BURRA FLOODS

BURRA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



The scene at the ‘Pig and Whistle’ Crossing with the Burra Creek in full flood
September 1910

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2008

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12 May 1848

Heavy rainfall in the district led to a rise of 8 feet in the Burra Creek with some huts flooded the earthy parts of those exposed beginning to scale off in large pieces – sensations of premature burial.

In Feb. 1850 a summer flash flood in the creek destroyed upwards of 80 huts; the furniture floating about in all directions. The water accumulated so quickly that in many instances large sums of money were forgotten to be removed. In one instance a man dived after his money said to be upwards of £100 and succeeded in recovering it. It was a sad sight to see women and children endeavouring to save their furniture from the flood.

Floods in 1851

There were three major floods in 1851, one in May followed by a second greater flood in June and a third a fortnight later. The first of these destructive floods washed through the township of Kooringa, overflowing a tributary creek in the main street and flooding the town's stores.

In less than two minutes the streets were full of water carrying everything before it, horses, carts, pigs, fences, empty casks, large logs of wood and even a dray floated down the street.

In the second of these floods an earthen embankment causeway across the creek, carrying the road from the mine to the smelting works suddenly gave way under the pressure of the rising water.

First recorded death as the result of a flood in South Australia occurred in Burra on Sunday 8th June 1851.

The Obsever:

'I reopen my letter to acquaint you that at 6 o'clock this evening (8th June) we were visited with a dreadful storm of hail, rain and thunder and at this moment (8 o'clock) are swamped and much goods destroyed, the street is again like another 'Niagara'. It is impossible to tell at this time what damage is done; all is consternation and the elements battle with each other, which adds much to the awful character of this visitation. We are completely drowned up here……'

Another correspondent from Burra was eager to tell his mine bosses that all was secure, '*It is with regret that I have to write you the circumstances which took place last evening about 6 o'clock. We were again visited with lightening, thunder, hail and rain to a most fearful extent. I was obliged to press men to watch and keep the drains clear, to prevent the rivers of water from washing away the ore and also from going down the mine. I am happy to say we lost no ore and the mine is all right…. I then started with five or six carts for the township and creek to assist people in removing their families, goods etc. Every place in the shape of a shed or covering overhead is filled with people. One poor man by the name of Box, a lander at Paxton's shaft, was killed by the falling in of his hut. He has left three poor little children, now motherless and fatherless. I just now sent for one of the children, but the people refused to let him go.'*

The inquest into Mr. Box's death records that, '*it was clearly shown the deceased came to his death by the falling in of the roof of his hut, in the Burra Creek, whilst in the act of removing his furnishings. It appears that the deceased had previously helped his next door neighbour and his neighbour in return assisted him for the same purposes and was standing within a yard of the deceased when the roof fell in and covered the unfortunate sufferer.'*

In the third flood on the 10th of June 1851, Commercial Street and many of its shops were inundated.

The Great Flood of 1859
January 25th 1859 was remembered as the Great Flood when it swept all the bridges and fords away with the exception of the company's stone bridge and flooded the Burra townships. Only two dugouts survived this flood.

Torrential Rain in 1877 and the Loss of the Bridge Street Bridge
On March 19th there was some flooding caused by a thunderstorm and the weather failed to clear as it usually did and on each following day there was some rain until on Thursday 22 March it rained through the night becoming torrential on Friday from midday on. Burra Creek burst its banks near the Unicorn Brewery and formed a second channel parallel to the main one. By 5:30pm it was level with the roadway in Bridge Street and then it broke through to form a channel between the bridge and the Bible Christian Church. Lower Thames Street was flooded as were most houses between Station & Henderson's [Market Square] and the Primitive Methodist Chapel. Fences and outbuildings between Thames Street and the creek were swept away. Houses on the western side of Paxton Square were flooded to a depth of 6-9 inches.
At 7.00pm the Bridge Street Bridge was swept away which allowed the water level to fall quickly by some 2-3 feet. The bridge structure remained fixed to the eastern buttress and both ended up about a mile downstream.
At Aberdeen there was a sheet of water from Opie's Hotel to the new railway embankment and water 2-3 feet deep with a strong current was flowing up the road between the White Hart and the Aberdeen Hotels. Near Tiver's Corner it was 3 feet deep and the Aberdeen Hotel was flooded to several inches. This stream re-entered the main creek between Orchards and the Burra Mill.

