

THE GRAND OLD MAN OF PIGEON RACING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

How many of the present members of the South Australian Homing Pigeon Association Inc. know anything about the history of pigeon racing in this state? One man for certain really does know because, still going strong at the ripe old age of 87, he played a major part in lifting the sport to its level today.

Mr. Tom Horsfall first became interested in pigeons in the 1890s when he built his first make-shift loft on top of his father's stable, and joined the old Hindmarsh Club.

The first Association was founded in 1894 its objects, and I quote "being the encouragement of high class breeding, training and racing of the Pigeon Voyager; the arrangement of intercolonial, champion and inter-club races; to legislate on all disputes or difficulties with regard to Homing in South Australia; the acquiring of money by subscription or donations, medals or other gifts for the carrying out of the objects of the Association."

At this time the Association consisted of the Excelsior, Fullarton and Hindmarsh Clubs. Its first Patron was Governor of the day, His Excellency Lord Tennyson, and the President was A. W. Ware, Esq., Lord Mayor of Adelaide.

After ten years the Association had grown considerably and in 1904 the records show that in addition to the three original clubs, 13 other clubs had joined. They were the Adelaide Flying Club; Eethelton Homing Club;

South Australian H.C.; Woodville H.C.; Goodwood Park H.C.; Holdfast Bay H.C.; and the country clubs Callington H.C.; Terowie H.C.; Yongala H.C.; Jamestown H.C.; Blyth H.C.; and the Port Pirie Homing Society.

Mr. Horsfall recalls that about this time a depression hit the country and he was forced to give up his hobby and journey to Broken Hill looking for work. Here he was fortunate enough to get a job in the Mines. Two years later he returned home, became interested in pigeons again and joined the Croydon Club.

With the outbreak of the First World War many fanciers volunteered for service overseas and naturally club membership declined, but in the 1920s the sport flourished again and many new clubs were formed. However although the Association continued to conduct races, the conditions under which it functioned were far from good.

In 1927 a few far sighted fanciers decided that if the sport was going to progress, a permanent headquarters suitable for handling the affairs of the Association was urgently needed.

At the time, headquarters consisted of one room at the City Baths. This room was only big enough to house a few members to conduct the hampering and clock setting. The rest had to wait outside with their birds, quite often sheltering from the rain under the bamboos which were growing at the back of the room.

Conditions could not have been worse and mainly through the efforts of the Croydon Club, meetings were held to consider the possibility of the Association acquiring its own hall. The Croydon Club suggested that an interest free loan be raised from among the members, but this received a cool reception and was rejected at first by the majority of clubs.

If it hadn't been for Tom Horsfall and his great friend Hedley Trestrail, the whole matter might have been forgotten. These two men refused to give up and campaigned so vigorously that, at a later meeting, when the matter was raised again, a vote in favour of the loan was carried. Messrs. D. Cudmore, H. Horwood, E. McLean, H. Trestrail and T. Horsfall were elected as the Organising Committee.

It was no wonder that Thomas Horsfall and Hedley Trestrail were asked to do the begging and these two men set about their task with

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MR. THOMAS HORSFALL, aged 87 years.
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**GRAND OLD MAN OF
PIGEON RACING (continued)**

enthusiasm. However they soon found their job wasn't going to be an easy one. About this time the country was fast approaching another depression and money was scarce, but undaunted they carried on and spent all their spare time working for the appeal. Eventually, after many setbacks and a lot of discouragement from some quarters, £600 was raised. Included in this sum were four loans of £50 or over, which was a lot of money in those days. With this money in hand Mr. Alf Nicholls offered a further £600 at a very reasonable rate of interest.

Land was purchased within a mile of the heart of the City of Adelaide at Mile End, and Mr. Cliff Kennett a well known builder and fancier at that time, was given the contract to build the hall.

The building was completed in 1929 and the five men who organised the project were elected the first Trustees.

tees. Mr. Hedley Trestrail was appointed the secretary of the Trustees and with the help of his old friend Tom Horsfall who offered his car, a phone, these two set about making the hall earn some revenue and so commence paying the loans back. Being a new hall, prospective hirers usually wanted to inspect it. Hedley and Tom spent many hours each week at the hall.

With the untimely death of Hedley Trestrail in 1934, Thomas Horsfall was elected secretary and carried on this labour of love alone, a task which he continued to perform without recompense for almost 30 years. Although the hall was situated a considerable distance from his home hardly a week went by during this long period that he wasn't called upon to go there and arrange for its hire, or keeping it clean and tidy or keeping an eye on its maintenance. With the revenue earned and the help of yearly rentals from the Associated Clubs the hall became a freehold property in 1936, and its value today is many thousands of pounds.

Mr. Horsfall, because of advancing years, recently resigned as a Trustee.

but this magnificent hall, which has many times been described by interstate visitors as the finest pigeon hall in Australia will always remain a memorial to this fine old gentleman whose foresight, enterprise and service, has done more than anything else to raise the Sport of Pigeon Racing in South Australia to the level it is today.

Ross Wickham.

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