



John McDouall Stuart

From Dysart to Darwin



In Stuart, Australia possessed a man cast in the mould of a hero - a man whose amazing persistence, indomitable courage and unfailing common sense, enabled him to succeed in a mighty task in which most others would have failed. (T.G.H. Strehlow, Reader in Australian Linguistics, University of Adelaide 1967)

John McDouall Stuart is possibly/probably Australia's finest and best known internal explorer. To this day he is held in the highest regard and extensively commemorated in the land where he made his name. The man and his achievements are seared into the consciousness of Australian children from an early age.

When John was born in 1815, Dysart - the *Saut Burgh* – was a burgh in its own right. It was not until 1928 that Dysart became part of the extended Kirkcaldy, losing its autonomy along with its Provost, Magistrates and Councillors.

Research shows that the first appearance of Stuart in the local press was in the pages of the *Fife Free Press* in their edition of the 23rd July 1904. Their opening statement was that “Dysart may well feel proud that a monument to one of her sons adorns one of the principal squares of the City of Adelaide, South

JOHN McDONALL STUART.
Great Australian Explorer.
BORN IN DYSART, 1815.
DIED IN LONDON, 1866.

Dysart may well feel proud that a monument to one of her sons adorns one of the principal squares of the City of Adelaide, South Australia. As noticed by us last week, the monument was unveiled on the 4th June.

A son of the “Saut Burgh”—and no unworthy representative—in alluding to the event, says:—“The monument is in memory of a famous Dysart man—John McDonall Stuart. As he left that celebrated Royal Burgh before I was born, and died before I came to South Australia, I had not the honour of his acquaintance, but his name and deeds are evergreen in the Southern Sunny Lands, and, if one cannot achieve greatness himself, it is something to claim him as an erstwhile fellow-townsmen. No doubt there are a few Dysartionians who will remember something of the Stuart family, and many, no doubt, rejoice at the honour done to the great Australian explorer.”

Australia. The monument was unveiled on the 4th July”. The writer mentioned that he had been born after Stuart and that the explorer had died before he came to Australia. He then expanded into saying that: - “If one cannot achieve greatness himself, it is something to claim him as an erstwhile fellow townsman. No doubt there are a few Dysartionians who will remember something of the Stuart family, and many, no doubt, rejoice at the honour done to the great Australian explorer”. A speaker at the unveiling ceremony remarked that: - “he was sure that in the little corner of Fifeshire where Stuart was born – Dysart – the people would be glad to think that Australia knew how to honour and commemorate such services as their great fellow townsman had rendered”.

There followed some potted details of Stuart’s historic and heroic journey with a final paragraph which will be retained meantime to provide a strong finish to this narrative. Surely it

is only right and proper to leave the final words on one of Dysart's most famous men to a fellow son of the Saut Burgh?

Whatever else the newspaper item did it seems to have failed to create any special interest in the explorer. However, it was the same newspaper almost half a century later which did manage to light the touch paper which led to local interest and then commemoration to Stuart.



The starting point for this narrative is some 70 years ago when Kirkcaldy Town Council placed a commemorative plaque to Stuart in Dysart Town Hall. The *Fife Free Press* was there to photograph the plaque and the picture appeared in their 7th June 1952 edition. A copy of this

photograph is shown here. The picture does not do full justice to the plaque which remains to this day fixed above the fireplace in Dysart Town Hall. In fairness to Councillor Alex McLean, it was he who was the driving force behind the idea and provision of the plaque. While we may have questioned his part in the demise of the "Man I' the Rock" in an earlier story – he stood up and was counted when it came to commemorating Stuart.

It is a sizeable and sturdy memorial to one of Dysart's most famous sons and is without question the first local commemoration to Stuart. For this reason the physical plaque itself has been used to bookend the title of this month's narrative.

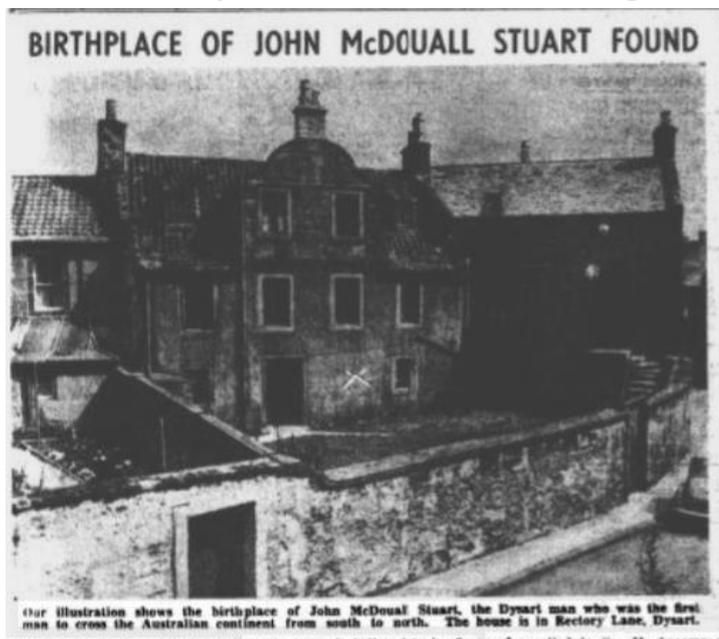
Dysart Trust does a fine job in keeping the *Saut Burgh's* history alive and a visit to their Summer Exhibition in the Tolbooth/Town Hall is well worthwhile. Together with the plaque there is a raft of exhibits and photographs highlighting Dysart's past

The event certainly created interest, as is shown, when we examine the *Fife Free Press* of the 18th July 1952; where they had warmed and returned to the subject.

A very interesting article featured McDouall Stuart's birthplace – or did it? Today, without reservation, we accept that the renovated house, complete with a blue plaque in Rectory Lane was where John McDouall Stuart made his entry into the world.

The article informs readers that this could not have previously been taken as factual as his place of birth was not confirmed by any documents or records. However, the item discloses that: - "After a search, extending for over two years, the birthplace of John McDouall Stuart, the famous Australian explorer, has been discovered. It was known, of course, that he had been born in Dysart, but searches

through the old registers and documents failed to pinpoint in which part of the “Saut Burgh” he was born.



“Now the place of his birth has been established, thanks to the help of 83 year old Mrs Spalding, who lives at 27 Normand Road Dysart. She told our reporter this week that she remembers, as a girl, her mother used to tell her

something of the history of the house owners in Dysart.

“Mrs Spalding’s mother, a Mrs Stewart, told her that a Captain Stuart resided in Rectory Lane and that he was the Excise Officer for the town. There was a big family of sons and one of them went to Australia. Mrs Spalding’s own family came to Dysart before 1800 and her grandfather started the steam looms at Normand’s factory”.

The sizeable headline and article also featured a photograph of the house, presumably taken in 1952, and mentioned that it was believed to be over 500 years old and correctly observed that it had outstanding views over the Forth and of St. Serf’s Tower. The photograph is shown here.

The item concluded with a potted history of his achievements and we can now begin our journey following in his footsteps. It will be interesting to see if, in the intervening

70 years, some more tangible evidence of his birthplace has come to light.

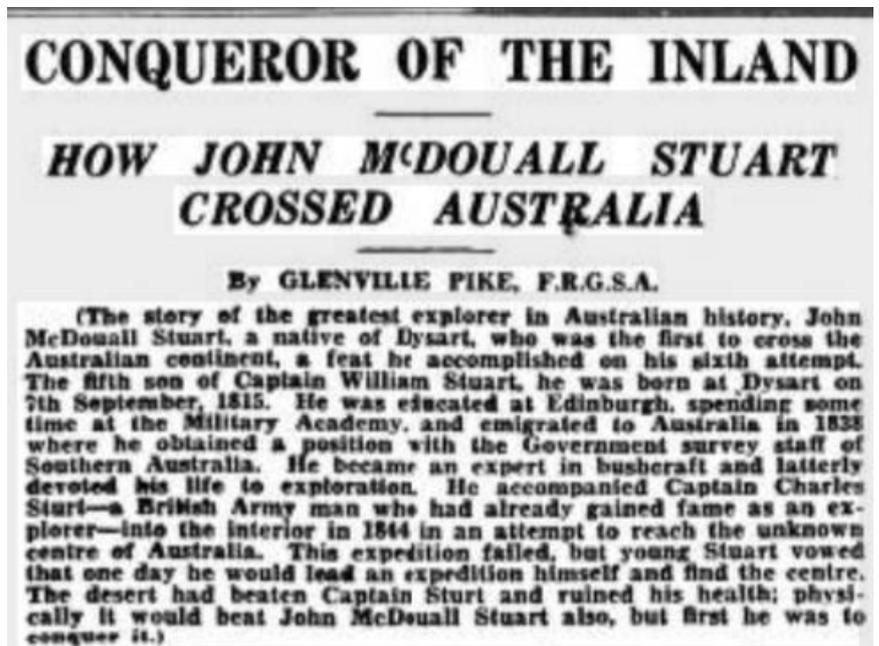
So what had brought about this spurt of activity in relation to McDouall Stuart? A little research disclosed that once again the *Fife Free Press* had been instrumental in creating the initial interest by serialising the work of one Grenville Pike on the life of Stuart. The serialisation commenced on the 5th August 1950 although it is not obvious if the material was sent from Australia or if Pike himself was in the area at the time of publication. It was subsequently discovered that the material used had been received via correspondence and not through Pike's actual presence in Kirkcaldy/Dysart.

A little research disclosed that Pike's grandparents, George and Emily Francis, emigrated from England to New Zealand in 1872. Their daughter, Effie, married Charlie Pike, a cabinet maker and musician. Glenville was born in Toowoomba, a city of some 150,000 souls in Queensland, Australia. He was an author of a significant number of books about Queensland and the wider Australian continent. Pike was a *Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia*. He certainly appears to have been well qualified to outline the life of John McDouall Stuart. Given the work was published in the local paper it seemed only right and proper, where possible, to weave some of that content into the story.

When the commemorative plaque was installed in Dysart Town Hall, Pike wrote a congratulatory letter to the Fife Free

Press appreciating the gesture. He was also intent on ensuring that Australian press would pick up the story.

The first episode published on the 5th August was something of a scene setter opening with *“The Fife Free Press* feel privileged to publish this series of articles on John McDouall



Stuart who was the first explorer to cross the Australian continent, a feat which he accomplished in 1860-62, after enduring many hardships and dangers. The story of how this Dysartonian became the greatest explorer in Australian history will make enthralling reading and will add considerably to local knowledge, as well as increase local interest in Australia, with which Kirkcaldy and district has already so many associations.

