicated to promoting educated awareness of the environmental crisis and many of the issues presented by him showed an understanding of the changes occurring overseas and of the underlying factors behind the democratisation and centralisation of water supply. Democratic ideas of equality in society in regard to water supply were explored by Stephens, were widespread in society and were reflected in the Water and Sewerage Act.

Like many others, Stephens' focus on clean water was mainly for public health reasons and this nineteenth century bias has meant the continuation of unequal priorities in river protection by governing powers. Regarding water for public domestic use, governments have tended to concentrate on the health of the water used for public supply rather than the overall health of the river system. Stephens' concern for the central area of the river was ignored. Rivers were still seen as an area of exploitation, and a ready answer to the problem of sewage

135 ibid., p.129.
136 Advertiser, January 7 1881, p.7
137 Ibid.
139 B. Kovarik, op. cit., p.3.
disposal. The progress of the city meant that the river water deteriorated even more until the 1880s and it became associated with images of sickness and death. That the government placed little priority on the aesthetic and recreational function of the river at this stage is attested to in the continuation of sewage disposal into the river.

In the central area of the city the Torrens’ function as a water supply was now forfeited. While water for domestic use from the Torrens had been its most crucial resource initially for the settlement, in this period we witness a shift in people’s attitudes. Water from the Torrens soon came to be seen as inadequate. Hopes of a modern system of water supply corresponded with changing perceptions of rivers and water by the people of Adelaide. The idea of progress was applied by those in Adelaide to the Thorndon Park Reservoir that was erected further upstream in the Torrens in 1860. The transformation is about modernisation, it is indicative of the change to a geographically modern society where the populace is not restricted to a particular area. Piped water made living in the suburbs of Adelaide much easier. Growing towns increasingly have to reach beyond their boundaries for resources, and thus it was with their water supply. By the early 1860s it had already begun to be questioned whether the Torrens waterworks would be able to supply the city. Soon Adelaide society would also have to look even further afield for their water supply, with investigation of the irrigation possibilities of the River Murray beginning as early as 1883.

Increased water supply then also helped the town to expand further out. While the settlement had initially been based around the Torrens and used its resources, it was now reaching out beyond the city limits for its water and expanding its geographical boundaries. Initially suburbs in Adelaide developed along the Torrens and, to some extent along transportation routes, with sites along the river of high monetary value. The introduction of piped water would change this situation. Towards the end of the century suburbs tended to develop mainly along transportation routes, particularly the new railway lines, as transportation became the new attraction in real estate development.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE TORRENS LAKE

INTRODUCTION

By the 1860s the Torrens River’s banks were eroding, it was heavily polluted, and many of the trees and shrubs that had lined its banks had been removed. Sewage continued to be deposited into the area and with much of the water reseroired upstream, the water level remained low. While aesthetic concerns about the river began to increase as the community grew, the changes that took place with the construction of the Torrens Lake were also due partly to the devastation that had previously occurred. The prospect of a European style parklands area with a lake found favour with the majority of citizens.

The control and supposed “improvement” of nature is exemplified in the Torrens Lake: it is here that we witness the final re-creation of the Torrens River. The need for the Torrens to become a place of pride rather than disgust was constantly stressed in arguments for a lake, and in the self-congratulation that followed its construction. The Torrens Lake was achieved when Sir Edwin Thomas Smith was Mayor, between 1879-1881. Smith was five times Mayor in the 1880s and was known for his energy and philanthropy. He considered the Torrens Lake one of his personal projects and felt that such beneficent rule by the local government would train the working classes to exercise their franchise properly and would promote their comfort and happiness.1

With the growth of a bureaucracy in Adelaide grew the bureaucratic control of nature. Bureaucracies deploy techniques to rationalize nature, to “render it predictable, to replace its self-sustaining “wild” state with well-managed, industrial, residential and recreational states.”2 Thus, nature becomes a human construction and also becomes merely of instrumental value. In accordance with this bureaucratic type, one places great faith in reason as a guiding force.3 Those in power in Adelaide made many attempts to exert this control, but their lack of administrative skill and financial resources resulted in failure until 1881. However, given the widely accepted success of the 1881 Torrens Lake development, the City Council now considered themselves the creators and owners of the area, not just by their legal right, but by transforming it into something they were proud of.

The grand opening of the Torrens Lake in 1881 marks the final step from the Torrens in the city being used as water source to its transformation into a park region. Following the

3 Ibid.
introduction of piped water the central area of the Torrens was no longer a valuable water source. It was highly probable that the Torrens would eventually be dammed. For most of the Victorian era it was seen as not only desirable but also essential that a city’s river was a substantial body of water; this was a sign of a city’s importance and its prosperity. It was also desirable that the river be controlled and safe. A further advantage of damming the Torrens was that it would hasten the need for deep drainage within the city. It was not acceptable for an ornamental and recreational lake to have the effluence of the city flowing freely into its waters.

But the Lake marked the cleaning up of the river area in more than one aspect. The changes would not only improve the river but also those who ventured to recreate themselves along its banks. Such recreation was consistent with the principles of industry and the idea of moral improvement. Far-reaching social reforms lay behind the creation of the Torrens Lake. By the 1870s there was greater need in Adelaide for places of recreation. The battle for the eight hour day was being waged, and had been won for some, and the Saturday half-holiday had been achieved in 1865. While those intent on outdoor enjoyment could catch a tram to the resort town of Glenelg, and did in their hundreds, there were few facilities for recreation within the city. The Botanic Gardens was one, and the large attendances there attested to the need for further places of resort. The area needed to be civilised.

BEAUTIFYING THE RIVER

The desire for watered areas appears to have been strong for colonists throughout Australia. A hutkeeper in rural Melbourne, typified this longing for lake areas when he wrote of the countryside: “but for the want of water (it) would be most delightful to dwell in...The country abounds in the most beautiful Lakes equal in beauty of any scenery in England, but still most unfortunately they too are of salt water.”4 For those in the colony of South Australia, the driest colony, the longing was even stronger. In the 1870s, partly as a result of increased affluence, and the access to reticulated water, suburban gardens also began to flourish. 5 The water supply would also enable the parklands to be transformed into a European garden. The Torrens was seen as the ultimate site where the potential for greenery, for the cool lawns of England and the refreshing sight of water might be created.

During the period of the lake’s creation it was not untouched nature that was generally desired for the park, but a natural world constructed by the artistic hand of man. The settlers were

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looking for a park, enhanced by a large body of water. The strength of their inherited ideology was strong. A city must have a dignified water area. In Australia settlement was centred on a principal, planned, orderly town which was to be to be a civilising influence. In South Australia settlement focused upon the city of Adelaide and it was significant as a civilising influence as well as an object of pride, especially to those who held a position of power in the colony.

From the onset of white settlement the Torrens’ size was an object of ridicule for some. With many Victorians’ love of grandeur, such a puddle as they saw the Torrens to be, was unacceptable. Just as mountains were preferred noble and majestic, so a river in the city should be a “goodly sheet of water”. Adelaide had “no gently flowing Deva”. The editor of the Register, highlighting many of the points in favour of the Torrens dam, saw the primary advantage being that it was a favourable addition to the city: there were “many advantages which a city derives from a goodly sheet of water in its immediate vicinity”. The laughter elicited by Tolmer’s party in 1836 continued until the construction of the Torrens Lake, which was meant to extinguish it. Hearkening back to early hopes of the Torrens, a writer in 1881 hoped that the new lake would make the river of a “navigable” and “useful” nature.

The use of parks to assist the health of cities’ residents was widely accepted. The creation of public parks had been an important element of reform suggested in the Select Committee on Public Walks in London in 1833 and the parklands in South Australia were assumed to be reserved for both the health and recreation of the community. Changes to the river had been suggested from early in the settlement, calls to improve the physical beauty, with its potential cited as an area for healthy recreation were heard in the mid-1840s. As the city progressed, so the demand for this grew.

The press promoted the Torrens’ region for its potential health-giving qualities and its beauty. The Register in 1845, while on the subject of the Health of Towns, had mentioned that open spaces for “public promenade” were important for the health of the community. There was pride shown in the extent of land set aside by Light and its ability to rival any other city’s parks: “In extent as well as in the beauty of its unimproved accessories, it may be said to vie with any in the known world.” However, while its natural beauty may have been impressive,

7 Register, April 13 1857, p.3.
8 ibid, February 10 1873, p.5.
9 Advertiser, January 18 1881, p.6.
10 Register, June 4 1845, p.2.
this author was eager to suggest means for its improvement, based on the example of parks in “opulent” London. The vision of what it might become was quite detailed. It was variety that was looked for, upon European lines, a park rich in “rare and curious collections” of animals and plants, and one of the vital elements was a parterre and a lake. A water area was seen as integral to the healthy park concept.

