



November 2024

In this newsletter:

- Conservation news: Let the pugging begin!
- Photos - then and now.
- Wine sales back - in time for Christmas.
- A foot of footings campaign - leave a legacy.
- We've been in the news.
- Rechner history and genealogy book still available.
- From the website - Combatting frost in the vineyards - old-timers way, What is pug, and a local recipe for pug mix. A fabulous photo from the past.

Conservation update:



We are finally up to pugging the cottage!

We are so thrilled to let you know that we are up to this stage. As you know, we had to pause the conservation efforts whilst we gathered the necessary funds to proceed. Thanks to a generous *SA Heritage* grant received in July, we now have enough money (just!) to proceed with the pugging of the cottage walls. This is a landmark occasion, as it signifies the end of the conservation of the building itself. It will now be protected

from weather and vermin and should stand for at least another 150 years. Pugging the walls means she will look much more like she did when first constructed, so it will be wonderful to see.

And in more great news, you are all invited to come and help! One way to cut costs is to use volunteer labour for the pugging. As well as learning the techniques of pugging under the guidance of renowned Heritage Builder, Andrew Steinkopf, it's a wonderful opportunity to participate hands-on in the history of the cottage. Wouldn't you love to know your hands have helped put in the pug that will be there for years to come? In a very real and physical way, we will be part of this new chapter in the story of the cottage.

We have attached an invitation for you – The pugging will be happening from the 27th November to 1st December. Work will be done in the morning, and you can come for just one morning, or more if you wish. It's free, but registrations are essential. Many of you have supported us from the beginning (5 years ago, can you believe?) and we would love to see you there, to share in the excitement of this final stage.



In the next few weeks, the builders will work on the doors and windows, keeping what's there but putting wood behind bits that need to be strengthened. They will also add in lathes to the walls where there are big gaps, so that the pug has something to stick to. We will be busily sourcing clay and 'stooks' (long-cut straw) to make the mix. Let the pugging begin!

What's next to be done?

We are getting so close to the end! After the pugging, and in the New Year, we will turn our attention to

- Landscaping and earthworks around the cottage
- Installing signage and photographs to tell the history of the cottage and explain its features.

Here's a few old photos, and a few recent ones, so you can see how far we've come.



2018



2024



Fundraising: Thank you to everyone who has supported us through donations or our fundraising campaigns. Although the end is in sight, we still need more funds to bring the project to completion. Here's two of our most popular ways you can help...

Buy some wine! We're pleased to say our popular wines are available now, and waiting to be delivered to your door.



Living in the Barossa, sharing a glass of wine has historically been an integral part of connecting, providing hospitality and celebrating anything and everything. Our delicious wines come from grapes grown on local Barossa vines and are lovingly produced by *David Franz* winery. David produces unique small batch parcels of Barossa wine, hand wrought with passion. He has generously donated his wine to help support the conservation of the cottage. Like his parents, Peter and Margaret Lehmann, David is passionate about both wine-making and Barossa history.

The new wines are available now, in time for Christmas. At \$15 a bottle, they are fantastic value and sell out quickly, so don't delay. Use the attached order form or order on the website, where you can read the delectable tasting notes. They'll have your mouth watering!

'A foot of footings' campaign.

Looking for a unique Christmas gift? And a way to leave a legacy?

Here is a way you can be part of history and leave a legacy for someone you love, whilst also helping conserve the cottage. For \$100, you can donate to a foot of the wall around the cottage. Donate in your own name, or honour others in your family by making a gift in their name. You'll be able to see on a map of the cottage where your 'foot of footings' is. The name/s are acknowledged on our website and will also be onsite once the cottage is completed.



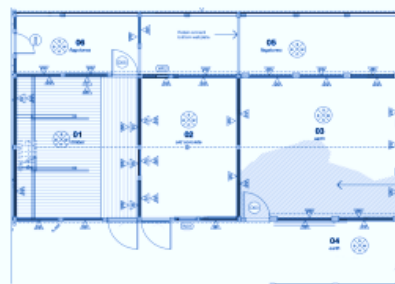
You can donate to the bank details below or securely via the website. (rechnercottage.com). Please confirm via email who you would like to be acknowledged at rechnercottage@gmail.com.

