

# Make our history a drawcard for state

AS with Victoria Square's redevelopment, a specialist museum devoted to the history of our capital city seems one of those desirable, yet perpetually unattainable, projects in which Adelaide specialises.

Most recently Bronwyn Halliday, commissioned by the city council, came up with a whiz-bang scheme for a virtual museum (or walking trail) using audio-guide technology to encompass much of the city's major buildings and sites. As with the more conventional museum plans floated in the 1990s when Jane Lomax-Smith was mayor, Ms Halliday's report has remained just that.

Adelaide's history museum saga has much more history. The National Library's online newspaper database ([www.trove.nla.gov.au](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au)) reveals *The Advertiser* ran an article, headlined "The need for an ... Historical Museum for Adelaide", no less than 65 years ago.

John Harding Carroll, a young reporter returned from war service overseas, pointed out historical museums are "commonplace throughout the towns and cities of England, the rest of Europe, and the United States, where they are considered a cultural necessity". Yet, in Adelaide, "where we pride ourselves on our cultural standards, little has been done to preserve for future generations some tangible evidence of our early beginnings".

**22 The Advertiser** [www.adelaidenow.com.au](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au)



IN MY  
VIEW

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Mr Carroll contrasted South Australia's pioneering approach to the conservation of historical documents (we led the country by establishing Australia's first public archives in 1919) with its haphazard treatment of "the actual physical relics of our early colonists, explorers and statesmen, scattered to the four corners of the state".

In response, a letter to the editor claimed the case for an Adelaide historical museum was being canvassed as far back as the 1920s.

Of course, there is always fierce competition for scarce funds. We are not the largest or wealthiest capital. Over the years, there have been temporary expedients or halfway houses, including the short-lived "Constitutional Museum" at Old Parliament House, and the Art Gallery's "Historical Museum" which occupied the former mounted police store until shortly after the advent of the History Trust in 1981.

The various specialised museums administered by that body (currently History SA) have

generally done an excellent job in their particular fields of maritime, migration and motor history. We still lack an institution that collects and preserves historical artefacts or moveable cultural heritage, as aids for depicting the story of Adelaide if not South Australia at large, to locals and visitors alike.

If Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney can do it, why not Adelaide? Among many possible reasons, I suspect one major cause is a kind of inferiority complex or cultural cringe.

Some people still seem to think there is nothing very distinctive or interesting about the history of this place. Yet Adelaide was the first Australian city laid out and built according to a formal plan. While maintaining an unrivalled demographic and economic dominance over the rest of the state, Adelaide was relatively slow to industrialise. Hence the remarkable colonial architectural heritage.

Perhaps we need a new Museum of Adelaide and South Australia combined, as a drawcard for tourists and a cultural and educational resource for all South Australians. This would enable the scattered collections of historical materials and memorabilia illustrating the unique development of our city and state to be on public display, not languishing in storage for another 65 years.

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