A common desire was to recreate an oasis, a green space which would be like a piece of England in the middle of the dry, South Australian landscape. People in Adelaide objected to the aridity of the landscape they found themselves in, particularly in summer. It was pointed out that the parklands set aside by Light, while acceptable enough in winter, made the landscape worse in summer, encircling the city in “a cordon of arid plains.” What was thus needed was a park which would be “shady, cool and healthful.” Coolness was not just refreshing, it was seen as healthy.

It was felt that the first impressions of a visitor to Adelaide during the summer season must be very unfavourable and that they must suppose that the city was built in the centre of a desert. Complaints about the barren nature of the South Australian landscape are summed up in the longings of a poet in 1844:

Oh! This is a barren land I ween,  
Where there is no oak-tree stout,  
Nor the stately elm, with leaves so green,  
Nor the velvet sward about.

“Barren” is certainly a strong word to use, with its connotations of both infertility and monotony. The lack of the rich green found in England was to be a continuing feature in complaints about the landscape around Adelaide.

In 1869 the report of the River Torrens Improvements Company claimed that the North Park Lands would be “converted from their present condition of dreary waste, hot, parched and dusty in summer, cold, wet and shelterless in winter, into a scene of charming life.” The desire was expressed in the 1870s for banks which would “quickly burst into verdure”, and
the longing for a "rich, green sward" as could be found in the parks of London.\textsuperscript{16} While most colonists had come from a tradition of garden lawns they had been frustrated in their attempts to reproduce these in the harsh Adelaide summers. The desire for greenery can be witnessed after the introduction of reticulated water in the extraordinarily strong desire for a home lawn. By the turn of the century, when this was possible, almost every garden had a plot of lawn somewhere, often in the front garden.\textsuperscript{17}

Criticism of the area grew in proportion to the growth of the city. As the Register was to elaborate in the 1850s, the banks of a river should aid in the picturesque effect of a city, most other cities intersected by a stream had already achieved this.\textsuperscript{18} It was acknowledged that neither the potential aesthetic, nor the health-giving qualities of the park were being met. The Mayor and the Civic Corporation were not seen to be paying due attention to the river, and it was claimed that this should have been one of the Mayor’s priorities in improving the city.\textsuperscript{19} In 1857 it was strongly advocated that regulations protecting the area and planting of the banks of the river should be taken up by the Corporation in earnest. The cold neglect of the government was claimed to have perverted the original intent of the reservation in question: “what was arranged with a view to sanitary results has, in some respects, lapsed into a nuisance, offensive to the senses and detrimental to the health of the community”.\textsuperscript{20} The Adelaide Corporation was urged to get rid of all the rubbish from the grounds along the Torrens, and by the introduction of improvements, “realise within the next twenty years the ideas that were conceived some twenty years ago.” \textsuperscript{21} It was a call that was met by the Corporation, albeit not until over twenty years later. In the 1860s the river was seen as a weak point in a city which had been refined during that decade with handsome and ambitious buildings. Having got beyond their “primitive age” they needed to exhibit some respect for “the ornamental”.\textsuperscript{22}

Civic rivalry was strong in the late 1860s to 1870s. One colonist from Victoria writing his “Impressions of Adelaide”, sarcastically drew attention to the “noble Torrens”, claiming that they had more imposing swamps in Victoria. He felt that it was a waste building a fine bridge over it as they were only pretending that there was real water underneath. If some-one wanted to commit suicide it would be impossible to make a “drowned body” of himself unless he went to the Port. Moreover, unlike English rivers, and most cutting of all, there were no

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] \textit{ibid.}, February 10 1873; January 5 1860, p.5.
\item[17] R. Hodgkinson, \textit{op. cit.}, p.239
\item[18] \textit{Register}, February 2 1850, p.4.
\item[19] \textit{ibid.}, December 12 1857, p.2.
\item[20] \textit{ibid.}, April 7 1866.
\item[21] \textit{ibid.}, July 8 1857, p.2.
\item[22] \textit{ibid.}, May 10 1857, p.2.
\end{footnotes}
What Adelaidian could endure such laughter? It was hoped that visitors would “no longer be able to laugh at what we have been accustomed facetiously to call the River Torrens.” In another article, Adelaide was seen to be lagging behind the country’s other major cities: Melbourne had the Yarra and artificial lagoons, Sydney could boast of a “noble harbour” and both Launceston and Hobart Town each had a “charming pleasure stream.” The Yarra was, moreover, deepened and straightened near its Botanic Gardens in the 1870s, adding further fuel to the fire. Further complaints suggested that for at least one small section of the river the citizens of Adelaide could have a body of water of which they were proud and which would allow them to contend with the more naturally endowed water areas of other Australian cities.

While many agreed that trees were needed, gum trees were thought by many to be sombre and unpleasing. Shade was to be a priority and the gum trees were not only seen as unattractive, they were pronounced unsuitable for this purpose being: “not so graceful in outline as many others which would thrive luxuriantly in this climate, and for the purpose of shade they are comparatively useless.” The association of green, shady English trees with the traditional English landscape was an added benefit. An editorial in 1853 suggested that cedar trees would probably grow along the Torrens and would provide a familiar landscape, the sight of English oaks would, “give rise to some pleasurable associations.” Other exotics were also considered and American trees thought to be suitable because of their value for shelter. Willows and other semi-aquatic plants were suggested as enhancing the cool, refreshing qualities of the river and as being perfect for First Creek, thus giving relief to the monotonous view existing there. The shelter in park areas in England was cited as an example of what Adelaide could achieve. In an article on the public uses of water, the restorative effect of shaded and watered areas was upheld as a good that all citizens could benefit from: “It has been an animated sight to see the brick-pent citizens of high and low degree, parents and children, resting themselves under the trees, or scattered in happy groups over the rich, green sward.”

J.E. Brown, the Conservator of Forests, who produced the final plans for the area, was to see the gum trees as “perhaps the worst features” of the parklands area. While it is accepted that

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23 ibid., July 1, 1871, p.6.
24 ibid., February 10 1873, p.5.
25 ibid., February 10 1873, p.5.
26 ibid., July 13 1853, p.2.
27 ibid., December 1 1857, p.2.
28 ibid.
29 ibid., January 5 1860, p.2.
there was some reappraisal of the gum trees in the 1870s-80s, many settlers continued to see them as ugly. An insight into the Victorian mind can also be seen in Worsnop’s *Guide to Adelaide and Its Environs*, published in 1878. When describing the plants in the Botanic Gardens the bamboo was viewed as a “tropical delight”, and the willows were “splendid”. It was the “rich profusion” in the Palm House, however, that he was most captivated with. Just as in the ornamentation of grand buildings and in interior decoration, the Victorians looked for richness and the exotic also in nature. Of the Botanic Park Worsnop claimed: “the works and views are evidently the studied productions of one eminent in the delightful art of landscape gardening.” It was the art of the landscaper which held pride of place over the indigenous environment. It was variety and profusion that the Victorians were looking for. Ironically, they had destroyed much of this variety along the river banks themselves.

Some South Australians hoped to achieve a European sophistication, and the public promenades of the cities of southern Europe were given as an example. Similar climatic conditions to Mediterranean countries were noted as a reason to justify a move towards a more recreation-centred outdoor society. “It is not too much to expect in such a climate as ours some of the innocent gaiety witnessed in the Champs Elysees and other public resorts in the city of Paris...One thing may be taken for granted: the public must and will have amusement.” With the banks properly sloped and cultivated, the Torrens was prophesised to become “the most attractive place of metropolitan resort” within the city. Others compared the possibilities of the area to Hyde Park, and again its multi-faceted potential was recognised. The path along the river would be the “resort of the elite”, lovers would walk along the shady paths, games would be played along its banks, and the river would be crowded with boats, while the lovers of nature would also find a quiet spot of retreat.