“Up to the present time, little has been heard of this great man on this side of the world, as his life’s work was accomplished far from his native shores and the story of his adventures and discoveries, compiled by Mr Grenville Pike after lengthy historical research, will come as a revelation to local readers”.

That was the taster published and the series would start from the 12th August. It is also noted that The *Kirkcaldy Times* (Published on a Wednesday) would also be carrying the story.

Captain William and Mary Stuart came to Dysart around 1812. Mary's maiden name was McDouall and she hailed from Wigtownshire. When they arrived in Dysart their first four children had been born – three sons and a daughter. Stuart had retired from the army (9th Elgin Foot) in 1802 when his regiment was disbanded. He was paid around £85 per year as a Customs Officer at Dysart Harbour. He also received rental income from Edinburgh properties he had inherited from his father.

At Dysart we find a further five children had been born and registered in the Parish Church records.

- Samuel 14/11/1813
- John McDouall 07/09/1815
- Mary 03/11/1817
- Caroline 24/07/1820
- Georgina 11/02/1823

It is difficult to try and reconstruct such a large family in the days before statutory records and the Census. With some research and luck records were found to give a little more background detail.

- Mary McDouall was born to Samuel McDouall and Mary White and baptised on the 16th January 1778 at

Minnigaf (Kirkcudbrightshire). In the register the names are spelt McDowall.

- William Stuart and Mary McDouall were married on the 21st April 1804 at Penninghame* (Wigtownshire). In the register Stuart is spelt Stewart and again McDouall is spelt McDowall.
- Andrew McDouall Stewart (first child) was baptised in Dumfries on the 14th February 1805. It goes without saying that the middle and surnames are shown as McDowall and Stewart.
- Margaret Hannah Stewart (first daughter) is baptised on the 11th February 1807 in St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh. Again we find father and daughter have their surnames spelt as Stewart.
- Peter Stuart was baptised on the 1st September 1808 at St. Cuthbert's. Father spelt Stewart with mother this time McDougall.
- William Stuart was baptised on the 29th July 1810 at St. Cuthbert's. Father again spelt Stewart with mother McDowall.

*Not a place the team were familiar with but the church of Penninghame had belonged to the bishops of Galloway, who were the proprietors of Penninghame and had their chief residence at Clary, formerly called Clachary, less than a mile from the church.

Although it cannot be proven that we have the correct person it does seem very plausible that a birth registered in St Cuthbert's on the 28th May 1871 might be Captain William Stuart. The father is recorded as Peter Stuart which is correct. The mother is listed as Marion Watt. Confidence would be a little stronger if a daughter, normally the third, carried the name Marion. (Traditional Scottish naming system)

Some of the published material on the family suggests that there were six surviving children. Mona Stuart Webster*, in her 1958 book *John McDouall Stuart*, asserts that the three surviving daughters were Margaret, Mary and Caroline. They were home educated as was the norm at the time.

The surviving boys were Andrew, Samuel* and John. What is



certain is that at one point the three boys were educated in Edinburgh at the *Scottish Naval and Military Academy*. This institution which opened in 1825 was established to educate boys aiming to join the Army, Navy or the East India Company. In 1829 it moved to Lothian Road – a site almost opposite Castle Terrace. The

photograph shows that it became part of the Caledonian Hotel.

We can be quite confident that it was Peter, William and Georgina, who met with early death.

*Mona is a direct descendent of Samuel Stuart. Given her access to family records it tends to give credence to her words.

It was at this stage that the family was split apart when both William and Mary died in quick succession. The resulting situation is that all six children came to live in Edinburgh. Margaret was enrolled at Miss Murray's Boarding School where she was joined by her sisters Mary and Caroline.

Margaret married a John Arthur with the marriage registered in Kinghorn on the 23rd December 1835. Three children were located in the Registers.

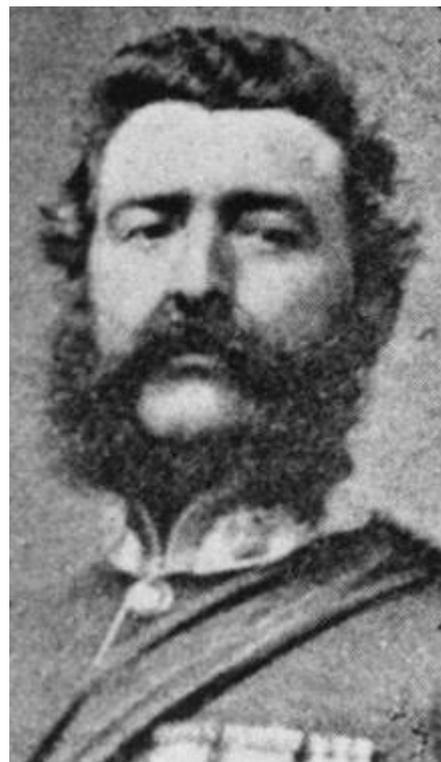
- Mary McDouall 9th October 1836 Kinghorn
- John Arthur 8th October 1838 Kirkcaldy
- Caroline Stuart 19th September 1843 Dundee

The entries carry the usual raft of spelling or transcription errors – we have Stewart, Steuart and McDowall as some examples. We have an interest in John's sisters as, when he passed away in London, it was at the home of one of his sisters and our suspicion is that it will be that of Margaret and John Arthur. This is the reason for genealogy being carried out on someone not central to the narrative.

Mona Webster also gives some other interesting facts. Mary married a Gavin Turnbull who was 20 years her senior. He

was a Doctor and served in the Bengal Army until his retirement in 1852. Living in India and dying in Jersey leaves little scope for more information but Mary does resurface later in this story.

If there was one thing the team did not expect it was to discover a family member being awarded the Victoria Cross! That was indeed what happened and again it was Mona Webster who disclosed that Caroline Stuart had married a William Rennie, of the Duke of Sutherland's gamekeeper. Joining the army he served throughout the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1859. On the 21st September 1857 and again on the 25th of the month – he charged enemy guns while under fire – forcing the crews to abandon their guns. Not only did he attack with his sword but he also used his fists! To crown it all – he had three fingers sliced off in his first act of gallantry! He left the army as Lieutenant-Colonel Rennie on full pay – dying in Elgin in 1896.



The brothers were already living in Edinburgh when their parents died. A good education was a prerequisite for the children of a gentleman such as William Stuart.

Andrew was studying medicine at the University and it was he who inherited the houses which his father owned in the Capital. Mary Quick suggests that the properties were on

Castle Hill and that in time they were acquired by the military and became married quarters for part of the garrison.

The boys lived together at a house in Stockbridge where they were looked after by a former servant of Mrs Stuart. In time Andrew joined the Bengal Army and served in India from 1829 until 1851.

Samuel went into business in Glasgow and in 1857 he left for Australia. On the 6th January 1837 we find his marriage to Emma Wilson recorded in Govan. There were 3 children from this marriage -

- Mary 2nd March 1838 Barony, Glasgow
- Ambrose Dale 2nd December 1839 “
- Emma Wilson 22nd August 1841 “

Emma is known to have died, as Samuel married again in 1843. On the 2nd June his marriage to Ellen Sands is recorded in Govan. A further 4 births are recorded.

- Janet Long 15th March 1844 Govan
- Mary McDouall 10th May 1845 “
- William Hodge 22nd November 1852 Kilsyth
- Margaret Carol 10th July 1854 Kilsyth

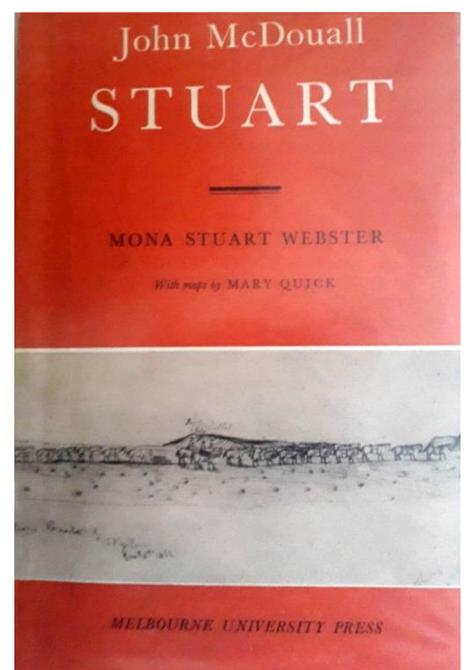
Mary Quick records that when Samuel left for Australia he left some of the children behind to complete their education before joining him. Other than Ambrose being dealt with in this way – no other names are mentioned as either staying or going in 1857.

John, after leaving the Academy, certainly stayed with Samuel at some point before leaving for Australia. He had studied civil engineering and had qualified as a surveyor. Having been a fairly weak child, standing only 5 feet 6 inches tall, weighing around 9 stone, it had become rather obvious that his constitution would not allow him to follow a military career, hence the move into civil engineering. This constitution must have been an iron one to see him survive the hardships he came to face.

What is not clear is whether this qualification was gained in Edinburgh or after moving to Glasgow. It is not known if John had studied surveying at the Academy or if this was undertaken after he left.

This and other points, where there is a lack of clarity, are explained by Mary Quick in her book *John McDouall Stuart*. She makes mention of family papers being lost in a shipwreck but has, or offers, no further details as to whose or which papers had been lost. Even the site of the shipwreck is undisclosed.

We have now covered John's formative years and to some extent looked at details of his siblings. In all honesty any records detailed or otherwise, offer nothing concrete on John's activities before leaving for the New World in 1838. It therefore follows that little or nothing has



Australia will furnish, not only a happy and prosperous home for thousands of England's sons, and of the finest peasantry in the world, whose condition, from circumstances which need not here be inquired into, presents the anomaly, in a period of civilization, of a starving people in the midst of plenty; but that the colonization of South Australia will furnish to civilization another resting-place, whence she may spread her magic influence over a large and hitherto untrodden portion”.

The book went into a number of reprints and we noted that one had been published by *Smith, Elder & Co, Cornhill, and London*. These were two of the gentlemen mentioned in *Object 15* which sought to highlight the massive part Kirkcaldy's Elder family had played in the development of South Australia. We will find several others mentioned in that narrative making their way into this story.

The press of the day carried advertisements and articles on life in South Australia – almost without exception they painted one of an excellent climate together with opportunities galore. Some of the

SOUTH AUSTRALIA.



