South Australian Herit e Act 1978-80:	HERITAGE SURVEY ITEM IDENTIFICATION SHEET	REGION 6 : SOUTH EAST

Item No. : NAR:001
ITEM NAME: Struan House, "Struan"
Former or other names:

LOCATION:
Address: Naracoorte-Penola Road, Struan
Allotment:
Section : 335
Hundred : Robertson
County : Robe
L.G.A. : Naracoorte
S.H.P. Region: 6
A.M.G., Ref. Z: 54 N: 5894500
E: 481350

TYPE OF ITEM:
Description: House
Subject: 4.01
Period: 1860-1880
Date: 1873-1875 Condition: Well Kept
Architect: William T. Gore/G. Pannell
Builder: Henry Smith and Thomas Agar

STATUS State Heritage List: Registered
National Estate : Listed
National Trust : Classified

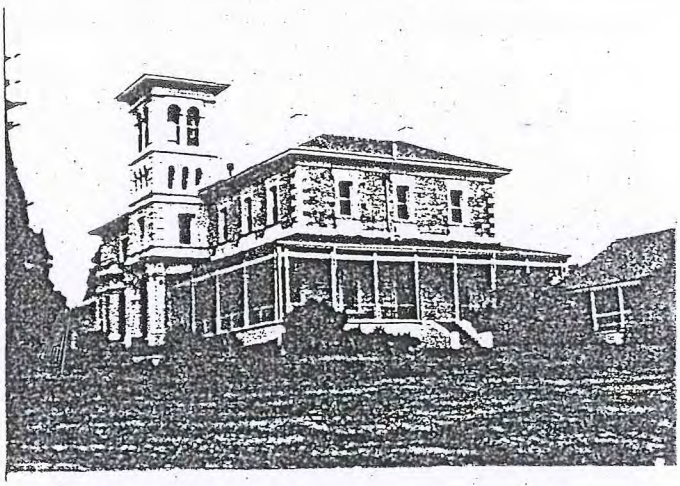
HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE RECOMMENDATION: State

Description:
Random coursed sandstone with limestone quoins and surrounds. Corrugated galvanized iron hipped roof and single storey return verandah. Three storey tower over main entrance - random coursed sandstone and limestone quoins and surrounds. The house is divided into the main house with the servants' quarters attached to the south elevation. The verandah is raised and has Mclean's patent columns and elegant lacework. Surrounding the main entrance, under the tower, is ornamental masonry, consisting of pilasters, bases, capitals, and brackets. This entrance is reached by a flight of slate steps. On the left hand side of the tower is an elegant bay window. The interior has several marble fireplaces and the main entrance vestibule has a multi-coloured tiled floor. The staircase is freestanding. Struan House has an Italianate style, using the three orders of Greek architecture, Doric; Ionic; and Corinthian.

The two storey house was built by John Robertson and was opened by a grand ball on January 27th., 1876. It was estimated to cost 10,000 pounds. Motivation for its magnificence is said to have included a determination to outrival all other homesteads in the region.
Report Text:

REFERENCES: J. Murdoch & H. Parker, "History of Naracoorte" pp. 49-52
"Struan House Centenary - 1876-1976" Folio (Naracoorte N.T.)

Verbal: Norman Wayne, D. of A.



PHOTOGRAPHS:
Slide No : 6/18
Film No : 17
Negative No: 12

Archival No: B10016 (c.1879)

DANVERS ARCHITECTS Date: 1983

7023-10249
'Struan House'
Struan

67/16/01
Struan House
(Kendla)

JOHN ROBERTSON.

THERE was a time when John Robertson, of Struan, was as well known as the South East itself. Before the township of Naracoorte was established he was designated an "old settler" in the district. William Mac Intosh, the founder of Naracoorte, discovered him there when he came on the scene in July, 1845, at which time the locality was known as Robertson's Plains, and to this day there is a Hundred of Robertson keeping green the memory of a really notable pastoralist. He was then known as "Poor Man Robertson." For what reason it is difficult to say after this lapse of time, but beyond doubt is the fact that he lived down the sobriquet. By industry, thrift and patience the squire of Struan built up one of the largest estates in the colony, and proved himself one of the most open-handed men ever associated with broad acres and livestock.