Bank details.

BSB: 633-000

Account: 213974280

Name: Rechner Cottage
Conservation Association
Incorporation.



List of names.

1. Jon Smith
2. Janet Collins
3. Pearl Lacy
4. Your name here.....



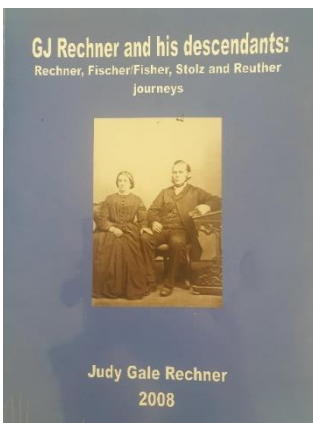
Conservation works keep Light Pass history alive

ADAM CURTIS
 WORKS to preserve a heritage-listed cottage in Light Pass are well underway, but the group behind the project is eager for more help from the community.
 Following a large family reunion in 2018, descendants of the Rechner clan formed the Rechner Cottage Conservation Association (RCCA) to fund to conserve the operation cottage behind the St Ann Lutheran Church.
 Five years on, the conservation works have reached their second stage and the RCCA has called on the surrounding community to aid in the cottage's history.
 RCCA secretary Catherine Rechner said the cottage was built in the mid-1800s-1890s and holds a lot of history for Light Pass that she would love to see come to light.
 "We're really keen to hear from members of the community who own either books or documents or photographs or photos to sell us," Ms Rechner said.
 "The cottage was listed on the state heritage list as an example of the German architecture called 'Sitzhaus', so it's architecturally significant, but it also has cultural significance because of the settlement in Light Pass around the St Ann Lutheran Church.
 "Being the cottage is a reference point for the appearance of other their life, more like an artifact, and what they brought to Light Pass."
 As a descendant of Gustav Julius Rechner, who built the cottage, Ms Rechner said it has been an ongoing process to be involved in both the conservation and jobbing the area's history.
 "I think we feel very privileged to know that link back to our forebears and also to know the importance of what the stories of these people," she said.
 "When the artisans and the builder were going over the cottage initially, they found a fungus on the roof in the ceiling, which is annoying."
 For building contractor Andrew Schickel, subsidising the cottage's exterior has proved an "interesting" challenge, but he said it was a non-negotiable.
 "I've worked on maybe five of these sort of things in the last 30-40 years, which makes me one of the more experienced people in the state because not too many people can be bothered working on them," he said.
 "With this sort of conservation, there's not a huge amount of examples, [and] generally speaking, we should keep an example of buildings for historical reasons."
 "We do quite enjoy working on it."
 He said for the Rechner Cottage group to contribute to fundraising for further conservation works, visit the RCCA website.

In the News

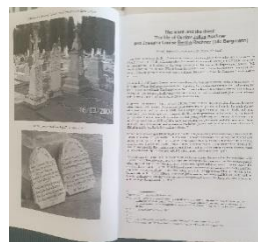
We're almost famous – well, not quite, but we have been in the news quite a bit. For good reason! People have been really interested in the SA Heritage grant and what the funds will enable us to do. We've spoken to reporters from The Barossa Leader and the Gawler Bunyip. We've also done some radio interviews, with Narelle Graham for Regional Drive ABC South Australia & Broken Hill, and with Tom Mann from ABC North &

West. They were fascinated to hear about the cottage and asked to be updated when a date for the pugging was set. It's so good to be able to share the story of the cottage with a wider audience. You can read the newspaper articles [here](#).



Rechner history and genealogy book.

We still have copies available, with all proceeds going towards the cottage. They are \$35 a copy (postage included). They are full of information about life in Silesia, GJ Rechner, and the early days in Light Pass, as well as the Rechner family. The book also has some wonderful photos.