THE COLONISATION COMMISSIONERS having resolved on despatching a first-class Ship from LEITH, offer a FREE PASSAGE to SOUTH AUSTRALIA, including provisions and medical attendance during the voyage, to MARRIED PERSONS of the following description, not under fifteen nor more than thirty years of age:—Agricultural Labourers, Shepherds, Bakers, Blacksmiths, Braziers, and Tinmen, Smiths, Ship-wrights, Boat-builders, Butchers, Wheel-wrights, Sawyers, Cabinetmakers, Coopers, Curriers, Farriers, Mill-wrights, Harness-makers, Boot and Shoemakers, Lime-burners, all persons engaged in the erection of Buildings, Sailors, and Fishermen; also to Single Women of same age, provided they go under the protection of their parents, or near relatives; Children under 2 years, or full 15 years, free; from 2 to 15, £5 each must be paid by their parents or friends, or by the parish.

On the arrival of the emigrants in the Colony, they will be received by an officer, who will supply their immediate wants; and they will be at perfect liberty to engage themselves to any one willing to employ them, and will make their own bargain for wages, which, in these colonies, are much higher than in Scotland. The thriving state, as well as the salubrity of the climate, of these Colonies, are so well known, that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them. The demand for labourers of the description mentioned is very great, and they have every reason to depend upon getting immediate employment.

Application must be made to the undersigned Gentlemen, viz.

Wm. ALLAN & SON,
Or, **WOODCOCK & ADAMSON,**
Joint-Agents for the Commissioners.

Leith, 20th May 1837.

articles are shown here for interest but, as already mentioned, it is highly unlikely that the reason for Stuart's move will ever be known.

Whatever the reason when the 422 ton barque *Indus* left Dundee for Adelaide on the 13th September 1838, John McDouall Stuart, was one of the 73 passengers on board. The journey, under the command of Captain Clarke, took the standard 4 months, arriving in South Australia in January 1839. Not unnaturally there are few details of the voyage but two things are recorded. The first is that Stuart and a fellow passenger, James Sinclair from the Isle of Arran, struck up a friendship which remained solid during Stuart's time in Australia.

Secondly, Sinclair had a vivid recollection of Stuart suffering two violent episodes of coughing up blood during their time at sea. A doctor would have been on board but nothing more is recorded other than this observation.



It is *deja vous*, yet again, when we turn to the reasons John McDouall Stuart found employment as a Government Surveyor. A full explanation of the work of Edward Gibbon Wakefield was carried in Object 15, the previously mentioned story of the Elder Family.

Wakefield had impressed the British Government with the plans and strategy he promoted for the

systematic and balanced growth of South Australia which was founded in 1836. He believed that the issues of wretchedness and pauperism which plagued Britain at the time was put down simply to – *great wealth in the hands of a few*. His argument was that *there was too large a population for the land available* and he contrasted that to the position in South Australia of *too much land for the number of people*. The obvious solution to Wakefield was to send what he termed *surplus population* to help found Britain's new colonies. It also, he suggested, would allow the wealthy at home to invest in the new colony.

To achieve his objectives he championed a plan which did away with transportation of convicts and the practice of giving some land away free which had until then been the norm in some colonies.

Instead, all land was to be sold to capitalists in Britain or the new colony at an all-important fixed price – having to be low enough to attract investors, yet high enough to ensure that initially it prevented most new arrivals from buying their own land. This meant that most had to continue, for a spell at least, as wage earners – providing a necessary pool of labour as there were no convicts to press into such service.

The monies accruing from the sale of the land would be used as a fund to assist selected emigrants who were carefully chosen to maintain a balance of sex, age and skills. This balance between tradesmen, labourers, artisans, and those

with capital, was seen as an overriding prerequisite of success. It was, it seems, almost a form of social engineering or creating Utopia.

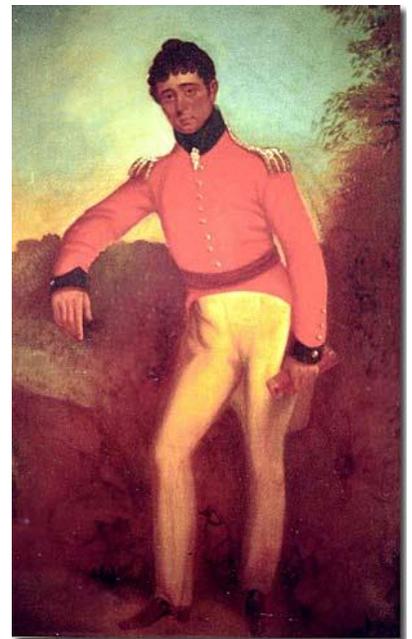
This was where surveying became an important aspect as a considerable amount of land would be sold in London before any settler set out for their new country. It was therefore of paramount importance that the lots sold had been surveyed, mapped out and recorded. This ensured that purchasers were able to take possession of the exact blocks of land they had paid for.

So, the plans were laid for this new scheme with the surveyors, under the leadership of a Colonel William Light, despatched to do their work in advance of the arrival of the governors, officials and settlers.

The theory was that by the time of their arrival they would have selected the site of, and drawn up the plan of, the first town (Adelaide). They were also tasked with surveying sufficient land to allow the purchasers an adequate choice of blocks to purchase.

So it all seemed well planned – surveyors first – select and plan the first town and prepare a raft of blocks of land to satisfy demand – what could go wrong?

Quite simply, insufficient time was given to Light to complete the mammoth task. He had to contend with a lack of both



surveyors and equipment and, to cap it all, the settlers arrived far too early. Matters were exacerbated by some settlers even jumping the gun and independently finding their way to the area – even before Light arrived!

The result was that instead of the land being ploughed, worked and sown, or pasturing the flocks – people were condemned to living in the shanty town unable to get access to the Promised Land. The effect was a delay to the State becoming self-sufficient and the knock on effect was many labourers having no employment. If ground was not cleared, no crops could be grown – the result was imports being necessary leading to rising prices. Not quite living the dream!

By 1839, when Stuart arrived, conditions had improved slightly thanks to more surveyors and equipment being secured from Britain or other Australian States. Fresh meat was also available through the driving of herds of cattle from New South Wales by men known as overlanders. Before this the only fresh meat available had been kangaroo as the flocks of sheep and cattle required to be built up not eaten!

The impetus had to be on surveying, mapping, selling the plots, and then clearing the scrubland for crops or flocks. Until this could be achieved the necessity of imports and a lack of employment made living conditions difficult. Young people arriving in the Colony with limited capital soon found that their money would diminish quickly. This made it vitally important that Stuart found employment quickly and thanks

to his surveying background this was not as difficult as it might have been for others. Young Stuart found employment with the State Survey Department and it appears that he took up a position as a draughtsman in their survey camp on the Onkaparingo River. The camp was some 20 miles from the fledgling Adelaide.

Once again we find that details of Stuart's early life in South Australia are almost non-existent. None of his diaries or letters from the period has survived and many of the Survey Department's records were lost in an 1839 fire. Despite what was to follow, during those early years he was of insufficient stature for his activities to be recorded in either the available media or public record.



Where there is mention of him is in the diaries of one James Collins Hawker. Hawker was an English born explorer, diarist and surveyor. Hawker kept a diary for most of the time he was in Australia and it was he who was second in charge of the aforementioned survey based around the Onkaparingo River. The overall supervision fell to a John McLaren and for some time he was the only surveyor with a horse.

Hawker's reminiscences of life in the formative years of the State were published as - *Early Experiences in South Australia* (1899), Adelaide: E.S. Wigg and Son.

Most assuredly, Hawker and Stuart worked together and once again Mona Webster records that in the writings of Hawker we find: - “following on from their association they were chums for many years”. The paragraph also records that on one of Stuart’s later journeys of exploration he named a creek in northern Australia in Hawker’s honour. Life in the camps was rough and ready with the men, when surveying, having to travel on foot, carry instruments, tools, provisions and frequently water for the day”.

Mona Webster, quoting from Hawker, suggests that the “personnel of the survey parties evidently consisted largely of young men like Hawker and Stuart, of gentle birth, but who had spent the funds brought with them and were now commonly called hard up and not ashamed to try to earn wages as axe and chainmen. When the work of the day was over us young fellows used to spend a convivial evening, generally in my marquee, but occasionally Mrs. McLaren, a most kind, motherly Scottish body, would entertain us. Singing was frequently how we passed the time, varied by anecdotes”. The surveyors, at that time, received pay of 2/10d per day (14p) plus rations.

The rations were perhaps not of the best quality and eventually an inquiry led to the appointment of Captain Charles Sturt (yet another spelling) as a replacement for Colonel Light. Sturt had been born in Bengal to English parents and had joined the army in 1813. In 1827 he arrived in Australia as an escort on a ship bringing out convicts. He liked and enjoyed both the country and its climate which



prompted him to stay. He was very interested in the geography of the area and in particular the rivers.

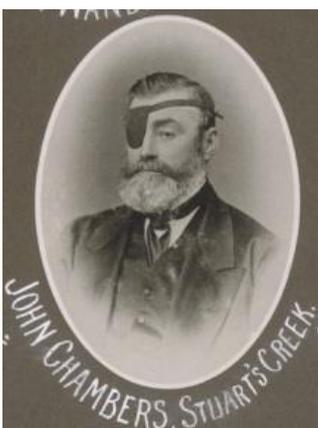
He led two major exploratory expeditions. In 1828–29 Sturt led the first which traced the Brogan, Macquarie and Castlereagh rivers, leading to his discovering the Darling River. The major outcome from this journey was that all these west flowing rivers did not flow into an inland sea as had previously been the belief. What it did not do however, was to establish where they did flow into!

This was the purpose of his second expedition which was mainly navigating down the Murrumbidgee River. In doing so he discovered the Murray River and followed it to its mouth near Adelaide. He was exhausted and nearly blinded, primarily because of a poor diet and overexertion, (the effect of rowing downriver and then the even more demanding return journey upriver). He required a period of recuperation and returned to England during the years 1832-1834. In this period he published, in 1833, *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia 1821-1831*. It was this volume that led to the choice of South Australia as the site for a new British Settlement which, as mentioned previously, subsequently came into being in 1836.

Sturt remained with the Survey Department until leaving to become a private surveyor in 1842. Exploration was in his blood and in 1844 he set out to explore the arid interior of the country. He engaged John McDouall Stuart as a draughtsman. The expedition had bitter sweet results. Yes – it penetrated further north than had been previously achieved but at an unimaginable price. The group came upon

two of the most fearsome and difficult areas anywhere in Australia, the *Stony Desert* and the *Simpson Desert*. The second in command of the group, James Poole, died of scurvy and Stuart was promoted into his position. Both men survived to return to Adelaide but suffered to such an extent from scurvy that Stuart never fully recovered and soon returned to England. Stuart was in such poor health that he was unable to work or travel for almost a year. The expedition taught Stuart valuable lessons which he made good use of in the future. One was certainly how it increased his ability in the art of bush craft, with the other being the importance of travelling light through the use of horses not wagons.

