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St Georgeâ??s opens doors for history festival

Text and pictures by Joanna Cox

St Georgeâ??s opened its doors recently for the SA History Festival for visitors to experience the beauty of the stained glass windows and the selection of beautifully hand crafted tapestry kneelers on display.

The church has been a focus of public worship in Gawler since 1858 and features spectacular stained glass & leadlight windows, a soaring ceiling, together with a pipe organ and a chime of eight fixed hemispherical bells in the tower.

The bells are the only ones like this left in the Southern Hemisphere. The bells were placed in the tower and dedicated to the men of Gawler who gave their lives in the First World War.

They pealed out and could be heard by all surrounding districts due to its lofty central site â?? several people came along because they heard the bells.

One couple heard the bells from the main street of Gawler, another gentleman from Willaston and a father and son from just one street back from the church. The father and his son, a musician, on arrival at St Georgeâ??s were quite enthralled at the prospect of going up to the tower and being given the opportunity to â??have a goâ??.

Following the bell ringing at 11am, our bell ringer was an absolute delight in her enthusiasm, skill and historical knowledge as she shared with visitors, up to 4 at a time, who were able to experience bell ringing firsthand. This experience was new to all who attended and thoroughly enjoyed, being one of the highlights of their visit.

The bell ringing music at St. Georgeâ??s

The historical display was admired by all, showing a wonderful array of historical clothes, accessories, pictures and books which provided an interesting and colourful display spanning the years. Artefacts were on display around St Georgeâ??s which could be viewed during the tour.

Guided tours were conducted providing insightful information covering many aspects of the history of St Georgeâ??s and its artefacts.

An organ recital was given on our present organ which has 32 pedals and 18 ranks of pipes built in 1878 in Bristol, UK and graced two Church of England churches. It was purchased and arrived at St Georgeâ??s in 1986.

Part of Communion Foundation Stone and Trowel on display at St. Georgeâ??s

Messy Church provided the childrenâ??s activity and awarded the children with a gold medal on completion of the activity.

Visitors received a gift pack as they concluded their visit which included a gift voucher from the Open Door Community bookshop in Gawler.

It was wonderful to share the history of such a magnificent church with so many people both local and interstate, some of whom were not aware of St Georgeâ??s and its rich history.

We are very excited about our next SA History Festival Open day on Saturday 14 May 2022 which we hope to expand to include tours of St Georgeâ??s cemetery on Saturday 21 May.

St Georgeâ??s cemetery was designed by Rev. William Henry Coombs in 1861 and following almost 50 years of service to the Anglican Church, Gawler, Rev. Coombs and his wife Eliza were buried exclusively within the central plot of the cemetery which is surrounded by most of Gawlerâ??s original Anglicans, their families and friends.

I would like to express my thanks to parishioners, bell ringer Alex, organist Adrian, all the helpers and to Fr Simon who has been supportive through the whole process and assisted where he has been able to.

Joanna Cox is a member of the SA History Fellowship Gawler, *along with Joyce Mendrik, Julie Bruno, Brenda Mott, and Craig Withers*.

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