7th February 1890 A Thunderstorm
Heavy rain fell at 4.30 a.m. Wednesday in a thunderstorm that delivered 1½inches in about 20 minutes with even heavier falls to the north. Between 8 and 9 a.m. the Burra Creek came down a banker and Mt Bryan Flat was under water for several miles. Low-lying areas of Redruth became a lake and many families were flooded out. The peak came between 10 and 11 a.m. The Temperance Hotel, as well as the Redruth Eating House, the house occupied by Mr Thomas Hall and several others were completely swamped. The premises of J. Tiver and B. Preece were surrounded by water. In Kooringa much damage was done to roads and footbridges. The footbridges opposite the Post Office, behind the Burra Hotel, opposite the Bible Christian Church and near the old Pig and Whistle were all demolished. We have not heard of any personal injury. Ridgways store was flooded as were most houses between Tiver's Corner and the White Hart Ford. The Bank of Australasia was surrounded, but not flooded.

A Summer Storm December 1891.
Last Friday, 11th December, the period of hot dry weather was broken by a shower of rain at noon and then at 4 p.m. thunder, lightning and a severe hailstorm was accompanied by a hurricane wind. Floodwaters threatened many shops. Water entered almost every room in the Burra Hotel and Drew & Crewes large cellar half filled with water. The suddenness of the short downpour caused water tables and gutters to overflow in all directions.

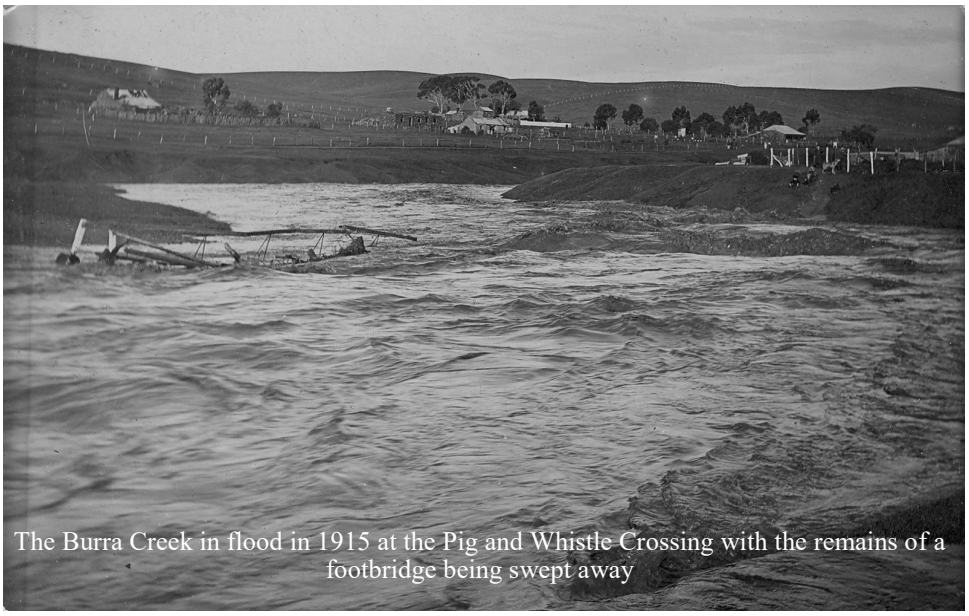
At Mt Bryan Mr Prior's wheat crop was cut to the ground by hail and wind as if mowed and all surrounding crops suffered badly. (Mr Prior's crop at Baldina had been destroyed by rabbits.) The Mt Bryan Road was flooded for a considerable distance.
Several houses at Ironmine were unroofed as were several at Baldina.
Mr Forder's windmill was flattened.
At Baldina, creeks and dams overflowed and saltbush was stripped to twigs, destroying essential summer feed.
J. Morgan lost his roof from three rooms with the iron carried ¼ mile away.
But the storm was very confined with very little rain at Shafton or at Mongolata.
Correspondents reported hail and storm damage as follows:
Mt Bryan – severe with a fall of 1.10 inches in a short time
Hallett – severe crop damage
Koolunga – severe crop damage with hail the size of pigeon eggs.