In time Stuart returned to work as a private surveyor but he now, despite the hardships he had suffered, also had a taste for exploration, spending more and more of his time in the wilder, remoter parts. It is known that he moved to Port Lincoln for a number of years before heading to the Flinders Ranges – the largest mountain range in South Australia.



Here he found work with the wealthy pastoralists William Finke and the brothers John and James Chambers. He was involved in exploring, prospecting for minerals, and surveying pastoral leases. It was a stroke of luck that



he became involved with this triumvirate as it was they who encouraged, financed, sponsored, and supported this young man on his way to Australian immortality.

With their significant backing, John McDouall Stuart now had the opportunity to put his own plans into action and in the May of 1858, financed by William Finke and James Chambers, he set off on the first of the six exploratory trips that he eventually made. The starting point was the *Oratunga Station* which at the time was the head station of the Chambers' Brother's empire.



This first expedition was undertaken by Stuart and a bushman named Foster plus an aboriginal youth. Its aim was to explore the area around Lake Torrens. The party had no more than 6 horses and

provisions for a month. In a journey of over 1500 miles over a 4month period they endured horrendous hardships through a lack of both food and water. It was only the fine bushman skills of Stuart which brought both back to civilisation and safety. The major discovery from this expedition was a large creek with permanent water. Stuart later named it Chambers Creek (after James Chambers) but it is now apparently known as Stuart Creek.

Stuart had demonstrated his ability as a first class explorer and the South Australian Government made him a grant of a large area of grazing country. Large is perhaps an understatement when we read the following. The South

Australian Assembly agreed that “an address be presented to His Excellency The Governor-in-Chief, requesting that he will take the necessary steps, by amending the *Waste Lands Regulations* or otherwise, for granting unto John McDouall Stuart, in consideration of and reward for his important discoveries of new country on the north-western side of Lake Torrens, a fourteen year’s lease of 1500 square miles, for pastoral purposes, to date from the 1st January 1859, to be rent free for the first seven years, to be declared stocked at the end of the first four years; after the expiration of the first seven years, to be subject to such rent and regulations as may then be in force. The runs to be in blocks of not less than 200 square miles, of rectangular form, whose length shall not be more than twice the width; the situation of such blocks to be described to the Government by Mr Stuart on the map of his exploration before the 1st January 1859”. (The Commonwealth the 22nd January 1859)

The South Australian Register commented: - “The land granted may seem a vast track – being equal in size to Cumberland, one of the largest counties of England – but it is only the tenth part of what Mr Stuart describes as available out of the 40,000 square miles which he has added – as we may term it – to the colony. Under these circumstances, and with the fact that he takes his portion of the country to improve it and then return it to the public, it cannot be said that his daring and perseverance have been more than fairly rewarded”. (*The Commonwealth* the 22nd January 1859)

The Royal Geographical Society also honoured him by awarding Stuart a gold watch.

It is always important to bear in mind that in the context of exploration that they are only a 'discovery' in terms of the non-indigenous explorers.

With his star in the ascendancy he was now able to attempt more ambitious journeys. His aim in the short to medium term was to reach and find the centre of Australia. Longer term was to cross the continent from north to south – a feat not yet accomplished by any explorer. These aims were also the ones in which Sturt and Stuart failed in 1844 and that may well have been a contributory factor in his determination to succeed.

The longer term aim was possibly, to some degree, fuelled by the Government announcing a prize of £2,000 in cash to the first Europeans to cross the continent. It was not as simple as merely crossing the continent but to establish a route which could be utilised as one for the new-fangled overland telegraph to follow.

Two more preparatory journeys were to be undertaken – the first between April and July 1859, followed by a second between November of 1859 and January of 1860.

Once again, the financial side was covered by William Finke along with James Chambers. The first 1859 journey was to survey land claims in the region of *Chambers Creek* which he had discovered in 1858. There was a



personal benefit involved with this trip. In October 1858 Stuart had applied to the government of South Australia for a pastoral lease on *Chambers Creek* which exceeded the area which he had been granted after the success of his first sojourn.

The surveying undertaken during this trip was intended to hurry along his land application. In essence, he was volunteering to do the work of the government surveyors by measuring out his chosen blocks of land.

On this expedition he was in the company of three men and 14 horses. Once the surveying was completed the party commenced exploring to the north-west. The major result of this trek was that they reached a point 90 miles further north than on the previous expedition.

The 1859/60 expedition was once more undertaken primarily to re-survey Stuart's own land claims. In addition, after



completion of this necessary work, the intention was to survey potential land claims for his sponsors. The re-survey was necessary as, unfortunately, his first survey had encroached on land which had been discovered and claimed by a Benjamin Babbage

and Major Peter Egerton Warburton. Perversely, they had only come to the area following news of Stuart's discoveries!

On this journey Stuart discovered the northern end of *Lake Torrens*. The importance here was that it proved Lake Eyre – 4000 square miles of salt encrusted plain, which was below sea level, was a separate lake and not part of a great inland sea. During the trip Stuart discovered new springs which were fed by the waters of the *Great Artesian Basin*, many creeks and good grasslands. This particular party consisted of five men and 12 horses. One of the men was a William Dalton Kekwick who became a constant companion to Stuart in the exploits, triumphs and dangers, which lay ahead.

When the party returned to *Chambers Creek* two of the members refused to take part in any further expeditions. Kekwick was sent off in search of replacements but returned with only one – Benjamin Head.

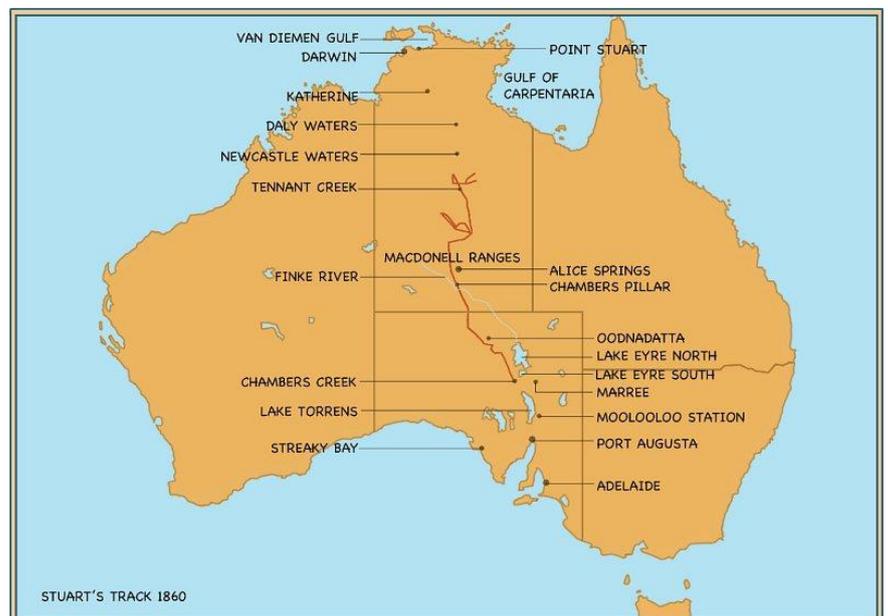
What Stuart did do during these 1859/60 exertions was to establish a base for his exploring activities at *Chambers Creek*. The base was 300 miles north of Adelaide and, despite being on the very edge of the desert, had a permanent supply of water.

On Friday, the 2nd March 1860, John McDouall Stuart, Kekwick, Head and 13 horses, set out from *Chambers Creek* to find the centre of Australia and, if possible, attempt to reach the northern coast and return. It was to be three men and 13 horses against two thousand miles of wilderness utterly unknown and untrodden by white men.

“Far away in Melbourne, The Great Victorian Exploring Expedition, led by Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills, was being fitted out at a cost of £14,000, with the crossing of Australia to the northern coast being its objective.

The exploration was at the behest of the Royal Society of Victoria and its aim was to travel from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north, a distance of some 2,000 miles. In total 19 men set off and were not only equipped with horses but 27 camels! It set out in August 1860 but boggy ground stopped them reaching the ocean. Seven men lost their lives on the expedition which included the leaders. Four men from the party had made the final assault on the coast and only one survived to return home.

“Backed only by his friends Finke and Chambers and without Government aid, with no public farewells and less publicity, Stuart and his two companions rode off into the heat haze of the everlasting desert – to death or glory”.



Stuart's journals reveal that on the 11th March the camp was deluged by an unexpected rainstorm which necessitated a move to higher ground. The next day he recorded that “This rain is the greatest boon to me, as it will give both feed and water for my horses, and if it has gone northwest it will save me a great deal of time looking for water”. (F.F.P. 12/08/50)

It was not long before the party realised the rain was a mixed blessing. The ground had become boggy and great difficulty

was experienced crossing the Peake River. What should have been an almost arid watercourse had become a raging torrent overnight. The crossing of the river led to some of the precious supplies being saturated, with some able to be dried off but others were completely spoiled.

Another misfortune befell Stuart when one of the horses bucked off its pack bags breaking some of the surveying instruments. Stuart spend a whole day repairing the sextant and confided to his journal "I am not sure now if it is correct or not". Pike, in his serialisation, commented that "Mistakes could mean the difference between life and death in that unsettled wilderness".

Despite these setbacks they pressed on northwards to a land "where mirages shimmered on desolate horizons and dead rivers spread out in great lakes of salt. Their beds changing from year to year as dunes of blood red desert sand shifted as the winds blew.

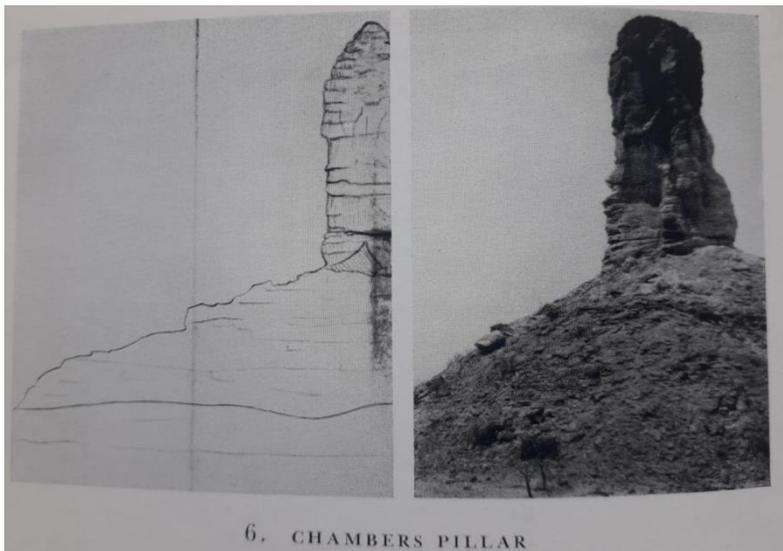
"The heavy rain had brought out a growth of spinifex on the sand hills, coarse [sic] grass along the creek beds, and water was abundant.