Not only did citizens wish to improve the banks, they also felt that the fish-life could do with a little European colour and variety. Fish introduced into the river included several hundred goldfish, a plan hatched by a group of individuals acting entirely on their own initiative. Acclimatisers also envied the steps taken in pisciculture in Victoria, where 2,250 trout ova obtained from Tasmania were hatched in Royal Park. 600 more trout had also been apportioned out to different Victorian streams, with a large share of them deposited in the Yarra. The seriousness of trout fishing can be seen in one citizen’s complaint in 1881 that

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*City Archives*, 1880.
33 *Register*, April 13 1857, p.2.
34 *ibid*.
35 *ibid.*, August 6 1869, p.2
something needed to be done about “illegal straying of fish”. A special “Conservator of trout” was claimed to be necessary to monitor the situation in the Torrens. In September 1881 it was announced that the City Council had previously resolved that 20,000 trout ova should be obtained from Tasmania, in order to stock the Torrens water with fish. The fish were placed in the care of the Acclimatisation Society, who, after hatching 5,000 fish in the Thorndon Park Reservoir transported them to the Torrens Lake.

The climate of the colony was another prominent reason given for the formation of a lake. From early in the colony it had been suggested that the banks of the Torrens would be a “cool promenade” for pleasant exercise. However, the late 1850s saw its cooling qualities taken even further. This era witnessed interest in means of adapting to the South Australian climate, from changing people’s style of clothing to adopting the practice of regular bathing. The excessive heat was a matter of great concern and was blamed with injuring valuable trees, destroying large quantities of fruit and causing sickness and death. In 1879 Sylvanus Magarey would elaborate on the ideas of many when he gave a lecture in Adelaide on infant mortality. His main belief was that the excessive mortality rate was due to the “hot, dry air of our climate”. Such ideas were behind the emergence of the hills area of Adelaide as a healthy retreat for the summer months. The creation of a water area in Adelaide was seen as a means of controlling and tempering the harsh environment. The fear that the dry continent would become even drier, while strong in the 1850s, reached unprecedented levels in the 1860s. It was widely believed that through the planting of trees and the creation of water areas the climate could be controlled to some degree. Those who were in favour of tree planting and the expansion of water areas were also acclimatisers, preferring European trees to the gum. While the Aborigines adapted to their climate, many of the settlers to South Australia instead aimed to adapt their water areas to improve their climate.

While there was some merit in the idea, and there may have been an effect on the microclimate around the lake, those who believed in climate control often went too far in their claims, believing that it would have greater benefits. William Stanley Jevons, a scientist in Sydney was one of the few to refute such claims. Writing in 1856 he was strong in his denunciation:

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36 *ibid.*, September 22 1881, p.7.
37 *ibid.*, September 16 1881, p.5.
38 R. Hodgkinson, *op. cit.*, p.54.
40 T. Bonyhardy, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
Climate, indeed, is a subject upon which the most extravagant and unreasonable statements are made...they even assert that man’s muscular strength and mental ingenuity can affect such changes. The clearing away of trees they say will render a climate dry; extensive reservoirs of water may increase the moistures of the atmosphere. 41

Jevons objected to the idea in Victorian society that all things could be controlled by an exercise of their will and intelligence. It is a point that is pertinent to the creation of the Torrens Lake. People preferred a passive lake to the often dangerous river.

The author of an article written in December 1851 entitled “Adelaide in Summer” was obviously feeling the heat. It was felt that water in a sufficient quantity would not only be ornamental but would “exert a perceptible cooling effect upon the atmosphere”.42 It would increase the salubrity of the city: “These lakes would certainly tend to correct the intense aridity of the atmosphere at least within a short distance from their margins, and they would thus create a cool retreat from the severer heat of the city.”43 The general confusion about the South Australian climate can be seen in the reference in the same article to Adelaide as “an almost tropical city”.44 But the use of the tropical description may refer more to the unfamiliarity felt by the author regarding the climate, the tropics being regarded as something environmentally distinctive from Europe.45

There were a few people who appreciated the gum trees, and as with other aspects of the original river environment, these tended to be colonists who had arrived at the beginning of settlement, and who had seen the landscape in its original state. A letter to the Register signed “Abores Australis” reflected on the plan for the Botanic Park in 1874. This involved the destruction of many of the few remaining large red gums, the “grand old forest giants” that had flourished in the area for centuries.46 He presumed that this was done so that the park would not vary from a “strict geometrical linearity” but argued that they could have been spared if some compromise was sought in the laying of paths which could have curved around the trees in a more natural manner. While he could understand if it was unhealthy trees that were being cut down, these were not, instead “some of the stateliest records of the primeval

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42 Register, December 1 1857, p.2.
43 ibid.
44 ibid.
46 Register, May 9 1874.
forest” were being cut up for fencing and posts and firewood. He considered this to have been the one “natural oasis in the dreary expanse of parklands.”

An early conservationist, he claimed that he could never see such lordly trees overthrown without reflecting on the stupidity of men who cut down what it took God himself centuries to build up. Gum trees were a tenacious breed and with care would continue to flourish in this area. While acknowledging that Doctor Schomburgk possessed a great deal of skill in landscape gardening, he nonetheless considered the destruction of the trees to have been a mistake. While the foreign trees replacing them may be beautiful in time, it would take a century before they would be able to rival the “poor, despised natives of the soil”. The matter, he felt, was of some significance and he hoped to prevent “irreparable injury” to those that remained.

Samuel Tomkinson, a prominent member of the community, had complained about the removal of gums before by the Corporation, such as those in Waterfall Gully. He also drew attention to encroachments on the parklands around the river in 1874 for the Adelaide University. His letter gives some insight into how the area was used at the time by people. Tomkinson described how people had already begun to make their own unofficial areas of recreation and paths along the river which were now being destroyed by the government. The hill looking down from the Exhibition grounds was one of the sites mentioned which had always been free for people to amuse themselves and for children to play on. The beautiful vista from here was about to be closed in and another building added. Not only were their recreational areas being eroded, he felt that an important part of their memories and the history of the area were being destroyed. In 1881 Tomkinson again wrote into the Register about timber felling of “pale young gums” along King William Road and near the oval on the northern banks of the river. An acquaintance of his had managed to obtain an order from the Town Hall to spare a young gum by Avenue Road, only to find it had been felled before he could save it. Tomkinson was scathing about the Corporation, referring to them as the “larrikins of Town Hall”. If it was up to him he would pillory them upon the bridge abutments.

Judging by remarks about Tomkinson in the papers of the time, he was seen to be something of a spoilsport, and ridiculed as a constant complainer for his attempts to bring such issues to

47 ibid.
48 ibid.
49 ibid., November 2 1874, p.5.
50 ibid., August 17 1881, p.6.
public light. The *Register* referred to him at the opening of the Torrens Lake as a “croaker”,” others wrote in to disagree with his assessment of the Waterfall Gully clearings. Very possibly other early conservationists may have also been seen in the same light. The dominant belief favoured the building of industry, the growth of the city and the establishment of European trees and ordered paths.

South Australians were to achieve many of the objectives they longed for in a river. Looking ahead, in the new century, praise would be bestowed on the improved landscape for many of the reasons it had been criticised before the creation of the Torrens Lake: its danger, its lake of greenery and variety, its small size, its inability to adorn the city area, its lack of a cooling effect. In the official guide to Adelaide, written by the Adelaide Corporation in 1906, its merits were highlighted. After describing the “cool, green swards of the Adelaide Oval”, the author turned to the banks of the “placid Torrens Lake”, now transformed into something more acceptable:

In the full light of the morning sun, Adelaide’s only sheet of water is glinting and shimmering, having taken to itself a silvern sheen which serves to emphasise the emerald setting of the reeds and the other vegetation on its banks. ‘Tis but a small lake, but without it there would be something lacking in the beauty of the landscape.52

**RATIONAL RECREATION**

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51 *ibid.*, July 22 1881, p.4.
The Torrens Lake would not only tame the mighty River Torrens, it was to be an area of social improvement, and thus tame the working class. As with the Botanic Gardens, the Torrens Park would be a place for the “working man to take his wife and children instead of spending his Sunday either in drinking at home or at the public house.” The park thus also reinforced family life and activities. Brown’s plans for the area showed elegantly dressed individuals scattered in refined groups across a gently treed landscape. The view of the social improvement of nature was prominent throughout the Victorian Age, and was considered a serious matter by politicians and administrators.