John Robertson was born in Invernesshire, Scotland, in 1809. At the age of 29 years he left Oban in the ship Saint George for Sydney, where anchor was dropped in November, 1838. Ordinary business pursuits were followed for more than a year in different parts of New South Wales, and then a move was made to Melbourne. Shortly afterwards Mr. Robertson took up Struan Station on the Wannon River, Victoria, where a year or two was spent, and then in company with his brother William, late of Wando Vale, he crossed to South Australia in search of good land. He discovered the Mosquito Creek run, which was leased from the Government in 1843, and afterwards bought leases of several other properties, including Warrattenbullie and Elderslie, the latter being on the Victorian side of the border and immediately adjoining the South Australian estate. Woodford Station, on the Glenelg River, and large properties in Portland, were also acquired. John Gall, father of Joseph Gall, of Cantara Station, was manager at Wando Vale, Struan on the Wannon, and Warrattenbullie in turn and retired from the service of the Robertsons in 1862, to enter the pastoral industry on his own account. At one time the properties extended uninterruptedly for at least 30 miles, and embraced nearly 100,000 acres of freehold country, 20,000 acres of scrub lands leased from the Governments of the two colonies, and 6,000 or 7,000 acres of forest reserves and education leases. In the heyday of their history about 100,000 sheep were shorn annually, besides which there was a considerable holding of cattle and horses. John Robertson took great delight in improving his flocks, and, according to a press writer in 1880, his income from sheep alone was in the region of £20 000 a year. The original Mosquito Creek run was 68 square miles in area, for which £752 16/ a year was paid in rent and assessment. The wool used to be shipped at Portland, necessitating a journey of 120 miles. The famous Naracoorte Caves were discovered on this run while a party were out searching for lost sheep. The whole of the leasehold part of

the station was resumed on March 12, 1868.

Elderslie Station, on the Victorian side, is now a soldier settlement, but it was in the hands of the Robertson Brothers for many years. It included 35,420 acres of freehold land, and carried 33,000 sheep, besides 1,400 cattle and a good many horses. Eventually William Robertson dissolved the partnership and bought Wando Vale Station, in the Casterton district, where he remained until his death. Another brother, Duncan, settled at Gringegalgona, in the Coleraine district. There was another William Robertson at Moy Hall Station. He was a cousin of the Struan people. Many years ago Moy Hall was described as the best station for its size, north of Mount Gambier. It consisted of 20,000 acres of purchased land and a lot of scrub country, and it carried 20,000 sheep. The owner had seven brothers interested with him in pastoral properties in the Riverina, besides one on the border at Inglefield. The original area of Moy Hall was 68 miles, of which 51 miles was resumed in 1868, and £522 a year was paid in rent and assessment.

In 1875 John Robertson built at a cost of about £25,000 the ornate mansion known as Struan House, which was described as being more like an English nobleman's seat than a squatter's residence. Its doors were always open to travellers, especially in the pre-railway days. Judges going to the south-east on Circuit Court duty frequently used to stay there, and other distinguished guests were two Governors, Sir James Fergusson and Sir William Jervois. "The Advertiser" published the following account of the Struan house warming:—

"One of the largest (if not the largest) private parties ever given in the South-East, was that which assembled by invitation at the hospitable mansion of Mr. John Robertson, of Robertson's Plains, on Thursday evening, January 27, 1876. The occasion of it was the time-honored custom of warming the house, and all who chose to avail themselves of the invitation met with a hearty welcome. Notwithstanding the excessive heat which prevailed a large number of Mr. Robertson's friends and acquaintances availed themselves of the invitation, which embraced residents from all quarters of the South-East and not a few from the neighboring colony of Victoria. Altogether not fewer than 150 persons could have been present. It would be superfluous to say that everything that could be devised to make the visitors comfortable was brought into requisition, and the energies of the household must have been taxed, so complete were the arrangements. Dancing was commenced a little before 10 o'clock and continued with unabated vigor until the wee sma' hours. One of the large drawing rooms was used for the purpose, and was filled throughout the night with merry revellers. The Naracoorte Brass Band discoursed its sweetest music —and excellent it was—on a raised platform by a half opened window. Supper was served in the spacious dining room upstairs in two sets. When the sumptuous repast had received the marked attentions of the assembly, the Rev. D. McCalman, in a few well chosen words, referred to the interesting character of the event which they were all celebrating, and to the exquisite taste that met the eye at every turn. He trusted that the hospitable proprietor would long live to enjoy the fruits of his industry and perseverance. The house was then duly christened Struan House. Struan being the head of the clan to which Mr. Robertson belongs. The reverend gentleman then proposed the health of Mr. and Mrs. Robertson and long life to them. The toast was enthusiastically drunk in bumpers of champagne and suitably responded to, after which dancing was resumed. On the following day a trip to the caves was organised for the benefit of such of the visitors who desired to remain and see them. The house is by far the largest in the south east, and will bear favorable comparison with anything in the colony. It is not yet completed, but when the contemplated additions and improvements are made to it, Struan House will be replete with every comfort and convenience which modern ingenuity can supply. The cost when finished will be about £25,000."