"Five inches of rain can transform a pitiless, waterless, desert to a land such as Stuart found". The paragraph ended with a further quote from Stuart's journals; - "The most splendid country I have seen since I first came to the colony".

On April 5th 1860 the group reached the 26th parallel which is now the boundary between South Australia and the Northern Territories. They were now 800 miles north of Adelaide. Progress had become rather slower as the rain had led to the

growth of spinifex, which is also known as porcupine grass, meaning that for horse and man it presented a testing obstacle to navigate.

The landscape was remarkable and Stuart's own words from his journal give a graphic description. To put the quote in context the party had first viewed a perpendicular rock from a distance and made camp at its foot when dusk set in: - "It is a pillar of sandstone standing on a hill which is 100 feet high. From the base of the pillar to its top is about 150 feet with its width 20 feet, its depth 10 feet, and has two small peaks on top. To the north and northwest of it are numerous remarkable bare hills which have a very striking effect on the landscape. They resemble nothing so much as a number of



old castles in ruins standing in the middle of sand hills. I have named this phenomenon *Chambers' Pillar** in honour of James Chambers Esq., who, along with William Finke Esq., has been my supporter in all of my expeditions".

*photograph on the left is Stuart's own sketch

Pike himself added a paragraph aimed at highlighting the beauty of the area- "Central Australia is noted for its remarkable hills, eerie landscapes and vivid colouring, nowadays so vividly depicted by photographers and artists,

but to John McDouall Stuart and his stolid companions it must have been like coming into a lost world”.

Leaving *Chambers' Pillar* behind the party had plenty water thanks to the unseasonal deluge. However, they soon reached a rough heavily timbered range with dense scrub. Their skin, clothes and pack bags, were all torn while navigating a way through. Stuart's little riding mare, Polly, became lame as the oblong blocks of sandstone caused difficulties for the horse's hooves.

Quotations are now from the Fife Free Press of the 19th August unless stated otherwise.

“Far to the north, across their path, lay a ”high broken range, with two remarkable red-hued bluffs about the centre. I shall direct my course to the east bluff.....in the intermediate country are yet three lower ranges we first must cross, Stuart recorded. Our hands are very bad from being torn by the scrub and the flies are a perfect torment. Indications of scurvy are beginning to show themselves on us”, he added.

By the 12th April 1860, despite both men and horses being weary, the party continued toiling over the foothills of the *McDonnell's* which Stuart named after Sir Richard McDonnell, Governor of South Australia.

The next morning he climbed to the highest point of the hill within easiest reach. From the vantage point he could see, some five miles distant, numerous small spurs and beyond that an extensive scrub filled plain followed by another range of hills. “Everywhere I look is ranges, frightening yet calling to be investigated..... a vista which no white man has hitherto

gazed upon. Had a terrible time in getting down the bluff; one false step and I should have been dashed to pieces in the abyss below” Stuart committed to his journal.

But he was a man of action and set off over the difficult terrain. It took a whole day to travel around five miles and it transpired that the horses were continually falling, thereby bruising and cutting themselves. The 15th April saw the party leave the range of foothills behind and they were in the open country, albeit a country covered in dense scrub and spinifex. The land was bone dry which necessitated Kekwick being sent in search of the precious commodity. Camp was made close to a high peak which Stuart had first seen from *McDonnell's*. He named the peak *Mt. Freeling* after the Surveyor-General and the range *The Reynolds* in honour of the South Australia Government's Treasurer.

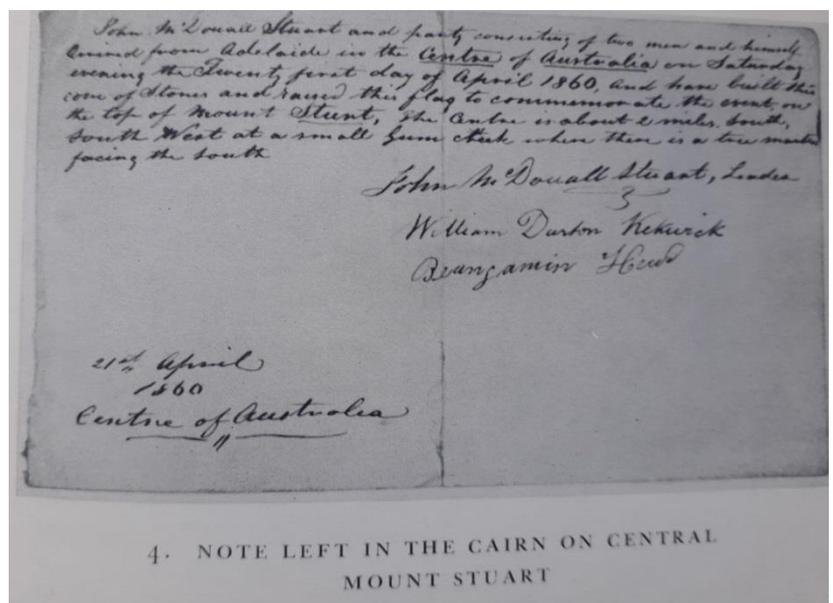
By the following night they were camping at permanent water and for the first time Stuart mentioned in his journal that he had carved his initials and the date on a tree. This appears to have been a standard practice at each camp with the idea that the pioneers who followed with their flocks of cattle and sheep would have a primitive form of guidance. Pike remarked that “these stout hearted pioneer families pushed the frontiers of civilisation further out year by year after explorers such as Stuart and others had first blazed the trail”.

During the journey many strange trees, flowers and fruits, were seen with some of the fruit being sampled. There was no botanist in the party but Stuart saved the seeds of all the new plants he could find. Two further days pushing onward

over rocky hills and dense mulga scrubs tore their clothes to shreds and again water was scarce.

On Sunday, 22 April 1860, Stuart calmly wrote in his journal: "Today I find from my observations of the sun, 111 degs. 00' 30", that **I am now camped in the centre of Australia.** I have marked a tree and planted the British Flag there. There is a high mount about two miles and a half to the north-north-east.... we got some water at this camp by scratching in the sand. " The following day (23rd) Stuart and Kekwick climbed the mountain which was subsequently named Central Mount Stuart – not by Stuart himself however. The name was bestowed by the Governor of South Australia in recognition of Stuart's achievement. Grenville Pike remarked "Stuart liberally plastered the names of friends and parliamentarians across the map of Australia but did not name a single physical feature after himself".

Standing on top of Central Mount Stuart he must have felt a great deal of satisfaction. He had achieved the task he and Charles Sturt had faced but failed to achieve in 1844. Stuart was a driven man and was determined to press on to reach the shores of northern Australia. A cairn was built on Central Mount Stuart and the British Flag nailed to a pole supported by the stones. A piece of paper explaining who had built the cairn and raised the flag was placed in a bottle which was



incorporated into the little memorial.

From his vantage point Stuart decided that while he wished to travel northwards it appeared more advantageous to start to the northwest. The grassy ground soon gave way to spinifex and sand hills. For two days the party had no water until Kekwick discovered some pools. Despite this the country became more inhospitable and often camp was made for the night without water. The horses by this time had nothing to eat but spinifex.

On the 3rd May Stuart wrote in his journal – “I wish I had turned back earlier, for I am almost afraid I have allowed myself to come too far. I am doubtful if all my horses will be able to get back to water. If we do not find water this night (4th May) I shall lose the whole of the horses and our own lives into the bargain. My poor faithful animals are suffering greatly which pains me much”. The result was that the team retraced their steps for 30 miles where they found an old native well. With some vigorous digging water slowly appeared although it took an hour and a half to water each horse. They were then able to travel another 30 miles to another well they had found on the way north and again water was available. By the 15th May the party was back at Central Mount Stuart. By this stage lesser men would have given up – Stuart confides that he was suffering from scurvy, his hands a mass of sores, and he was in great pain as he had been thrown and dragged by his horse when she was spooked by a kangaroo. He also recorded that his legs were turning black.

However, he was “determined to carry on” and by the 18th May they struck out northeast in the hope of finding a way to the coast. After only 15 miles Stuart had to rest for some days. The terrain was rugged and difficult and water was again scarce but the 24th and 27th May saw heavy showers which helped Stuart’s health immensely although he was still suffering from scurvy.

By the 5th June, having travelled 50 miles, Stuart named a rough quartz and limestone range – *The McDouall Range*, after a friend/relative who was a Colonel of the Lifeguards in Wigtownshire. Very helpfully, when looking for something else, we came upon a passage in Mona Stuart Webster’s book. It carried the information that the good Colonel was a younger half-brother to Stuart’s mother. By this stage Stuart was slightly north of the 26 parallel and some 1200 miles north of Adelaide. On the 7th he found a creek with plenty of water with grass growing on the banks. This was named *Tennant’s Creek* after a friend and from 1872, for over 50 years, was a telegraph station on the overland line which followed Stuart’s route northwards.

Moving on, water became an issue once again and on the 10th June two horses had to be abandoned and Polly had a moment of madness when she attacked both the men and another horse. The lack of water was having a severe and detrimental effect on the animals. As Stuart tried to return to the nearest water hole, to his horror, he discovered that the water canteens had been damaged and precious water lost. At dusk on the 11th June they finally returned to the water hole at *Bishop’s Creek* where they halted for two days. Stuart wrote of the horses - “They have again stayed by the water

all night: They had been 101 hours without a drop and covered 112 miles. They will require a week to recover". Stuart was now in the unenviable position of being left with 8 horses of which only 6 could be ridden or carry packs.

He had made a decision and further wrote "Thus ends my last attempt at present to make the Victoria River. I will continue on due north as soon as I am able". Part of the Victoria River which runs into the north-western coast was already known, having been discovered from the sea by the *Beagle* in 1839.