The Storm of 16th December 1902
The water rushing down the creek near Dr Sangster's flowed over the Commercial St bridge and then down the street to flood Market Square. The thunder continued to roll and the lightning was the most vivid for years. Footpaths on Market Square were flooded and mud covered the flagstones. Some houses in the lower part of the town were flooded. A washaway on the train line at Yunta delayed the Broken Hill train until late on Wednesday evening. Over 3 inches of rain fell at Springbank.
At Leighton one resident had about 30 turkeys drown and another lost a number of fowls and several settings of eggs. Dead rabbits were left along Burra Creek.
House gutters overflowed into rooms in several places.
A farmer at the west of town lost 20-30 bags of wheat down the creek and another lost several pigs. Around the district the loss of sheep is considerable. Mr Duldig at World's End had left a plough and scoop in the nearby creek after dam work and the plough was swept 600 yards and the scoop a mile. He lost 6 chains of fencing to rushing water. Over 2 inches fell in the afternoon and another 1inch at night.
A good crop of mushrooms has followed the rain on Flagstaff.

A Storm on 7th September, 1910
A storm on the night of 2nd September began with rain from about 11 p.m. which continued in torrents throughout the night. By Saturday morning the Burra Creek was flowing strongly and by 2 p.m. was the highest for 20 years. The Pig And Whistle footbridge was washed away and a boy who was foolishly about to cross had a lucky escape. About half the footbridge behind the Burra Hotel was swept away. In Aberdeen the waters covered almost the whole of the new oval and much of the country to Mt Bryan was flooded with all traffic suspended. The footbridge at the White Hart was covered and water lapped the doors of Messrs Reed & Gully, but the level soon subsided.
The heavy falls also extended to the east.
At Mt Bryan by the church the flood was over a mile wide.

The Drought Breaks 14th April 1915
After a total of 7.17 inches of rainfall in 1914 and very little more for the first three months of 1915, on the Thursday after Easter a downpour led to all the creeks running a banker and the flooding of premises. The flood began to be compared with the great flood of 1874 and was generally reckoned to be bigger. About 1.70inches fell in the day and by 9 a.m. the next day 1.95inches had been recorded. The flood swept away footbridges at the Burra Hotel and at the Pig and Whistle. The Commercial Hotel cellar was

filling up and water was pouring through S. Burns' shop, through Bagot, Shakes and Lewis's Office and at E.J. Harris's they were fending it off with brooms. A number of private bridges also went and Mrs Howell had to be carried out of her cottage. In Aberdeen there was a lake from the railway line to the Racecourse. W.B. Page took a great