Before South Australia was colonised the social improvement of nature had been investigated by the Select Committee on Public Walks in London (1833). They had gone so far as to claim that civilised walks improved people’s dress standards: “the advantages which the Public Walks (properly regulated and open to the middle and humbler classes) give to the improvement in the cleanliness, neatness and personal appearance of those who frequent them.” This was obviously not bushwalking that was being done, but promenading, being on show. The aim was to produce a stable and industrious workforce. The Select Committee had in particular stressed the “peculiar natural advantages” of walks along the Thames. They had suggested that public bathing places be reserved along rivers or in the neighbourhoods of large towns. The policies of the Select Committee marked a huge shift in attitude and policy towards parks, seeing them not just as urban adornments but as devices for social betterment. Parks and river areas were not just for the amusement of the rich but places for the recreation of the labourer.

This philosophy continued in South Australia. In an article in favour of a Torrens Lake written in the late 1850s it was argued that amusement was beneficial and that people would work and live more productively. Thus, those who wished to “promote national morals” and to stimulate industry should provide amusement that is “consistent at once with the claims of business and with the moral and religious duties of life.”

At the opening of the South Australian Institute in 1857, important speeches were made about the need for recreation that exerted an elevating influence on the public mind. Nature was seen as a rejuvenating natural force, with relaxation needed for every-one’s well-being. Romanticism was an inspiration; there was talk of the working classes imbibing

53 Register, February 13 1873, p.5.
56 ibid.
Wordsworth's influence upon the banks of the Torrens. An article in favour of the park saw the need for a retreat where Romantics could find harmony with nature: "nor do we indeed have any "sylvan Wye," on the banks of which nature lovers such as Wordsworth can recline and chew the sweet cud of poesy". Wordsworth's poetry was published in the Register to uphold and strengthen such values. Nature was upheld as a rejuvenating and moral force:

\[ \text{The world is too much with us; late and soon} \\
\text{Getting and spending we lay waste our powers;} \\
\text{Little do we know in Nature that is ours;} \\
\text{We have given our hearts away - a sordid boon!} \]

The more refining aspects of life were being sought. While it was acknowledged that people in a developing city such as Adelaide had far less time to spare than those in more established communities, there was an increasing need for recreation. It was time to move away from just building the colony, to taking some interest in peoples’ spiritual welfare and their moral and physical health. The editor of the Register was quick to point out as early as 1857 the lack of recreational areas when arguing for the improvement of the Torrens' banks and the damming of the river: "We have no public promenades or gardens; no public museums or galleries; no sheet of water upon which we could launch a boat; no shady grove in which to take a sheltered stroll."

The lack of outdoor activities was becoming obvious. An article in 1861 calling for more recreational activities for the young colony claimed they were "likely to expire of ennui". Complaints were continuously made that the people had no means of amusing themselves and all sorts of suggestions were put forward, such as swimming and shooting matches. On the other hand, it was argued that the habits of South Australians were less sophisticated, an argument that favoured the more relaxed appreciation of nature. As this self-appointed spokesperson for the public put it, they did not feel the "feverish longing for artificial excitement that prevails in overcrowded cities." The increase in public holidays were also seen as a further need for places of resort, these were seen to be "all sacredly devoted to nature and healthful recreation". In 1873 it was argued that the river area would also provide a refuge for lovers of nature; pleasant walks could be laid out to make it one of the few shady

\[ \text{Register, April 13 1857, p.2.} \\
\text{ibid., February 10 1873, p.5.} \\
\text{ibid., April 2 1861, p.2.} \\
\text{ibid., April 13 1857, p.3.} \\
\text{ibid., January 5 1861, p.3.} \\
\text{ibid.} \\
\text{ibid., April 2 1861 p.2.} \]
places within the city; aquatic pastimes and fishing would give citizens of the city a much needed source of recreation. While aquatic pleasures were available at the Port and at Glenelg, it was argued that these could not compete with the pleasures of a fine river stream.64

There was more than one recreational aim behind the damming of the lake. While the working classes would be improved, the upper classes would also be catered for. The Torrens Lake was established at the height of the rowing mania in Australia. In 1876 Ned Trickett had won the World Championship on the Thames and became the first Australian to win a world championship in any sport. This was the beginning of the Australian world domination of the sport.65 Tens of thousands of people would treat a title match on the Parramatta or Nepean Rivers as an opportunity for a holiday. The scullers were the first Australian sporting heroes and the lead up to the opening of the lake widely publicised by the South Australian rowing competition. An Adelaide rowing club had already been established in 1867 when the first dam was created, but their initial activities were shortlived. While the Torrens was not seen as professionally as good as the Port for rowing it was hoped that large numbers of the population would attend regattas to be held at the Torrens and its value as an accessible watercourse was appreciated. The fees for rowing, being a more upper class sport, were prohibitive for many, as were the fees for a licence for fishing, which were required to be paid for a season, rather than a session, thus discriminating against the occasional fisher.

Of some significance in the recreational movement is the debate that raged in the 1870s as to what pastimes should be allowed on Sundays. The enjoyment of nature was promoted as a spiritual activity, while pastimes such as boating were for pure enjoyment. It was a situation that was to impinge on the activities on the Torrens and one which divided sections of the community. Some people had experience of the parks in London, such as Victoria Park, and one wrote in to report his views on appropriate Sunday activities. There was “no excuse for riotous pleasuring on Sundays,”66 the quiet enjoyment of nature being sufficient. It was also debated as to whether boating should be allowed on the Torrens on Sundays.67

Some had been enjoying activities along the Torrens of a less refined manner. It was hoped that the arrival of a civilised area would also civilise the activities occurring. The river had frequently been an area for drinking from the beginning of settlement. A handful of Aborigines still continued to camp near the Morphett Street bridge, and a resident of Morphett

64 ibid., February 10 1873, p.5.
65 W. Vamplew (et. al.), The Oxford Companion to Australian Sports, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.292
66 Register, February 8 1873, p.6.
67 ibid.
Street complained of the "continual stream composed of blacks, prostitutes, loafers and larrikins" in this area. There had also been a depot at the site of the Native Location, which was used for housing Irish orphans shipped over as domestic servants. There were complaints about the activities here, and the continuous stream of men being brought back to the site at night. The Register went so far as to call it a "Government Brothel," supported at public expense and under the charge of a paid officer of the Government. River banks, with their secluded areas are a good site for illicit pleasure, and this had been continuing in some areas, presumably with little Wordsworth being read. In a spot referred to as the "Willows", conduct unfavourable to the respectable citizens of Adelaide was occurring. A writer in the Advertiser hoped that the damming of the Torrens would put an end to this:

One great public nuisance that at present disgraces the waterhole will fortunately be extinguished when the dam is completed. We refer to the immoral practices which are still carried on in the infamous neighbourhood known as "the Willows".

Boating had also come under attack as encouraging some "disgraceful scenes" when the previous dam was in place. It was suggested that a policeman be stationed on the banks of the river to protect decent citizens from the behaviour of youths using obscene language. However, it was thought that greater policing along the Torrens Lake would ameliorate this.

**DAM BUILDING**

To transform the area needed a leader to take initiative, and the management of the region needed to be clearly demarcated. Attempts had been made before to build a dam. In 1866 Parliament had granted 1,000 pounds for the purpose of improving the Torrens banks, by producing a more regular slope, creating a dam and planting trees. Four horse loads of willow trees were planted along the Torrens, close to the waters edge, from the dam on the north side to the Frome Bridge. Several thousand bamboo roots were also planted. In the following year a further grant was requested. The dam was situated just below the city gaol and work on it begun in 1866 by means of prison labour. The workers were engaged in cutting away the top of the bank and sloping the loose earth down to the water's edge. The dam was to be

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68 *ibid.*, December 12 1874, p.5.
69 *ibid*.
70 *Advertiser*, January 18 1881, p.6.
71 *Register*, May 8 1867, p.2
72 *Advertiser*, June 1 1881, p.4.
74 SAPD, October 3 1866, p.517.
constructed of clay and wood, and sand was to be taken out of the bed to a considerable depth until they reached a foundation of conglomerate on which clay was placed and beaten down with the hope that when it became hard it would be impervious to water. This involved removing layers of fallen trees underneath the surface gravel, and trying to deal with the ineffective removal of water from the area. A wooden framework was designed to resist the force of the water. A portion of the heavy planking was moveable so as to allow the water to escape when necessary to do so.

