

# Historic Event

AT BIRDSVILLE MEMORIAL

STURT CENTENARY CEREMONY

DISTINGUISHED GATHERING

Friday, 1st September will remain in the memory of the people of the south-western districts of the State as an historic occasion, for on the forenoon of that day the cairn and plaque, built by the Diamantina Shire Council at Birdsville at the request of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia by the branch in Brisbane, following the suggestion of the South Australian branch, was unveiled by Mr. W. H. Green, Queensland president of the Society, before a large gathering of residents and visitors from several States.

Friday, 1st September, was the first day of a two days picnic race meeting at Birdsville, and this far south-western outpost of the State became the centre of a national celebration which commanded the attention of every Australian, for there is no question that Captain Charles Sturt by his exploratory work one hundred years ago gained for himself a notable place in Australian history.

## MR. DEVRIES' UNIQUE HONOUR

The president (Mr. W. H. Green); the hon. general secretary (Mr. D. A. O'Brien); Miss Agnes T. Woodard, F.R.G.S.A. (member of Council) and Capt. W. Forgan Smith (Qantas pilot and member of the Society) flew from Brisbane to Birdsville to represent the Society at the unveiling. The Commonwealth Government granted the use of a plane for the purpose. Mr. G. H. Devries, M.L.A. (Gregory) was also a representative and member of the Society, but other Parliamentary duties necessitated his transit by road and he arrived in time for the unveiling, to represent the Society, the Queensland Government and also be present as the member for the district.

Mr. Devries' presence at Birdsville marked the first occasion when a member of Parliament representing that area, visited the district since the inception of Queensland as a separate State, or before it, during the past 100 years at least. Mr. Devries' interest in the constituents of the isolated parts of his large electorate has achieved that commendable honour.

The cairn was built by the capable hands of the Diamantina shire clerk (Mr. R. Gaffney) and it would do credit to a large city. The inscription

reads:—"Central Australian Exploring Expedition. Captain Charles Sturt with a few companions twice entered the Birdsville region in September and October, 1845. His discoveries opened the way to the north for later explorers and resulted in the pastoral occupation of Western Queensland."

Altogether about 22 memorials of various kinds have been erected along the route Sturt took from Adelaide to Birdsville and on 13th August, at Adelaide, the Deputy-Governor of South Australia in unveiling a plaque to the memory of Sturt, gave a splendid summary of the life and work of this great explorer.

## THE CEREMONY

The Royal Geographical Society representatives called at Charleville on the way to Birdsville and on the evening of 30th August were given a fine welcome by the principal citizens of that town. Mr. J. Allen presided at the gathering in Hotel Coronas Hall where refreshments were served to support the celebrations. A number of souvenir Sturt Envelopes were posted at Birdsville bearing the post mark of the day of the function and will serve a good medium for advertising Australia abroad. Rev. M. Rayon, loaned a flag which was used at Birdsville unveiling and now becomes historic.

On the evening of 31st August, in the absence of Mr. Afford (chairman of the shire), Mr. R. Gunther (Monkira, Winton), presided and extended a warm welcome to the Geographical representatives, including Mr. G. H. Devries, M.L.A., who was also present, representing the Queensland Government and as member for the district. Mr. Gunther said it was the greatest day in the history of Birdsville.

In responding, Mr. W. H. Green said it was a privilege and an honour to respond, and in helping to honour one of the greatest citizens of Australia in Capt. Sturt, their visit was not in vain. Representatives were present by the courtesy of the Prime Minister of Australia and were able to join with the local people in co-operating in the celebrations as befitting the great occasion. Mr. Green said he and other representatives were at home and received hospitality in the full which will last in their hearts and memories. He regretted the absence of His Excellency, the Governor, Sir Leslie O. Wilson, who was unable to be present and had asked him to convey his best wishes and kind thoughts. -He regretted the delegates from the South Australian branch were unable to be present and thanked Mr. G. H. Devries, M.L.A., for having agreed to be

present and thanked Mr. G. H. Devries, M.L.A., for having agreed to be present when it was thought no other representatives could attend.

Mr. O'Brien thanked the chairman for his welcome and was pleased to be present with his fellow representatives:—Mr. Green, who is a busy man and gave up his valuable time; Mr. Devries who travelled a long road journey under many difficulties to be present; Miss Woodard who stood beside the London Geographical Society's plane in England when it returned from exploration over Mount Everest, and who contributed articles to the "London Times" and B.B.C. in England dealing with the Correspondence system in operation by the Department of Public Instruction in Queensland; and also with Capt. W. Forgan Smith, who has a distinguished flight record. He stated he had been associated with Mr. Devries for many years and his fine character and good citizenship combined with his conspicuous ability would afford him a life of great usefulness in the development of his country.

Miss Woodard in expressing thanks stated she was the only woman representative present.  
(Continued on Next Page)

## HISTORIC EVENT

(Continued from previous page)

representative and on behalf of the women of Queensland appreciated the honour of being present.