The opening of Moy Hall House in 1867 was marked by a less elaborate celebration, ending with a general kangaroo hunt. Everybody who had a horse was invited, and the slaughter was great. On that occasion John Robertson had a collarbone broken when his horse was killed under him. His generosity was remarkable, and he obeyed literally the Apostolic injunction, "Use hospitality towards one another without grudging." His house was open to poor and rich alike, and "the blessing of him that was ready to perish" was often upon his head. Until within a few weeks of his death four bullocks a week, besides a number of sheep, were killed at Struan to provide, without charge for those who were travelling or out of employment. That was in the old days when the journey between Adelaide and Melbourne was made by coach. The construction of the railway changed it all. The authors of "Adam Lindsay Gordon and His Friends" make special reference to this splendid side of the Robertson character, and add: "Naturally this generous, frank-mannered family were extremely popular with everyone, especially with all who were poor or in trouble." The Struan and Moy Hall people were great supporters of horse racing and coursing, and Mr. David Mack says that the first coursing event in Australia was run on the Moy Hall estate, and that some of the most famous greyhounds Australia has seen are buried alongside Struan House, including Rodanthe (which won the Victoria Waterloo Cup twice,) Capri and Highthorn. Governor Fergusson went down to see one Moy Hall Cup run. John Robertson patronised mostly the South Eastern race meetings, and Mr. Mack recently published the following in his reminiscences:—"To show how popular were the Penola meetings, for years many Victorian owners brought their horses along, and I have vivid recollection of seeing Duke Montrose, owned by the late John Robertson, of Struan, being defeated in tthe Penola Handicap, of two miles, by the late Tom Fergusson's Melisia. Mr. Robertson, who kept many horses at Struan, would not hear of the Duke's defeat, and when the post had been reached, and his horse outpaced, he gave a sarcastic bystander a smack across the shoulders with his riding whip; but the squire of Struan, regretting his impulsive act, sent along a handsome cheque to Charlie Drake a few days later. An imported horse named Frank stood at Struan at the time, and he got a few good winners."

John Robertson died on March 31, 1880, at the age of 71 years, and his tomb is on the hillside near Struan House. The township of Naracoorte was deserted during the hour of his funeral, all business places being closed. The bell of the Presbyterian Church was tolled. He was one of the founders of the church, and he and his cousin William gave £700 to help extinguish its debt. The "Naracoorte Herald" published a beautiful poem about John Robertson when he died, including these lines:—

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The Hon. W. Shiels, Premier of Victoria in 1902-3, married a daughter of John Robertson. Mrs. May Pender, of Naracoorte, is another daughter, and the "Stock & Station Journal" is indebted to her for the portrait reproduced with this sketch.

Cockburn, R.

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Lynton Publications
1974.

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FILM 60
NO 3

STRUAN HOUSE FROM NORTH WEST

NARACOORTE
23-2-79

FILM 60 NO 2 — VIEW OF STRUAN HOUSE AND ROBERTSON FARM 2ND HOMESTEAD FROM NORTH WEST — NARACOORTE 23-2-79

10249

FILM 60 DOORWAY 2ND HOMESTEAD, STRWAN HOUSE NARACOORTE
NO 5 10248 23-2-79

FILM 60 INTERIOR ENTRANCE HALL NARACOORTE
NO 6 STRUAN HOUSE 23-2-79