

Public Nomination

197 Childers Street, North Adelaide

DISCUSSION

Apart from the assertion that the house was the home of James Stobie, inventor of the Stobie pole, the nomination provides no evidence that the place might meet one or more of the criteria at the State level. As the desktop study shows this assertion is not correct, DEW considers that a full assessment is not warranted for this place. A summary of findings is below.

The dwelling at 197 Childers Street, North Adelaide is a blue stone cottage that was constructed in 1890 and has been extensively renovated and extended in the past few years.

Despite the assertion in the nomination, it appears that the house has had no associations with the Stobie family until it was bought by Peter Stobie in the 1960s (long after the Stobie pole was invented and after the death of his father James Stobie). However, the nomination does draw attention to an important fact, namely the significance of James Cyril Stobie. He did have a considerable impact on the pattern of South Australian history, and is also associated with something that is distinctive to this State. At some point in the future it may be worth considering whether his significance is adequately represented on the Register, in particular, whether any of the surviving Stobie poles should be considered for listing (given there are already a number of Electric Company Buildings on the Register). We propose to add 'Stobie pole' to our wishlist for future assessment projects.

A brief history of James Cyril Stobie and the Stobie pole

James Cyril Stobie was born in 1895 at Parkside, Adelaide to James and Alice Stobie who were grocers. A gifted student, James received a scholarship to the Preparatory School at the South Australian School of Mines and Industries. However, when his father passed away in 1912, James took over the family grocery store at Mile End. In 1915, he enrolled in evening classes at the School of Mines and was awarded a diploma in mechanical and electrical engineering that year.

In 1916, James was employed by the Adelaide Electric Supply Co Ltd (AESCo) and while working there he continued his studies; receiving a fellowship diploma in 1919, then a Bachelor of Engineering from the University of Adelaide in 1921, and later his Master of Engineering in 1932. He became the chief draftsman for AESCo in 1923, and in 1924 invented the Stobie pole to carry electricity and telegraph cables and address the 'scarcity of timber and abundance

of termites¹ in South Australia. Each pole consists of two steel I-beams held together with tie bolts and concrete fill. He applied for letters patent for the pole in 1924 and was later paid £500 by AESCo for the patent rights. Stobie went on to invent a number of other items and applied for patents for some of them in 1929, 1931 and 1940. In 1946, Stobie became the chief design engineer for ETSA, which took over from AESCo and then in 1950 he was made assistant to the manager of engineering research. Stobie passed away in 1953 at his home in Malvern.

Identifying where JC Stobie resided

In 1915, a Jas Stobie storekeeper lived on Gladstone Street, Mile End. During the 1920s a place of residence doesn't appear in the Sands and McDougall Directories for JC Stobie or Jas Stobie, however, Mrs A Stobie, most likely his mother was living on Military Road, Henley Beach. Stobie is an unusual name and there are only three or four entries for it in the directories each year. It is possible that James and his wife Rita, whom he married in 1924, were residing with and supporting Alice Stobie as James had done after his father's death. While he disappears from the directories during the 1920s, JC Stobie engineer is listed in 1929 as residing at Franklin Street, Henley Beach. His grandson Michael, has confirmed that James did live at Henley Beach during the 1920s, before moving to 51 Austral Terrace, Malvern where he resided until he died (Attachment D).

197 Childers Street

The nomination suggests that the dwelling at 197 Childers street was the Stobie family home. A title search indicates that it was owned by Peter Stobie and his wife Margaret from 1966, Peter is James's son. A search of the Sands and McDougall Directories indicates that throughout the 1920s and until the mid-1950s, 197 Childers Street was the home of Mrs Eversley Thomas. In 1955 it was the home of FH Henderson until the early 1960s when Dr Peter Stobie, eye specialist, is listed as residing there. This suggests Peter may have lived at 197 Childers Street prior to purchasing the property with Margaret in 1966. There is no evidence that James Cyril Stobie lived at 197 Childers Street, as the family lived at Mile End where the family store was located, then at Henley Beach and Malvern.

In 2014, 197 Childers Street was assessed by McDougall and Vines as a part of the North Adelaide Heritage Survey. The recommendation at that time was 197 Childers Street should be listed as a local heritage place as it was found to meet two local heritage criteria, namely (a) and (d). Specifically, it 'represent[s] the continued construction of residences on recently subdivided town acres, particularly in the 1880s' and 'displays aesthetic merit and design characteristics of significance to North Adelaide as it's a typical 1880s Victorian residence'. It is unclear why, 197 Childers Street was not subsequently listed as a local heritage place.

State Heritage Assessment

The nomination has provided very little evidence to substantiate the claims made, nor has the nominator applied the criteria in a rigorous manner in keeping with the guidelines and threshold

¹ Australian Dictionary of Biography

required for State Heritage listing. Most of the assertions in the nomination form pertains to local heritage criteria and the local rather than State context. A review of the evidence provided and available sources suggests that there are no grounds for suggesting the nominated place could fulfil any of criteria (a) – (f). The only possible grounds for considering the place to have State values relate to criterion (g) because of the significance of James Cyril Stobie. An analysis against criterion (g) is provided below.

(g) It has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance.

James Cyril Stobie is an important South Australian inventor and engineer who is most well-known for developing the Stobie pole. Since its development in 1924, the Stobie pole has become a ubiquitous part of the South Australian landscape and played a vital role in the supply of electricity to South Australians. A recent nomination claimed that James Stobie lived at 197 Childers Street and consequently that the place is associated with this important South Australian and his invention. However, there is no evidence to suggest that James Cyril Stobie lived at 197 Childers Street, nor that he worked on the development of the Stobie pole there. Rather, he most likely lived at Henley Beach and then, from 1930 until his death in 1953, at Malvern.

Stobie developed the pole while employed by AESCo, although seemingly not for them as an employee as the company later purchased the rights to the patent. However, there are three State Heritage Places on the South Australian Heritage Register that are associated with AESCo, namely:

- Former Adelaide Electric Supply Company Converter Station, 8-51 East Terrace, Adelaide, SHP 10985
- Tandanya (former Adelaide Electric Supply Company Power Station), 241-259 Grenfell Street, Adelaide, SHP 10984
- Former Adelaide Electric Supply Co Ltd - Four former garages and two double storey office/workshop buildings, 32-56 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Mile End, SHP 26308

James Cyril Stobie is an important South Australian and his invention of the stobie pole deserves recognition, however, 197 Childers Street has no known association with him or his development of the Stobie pole. Instead it became the home of his son Peter, nearly a decade after James' death.

References:

¹ R. W. Linn, 'Stobie, James Cyril (1895–1953)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stobie-james-cyril-11776/text21063>, published first in hardcopy 2002, accessed online 15 July 2020.

National Archives of Australia search results for Stobie, James Cyril
<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ListingReports/ItemsListing.aspx>
[accessed 15 July 2020](#)

'Death of Mr JC Stobie', *Advertiser* 17 August 1953, p.2.

Rob Linn (1996), *ETSA: The story of electricity in South Australia*, (Adelaide: ETSA)

Sands and McDougall's South Australian Directory for years 1910-1965 available online at SLSA:

https://encore.slsa.sa.gov.au/iii/encore/record/C__Rb1040847__Ssands%20mcdougall%20a%20delaide%20directory_P0%2C16__Orightresult_U_X1?lang=eng&suite=cobalt