Townsend, upon introducing the request in 1866 for money to complete the improvement of the banks, pointed out that it was a disgrace to the capital and that visitors from other colonies obtained a bad impression of the colony from inspecting the river. Townsend had been elected the Mayor of Adelaide in December 1864 and had served two terms before being elected to Parliament. He was obviously aware that the Adelaide Corporation could not afford to implement the changes from its own finances. The Chief Secretary concurred with his suggestion, “Anything more unsightly and repellent within a public city he never saw.” 75 The grant of 500 pounds was rejected, however, and many politicians claimed that the money was being thrown away, as there was no protection for the banks. With an increase in rainfall, or flooding, they would be washed away. It was suggested that the Corporation should have planted the bed of the river, but with introduced species: with willows, bamboos, reeds and such plants so that the splendid soil thrown down the sides might have been saved. Now, however, nothing could be done to prevent its erosion. Even those willows planted had few chances of remaining.76

The first dam was completed at the beginning of 1867 and this shaky structure gave a sheet of water which ran for two to three miles. The banks of the river became much greener, the “unsightliness of the Torrens’ bed” was finally covered and boating became very popular. 77 The dam was erected at a cost of 4,122 pounds, much exceeding the estimate. Planting of both indigenous and foreign trees and shrubs along the river’s banks had also increased, new pathways and promenades were formed and trees planted by the side of the river for a carriage way to be made in the future. Unfortunately, the glory of the new dam was shortlived. The heavy rains which fell at the end of September and the beginning of October in 1867 swelled the stream so much that it burst the dam and was swept away. All that remained was “but a pitiful remnant of that which was to afford so much pleasure to the citizens.”78

75 ibid., October 3 1866, p 512.
76 ibid., November 16 1866, p.982.
A Torrens River Bill was introduced into Parliament in December 1869 to provide for the damming of the river and the improvement of the banks. The attention was initiated this time by the River Torrens Improvement Company who proposed that a dam be built near the railway bridge.\textsuperscript{79} This proposal, however, involved leasing a section of the river to a private company, a situation which many were not happy with. It was felt that work should instead be undertaken by the Corporation. The previous dam had been erected under the provision of the Corporation Act of 1861 and this gave the Corporation only limited powers. The new Bill proposed to enlarge these, giving the Corporation special powers instead of general jurisdiction over the area.

By the provisions of the River Torrens Improvement Act assented to on 9 February 1870, the Corporation of the City of Adelaide was empowered to construct a dam across the river “for the purpose of public recreation or amusement”. The Act vested in the Corporation “the conservancy of the said sheets of water”, the power to grant exclusive rights of erecting sheds, boat houses, stands and landing stages, the right to control fishing, and licensing of all pleasure craft and boats plying for hire upon the river.\textsuperscript{80}

The Corporation still did not have enough control, however, to effectively build and manage the dam. Money was a problem, and the Corporation was already in debt. The previous dam had been costly, and it was obvious that the next would need to be a more sturdy structure. Under the legislation the Corporation was able to build a dam but not to lease it. Moreover, the Corporation of Adelaide had attempted by public meetings to obtain authority for borrowing money for the erection of a dam, but it was refused them. In 1872 another River Torrens Improvement Bill entered parliament.\textsuperscript{81} One of the clauses provided for stopping sewage from going into the river, effectively meaning that the Corporation could be punished for allowing sewage to run into the river. This sewage clause was postponed, pending the results of a Select Committee into Deep Drainage. It was eventually deleted.

By 1873 the Torrens was again coming under criticism and described as an unsightly gutter. A proposal to construct a new dam was this time launched by another private company. Others soon joined in support of a new dam. In a comprehensive article on the subject in 1873 the editor of the \textit{Register} pointed out that one of the side effects of creating a lake was that it would quicken the move towards a system of deep drainage.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{78} cited in D.L. Smith and C.R. Twidale, \textit{op. cit.}, p.44.  
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., p.46.  
\textsuperscript{80} "Records of the Parks and Gardens Department," \textit{Adelaide City Council Archives}, Context Unit 51, p.5.  
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{SAPD}, February 14 1872.  
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Register}, February 10 1873, p.5.
In 1879 Edwin Smith became Mayor of Adelaide. Significantly, in 1879 he also gained control of reserve land with frontage to the Torrens, which became the future Elder Park. Smith had previously shown his determination as mayor of Kensington and Norwood in 1867 and 1871-3. During this time the roads were metalled, bridges built, gas and water mains laid and new streets formed. Smith was the first of Adelaide’s great civic improvers, during his terms as Mayor of Adelaide he had several major projects completed, and took great personal interest in them. Amongst these were the replanting of the squares in Adelaide, a comprehensive scheme for the Park Lands and the creation of Elder Park and the Torrens Lake.  

In the Mayor’s Report of 1879-80 Smith recounts that plans had been prepared for a weir to be created in the Torrens, near the gaol which would throw open a reach of water to a point in the river near the Death hole, a distance of about two miles. A contract for this work was to be shortly signed.

Work on the site began by the end of 1880. However, problems were to occur with the work done by the contractor, the base being not sufficiently strong and the cement not in good condition. A report in March 1881 announced that the contractor was in breach of his contract. The situation was resolved and by 2 May 1881 the Engineer announced that the foundations for the Torrens was now in and the last two sluices would be completed within two days. In the months of 1881 before its completion, the new Torrens Lake was given a lot of press by the Adelaide media. The Advertiser was to outline in tedious detail the specifics of the project so as to reassure people that this lake would be stable. The Lake was officially opened in July 1881.

Smith took a strong interest in the boating side of the venture and mentioned only that the lake was for boating purposes in his report of 1879-80. The erection of boatsheds and landing stages was an important consideration in the creation of the Torrens Lake. The council decided to erect ten extra landing stages from the Botanic Park to the weir on the southern side and between the Adelaide and Victorian bridges on the northern side. Boating would be available by the hiring of boats with a boatman or by private owners of boats. The mayor also emphasised boating in his report on in 1881, the regattas being his only specific reference to recreational activities on the lake. He stressed the gentlemanly aspect of the

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83 P. Morton, _op. cit._, p.38.
84 “Mayor’s Report 1879-80”, _Adelaide Council Archives_, p.68.
86 “Mayor’s Report 1879-80”, _Adelaide Council Archives_, p.68.
pursuit, the “courteous rivalry” between the clubs, and that it had achieved the aims he wished for in the lake, this being: “physical and moral good.”

Nonetheless, whatever priorities the Mayor may have personally had, the park was seen to be an area where all social classes could interact. This emphasis can be seen in 1881 when the _Advertiser_ was to reflect upon the potential recreational benefits of the impending Lake. The river would be changed into a fine deep watercourse:

...useful for boating, fishing and bathing and all other kinds of aquatic sports and amusements; while on the other side its banks will afford a shady retreat to confined city folk after the busy day is over. The active athlete propelling his flimsy outrigger...the happy lovers in their safer old fashioned cockle-shaped boat gliding smoothly under the overhanging willows...and the quiet “piscator” moralising as he pursues his patient amusement on the banks, will one and all derive enjoyment, relaxation, and benefit from the new weir.

**ADELAIDE’S OWN CAPABLE BROWN**

By 1880 the Torrens was described in Thomas Worsnop’s _Guide to Adelaide_ as a “shallow and sinuous stream, variable in volume, charged with stones, pebbles and sand; bamboos margin its course and its banks are half overgrown with gums, poplars and willows.” Obviously some of the introduced species had taken hold. Worsnop reflected on the superior condition of the Botanic Park whose appearance and views showed evidence of a designer “eminent in the delightful art of landscape gardening.” The Botanic Gardens had become renowned for their artistry, enthusiastically described by Twopenny, an author of travel books, as being: “transformed by means of the artificial water and artificial hillocks, into the prettiest garden in the world.” Dr Schomburgk of the Botanic Gardens had been at work on the creek in the Botanic Garden for some time. His 1871 report explains that the “rugged banks” of the creek there had been “beautifully sloped” and that the irregular course was “converted into graceful curves”. Trees including pines, willows and other ornamentals had been planted. The same was to occur along the Torrens.