And from the website, here's a few articles: There's a very topical one on fighting frosts in vineyards, and some from the archives, with all you need to know about pugging. If you haven't yet had a browse through the website, visit it at rechnercottage.com. There's lots of interesting information and articles to enjoy.



Frost Alarm, used in Light Pass in the early 1900's.

Fighting Frosts

"The worst frosts in 55 vintages" have recently destroyed crops, devastating both wineries and growers.¹ Farmers in Light Pass 100 years ago knew exactly how that feels. They also experienced devastation caused by frosts, as time after time frosts would wipe out entire crops of fruit and grapes. While research suggests that frost events are becoming more frequent, beginning earlier, ending later, and impacting wider areas than ever before², they are certainly nothing new.

After several seasons of disastrous losses due to frost, in 1932 the local growers in Light Pass formed the *Light Pass Frost Combatting Committee*. Like the *Agricultural Committee*, they were keen to experiment and use the latest methods, and quick to seek advice from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Weather Bureau & the Department of Agriculture³. According to a 1958 newspaper article, they "followed up all avenues opened

by science and experiment”. Many types of frost protection were tried, and the committee played a vital part in bringing together the local knowledge and experience of farmers with that of the research and government organizations.

Keeping the air warm and circulating around the base of the vines was found to be helpful in combatting frost, and a means of doing this in the early days was the use of frost pots. Shaped just like a flowerpot, the pots were filled with sump oil to the level of an insert. The insert was especially shaped so that when the oil was lit the smoke would disperse evenly into the air. Set out along the rows of vines, the frost pots would be lit when a frost attack was likely.

The committee was instrumental in pioneering the idea of orchard heating and the use of frost pots. They made them available in bulk to farmers, and at one stage there were as many as 25,000 pots in use.

Not everybody agreed on the details of their use, and there was some contention about when the pots should be lit. In a 1932 article in the *Angaston Leader* it was reported that “some members held the view that it was necessary to light smudges as soon as the temperature was at freezing point. Others were of the opinion that the fairly sudden thawing of the sap occurred about the time of sunrise and for this reason it was necessary only to have the fires going about an hour before sunrise.” The article goes on to say that “the committee hopes to evolve a definitive scheme to lay before the residents of the Barossa Valley in order to secure the cooperation of those both directly and indirectly involved”⁴.



A simple frost pot.

But, tucked up and sleeping soundly in their warm beds, how did the farmers know when the temperature plummeted out in the vineyards? By means of the wonderful contraption pictured at the start! It’s a box containing a thermometer which was attached to an alarm. When the thermometer dropped to a certain temperature, it would trigger the alarm, and awaken a saintly gentleman by the name of Gordon Boehm, who magnificently held the post of alarm officer for 46 years. At whatever ungodly hour it was, he would then notify the growers by ringing them all to warn them of an imminent frost. They would clamber out of bed and head out into the cold vineyards to fill and light their frost pots⁵.



Frost pots were eventually banned as they were an environmental problem and expensive to fill. Today, many grape growers use frost fans to circulate the air around vineyards and prevent the ground temperature from cooling too much. These are often solar-powered and temperature sensitive, switching on automatically when needed. Much easier!

Do a quick Google search and you will see that there are many techniques, suggestions and products available for mitigating the effects of frost on crops. However, despite years of research and scientific advancements, Jack Frost is still a fierce opponent. An opponent who struck fear into the hearts of farmers 100 years ago, and still does the same today.

References:

¹. [South Australian wineries have had entire vintages wiped out by the severe frosts. Here's how you can help them. – Glam Adelaide](#)

². [Frost protection is easier and better than ever – AgroBest](#)

³ [\(4\) The early1930's were not good... – Luhrs Cottage Museum & Light Pass | Facebook](#)

⁴[27 Oct 1932 – Study Frost Peculiarities – Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵ Information from a display by Luhrs Cottage Museum.

Thanks also to Luhrs Cottage for the photographs.



Pug walls in the cottage, showing remnants of limewash.