Mr. Devries said the country out-back was sparsely populated, but had its compensating advantages. The people were sharp and intelligent; their mentality was good and they were fortunate to possess such a fine corner of the State. He thought localities should be judged by production and results those in authority should come amongst the people, he was proud to represent such an area in his constituency, and he had just learned he was the first member to have visited this part of the constituency in 100 years. He hoped to be able to help many of the local people in their troubles when he returned to Brisbane. He was pleased to see Royal Geographical Society representatives present and hoped they will do much more for the development of the State. He referred to local development, hoped aerial transport would be a big factor in the future of Birdsville and considered this part, as a land of unknown people, as quite different from being forgotten. He hoped the Royal Geographical Society would be as an ambassador to help him to do big things, for the development of the country.

Capt. Forgan Smith said it was his

Capt. Forgan Smith said it was his first visit to Birdsville and was given such a warm welcome that he hoped he would be able to come back again.

The chairman (Mr. Gunther) said as Mr. W. Lloyd (chairman of the Boulia Shire) had travelled 400 miles by road to be present at the celebrations, he would like him to support the welcome to the delegates. He (Mr. Lloyd) agreed with Mr. Devries that they were not a land of forgotten people but unknown. It gave him great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the Royal Geographical Society representatives.

The chairman said he appreciated the remarks of Mr. Devries and he knew Mr. Devries is held in high esteem and bears a high reputation.

### SHIRE'S WAR EFFORT

Mr. W. H. Green congratulated the shire on its war effort which, if calculated on a population basis, would have been first place in Queensland. He congratulated Mr. R. Gaffney on his personal skill in constructing such a fine cairn of stone and cement for the Sturt Centenary. It was pleasing to know that the gathering was the largest attendance for Birdsville and included Matron Martin, who came 400 miles from Boulia Hospital whilst others came from as far as Maree in South Australia, 370 miles distant, to be present for the celebrations. Mr. Green moved and Mr. Devries seconded a vote of thanks to the chairman for the fine way he conducted the meeting. This was carried by hearty cheers and thanks were returned by Mr. Gunther.

The picnic races were held on Friday and Saturday when good events were conducted with a record attendance.

At the unveiling of the Sturt cairn on Friday forenoon, 1st September, the chairman called on Mr. Green to perform the ceremony of unveiling. He said they had gathered to honour Sturt, one of our greatest explorers. He considered Sturt, in visiting the Birdsville area, made his decision through lack of water, to turn back, and by sheer grit, made his way to Adelaide after a trying journey of 17 months.

Mr. W. H. Green said it was an historic occasion indeed. He thanked the Diamantina Shire Council for making it possible for the Society's representatives to be present, and thanked the chairman and Mr. Devries for deciding to ask him to perform the ceremony. He conveyed the congratulations and kind wishes of His Excellency, Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, who was in Sydney that day and unable to be present. His Excellency was interested in the Queensland, and Australian pioneers and held remembrance of pioneers who help-

and Australian pioneers and held remembrance of pioneers who helped and stood by the nation in every crisis.

The chairman stated thanks were due to the Prime Minister (Mr. J. Curtin) for granting a plane to convey representatives to Birdsville. It was a big and worthy action in recognition of those who served the country in the past and an inspiration for those to come after us. It will help the child in future, to link the past with the present, as the past lends impressions that help the future. "We must not forget the pioneers who, at the risk of their lives and under great hardship, travelled over unknown lands and whose records will be known and honoured for all time," added the chairman. Capt. Charles Sturt fought in the wars in France and Spain and narrowly missed the battle of Waterloo. He was appointed K.C.M.G., for his difficult services. He was given one of the greatest honours by the London Royal Geographical Society, when awarded the Founders' Gold Medal. He was an explorer, a brave soldier, a good citizen and a sterling friend. A very touching reference was made to the ghost-like appearance of Sturt and his party, upon their return to Adelaide. He handed over his diary to be burned, but the gardener preserved it, and it is to-day a priceless historical record and one of the richest possessions in the South Australian Museum. At his farewell, Major O'Halloran thanked him for his services to his country and his touching reply disclosed the fine, brave type of man he was.

Mr. Green then unveiled the cairn and plaque and said he regarded the request to do so an honour for the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia.

Supporting Mr. Green, Mr. Devries said it gave him great pleasure to be present and felt honoured in being selected as an official representative at the Sturt Centenary on such an august and historic occasion. He said the fine address by Mr. Green left him little to say on the life and explorations of Sturt, but he compared the trials of the past and the present; Sturt trod where no white man had gone before and knew what he had to face in physical and mental pain to achieve progress for mankind. Mr. Devries paid a tribute to Mr. "Bob"

from Great Britain had said, of all the countries and peoples he knew, there were none better than Australia and its people. This can be truly said of the splendid people of Birdsville and its vast district, said Mr. Devries. He lived in Central Queensland for the past 28 years and knew the conditions. He was happy to be present and just learned that for 100 years he was the only member for the district to visit Birdsville. He would do his best to help the people in this isolated place.