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87 “Mayor’s Report 1880-81”, _Adelaide Council Archives_, p.29.
88 _Advertiser_, January 18 1881, p.6.
89 T. Worsnop, _A Descriptive Guide to Adelaide and its Environs_, Adelaide, George Robertson, 1878
90 _ibid._, p.18.
Between 1878-9 the Adelaide Council requested that J.E. Brown, the Conservator of Forests from 1879-1890 examine and report on the parklands and plantations of the city, including the proposed Torrens Lake area. Brown was of a learned nature and was to write “A Practical Treatise on Tree Culture in South Australia in 1881” and also the “Forest Flora of South Australia”. He submitted “A Report on A System of Planing the Adelaide Park Lands” in 1880. The report was endorsed in August 1880 and Brown was given control of improvements to the parklands. However, while Brown’s plans were the blueprint for change it would not be until the turn of the century that the major transformations he envisaged in planting and landscaping would finally occur.93

Brown saw the improvement of the river banks as a matter of urgency as they were an “unsightly object” and he agreed with many others in the potential of the area to become one of the most attractive features in the City lands. He saw himself as laying out the parks, “in accordance with the principles of Landscape Gardening”.94 There were various garden styles at this time. It has been suggested that pleasure grounds in the 1850s to 60s, with their slowly meandering waterways and broad reflecting ponds were an idealized agrarian scene. This era was without the fussy decorations of architecture, sculpture, or flowerbeds. However, by the 1880s there was a neo-classical revival, which showed the presence of civilisation, associated with more European aristocratic formal gardens. The overall philosophy behind Brown’s approach was to develop a “natural” garden area. The “natural” garden is considered to be the most recent type of garden, developing as it did as a reaction against the process of urbanisation.95

Brown follows the general underlying principles in this type of a garden. For example, he used vegetation to create effect and grouped plants together to recreate combinations which existed in nature, in this case, the English park landscape. The planting of trees Brown felt should be as natural as possible. Having groups of trees of one kind in some places, while carefully mixed at others would do this. Single trees must also stand out prominently alone in some places. He believed that the gum trees were not very ornamental and were not suitable, those in the Park Lands being unhealthy and showing signs of decay.96 Again Brown wished to avoid regularity of planting with single trees standing out in some places, and others being grouped. He hoped to have a great variety of foliage so that a “very striking and ornamental

92 Register, February 10 1871, p.4.
94 J.E. Brown, op. cit., “Introduction”.
96 J.E. Brown, op. cit., p.9.
effect as a whole be produced." Obviously, it took a great deal of artifice in order to make the scenery “as natural as possible”. Such an aim was common in the art of landscaping: there could be no higher praise to its designer than to be unable to decipher whether a scene was natural or artificial.

Composition of the “natural” garden centred on artificial ponds imitating natural rivers of lakes and providing conditions for the growing of plants. Again, Brown took a romantic view, wishing the banks to stay as natural as possible: “I would advise that anything like uniformity of slope, so as to have the appearance of its being artificially constructed, be avoided.” He wished to avoid regularity and “mechanical stiffness”. His sketch of the river banks shows carefully undulating banks, sloping gently to a placid water, the banks planted with pines and willows, with the eye being drawn gradually to a receding bend in the river on the horizon.

Paying of more than usual attention to the natural peculiarities of the landscape and vegetation was also a feature of the “natural” garden. Rather than change the shape of the river entirely, Brown saw the “sinuous and irregular” character of the river and its banks to be an advantage, and capable of producing many rare and striking effects, given the right landscaping. He saw

![Sketch shewing undulating River Banks](image)

Figure 12: Brown,“Sketch shewing (sic) undulating River Banks”

the river as being in the hands of an artist, features should be exaggerated or lessened according to taste, the best course to take lay “in the eye of the designer.” Advantage should be taken of other irregularities such as hollows, ledges, ridges, knolls, flats, and water-washed crevices and gullies. Thus, these could be enlarged or lessened depending on the effect required. He wished to accentuate its unevenness, to avoid the appearance of “regularity

97 J.E. Brown, ibid., p.12.
98 J.E. Brown, ibid.
99 see “Sketch shewing (sic) undulating River Banks”, Appendix.
or mechanical stiffness."\textsuperscript{100} It was important that the banks be neither too extensive nor too abrupt. The desire was for undulating slopes, ridges and terraces.

Other features of the “natural” garden were to achieve the illusion of greater size and to also give predominance to decorative functions in the choice of locations for planting and attempts at disguising the more unattractive plots. Brown’s conception of “natural” thus necessitated that at times the features of the site may need to be altered to a considerable degree in some places, so that the best features of the site might become prominent and the most striking contrasts secured. The area was to produce “a combination of pleasing effects and contrasts”. Brown demonstrated the then current desire to have a park that always provided a satisfying level of interest and change to the discerning viewer.

The public had made their own pathways through the Torrens banks. For example, there was a pathway leading from Frome Bridge to the Destitute Asylum which many individuals used daily. Another path existed leading from Hackney to the Company’s Bridge and one from Walkerville to the Frome Bridge. The beautification of the banks saw the paths changed from such practical purposes made by the people to a more aesthetic role. Brown felt that the footpaths, of eight to ten feet across, should follow the natural windings of the ground as much as possible. Thus fine views of the river would be obtained and striking effects with grouping of trees would enhance the scene. In contrast, the central avenue along the promenade was a perfectly straight line, where citizens could promenade amongst the shade of European trees.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{Sketch shewing Avenues and River Banks}

\footnotesize{Figure 13: Brown, “Sketch shewing (sic) Avenues and River Banks”}

\textsuperscript{100} J.E. Brown, \textit{op.cit.}, p.11.

\textsuperscript{101} see “Sketch shewing (sic) Avenues and River Banks”, Appendix.
While Brown wished it to look “natural”, he also wanted a “refined” landscape, which would refine the community, and influence them to act in accordance with their surroundings. It would give them a taste for the finer things and, importantly, lead them away from other unhealthy pursuits. While there is little mention of the park being seen as a rural haven, the Lake was claimed to be a “shady retreat for confined city folk after the busy day is over.” The trees gave a “natural, if not quite a rustic simplicity to the riverside.”

While the area was partly seen as a rural retreat in the heart of Adelaide, it was also expected that many visitors from the county would be enticed by its charm. Its verdant beauty would also impress visitors from other colonies. Poets in England, such as Morris, may have longed at the end of the nineteenth century for the Thames to return to its agrarian beauty for, “the clear Thames, bordered by its gardens green.” Morris also dreamed of London, “small and white and clean.” The citizens of Adelaide, however, were engaged in city building, as befitted a young colony. These very citizens had mainly come from the cities of London and Europe, rather than the countryside, and upon arriving in South Australia it was mainly to the city that they clung. The greenness and shade may have been longed for, but the park was also to be a place of activity and pleasure, a city pleasure ground and one, not on its outskirts, but in its very heart. The decision-makers followed the fashion of the times and strove to build an object of civic pride, one to even rival London parks.

THE OFFICIAL OPENING

At the opening of the Torrens Lake on 22 July 1881, Sir Edwin Thomas Smith gave a spirited speech to the “well-dressed and well-behaved” audience at the Torrens Lake’s grand opening. Before the official opening a rather less formal but more humorous event had taken place. The creation of the lake had created quite a lot of excitement in Adelaide. Weeks before the official opening, citizens from around Adelaide had flocked to the Torrens on the Saturday afternoon. This unofficial gathering was quite a different affair. While the large majority stood on the three bridges and on the water’s edge, some even attempted some water sports. Unfortunately, it was still a bit of a mud bath, with “not enough “sea” on to wreck a sardine tin.” The two officers who attempted to row up and down the dam had little opportunity to save any-one. A steamboat had also been brought up from Semaphore on the Friday and this took passengers on a half hour trip along the Lake. Rowers in two four oared racing boats from the Banks and Civil Service also attempted a row, and managed a fair job,

102 Advertiser, January 8 1881, p.6.
103 Advertiser July 25 1881, p.4.
104 Register, July 11 1881, p.6.
although it was pointed out that they would need a lot more practice before they could rival the Port Adelaide Rowing Club. One citizen had even attempted a sailing boat, which unfortunately capsized near the Adelaide Bridge.\textsuperscript{105}

At the official opening the Lake was decked out in streamers and bunting for the celebration. A procession of stream-launches and boats took part in a procession which began at 2 p.m. on the Adelaide Bridge. The opening ceremony took place on the northern side of the river near the weir. Ironically, given the supposed community basis of the recreational area, society remained divided. Those “gentlemen” and “ladies” with invitations were directed to the official enclosure. Ladies were then separated further, having their own seated platform. Edwin Smith was to see the Lake in terms of its symbolic significance, as a representation of Adelaide’s development. To the crowd of 40,000 said to have gathered to watch the ceremony, he dwelt on the progress of the colony, the great changes that had occurred in the city and the corresponding increase in property values. The Torrens was now an object of beauty, an expansive and noble sheet of water.\textsuperscript{106} The Mayor’s words about property values align the lake with subsequent real estate developments in the twentieth century whereupon lake areas would become commodities, which increased the value of property for investors.\textsuperscript{107} The names proposed for the lake are also suggestive of real estate ventures. The Mayor was given the task of naming the area. As he explained to the crowd, they had three names which were favourable: The Torrens, The Torrens Lake and the Torrens Waters. The Torrens, however, was too indefinite, as it covered the whole reach of the river. The term the Torrens Lake defined the area as that conserved by the weir.\textsuperscript{108} Thus, the area was finally marked off as separate, by name and by appearance.