While resting at the camp they had contact with natives and often heard their voices and saw their campfires but nothing in the way of confrontation. Leaving on the 18th June to try and find another route to the north the horses had benefited from the rest and Stuart himself felt better although still weak. He attributed his better health to having eaten native cucumbers which were found growing at the creek. Once again they came upon a formidable barrier of grey-green scrub and again Stuart retreated feeling that the horses were in no fit condition to successfully overcome the obstacle. After only a few miles they came upon water pools which they had initially missed. Stuart named these *Kekwick Pools* after his companion.

On the 20th they once again set off on a slightly different route and traversed through 18 miles of scrub onto a spinifex plain. But there was no sign of water and still none the following day where hopes were diminished by the sight from the top of a low hill of "vast treeless plains lost in

mirage, utterly waterless” – so he decided to return to *Kekwick Pools*.

It did seem a desperate situation and quite how, despite failing health, a lack of provisions and the ever-present threat of scarcity of water, they managed to come as far as they did is nothing short of miraculous.

But a new factor came into the equation on the 26th June when, at a site now known as *Attack Creek*, well-armed local Warramunga men launched an attack against the explorers which ultimately led to the termination of the expedition. The party were some 2400 miles from Adelaide, living on what could only be described as starvation rations and, with not only water drying up but their horses in poor condition, they now faced the long and arduous trek home. By the afternoon of August the 20th Stuart's half-starved party enjoyed the taste of a swan which Stuart shot near *Freeling Spring*. On his return to Adelaide Stuart was ranked among the greatest of explorers. The Royal Geographical Society in London awarded him their Patron's Medal – the veil over the centre of Australia had been removed.



As is so often the case after success, some critics in Victoria suggested that it was not possible to have travelled as far in

the time recorded. Their view was that the journals were faked, or Stuart had miscalculated his latitude. However, the South Australian Parliament were rightly galvanised by his success and, hopeful of finding a route for the overland telegraph, voted the sum of £2500 to allow Stuart to lead a larger and better equipped expedition.



This fifth expedition had the greater percentage of its costs government funded. It was organised by a police inspector – George Hamilton. Some of the provisions and horses were

supplied by James Chambers. The increased size of the party, which as always started from Chambers Creek, numbered twelve men and 49 horses.

Having set out on the 1st January 1861 Stuart soon found the extreme heat taking its toll and he had to send back two men and 5 horses which were in poor condition. The progress north was painfully slow due to an almost continual search for water and horse's feed. While it was slow progress it was continual and, after reaching Attack Creek, Stuart made a number of attempts to cross the scrubby country to the north-west. His hope was, as in the abandoned attempt, to reach the Victoria River.

However, fortune favoured the brave and he discovered what he termed “a splendid sheet of water” which he named *Newcastle Waters*. This, it must be remembered, was Stuart’s first experience of leading such a large party and he always took responsibility for scouting ahead for water, leaving Kekwick in charge at the main camp. This physical exertion contributed greatly to Stuart’s poor health. With provisions low, his men reflecting the effects of the diminished rations, and the horses in poor condition, Stuart again admitted defeat.

The well-equipped Burke/Wills expedition, which was now the subject of a search party led by Alfred Howit, had reached Cooper’s Creek where the only survivor, John King, was found living with the aborigines. It is a strange coincidence that around this time Stuart named a newly discovered watercourse “*Burke’s Creek* after my brother explorer”.

On Stuart’s return, almost immediately, the South Australian Government agreed to finance another expedition under his leadership. This time the plan was to follow his previous route to *Newcastle Waters* and then, rather than attempt to reach the *Victoria River*, he should continue northwards and follow the Adelaide river to the sea at *Escape Cliffs*.

Stuart set out on the 25th October 1861, from the home of James and Catherine Chambers, on his 6th expedition and, as in



past journeys, spent time in preparation at *Chambers Creek*. This, as we have seen, was his third attempt to cross Australia and this one was ultimately successful. The team completed the first European crossing of the continent from *Adelaide* to the *Van Diemen Gulf* passing through the centre of Australia. Not content, they travelled all the way back and without the loss of a single life. The members of this historic party certainly justify having their names highlighted:-

- John McDouall Stuart 46 Leader
- William Darton Kekwick 38 Second in Command
- Francis William Thring 24 Third Officer
- William Patrick Auld 21 Assistant
- Stephen King Jnr. 19
- John William Billiatt 19
- James Frew Jnr. 21
- Heath Nash 23
- John McGorrery 21 Shoeing Smith
- Frederick George Waterhouse 46 Naturalist

The expedition was ready and left Chambers Creek on the 8th January 1862 with 72 horses accompanying the men. Three months later they reached Newcastle Waters where the horses were rested for a week. This was to give them the ultimate opportunity of winning the battle to cross the plains which had previously defeated Stuart. He made many scouting trips over the ground before them and eventually discovered a series of waterholes, creeks, springs and rivers, which he named after his companions.

On the 24th July 1862 Stuart's journal recorded that "Stopped the horses to clear a way, whilst I advanced a

few yards on to the beach where I was gratified and delighted to behold the water of the Indian Ocean in Van Diemen's Gulf..... I returned to the valley, where I had my initials cut on a large tree”.

The following day, Friday 25th July 1862, which was exactly nine months since leaving Adelaide, the Union Flag was raised on the northern shore at Chambers Bay which is slightly to the east of present day Darwin.



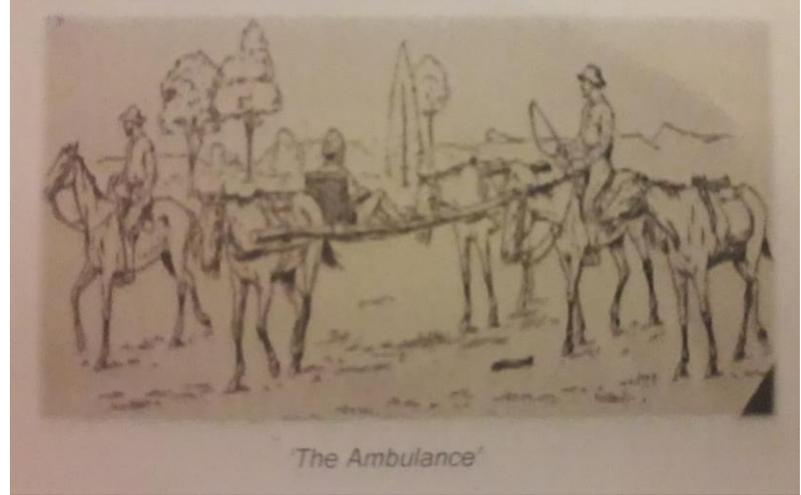
John McDouall Stuart's great ambitions had been achieved. His two aims of locating the centre of Australia and crossing it from south to north had been accomplished. Many years later William Auld

recounted that, at the instant of his success, Stuart seemed to almost collapse when remarking that; - “I have tried all my life to do this, and now have succeeded”.

The group faced a return journey of around 2100 miles following the same route and many support the view that it is one of, if not the greatest, feats of survival in Australian exploring history. The journey had to be undertaken by men and horses already weary from the nine month outward exertions. Add to this camping outdoors and living on limited food and water, Stuart's journal over the return leg paints a vivid picture of his

suffering. It could hardly be otherwise, given that the continual hardship on his many trips, often with only brief intervals between them, would take their toll.

With failing eyesight, it was Auld who was required to take the observations and in his later years he was said to be moved to tears when he remembered Stuart's suffering. There came a point when Stuart was



unable to continue in the saddle and McGorrery, the blacksmith, constructed a stretcher with poles which was slung between two horses. By this method Stuart was carried around 600 miles towards home. However, he was able to mount and ride back into Adelaide for the final part of the homecoming.

Stuart, at the outset of the final leg, had confided to his journal that:-

“I am very doubtful of my being able to stand the journey back to Adelaide. Whatever may occur, I must submit to the will of Devine [sic] Providence”.

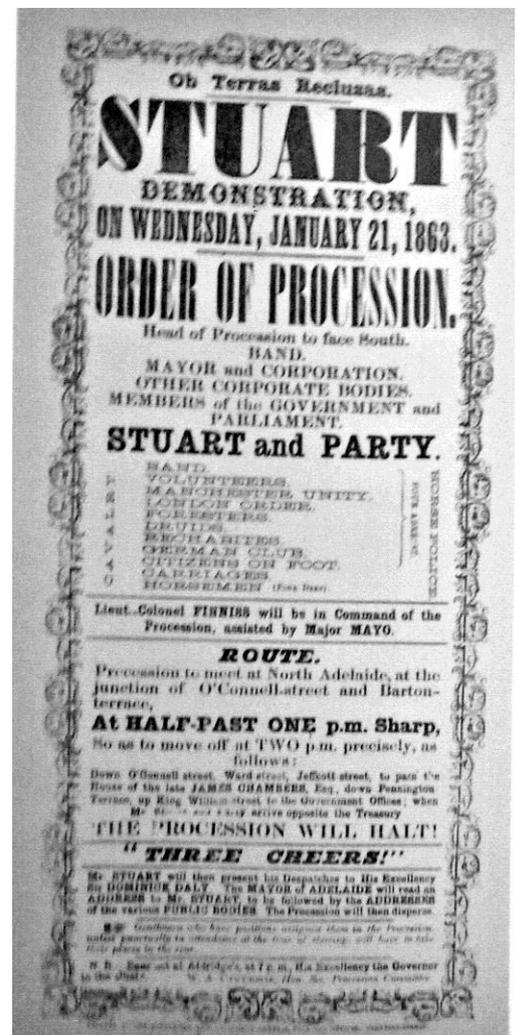
The care and devotion of his companions saved his life and he returned to Adelaide on the 17th December 1862. No man was lost, but only 48 of the 72 horses completed the journey.

It was mentioned earlier that Stuart liberally plastered names of friends and politicians on many of the landmarks and waterways he discovered. Mona Webster informs us that his team were rewarded in this manner with:-

- Billiat Springs.
- Thring Creek.
- King's Ponds.
- Frew's Waterhole.
- Auld's Ponds.
- Nash Springs.
- McGorrery Ponds.
- Kekwick Springs and Kekwick Ponds.
- Waterhouse River.

While Adelaide celebrated the success in Melbourne it was silence as the recovered bodies of Burke and Wills were laid into the ground.

These events took place on the 21st January 1863 before the largest gathering in Adelaide's short history. The organisers had asked the explorers to wear the exact same clothes and ride the same horses as they had done during the expedition. The idea was to create an impression of being the day and the hour of the actual return. So it came to pass that ten threadbare riders rode bony horses through cheering crowds six deep. The band played – "Hail the Conquering Hero".