What is 'pug'?

Rechner Cottage is often called 'Pug Cottage', but where does the term come from? 'Pugging' is a construction technique, used to create walls. It is a variation of wattle and daub construction, a method which has been around for over 6000 years. It's still used today and is becoming popular again as a sustainable method of construction.

In wattle and daub construction, the wattle is made by weaving thin timber or straw to create a lattice. This is then infilled with the daub, which has three components – a binder, which holds the mix together (eg. clay or lime), an aggregate to give bulk and stability (mud, sand, crushed stone) and a reinforcement agent (straw, hair, hay) to help hold the mix together and control shrinkage. A mixture of lime and water is often painted over the top to create a seal.

In areas where substantial timber was unavailable, pioneers' cottages and other small buildings were frequently constructed with light vertical timbers driven into the ground. In the Rechner cottage a variation called German *Fachwerk* is used. A solid timber frame is infilled with vertical, horizontal and diagonal pieces of timber.} The gaps were stopped with a kneaded clay and grass mixture known as 'pug'.



A local recipe for making pug mix.

Harry Schmidt was a Light Pass local. He and his wife Melva had the dairy on Research Rd next to the river, and the old Schmidt home is one of the historic buildings of Light Pass. Harry was a fount of knowledge about Light Pass and it's history and was on the Luhr's Cottage committee for some time. He passed this recipe on to Kim Michelmores in 2001, when some repugging was needed to be done on Luhrs Cottage. Kim has kindly shared it with us.

Harry Schmidt's Pug Mix Formula

First, collect a bucket of red clay from down near the Light Pass crossing – it is good binding clay. Break it up well into fine particles – no more than 1/8th inch in size. Remove any stones.

Second, collect a bucket of old dry cow manure from Schmidt's dairy on Research Road. Pulverise this into a fine powder. You can leave any straw in the mix.

Third, get a bucket of dry builder's sand.

For patching up you only need a little bit – it goes a long way.

Mix a couple of handfuls of each of these together in a bucket and add some water – a little bit at a time – you can always add more. Mix it with your hands and crush up any clumps. Keep adding water until it is a thick smooth mixture that can easily be squeezed between your fingers when you grab a handful. However,

it is important not to make the mix too “strong”. It must remain the pathway for moisture rather than the timber.

Leave it sit for a while to absorb the water. If needed, you may add a bit more before you start.

Remove the flaking whitewash and any eroded pug from the spot you want to repair. Don’t go too far or you will need to redo the whole building! Just enough to get into good solid material.

While you wait wet all the spots that need repairing. Use a builders brush or a sponge. Wet them well – a good soaking to make the existing pug really wet and sticky. This allows the new pug mix to bond to the old.

Put the pug into and onto the repair spots. Use a metal square cement float and press it in and smooth it off. Don’t overlap any good whitewash too much as your pug will not stick all that well to whitewash.

Let it dry for a while – and then rub over the repaired area with a cloth or sponge wet with water and smooth off the repaired area.

Let dry overnight and whitewash the next day to seal it off.”

Thanks, Harry!



1We have plenty of places to improve our skills!



And I thought you might enjoy this fabulous photo put up on *Facebook* recently by Les Peters, from a group called *“All Our Yesterdays: restored images of early South Australia”*. It’s described as the “Departure of the first Lutheran missionaries from Langmeil, Tanunda for Lake Killalpaninna at Hermannsburg Mission on 9th October 1866. A horse drawn wagon is about to pass a large crowd including a number of men in top hats. The group included Pastor J.F. Goessling and Ernst Homann.”

The early German Lutherans from Light Pass and the Barossa were passionate about the Central Australian Mission fields, and about preserving the local culture and language. There are two interesting articles on our website, too, if you'd like to read more. <https://rechnergottage.com/significant-journeys-bethesda.../> and <https://rechnergottage.com/take-a-trip-to-central.../>

As always, thank you for your interest, encouragement, and support.

Jo

(on behalf of the *Rechner Cottage Conservation Committee*)



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