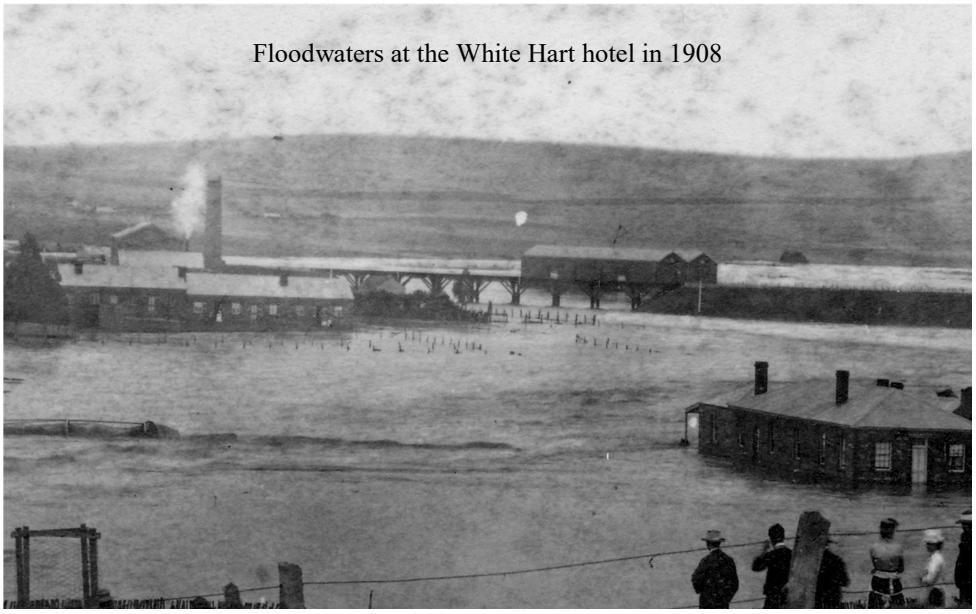
The Burra Creek in flood in 1915 at the Pig and Whistle Crossing with the remains of a footbridge being swept away

photo from the railway line near the Bon Accord Hotel, with Mr Robertson's house in the foreground and Drew & Crewes' bulk store surrounded and a great mass of swirling water under the Bon Accord Bridge.

Robertson's was quickly flooded. The two ladies took refuge on the windowsill, feet dangling in the water, till swimming snakes made them turn around and close the window. When their predicament was noticed Mr. Queale was sent for. Mr Shakes tried to get to them, but was almost swept away at the footbridge leading to the house. Mr McKeogh swam out to them. They were eventually reached from the Copperhouse side and rescued on horseback by M.C. Queale, W. Field, C. Rabbich, F. Highett and Shakes. Damage to the house is estimated at £150.

Co. corner, at the foot of Flagstaff were absolutely covered by flood waters.

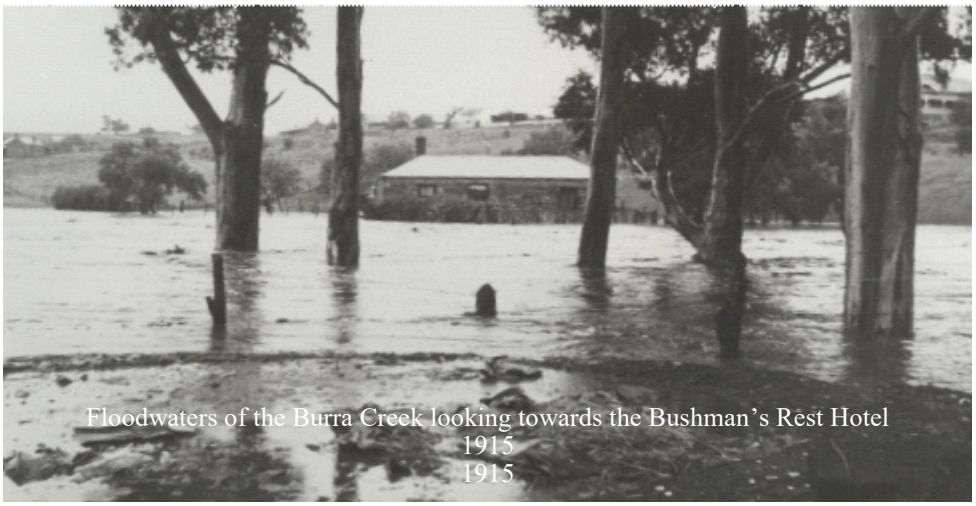
The Farrell Flat-Clare road was also water covered for quite some distances and some of the holes and washaways were very bad. Early Sunday morning, Burra Badminton players struck 'mud' trouble between Auburn and Manoora. It's not too good at all at that hour of the morning. Many farmers have been bogged in their own backyards. However, a few fine days like yesterday will son dry up the country roads. Many social functions throughout the area have suffered considerably through these wet, cold and rough conditions.