A poster highlighting the day's activities is illustrated here (courtesy of Dysart Trust).

On that self-same day it is estimated that 40,000 people watched the funeral procession of Burke and Wills pass through the streets of Melbourne with four black horses pulling the funeral carriage.

Stuart was also saddened by the news that his friend and sponsor, James Chambers, had passed away on the 7th August that year.

Following on from his achievements should perhaps have been a life of fame and possibly fortune, but a price had been paid. He literally found himself with nothing, mainly through the poor health which his efforts and deprivations had brought upon him. He had been able to secure his lease at *Chambers Creek*, but his lack of robust health led to his selling the land to John Chambers and Alfred Barker. His right hand, which had been damaged at the outset of his successful final expedition, meant that he could no longer work as a surveyor.

Stuart had given everything of himself to complete his goal and, after the excitement and adulation had waned, his life seemed empty. He looked to his friend and sponsor William Finke for assistance, but Finke died in January 1864. While John Chambers remained alive and offered support, Stuart decided to return to England.

The £2,000 reward was indeed paid to Stuart with £200 paid for his immediate use but the remaining £1,800 was held in a trust deed. The interest was to be paid to Stuart

on an annual basis. Instructions were contained in the deed as to the disbursement of the capital in the event of Stuart's death.

It transpires that the monies were to go to members of his family in Scotland. The income from the capital sum only amounted to £162 per annum which even at that time was insufficient to allow Stuart to live in comfort. Perhaps Stuart had reason to feel hard done by – Stuart had retired to England on a pension of £600! A further £1,000 was voted to Stuart by the Government in 1865 but this was only to be added to the £1800 to produce a greater annual income. Initially this £1,000 was to be returned on his death but subsequently this was rescinded.

He sailed from Port Adelaide in April of 1864; again on a ship named *Indus*, but not the same one as had brought him to the scene of his success all those years ago. One reason for the return may well have been in relation to the publication of his journals. These, or a copy of them, had been sent earlier by mail to a firm of publishers in England – *Sanders and Otley*. With mail taking such a long period it may have been thought by Stuart that being on the spot might hurry publication along. His hope was that money would flow towards him from sales.



The publishers chose Sir William Hardman M.A., F.R.G.S. to prepare the journals for publication. It was perhaps not the best choice as Mona Stuart Webster writes quoting from a letter of

Hardman's published after his own death – "I have cut out a good deal of his earlier explorations, and have remodelled multitudes of passages everywhere, for the Journal in its untouched form is frequently little better than a collection of rough jottings, without the slightest regard to literary composition. Stuart seems to be an almost illiterate person, and is assuredly the driest stick it was ever my misfortune to meet with". The journals when published were entitled *Explorations in Australia* and a copy was presented to the Queen. It is the only publication Hardman appears to have been involved in – we wonder why?

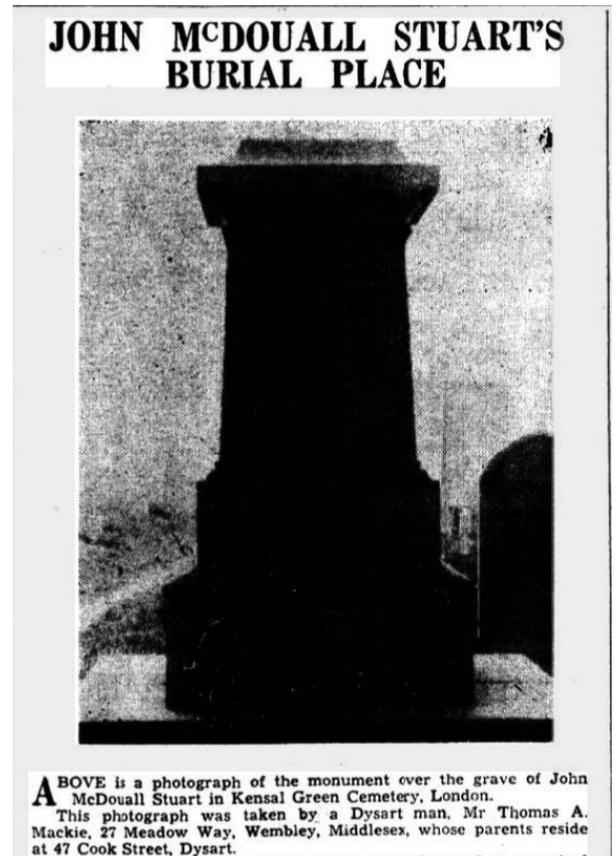
Another letter was stumbled upon by chance which again demonstrates the milk of human kindness which flowed from Hardman.

This time he was writing to an Australian friend – "on the side table in my room lie all the journals, sketches and a prodigious map of routes of your great explorer, McDouall Stuart.....From the portrait of the great explorer, I should expect him to write just such dreary platitudes as he does when he passed beyond the region of fact and incidents into that of opinion.....I shall be allowed full latitude to add, curtail, or dish up as I may fancy best for Stuart and the public at large".

Stuart's last public appearance was in Glasgow early in 1866. The event was a dinner hosted by a group of men who had formerly lived in Australia. When asked to speak he was unable to do so, mentioning that his eyesight and memory were now so bad that he was unable to compose

a speech or even recollect many of the events and incidents which had made his name. Soon after this he set out for London.

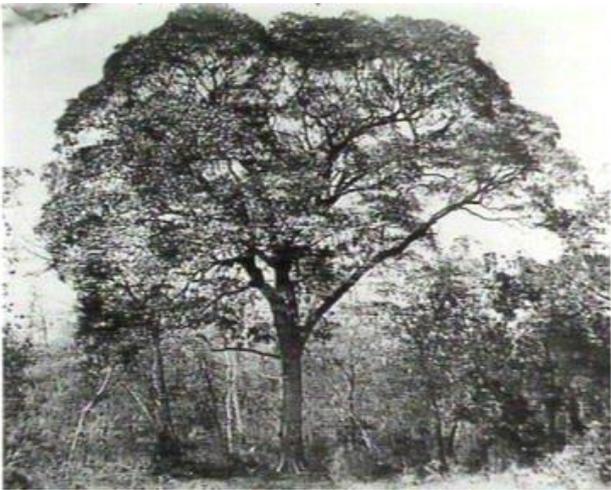
Stuart died on the 5th June 1866 aged only 50 and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery in London. Almost unbelievably, only 7 people were present at the funeral. His widowed sister, Mary Turnbull, arranged for a gravestone to be erected. Mary was by then a widow and living with her sister Margaret and brother-in-law John Arthur. Mary was also the executrix named in his final will which probably explains why it was she who organised the gravestone.



The stone was damaged during the Second World War and in 2010 the missing needle was replaced with the assistance of the Stuart Society and The Royal Geographical Society of Australia.

As always with human nature, after he has died his reputation and achievements were questioned in some quarters. It transpires that the first surveyors sent to locate the area where he reached the coast failed to locate the tree he had marked. Matters were made worse by the fact that several of his companions, who were in the area, also searched in vain. It transpired that Stuart's latitudes

were correct, but there were issues with his longitudes. It was always a testing time for navigators of those times in establishing that reading accurately. It transpired that he had followed the Mary River not the Adelaide River to the sea. Half a degree of longitude, which is around 35 mile, separated the rivers. While some critics cast doubt on both his character and achievements – two decades later the tree was located and photographed – with his initials still visible – his name was vindicated.



The tree was located by a party organised by G.R. McMinn, Senior Surveyor and Acting Government Resident of South Australia. The individuals who located the tree were J.P. Hingston, surveyor, along with

R.G. Buckland and H.W.H. Stevens. McMinn himself then went to verify the discovery and his companion, an Inspector Foelsche, took the photographs.

Given Mona Stuart Webster was a direct descendant, it is fitting that the story moves towards its conclusion with her words:-

The most important thing that Stuart gave his “adopted country” as he called South Australia is the route across the continent! The search for it dominated the later years of his life to such an extent that nothing else – health, or money, or home and family- mattered to him so much as finding a way to reach the northern shore, When he found

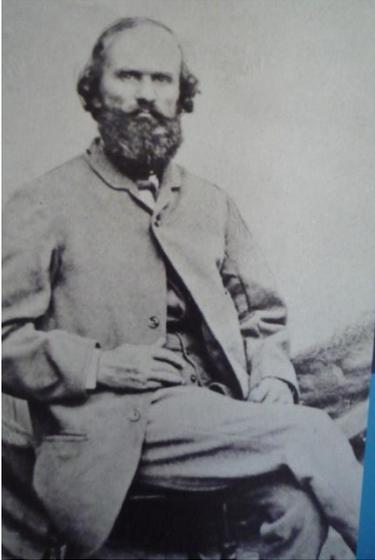
it, his health was gone and with it all hope of wealth or a home of his own, but to the end he was confident that he had achieved something of real value for which his name would be remembered”.

As mentioned earlier, it was felt that the last words should be those contained in the final paragraphs of the article carried by the Fife Free Press of the 23rd July 1904 :-

“It was John McDouall Stuart – when he won his way back to Adelaide from his intrepid journey across the Continent of Australia – who told the world that the vast space on the Australian map was no longer a blank, but a land where millions of human beings would live in peace, comfort and contentment. His work was of far reaching importance and benefit to the entire continent of Australia.

“The construction of the overland telegraph line between Adelaide and Port Darwin, which placed the whole of Australia in ready communication with the old world, might fairly be regarded as a second chapter in the history of McDouall Stuart’s accomplishments. Certainly, the execution of that gigantic undertaking would have been delayed until some years later had Stuart not proved the possibility of crossing the continent. Survivors of the expedition today say that the telegraph scheme was constantly in the mind of the great explorer and he loved to predict that some of the party would live to see consummated the bridging of the continent, not only by telegraph but by railway. Half of his prophecy came true quite early.

“The explorer was awarded £2,000 by the State, surely a very modest sum for the great national service he rendered.



John McDouall Stuart, says the Adelaide Register, requires no marble representation to recall his deeds. They are written into the pages of Australian history, and the records of his life's work can never perish“.

Recognition in Australia

- The 1690 mile long Stuart Highway.
- Stuart Park, an inner Darwin Suburb.
- Central Mount Stuart.
- Stuart Creek in South Australia.
- McDouall Stuart Avenue in Whyalla Norrie.
- Stuart High School “ “ “
- Stuart Street in Canberra.
- Electoral Division of Stuart in Northern Territory.
- “ “ “ “ in South Australia.
- Stuart Range of uplands near Coober Pedy (formerly Stuart Range) on the Stuart Highway.
- The Town of Stuart – renamed Alice Springs.
- A statue by James White honouring Stuart in Victoria Square Adelaide.