Whether by luck or good management, the opening of the Torrens’ Lake coincided with the opening of the International Exhibition in Adelaide. The \textit{Advertiser} was to reflect on the opening in glowing terms, and to compare the two enterprises:

The enterprise, energy and public spirit which bring into being self-sustaining exhibitions of art and manufactures, and the civic wisdom which conserves water which would otherwise run to waste, and creates a beautiful lake, where previously were stagnant pools alternating with dry sand patches, are proofs that we have

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{107} R.E.N. Twopenny, \textit{op. cit.}, p.29.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{ibid.}
amongst us men of the right stamp, men who are specifically adapted to carry on what has been called “the heroic work of colonization”.  

*The Register* also recorded the event, giving credit to the Mayor for completing the task, of which many were “sceptical of its fulfilment.” They commented on the complimentary success of both causes and on the positive effects the Lake would have on Adelaide society: “time spent in healthy innocent amusements are well spent and probably go along way to exorcising that evil demon who, as we are taught at school, finds some mischief for idle hands to do.” Journalists were also pleased about the number of women who turned out at the opening to help feminise the area, and the orderly display of the crowd. In a time when there were concerns about the growth of larrikinism it seemed that the river area was already having its refining qualities felt.

But the improvements were not finished yet. In 1882 the rotunda was added to the southern bank of the Torrens. In the same year work also commenced on the establishment of a zoo along the Torrens banks, and this would also include a small lake, with water pumped from the Torrens. Worsnop was to ask the government for some of the surrounding land including a strip along the lake frontage to extend the promenade. The land was the Governor’s old garden, a significant historical site, and a few years later, in 1887 the council agreed to swap some land near the sheep market for this. The promenade lawn around the lake was thus extended to two and a half hectares.

**CONCLUSION**

A few were concerned about the destruction of the river environment and questioned the assumption that it was not aesthetically pleasing in its original state. However, the majority concurred that the most desirable use of the Torrens area was as a European lake and parklands; a “natural” garden was planned and the area transformed following the principles of landscape gardening at the time. Moreover, the river was no longer in its original state, the destruction that had occurred rendered change a necessity. Nature was to be controlled and improved. The Torrens had passed through various stages regarding resource use: the ornamental was its final step. The river area would be healthy in itself, due to its greenery and expansive water area; and would provide an area for recreation and refinement. Its health-giving properties continued to be upheld. Indeed, one company featured it in its

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109 ibid.
110 *Register, July 22 1881, Supplement, p.4.*
advertisements for cough mixture throughout 1881, claiming that the impressive sheet of water “expands the chests and develops the muscles of hundreds.”\(^{112}\)

The river was thought to be healthier after the damming of the Torrens Lake; healthier for people that is. The well-being of the overall system was only taken into account by a few. While the building of the Torrens Lake was seen as a positive for Adelaide’s citizens in terms of recreation and civic pride, it was a further very large step in changing the natural workings of the river system. The lake also lessened the amount of water flowing into the Reedbeds. Before the end of the year complaints were to be heard, with Charles White of the Reedbeds voicing his objection to the decreased flow of the river which was interfered with by the dam. While the sewerage system installed soon after was to rectify the problem of sewage from Adelaide being discharged into the river, pollution continued to be a problem and would be an ongoing one for the lake. There was still pollution from upstream and from the Torrens’ creeks discharged into the river. The *Advertiser* recognised this in 1881 and called for the regulation of pollution from the creeks discharging their water into the Torrens between the weir and the newly erected dam. As they pointed out, before the Lake, much of the filth in the central area was washed away by floods. However, it now lay festering in the sun. They went so far as to claim that “no one has any right to defile any stream, whether he lives upon its banks or it runs through his property or not.”\(^{113}\) However, few were listening.

Civic rivalry was appeased by the width of the Lake: “The reach extending from the weir to the Victoria Bridge is certainly the finest of all. In width it eclipses the widest reach on the Yarra...”\(^{114}\) A painting from 1883 shows a full and wide sheet of water which did have boats on it, although of a much smaller size than originally anticipated (see Figure 14). The lake is graced by carefully placed European trees and boat sheds. The picture is one that emphasises the relaxed elegance of the area, and the Aboriginal people are now well and truly removed from the picture. After the opening of the Torrens Lake it was to continue as an object of civic pride. In 1883 the well-known traveller and writer, Twopenny, expressed his admiration of the Torrens Lake and congratulated the Mayor, Mr E.T. Smith, who in the course of two years had stirred up the citizens so that amongst other things the Torrens artificial lake had been constructed.\(^{115}\) The expectations for a large river that the Colonisation Commissioners and the early settlers had hoped for was partially met.

\(^{112}\) *ibid.*, July 27 1881, p.2.
\(^{113}\) *Advertiser*, June 6 1881, p.4.
\(^{114}\) *ibid.*, July 22 1881, Supplement, p.4.
\(^{115}\) R.E.N. Twopenny, *op. cit.*, p.29.
Figure 14: River Torrens, Adelaide, 1883
Europeans wanted and imagined a particular type of river. They wanted a river that was a fine, wide and navigable sheet of water. They needed a river for life-giving water, for bathing, as a sewer, but also as a recreational space. The Torrens was not the river they had imagined and was unable to service the population's needs, in trying to meet all these requirements they destroyed it. It was only when technology was employed to provide for these things, and when the Torrens ceased to be necessary for water supply and was bypassed, that they could turn it into an ornamental version of what they desired. They didn't find the river they imagined in their early, fanciful maps, but eventually they engineered a fascimile of what they had imagined.

After white settlement the Torrens River underwent various stages of land use. However, for the Kaurna it was a part of their lives in every sense: in myths, as a resource, as a source of life and renewal, a place of burial and an area to be respected. For those planning the colony of South Australia it began as a fantasy, an invention for commercial ends. Naming the environment is a way of appropriating it. When the River Torrens was given its official name after Colonel Robert Torrens the name was at once misleading because it overlooked the Kaurna's occupation of the area for over ten thousand years. White society claimed the river as their own and gave it a title which had no connection to the physical characteristics of the watercourse that had been Karrawirraparri, and had been given various names in different areas which recognised the variety in the river. As Ellis has written, "languages are symbolic and pragmatic systems", and the names given to the landscape by the Kaurna contained "reverberations of meaning" within their society.  

The Kaurna's occupation and relationship with the river was generally ignored. It would not be until the twenty first century that even the dual naming of the river would be recognised by the governing powers of South Australia. Instead it was named after one of the "founding fathers", the Earl of Durham in England, who was a capitalist, and land speculator.2

The settlers appropriated an environment they did not understand. This can be seen in the variety of contradictory language used to describe the central area of the Torrens. Many early settlers saw it as being gentle. At other times the river was seen as destructive when

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drownings and floods occurred. People labelled it a fiend, the river’s “impetuosity” was invoked and it was seen as “treacherous” and “uncertain, dangerous and deceptive” with its “angry billows” hurtling down on the unsuspecting settlers. In all these descriptions there is no endeavour to understand the river, but many attempts at apportioning blame. The accusations were to continue. Having polluted the water, settlers called it a “tepid stream”, accused it of being “lazy” and viewed it as the “common sewer of the city”, and even a “nursery of death”. But far worse insults would arise from outside of the city embarrassing the citizens of Adelaide.

