

MEDIA RELEASE

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Portion of the Old Colonists Banquet Group, B 47769

Meet the Old Colonists Photographic mosaics back on display

The State Library of South Australia, together with the Friends of the State Library, are pleased to announce the return to display of two superb facsimiles of 19th century Old Colonists mosaics.

The return of the mosaics, along with new indexes and online records, mark a milestone in a ten year project. This project has seen the conservation of the original mosaics, digitisation of the portraits, and identification of most of the 1,700 men and women featured, helping to make the mosaics more easily accessible to the public.

These two mosaics, and others that will go online for the first time in coming months, show 1,700 men and women from all walks of life who share one thing in common – they arrived or were born in the province of South Australia during its first five years.

The State Library is home to Australia's premier collection of photographic mosaics showing Old Colonists. It all began in 1872 when businessman Emanuel Solomon commissioned photographer Henry Jones to create 'The Old Colonists Banquet Group' of men. This was to commemorate a free banquet Solomon held at the Adelaide Town Hall on 28 December 1871 for fellow colonists 'who date their arrival before 1841'.

Jones also began a mosaic of women, partly as a consolation to those who applied for tickets only to be told that the banquet was for 'the Male Sex'. The 'Group of Old Colonists' women took

Jones nine years to complete, and has since been celebrated as unique in the history of Australian photography.

Alan Smith, Director of the State Library of South Australia says, “We are thrilled to be able to share with the South Australian community a series of photographic mosaics created in the 1870s. These mosaics are unique in Australia, as no other state or territory produced such a collection.”

Donated to the State Library in 1909, the mosaics were on display for almost 100 years. To preserve the originals, facsimiles have been reproduced and the originals reframed with the financial support of the Friends of the State Library of South Australia. Alan Smith says, “We are grateful to the Friends of the State Library for their financial support for this important project.”

President of the Friends of the State Library, Mark Gilbert comments, “The Friends are pleased to have helped fund this project. South Australian heritage items have always been important in our support of the State Library.”

The mosaics’ facsimiles and indexes will be on permanent display in the Spence Wing, State Library of South Australia from Sunday 30 April.

Meet the Old Colonists display

On permanent display
Open during Library hours (closed public holidays)
State Library of South Australia, Spence Wing
Corner North Terrace and Kintore Avenue
Free entry

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