



# Talk of the Town

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## Remembering the richness of Port Alfred's past

**I**t is with joyous enthusiasm, that we have collaborated, researched, and hounded many specialists in history, to aid our collective celebration of the period 1889 to 2014 – 125 years since the first mayor of Port Alfred was inaugurated officially.

The municipal area comprised of East bank (Port Francis) and West bank (Port Kowie).

Although, in earlier years, Port Alfred was formally declared a municipality, (circa 1889) it was the final step on the completion of the Putt Bridge that bound east and west into one town. Therefore, the birth of a tiny little village, with a wide and glorious river flowing out to sea, tells the story of this Settler village, through discoveries, trouble, changes and backbreaking work, and near disasters.

Then finally, as we reflect on where we live now, the essence of river, magnificent beaches and a harbour, albeit not in the mouth of the river, just a tad higher up.

We hope you are going to enjoy our souvenir "timeline" as it is a tale of "old"

settlers who arrived here, the events that changed their lives, ours for that matter, as we are the "new settlers". It is the story, in short, of the astounding transformations and through all of this, wars aside, one has to agree, it is a very special town, where colonists old and new, co-exist in harmony.

If there is one lesson we have learnt through our research, it is that despite modernisation, the essence of people remains the same. Swashbuckling entrepreneurs, thoughtful academics, hardy agricultural stalwarts and gifted artists of every genre make up the foundation of this settlement.

Port Alfred, is known as the very "seat" of 1820 Settler history, you can hardly move at times, as there are so many people who are family-related in some way from that date in history. Pick a surname, and you will trip over more than a dozen kin. From "toffee-nosed" wannabes, to the boets and swaers, to the "new-settlers", the fusion of all of these influences ensure that those who have left us, for whatever reason, never forget their roots.

Port Alfred has hosted many famous people over the years. From English royalty, to renowned politicians to the capitalists of intriguing dimensions, who changed the course of our history in some way.

We often muse and dream of the unlikely possibility of say William Cock, or Lord Charles Somerset, (circa 1820s) arriving here now and seeing that instead of a pooled lagoon, near the Kowie River mouth, there, comfortably ensconced, a sprawling marina, with gigantic homes built in materials they could never have imagined.

Imagine their collective bewilderment at instead of seeing tall ships with sails along the wharf, there were 21st century powerboats and yachts, booze-cruisers and wet-bikes, and hey, the motor cars and trucks? The list is endless, the changes profound.

The impoverished settlers sailed in dastardly ships, at times under horrendous conditions. It took on average three months to cross the ocean.

In 125 years, we have gone from

horses and ox drawn carts, to electronic transport. Men have walked on the moon. Instead of a leather bag of coins, or paper pounds, we use a plastic card as tender.

We wear synthetic clothing, and have deodorant. We send correspondence in the blink of an eye. It took an average of three to four months for mail to get to its destination, in those times. Aeroplanes, submarines, laser medical equipment, television, iPads, cell phones, cinematography, satellites, space ships, the list is never-ending.

The angst of lost history is almost unthinkable. It is not that we want to live in the past; it is the tempo, the values and the possible longing to know. To get details, learn about and absorb the reason for our settling here in the glorious Kowie.

We have been unpacking tidbits of settler history simply to illustrate and perpetuate, possibly to instil in this new generation, that without history, we have no future. We salute those hardy pioneers, while we pay homage to the now generation.