- A statue and monument in Darwin celebrates his achievements.
- The laying of the Australian Overland Telegraph cable connecting South Australia with the north coast. Completed in 1872, it follows the route Stuart pioneered.
- The McDouall Stuart Lodge of Freemasons in Alice Springs commissioned, in 2020, a 4 metre high statue of Stuart to be donated to Alice Springs Town Council. It was to mark the 150th anniversary of the 4th expedition which found the geographical centre of Australia – where Alice Springs is closely situated.
- The 1964 founding of the John McDouall Stuart Society which has done so much to perpetuate his name.

Recognition in the United Kingdom

- Plaque on the house where he died - 9 Camden Hill Square
- His grave was refurbished in 2010 and the needle restored.
- In Dysart there is a blue plaque in the house where he was born.
- The house is now known as John McDouall Stuart View.
- A street in Dysart – McDouall Stuart Place.
- A commemorative plaque in Dysart Town Hall.

- A commemorative carving of the 1860-1862 expedition along with the names of the participants carved into the pavement near his birthplace.

In the *Devon and Exeter Gazette* of the 19th April 1913 we discovered a nice touch being reported. It transpired that the Premier of South Australia had paid a visit to Exeter to present a gold watch to Mr J.W. Billiatt of Radnor Villa in recognition of the part he played in the 1862 crossing of the continent. The watch had the inscription – “Presented by the people of South Australia to J.W. Billiatt, Esq., in recognition of his having accompanied John McDouall Stuart across the Australian Continent in the years 1861-62. Adelaide, 29th of August 1912”.

The reason for the date being far earlier was that a dinner had been held in Adelaide to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the crossing. Four of the five survivors had attended and had received their watches along with a gold medal. Mr Billiatt had received his medal by post, but the Premier came in person with the watch.

The *Lynn Advertiser* of the 24th June 1976 carried another item in relation to Stuart. Under the Headline **Back from Desert Trek** the article recounted that a Lynn man, Lt. Raymond Borley, had completed a 6,000 mile trek across the desert centre of Australia. The safari, called “Exercise Down Under”, was a joint British-Australian Army expedition to retrace the steps of John

BACK FROM DESERT TREK

A LYNN man, Lt Raymond Borley, has just completed a 6,000-mile safari which took him twice across the desert centre of Australia.

The safari, called "Exercise Down Under", was a joint British-Australian Army expedition to retrace the steps of explorer John McDouall Stuart.

Five Britons and two Australians set out from Adelaide, capital of South Australia, and in six weeks crossed and recrossed the continent, through the centre, following Stuart's 1861-62 route.

Treasurer

"Lt Borley, whose home address is 28 Little Carr Road, North Wootton, was the treasurer and medic.

The five British officers, including Lt Borley, were all members of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on annual leave from the Royal Military College of Sciences in Wiltshire. According to Lt Graham Keene, who commanded the safari, "Our exercise was a success. We completed all our aims and followed

Stuart's route as closely as we could . . . in places, exactly."

The party went from Adelaide through Leigh Creek, Oodnadatta, Charlotte Waters, Stuart Bore, Lawrence Gorge, Boggy Holed Bore, Hamilton Downs to Alice Springs, where they rested for a few days. They continued on to Tenant Creek, Central Mount Stuart, Mataranka, Pine Creek, Point Stuart and Darwin.

They returned to Adelaide via Tenant Creek, Mount Isa, Winton, Charleville, Bourke and Broken Hill. They took particular note of the vegetation and what support natural life in the area could give to explorers.

Stuart's 1861-62 expedition, the first crossing of Australia through its desert centre, paved the way for great pastoral developments and the construction ten years later of a telegraph line linking Australia with the rest of the world.

Full reports on the expedition will be presented to John McDouall Stuart associations in Britain and Australia.

McDouall Stuart. Five Britons and two Australians set out from Adelaide and in 6 weeks crossed and re-crossed the continent, following Stuart's 1861-62 routes. The five Britons were all members of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers on annual leave. Full reports on the expedition were to be presented to the John McDouall Stuart Associations in Britain and Australia.

To complete the story the team were able to interview Dysart resident, Mrs Annabelle Fotheringham. The reason behind the interview was that for a 20 year period Annabelle served as Curator of the John McDouall Stuart Museum in Dysart.

This excellent little museum, as shown by the press cuttings, shared the 1973 prize for Scottish Museum of the Year. The museum was closed by Fife Council in 2009 having been contained in part of the house where Stuart was born. Annabelle had been friendly with a former Curator, the late Catherine

Simpson, who lived in Edington Place. It was Catherine who, on her retiral, suggested that Annabelle would be the ideal successor. So began a lengthy relationship with Annabelle working initially five months during the summer until this



was subsequently reduced to three. The museum was open seven days per week.

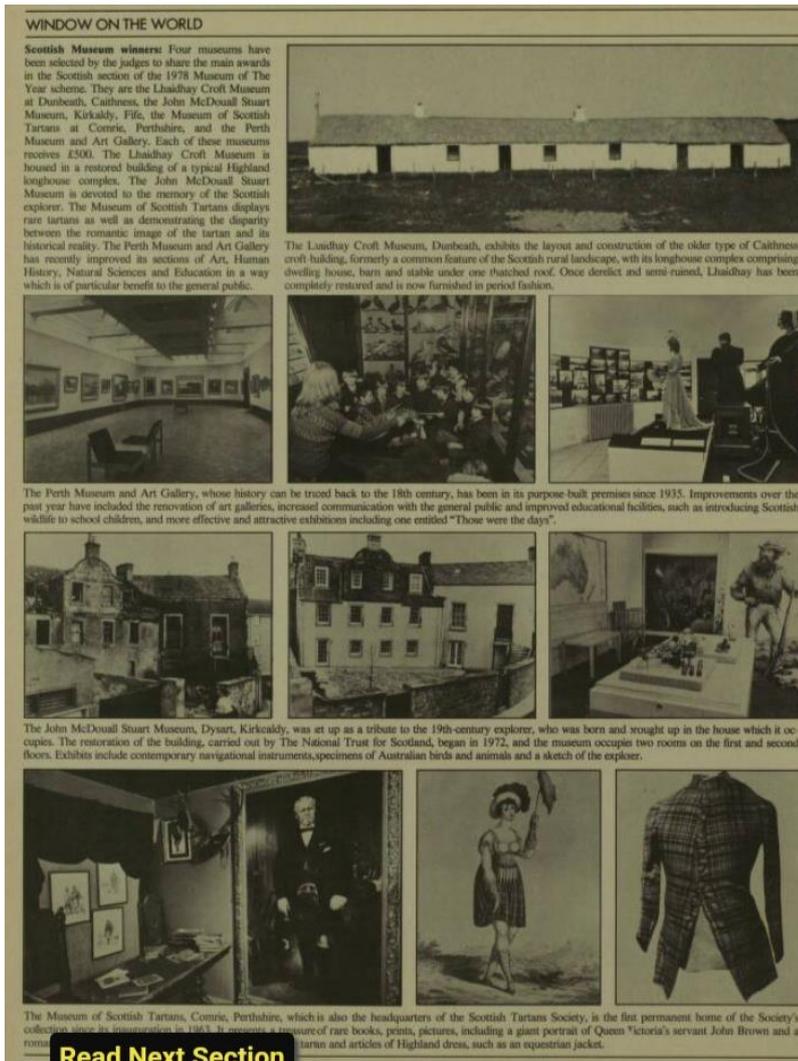
Annabelle recalls how significant numbers of Australian visitors came to the museum – with many undertaking significant detours to visit this shrine to Stuart. Annabelle has

many memories of her time there but chief amongst them are meeting Anne Bachelard and her daughter Kaye. Anne is the daughter of Mona Stuart Webster whose book is frequently mentioned in the above text. Anne and Annabelle exchanged Christmas cards for many years.

Kaye the great, great, great, great-niece of

McDouall Stuart was invited back to Dysart in May 2013 to officially open the Fife Historic Buildings Trust's excellent refurbishment of part of the house, now an ideal holiday let.

Annabelle also met a descendent of John Arthur when he visited the museum. It is believed that this was the John





Arthur who lovingly tended McDouall Stuart's grave for many years.

Also fresh in the memory was a walking stick used by John. It had been in the possession of the Chamber's family and was presented to the museum by an Australian visitor on behalf of the family.

When the news of the forthcoming axe falling on the museum broke fortunately Anne Bachelard was making what was her final visit to the museum. When she returned home – safely ensconced in her baggage was the said stick – which is now in the South Australian Museum. We had hoped to get a photograph of the stick and we are hopeful that the John McDouall Stuart Society will be able to provide the needful in due course.

The Society also informed us that John McDouall Stuart's gold watch



The John McDouall Stuart Museum, Dysart, Kirkcaldy, was set up as a tribute to the 19th-century explorer, who was born and brought up in the house which it occupies. The restoration of the building, carried out by The National Trust for Scotland, began in 1972, and the museum occupies two rooms on the first and second floors. Exhibits include contemporary navigational instruments, specimens of Australian birds and animals and a sketch of the explorer.

which had been presented by the Royal Geographical Society of London had been sold at auction some years ago. The Society attempted to purchase the article but had a ceiling of \$A60, 000. It went for \$A70, 000 but thankfully to the South Australian Museum!

We can have no other ending but the one which completes the circle. At the outset we mentioned that it was Mrs Spalding of 27 Normand Road who was able to provide the detail of where John McDouall Stuart was born. How fitting that Annabelle was able to tell us that as a little girl living at number 28 she could recall Mrs Spalding in her long flowing skirts – nothing we can write can top that!

Acknowledgements

The publication John McDouall Stuart written by Mona Stuart Webster was of immense help.

We thank the Dysart Trust for material, literature, photographs and unfailing assistance.

We thank Anabelle Fotheringham former curator of the John McDouall Stuart Museum for her assistance and reminiscences.

We thank Rick Moore, President of the John McDouall Stuart Society for his help, information and assistance - and his prompt responses despite the time differences!!

We thank Rick Moore and David Kennett for the authority to use David's maps of the six expeditions.

We thank the John McDouall Stuart Society for the myriad of information available to assist research

A link to the society is included to allow readers to obtain further information on the man and his achievements. John McDouall Stuart Society



Back row - left to right - Auld - Billiatt and Thring

Front row Frew - Kekwick - Waterhouse and King

Absent Nash and McGorrery