Floodwaters at the White Hart hotel in 1908

Lionel Oppermann was caught trying to cross the White Hart ford by Gully's house when a sudden wave of water washed the horses round one post of the footbridge and the lorry round another. Oppermann tried to save the horses. He managed at considerable risk to cut the harness and both horses eventually clambered out of the water. The lorry ended up in the creek opposite Walker & Sons Aberdeen shop, where it was secured by ropes. The footbridge was swept away soon after.

About 15inches of water invaded A. Thamm's. Mrs Allen's house was also flooded with furniture floating in the rooms [The old Bushman's Rest Hotel] Here it was high enough to run out of the windows, leaving cartloads of mud behind. Drew and Crewes lost 7 cases of benzine, 3½ cases of kerosene and 1 of methylated spirits, along with fencing



Floodwaters of the Burra Creek looking towards the Bushman's Rest Hotel
1915
1915

posts, strainers and the harness and lorry at the ford. Sara & Co had their benzine magazine flooded and their chaff shed was 3feet deep in water.
News from Mt Bryan and Hallett is scarce, but falls there were heavy. At Leighton falls were light only and at Baldina only 1.64inches fell, but floodwaters came down the creek. Barker Bros. lost 60 sheep and A.G. Gebhardt of Mackerode lost 40. At Hogback the flooding was severe and at King's Well the torrent was half a mile wide and 4inches deep. Several miles of the Eastern Telephone line are washed away. Clearly much fencing has been lost. There are also further sheep losses.

Floods. 1st June 1921
Last Saturday steady rain set in with an east wind and on Sunday the wind changed to southwest about noon and very heavy rain followed. The rain was particularly heavy to the west and the creek in West Ward rose rapidly. As in 1915 it broke out near Mrs Howell's residence and rushed down Commercial St flooding shops and dwellings. C.J. Pearce's was flooded from the back. In Commercial Street the premises of A.J. McBride, Bagot, Shakes & Lewis, C. Parks, Glenister & Sams, George Lawn and Bennett & Fisher were flooded to varying degrees. Mr Lawn fared worse with a cellar full of water and damage estimated at £40. On the other side of the street only Eyes & Crowle were affected. The water then rushed down Chapel and Thames Streets. The flood in Thames Street was particularly high. Spray rose feet into the air where the West Ward Creek meets the Burra Creek. The only bridge carried away was near Mr Bowen's residence. Debris including large logs and a 100 gallon tank of Mr Howell's was found when the water receded. Damage was also done at crossings on the road south. At Koonoona 4.40 inches was registered for the week with similar falls at Leighton. There were also good falls to the east. Varying from 75 points to 210 points. Henry Hopkins, youngest son of Mrs C. Rogers of Bewley's [The Cactus Farm], was almost drowned when his horse was swept onto its side pinning him and kicking him in the head. He was rescued by his brother and stepfather

Wind, Rain, Hail and Snow (8th -15th August 1960)
During the past week rain fell every day and as well as wind snow and hail storms. Creeks throughout the district were running strongly and many roads made impassable.
On Thursday, accompanied by bitterly cold conditions, a rather heavy hail storm hit the district, followed by a snow fall. Although not particularly heavy in Burra, it was more severe further North at Mt. Bryan, Hallett, Peterborough etc. The temperature at Burra was 36 degrees (2.2^0C).
The Burra Creek and all its little tributaries were running strongly for the greatest part of the week. This is the fourth occasion this season that the Burra creek has been running. On Friday the water ran over the top of the ford at the Pig and Whistle crossing this being the first time for a number of years.
The majority of the roads throughout the district are in a very bad state owing to the constant wet weather and continual traffic.
Many of these roads were rendered impassable for a period during the heaviest rains. The Burra-Hallett road and Hanson-Farrell Flat road have been greatly affected by stretches of water and potholes. Both district roads are just quagmires.
In the early hours of Saturday morning the roadway and nearby paddocks at Cobb and

