

# State Library of South Australia

## Media Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 2023

### **State Library acquires never-before-seen map linked to scandalous land tale**

The State Library of South Australia has acquired a rare, never-before-seen map of a town that was proposed for South Australia but was never built, following a controversial real estate venture linked to the state's first Governor, Sir John Hindmarsh.

Dig deeper and beyond the 'Town of Port Gawler' map, you will find a tale of a brotherly imposter, fraudulent property speculation and legal intrigue which gripped the Adelaide community in the late 1830s.

It began when legal clerk George Milner Stephen of Hobart, intercepted a letter sent by Sir Governor Hindmarsh to Stephen's brother Alfred, inviting him to become South Australia's Advocate General.

Instead of Alfred, Stephen arrived in Adelaide in February 1838. He then purchased 1,600 hectares of swampland, 43 kilometres north of Adelaide which he named 'Port Gawler', after Governor Hindmarsh's replacement, George Gawler.

After quickly re-selling half the land and boasting of a huge profit, George Stephen was accused of fraudulent property speculation in local newspapers. Libel claims and counter-claims followed, and Stephen's reputation was permanently tarnished after he lost the final case.

State Library of South Australia Director Geoff Stempel said the the map of the proposed 'Town of Port Gawler' is just one of the incredible stories now on display at the State Library of South Australia.

"The State Library is home to a vast map collection and many of these maps help to uncover the rich history of South Australia," he said.

"The Town of Port Gawler' map, which has been carefully restored by the Library's conservation staff, depicts neat parcels of land, a town square, market and cemetery, laid out near the Port Gawler River. But the map was never published, and the town was never built.

“The story behind the land release scandal of the late 1830s adds a great sense of intrigue to the display and encourages visitors to explore our collections further.

“The acquisition of the map was made possible by the generous support of the Friends of the State Library who made a significant donation to the State Library to assist in the purchase of the map.

“It is one of the most significant and unique gifts made by the Friends in their endeavours to support and promote State Library collections, and for that we are grateful.”

State Library of South Australia Senior Conservator, Peter Zajicek, who has treated thousands of artefacts during his career, said important cultural items, such as ‘The Town of Port Gawler’ map need to be carefully maintained to protect their future.

“Environmental factors such as light, framing and previous storage arrangements can all affect the condition of important paper artefacts, and if left untreated they can further decay, destroying the item and its history,” he remarked.

“The conservation team carefully treated the map in a special deionised water bath, attached it to a new lining for stability and realigned some sections of the image , before it was ready to be digitised, to very high resolution.

“The hand-coloured, gilded map is now ready to continue its journey through history.”

‘The Town of Port Gawler’ map will be launched to coincide with the 2023 History Festival, from May 1 – 31, and will be on display in the State Library of South Australia’s Mortlock Wing.

For more information, please visit <https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/events/town-of-port-gawler-map-1840>

### **Background on ‘Town of Port Gawler’ map:**

The map of the proposed ‘Town of Port Gawler’ was commissioned in 1839 by Captain William Allen and Captain John Ellis who had bought a large portion of the land from George Milner Stephen, with the intention of developing the area.

Surveyor Phillip L. S. Chauncy designed the map with a grid-like pattern for the intended layout of the proposed town, with streets named after mariners, explorers and British royalty.

## OFFICIAL

The State Library of South Australia acknowledges that the land and waters referred to as Port Gawler is unceded country of the Kurna people, whose traditional lands also include the Adelaide plains, where these events took place.

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