

The Lokan journey

by Pauline Burger

“Dobry dzień”. Our President Lyall Kupke began with this Wendish greeting (meaning “Good day”) at the Burnside Library on 6th May. As part of History Month SA, Lyall then introduced our speaker, Dr Keith Lokan, a retired physicist.



Keith's talk, illustrated by PowerPoint slides, was both informative and entertaining. He began with the background to his Lokan family's decision to migrate to South Australia. In 1848 a Martin Teschner from Turnow arrived here on the ship *Victoria*. He wrote glowing letters back to Lusatia which were published in 1850. His descriptions of life in the colony of South Australia contrasted with the conditions in Lusatia. As the feudal system collapsed, the lords and nobles relinquished power, but the serfs or peasants lost their homes and secure employment. They turned to day labour, but unemployment became an issue. The potato blight and failure of other crops added to precarious conditions.

Hannah Lokan, whose husband Hans had died, endured these tough times in Lusatia and the Teschner report led her to migrate from Turnow to South Australia. In 1856 she arrived with her children on the ship *Sophie*. This was the start of the Lokan story in Australia.

One son, Matthes, leased land in Tea Tree Gully, and the Lokan family thrived in that area, working at the Tolley Scott & Tolley winery, and as carriers.

Today, a Lokan Street and Lokan Grove in the local suburb of Redwood Park remain as a record of their lives in this location.

From Tea Tree Gully, Lokan descendants moved to Tailem Bend and further, being now scattered around Australia. By the 1920-30s the family had increased to around 150 members. Most lost their Wendish language quickly, except Keith's great grandfather Martin, who could still speak it up to his death in 1938. Within a generation, the Lokans were comfortably absorbed into their local communities — a pattern familiar to many listeners. Early generations worked in rural occupations, but with the availability of higher education from the 1950s the next generation took up a variety of professions.



Lokan wagon at the Tea Tree Gully Museum

Keith has delved into his family history over the last 20 years and travelled to Lusatia. In a church in Peitz (near Turnow), and later in Simmersdorf (see below), he found up to 7 different spellings of the name Lokan, and he also explained that the original pronunciation was “Lockan” (rather than “Lowkan”). He also found his original ancestor was described as a “Colonist” as he had moved to the village of Turnow from another village called Simmersdorf. Keith was then helped by the local pastor in Simmersdorf to find out even more about his ancestor, and actually met a Lockan descendant. In a photo of Keith and his relative, Werner Lockan, the two men could have been taken for brothers (see photo on page 2).

We also heard more about Lusatia. In the late 1800s to late 1900s, the region became very industrial with many open cut brown coal mines. The coal was a low-grade source of energy and since the reunification of Germany in 1990 the mines were gradually shut down. They have been re-developed into a series of lakes, mostly interconnected, transforming the landscape, as we saw from Keith's slides, and with walking trails, trees and locks it has become a holiday playground.

Keith also had a photo of a reconstructed Wendish fort at Raddusch. Remnants had been uncovered in one of the nearby mines. Apparently the Wends made these 7-8 metre thick walled forts for protection, and could seal themselves inside when threatened by marauders. With a source of water inside and other provisions, they would outlast any attack.



Reconstructed Wendish fort at Raddusch



Inside the fort at Raddusch



Werner Lockan & Keith Lokan in Germany

This was an inspirational talk which demonstrated how fascinating family history can be when intertwined with history and geography, and also how rewarding it is when it results in uncovering little gems of information about ancestors.