Flash Flood Inundates Burra 2nd March 1983
Last week tropical cyclones Ken and Elinore, which were situated over the Northwest and Northeast coasts of Australia respectively combined to feed a moist unstable air stream into South Australia which resulted in unseasonable tropical weather being expe-



Above and below: Floodwaters crossing the Adelaide Road near Burra
13th September 1960



rienced throughout the state. During Wednesday afternoon and evening, accompanied by constant rumbling of thunder 38mm (1½ inches) of rain fell on Burra and some surrounding districts. During the afternoon one State Emergency Service crew was dispatched to Mt. Bryan to rescue two tractors that were bogged and soon to be submerged in what was, a few hours earlier, a dry and dusty dam. Another S.E.S. crew was sent to assist with flood relief in Clare but returned when required to help with the floods in Burra. At about 7.15p.m. the creek which flows through Kooringa broke its banks causing torrents of water to flow rapidly along Commercial and Thames Streets causing some flooding of business houses, but the hardest hit were the cottages in Thames street, some of which had 30cms. of water flowing through them at the peak of the flood. During the crisis sandbagging was swung into force by some S.E.S. members and volunteers whilst others blocked off roads and directed traffic around the worst affected areas.

Thursday morning saw the clean up operation of the streets and houses begin in earnest. The midday weather report, which predicted further storms to hit during mid-afternoon put police and S.E.S. members on full alert and 250 sandbags were filled in readiness. At 3.00 p.m. a violent tropical thunderstorm unleashed 24mm (95 points) of rain and hail on Burra in 45 minutes. Flooding was extensive throughout Burra and at one stage 25 S.E.S. volunteers were working furiously protecting houses in Tregony Street, Burra North. During this operation two S.E.S. volunteers were swept down the watercourse suffering minor cuts and bruises.

At the peak of the storm, Police ordered that children were to remain at school until the danger had passed. School was dismissed 50 minutes later than normal. A 1000-gallon tank that had been picked up by floodwaters was smashed against the Ayres Street Bridge and reports of damage to roads including the new bitumenised road to the Redruth Gaol and the new bike track were received. Friday morning saw yet another storm, which hit at approximately 5.30 a.m. Twenty S.E.S. members and Police reported to the makeshift headquarters at the Council Office but only minor flooding, was experienced.

Controller of the S.E.S. in Burra, Des James said that the townspeople had rallied together extremely well to combat the common crisis. Thirty-five townspeople registered with S.E.S. as volunteers giving valuable help to the fifteen S.E.S. members. The response from business houses with food and drink was excellent and much appreciated by the volunteers. The ladies of S.E.S. welfare were hard at work throughout the crisis preparing soup, food and hot and cold drinks.

Burra Broadcaster: 23rd February 2000 Rains Cause Havoc in Burra

Rainstorms which hit Burra on Monday 21st February dropped 26mms. On the town in a relatively short time, causing localised flooding.

The Burra Art Gallery had problems with water coming in, Décor Made Easy had an area flooded when a drain blocked and several residences were also reported to have had water damage.

Peter Harvey, Chairman of the Art Gallery Board said the run-off down the hill behind the Gallery was immense, adding to the problems. The Royal Exchange-Best Place intersection also experienced problems when drains were unable to handle the volume of water. SES and the MFS were both out assisting people and businesses affected by the flooding.

Amidst it all, a covered truck and trailer parted company at the intersection of Chapel and Commercial Streets, blocking traffic and requiring assistance in being re-connected before continuing its journey.

Two hours later, the sun was shining and the skies were blue.

Burra Broadcaster: 27th Aug. 2003 Rough Weather Hits Burra

Some wild weather hit Burra over the weekend of 23rd and 24th August, resulting in minor flooding a power blackout to some areas and uprooting of a tree in Queen Street. According to locals, it would be five or six years since the Burra Creek has flowed but over the weekend, it had plenty of brown muddy water flowing through the town and submerging ford crossings.

With the rains being widespread (and generally being in the order of two inches over the past 4-5 days), the Burra Creek was also fed with flows from Springbank Creek in the south and from Firewood Creek to the north.