Mr. O'Brien referred to the excellent arrangement for all the functions the courtesy of the various bodies and the hospitality of the people. He eulogised the fine work of the Society and of its loyal co-operation in helping to build up the great British Empire. He said it was fine to see Matron Martin all the way from Boulia, 400 miles of a journey. The Boulia Shire chairman (Cr. Lloyd); Mr. Gunther from the Winton district and visitors as far as Maree, 370 miles away in South Australia, all gathering to honour the great explorer, Capt. Charles Sturt, and establish a record gathering for Birdsville for the celebration. He read a letter from the Premier (Mr. F. A. Cooper) congratulating the Diamantina Shire Council on providing the cairn and plaque, and congratulating the Royal Geographical Society on being the only body that linked the Sturt celebrations in the south with Sturt's visit of exploration to this State.

#### BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

Miss A. T. Woodard said she was very happy to be present. She said Sturt stands eternally in Australian annals and as one of his race she was proud to be associated with his explorations. His spirit permeates the wilds. She was the sole woman representative at the celebrations and thanked the Prime Minister for making it possible for her to be present, and joined with all the women of Queensland in wishing him well. When she made inquiries in Brisbane about the journey she was advised to "forget about it." However, said Miss Woodard, when the Diamantina Shire Council built the cairn and the Royal Geographical Society did so much to assist, she thought of Robert Bruce and the spider. She congratulated the women who came to this prosperous part of the world without the ordinary comforts of life, and with their husbands made good and have reared strong, healthy children. She stated she was fortunate in having such a courteous and efficient pilot as Capt. Forgan Smith, who made reference to all the places as the plane covered the journey.

Miss Woodard was then presented with two bouquets of flowers (including Sturt desert peas) by two little

---

Gaffney who built the cairn; a fine piece of work and shows why the spirit of Sturt lives on. The Prime Minister (Mr. J. Curtin) returning from Great Britain had said, of all the countries and peoples he knew.

with two bouquets of flowers (including Sturt desert peas) by two little girls (Misses Colleen Clanchy and Norma Carolan).

Capt. W. Forgan Smith said, as a member of the Society, he was honoured by his selection as a representative of the Society at such a gathering to honour so great a man as Capt. Sturt.

The chairman said he agreed with one distinguished writer, that whilst Sturt's discoveries were not the greatest, his difficulties and the survival of them places him first amongst the great Australian explorers. Seeing that Cr. Lloyd (chairman of the Boulia Shire Council) came 400 miles to be present, he would ask him to add his tribute to Sturt.

---

Cr. Lloyd said he was very pleased to be present to honour so great an explorer. When Sturt overcame his blindness he still persisted and must have been a man of unusual courage. When he discovered Cooper's Creek, he named it after a judge in South Australia. He (Cr. Lloyd) did not expect such a fine gathering and regarded it as a great honour to be asked to speak on the occasion.

At the commencement of the unveiling ceremony the National Anthem was sung and a feature of the gathering was the presence before the cairn in a special seat was Mr. L. P. Fahy, formerly a press representative for the district. After his long residence in the district it must have rejoiced his big heart to live to see the ceremony of this great historic day for Birdsville.

The Royal Geographical Society representatives were courteously shown over the Nursing and Welfare Home by Sister M. A. Gordon, who is in charge and learned the hospital is entirely supported by the people of the district. The home was originated by Rev. Dr. John Flynn, of A.I.M. fame.

Miss Woodard had the unique experience of congratulating Mrs. Gaffney (senr.) on the way her little grand-daughter presented the bouquet at the function; Miss Woodard worked the radio by the pedal set at the Nursing and Welfare Home.

#### RADIO TO MR. CURTIN

A radio message was sent to the Prime Minister by the Royal Geographical Society recording the unveiling ceremony of Chas. Sturt Memorial and stating this was very happily accomplished before a record Birdsville gathering, through his generous gesture, and the message was signed by the three officers of the Council of the Society.

The Diamantina Shire Council also sent a radio to the Prime Minister expressing appreciation of his action in

sent a radio to the Prime Minister expressing appreciation of his action in making transport available for representatives of the Royal Geographical Society.

From the very commencement of the celebrations to the very end when the representatives left for Brisbane, the whole arrangements were thoroughly planned and carried out in perfect order and harmony. The conduct of the people of this little centre was exemplary.

Birdsville is situated on the edge of the Simpson Desert and although the township is situated on a kind of clay-pan, there is good soil beneath the clay and several miles of rich soil beside the township where the Diamantina River spreads its banks. Flood time is of benefit to the pastoral industry when the up-crop of vegetation follows the waters as they recede in the river and the flood goes down.

A working bee at early morn on 1st September, the day of unveiling of the Sturt Memorial, prepared the ground to plant two trees provided by Mr. C. T. White, F.R.G.S.A. Queensland Government Botanist at Brisbane, and carried by the representatives in the plane to commemorate the occasion. The chairman arranged one tree (a currajong) to be planted by Mr. Green (president) and a bottle tree by Mr. O'Brien (hon. secretary). This completed the work of the Royal Geographical Society in connection with the Sturt Centenary at Birdsville.

The representatives left Birdsville at 6.30 a.m. on Saturday, 2nd September with morning tea at Springfield Station; lunch at Charleville; afternoon tea at Roma and arrived the same day in Brisbane at 5.9 p.m.