Adelaide struggled to come to terms with this small river. For the name of the river was also misleading, not just because of the association with Torrens, but because it was not really a river but a creek which dried up in summer and flooded during heavy rains. As Heathcote has pointed out, a major problem resulted in Australia because of the use of traditional English terminology to describe the unique Australian environment. Words used in descriptions did not always correlate to people’s pre-conceived ideas. Thus, “Terms such as “river”, “lake” and “stream” gave a false sense of permanence to what were often occasionally dry watercourses”. Settlers struggled not only to describe and understand the River Torrens but to live alongside it in a sustainable manner. It was often used as if it was a European river and was subsequently unable to cope with the demands placed upon it. Rainfall, run-off and stream flow also presented variability from season to season and from year to year which was beyond the settlers’ experience. Even the question of how high above “normal” the river’s bridges needed to be constructed was learnt only by trial and error. The destruction of the area was exacerbated by the settlers’ lack of knowledge of the environment.

The river environment played a key role in Adelaide’s history. The site was initially chosen as it was on sloping ground that had a gradual connection with the river. It was a good site for a parklands area. As the Torrens was a small river it was able to both divide and join the town into two sections, North and South Adelaide. The importance of bridges to join the areas became crucial and passage across the river a necessity. However, floods were continually

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6 Register, January 20 1844, p.3.
8 Register March 7 1853, p.3.
9 ibid., February 3 1844, p.3.
10 ibid., June 4 1847, p.2.
11 ibid., March 22 1872, p.5.
destroying bridges and thus isolating the two sides on many occasions; society’s practices in turn increased the environmental damage of flooding. The river environment in Adelaide was fragile and its use as a water source limited; resources were not replaceable.

By looking at this pivotal part of the natural environment in a growing urban area we can see how the river area interacted with the city. Cities demand resources, and the progress of the colony generally was reliant upon building a strong, urban base. For the first settlers the Torrens was not only the centre of the new settlement, it was also the major resource. The settlers were coping with an entirely alien world when they arrived. Not only was it a different environment from which they had come, the settlement was not surveyed totally, and little infrastructure was in place before its commencement. The South Australian Company rushed the venture and settlers arrived earlier than was really practical. Settlers could hardly travel anywhere else for their resources as there were few roads and much of the surrounding areas unknown territory. The Torrens gave life to the city of Adelaide: its buildings were constructed partly from the clay that lined that Torrens’ bed, the wood along its banks provided timber, it was their place for cleaning and bathing and the water provided the most vital of resources. The growth of the city meant the death of the river. But eventually economic progress also meant that the river could then be transformed.

It was during the Torrens’ period as a provider of resources that the Aborigines came into contact with white people, and mixed with the different elements of white society. In this central area of the Torrens the city emerged from the initial loose collection of tents and huts to the gradual development of buildings on the streets near the river. As is the case in paintings of the Torrens, Aboriginal people were initially accepted as part of the picturesque. They also played an important role in the new settlement as providers of water and wood, and helped the settlers to survive along the river, often saving them from drowning. However, as the city developed so too did objections to the Aborigines and white society’s affirmation of superiority and rights to the area. The Aboriginal presence along the river, which was a transport corridor for European settlers came to be regarded as a threat, Aborigines at the bridges were deemed to be harmful and disruptive. The Kaurna asserted their rights to use the water and the banks of the river but all Aborigines were systematically prevented from engaging in their activities.

The settlers gained control of the river area, but still failed to work within its limits. In order to exist cities require fresh water supplies. But that most important resource of all, water, was

\[\text{ibid.}\]
also used for sewage disposal. Water was under the control of water carriers, and supply polluted and scarce. With water in high demand and valuable, its contamination caused widespread complaints, particularly given the exorbitant price charged for it. As the city grew, pollution grew in proportion, with industries upstream and the government’s own practises along the central area also polluting the water. Bathing was one of the few “pollutants” that was actively policed, but this was mainly due to moral disapproval.

A system of water supply was implemented before a system of sewerage disposal and the Torrens remained polluted until the early 1880s. While the case has been made that sewerage disposal was a “less straightforward”12 procedure than implementing a system of water supply, the situation was more complex than this. Water was seen as being far more important. The desire for abundant water reflects a change in society’s perceptions about water and about its purifying qualities. Settlers desired abundant water for health reasons, for cleanliness and for protection against disease. The link that Victorians made between morality and health meant that abundant water was deemed to be a moral good and essential for all households. In the words of John Stephens, water should be available to all, “untaxed, unlimited and unsold.”13 Climate was also to play a significant role in people’s perceptions of the river and of water use. It is a paradox that Adelaide’s dry, hot climate was seen as a reason for using more water. Adelaide’s heat in summer was continually spoken of as a cause of discomfort, concern and sickness. The answer to this was to use water to ameliorate the sun’s draining effects. The cooling effects of water would continue to be advocated, and were in part a reason for the transformation of the River Torrens into a lake, which was seen as a refreshing, green European park area in the heart of the arid city.

Abundant water also came to viewed as essential for the city’s continued development and the supply of this seen as the government’s moral duty; sewerage disposal was considered less urgent. River water was brought to the people in a cleaner, more sanitary and more plentiful form, it was a form that disguised its original source and gave the misguided perception that supplies were unlimited. The Thorndon Park Reservoir thus further impacted upon the Torrens River system and came to be seen as a symbol of Adelaide’s progress. But progress would damage the river system even further.

Responses to the rivers can be understood as falling into two broad categories: utilitarian, or aesthetic. The shifting balance between these is central to understanding settlers’ use of the

13 Register, January 29, 1850, p.2.
river. Some initial reactions to the river were influenced by how it would provide for the society and economic structure that they were transplanting. Many judged it deficient as a river. On the other hand, positive evaluations were also made from an aesthetic standpoint. By the 1860s, settlers who had not arrived at the beginning of white settlement had no idea what the river looked like in its original state. Few would have believed it to be the “pretty stream” spoken of by some, and recorded in historical documents. There is evidence that some very early settlers demonstrated insight into how the activities of their society increased problems such as flooding and contributed to erosion. These individuals stand out in their expression of concern for the river, show some understanding of the reasons for its decline and valued the environment in its “pristine” state, regretting the changes made to it by settler society. However, as with other cities in Australia, the river area was of necessity the first area to be settled, they were the first areas to be polluted and for the environment around them to be radically changed. There was little chance of preserving them in their natural state.

In the late nineteenth century a conservationist movement would emerge in Australia which aimed to preserve natural areas. However, by this time the Torrens, which had been a site of beauty and a place of life for a variety of flora and fauna, and for the Kaurna, was destroyed. A strong nationalist ideal was not present at the time under study; and a reasonably sophisticated understanding of the Australian environment is evident in only a few individuals. When parks were created at the end of the nineteenth century they were at distance from Australia’s major cities, a distance that was far enough away that they had not been spoilt, but close enough to be accessible by rail. Only those areas that had not been drastically altered could be saved. This was far too late for the Torrens. Calls to “beautify” the Torrens area were associated with civic pride, not national pride and examples of city parks from Europe were turned to as an example for the Torrens’ area. From the early years of settlement there had been high hopes for the area and that it would become: “one of the most delightful pleasure grounds in the world.”\textsuperscript{14} While river areas in Australian cities are important to the reputation of a city, as a park region, and as an area of recreation, they have not come to be seen as a unique Australian environment but as an urban environment.

The final step in the Torrens’ land use was as a recreational area. Once white society had destroyed the ecology and beauty of the river system it then had to be recreated. The Torrens was always perceived as having a recreational function, but it was not until other uses were no longer needed that this really came into effect. The Lake is an artificial construction, which does not allow normal water flow, and in the future water would have to be imported into it

\textsuperscript{14} ibid., p.122.
from the Murray. Problems with flooding would also continue to occur, and large quantities of silt washed down from upstream would become trapped in the newly created lake. But in the 1880s the Lake was viewed as a major success and an example of the progress of the city. The Torrens area as a commodity was now getting a return from the investment outlaid on it. It was felt that the money invested into the Lake would be “amply repaid”, possibly by licence fees, but also by the “pleasure citizens would derive from it”. Moreover, it would help to increase the property values of the city and the city’s reputation. The Torrens Lake was considered healthy because of its mass of water, its effects on the climate and its greenery. With the creation of a “shady retreat” and a “beautiful lake” to replace the “stagnant pools alternating with dry sand patches,” civic pride was finally appeased, aesthetic needs satisfied and desires for a cool, refreshing recreational water area were met.

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15 C.R. Twidale (et. al.), *Natural History of the Adelaide Region*, Adelaide, Royal Society of South Australia, p.96.
17 *Register*, July 22 1881, Supplement, p. 5.
18 *ibid.*, July 11 1881, p.6.
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