The power blackout occurred during quite a violent electrical storm early on Saturday morning and involved areas to the north of the town as well as some areas right in the town.

The uprooted tree in Queen Street is a bit of a mystery but presumably blew down during the weekend.

Burra Broadcaster 18th January 1995

New Year Floods Again

Last Saturday Burra and the surrounding districts were deluged with more than 100mm (4 inches) of rain.

Reports of over 150mm have come from the Leighton and Gum Creek areas, which devastated fences and gave farmers plenty to do rescuing stock from the floodwaters.

Burra's Commercial Street fared worst hit in the town this time, when an inch of rain hit the catchment area feeding the creek that runs past the hospital in a 15-minute period around 4pm. The floodwaters covering the Adelaide Road entrance to Burra were only passable to the biggest vehicles, like road transports.

Businesses along the south of Commercial Street from Dollman's Garage to Elder's virtually all had some water inside. Other shops and private residences on Commercial, Thames and Chapel Streets received water damage.

Des James of the Department of Roads and Transport said Burra-Robertstown, Burra-Morgan and the Barrier Highway at Burra-Mt. Bryan floodway and south of Hallett were all closed at various stages.

'Only last week the extensive storm damage to the Burra-Robertstown Road was repaired,' he said.

Des congratulated the DRT employees on their non-stop efforts from 9am Saturday to 8pm Sunday night and thanked the whole community for their help and cooperation.

Burra Council is convening a special works meeting this week to deal with repairs and clean-up.



A flood in January 1995 rushes down Commercial Street Burra

Constable Martin Lunn and Des James at one stage had to convey a distressed mother and baby through the floodwaters at the Adelaide entrance to Burra.

Many of those affected by the floods praised the SES, all the helpers and controller Andrew McInnes on their efforts. Many locals pitched in to help with sandbagging in case more floodwaters hit

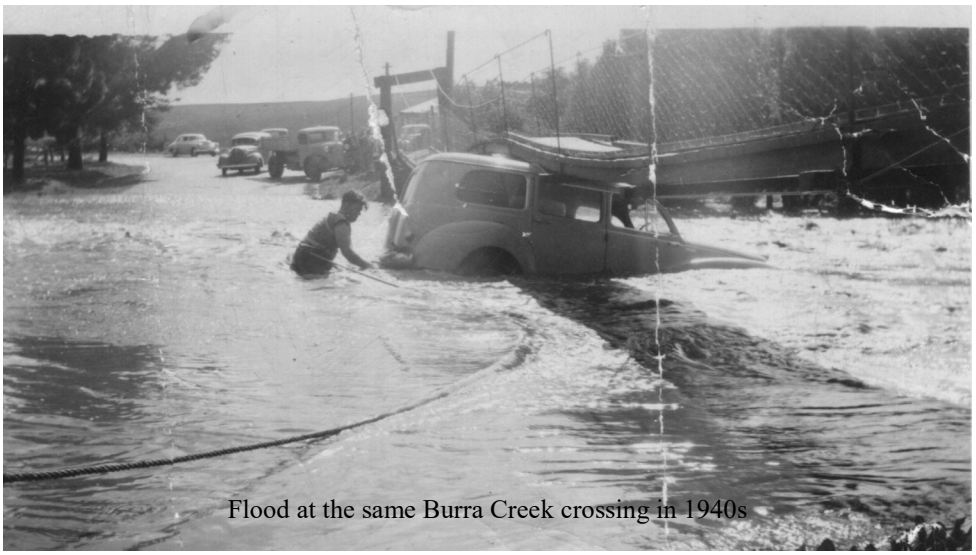
Someone even suggested there were a lot of potential emergency service personnel helping out who may be considering joining and learning additional skills for the future.



Burra Creek
in flood
at the
Redruth Bridge
Dec. 2004



Floodwaters at a Burra Creek crossing with the White Hart Hotel in the background
1910



Flood at the same Burra Creek crossing in 1940s

Compiled by Julian Ratcliffe
The Burra History Group Inc.
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