



TOWN OF GAWLER

GEORGE GAWLER AND GAWLER'S CREST



Sans Gauler Point de Fruit - "Without Labour there is No Fruit"

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George Gawler KH

George Gawler was born on 21 July 1795, the only child of Samuel Gawler, captain of the 73rd Regiment and his wife, Julia, née Russell. After a short education, he entered the Royal Military College at the age of thirteen and was commissioned as Ensign in the 52nd Light Infantry in October 1810. He served in the Peninsular War of 1808-1814 and was mentioned in the Duke of Wellington's dispatches. Promoted to Lieutenant, he took part in several major battles and minor engagements from Badajoz in 1812 to Toulouse in April 1814. He was awarded the Peninsular Medal with seven clasps and in 1815 he led the right company of the 52nd Regiment in charges on the French Imperial Guard at

Waterloo. After three years with the army of occupation in France, he was given sick leave, returning eventually to duty in 1819.

During his illness, Gawler had re-affirmed his Christianity and in 1820 he married Maria Cox. They had twelve children, five of whom survived childhood. Deeply religious people, Gawler and his wife worked charitably in England and Ireland where he was stationed with his regiment until June 1823. He was promoted to Captain in 1825 and in 1831 he purchased his majority. When he left the regiment in 1834, he was an unattached lieutenant-colonel, also by purchase.

In 1837, Lieutenant-Colonel Gawler was appointed Knight, Hanoverian Order (KH) by King William IV for distinguished services to the UK and/or Hanover and was appointed as the second governor of South Australia. His task was to render viable the experiment in systematic, self-supporting colonisation, devised by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and modified by Colonel Robert Torrens.

Before leaving England, Gawler was alarmed by the colony's financial provisions which limited his ordinary expenditure to £8000 per year with the right to draw a further £2000 per year to prevent destitution. Without prior authority from London, no public works were to be undertaken nor was any extraordinary expenditure permitted except in cases of dire emergency.



Colonel George Gawler, ca. 1843.
(State Library of South Australia
SLSA: B14426)

Upon arrival with his wife and five children at Adelaide in October 1838, Gawler found conditions far worse than he expected: £12000 had been drawn and spent in the first six months; salaries of public servants for the third quarter were unpaid and at least one public servant had been granted rations from the colonial store to prevent him starving; some public officials were inefficient and some devoted their time to private ventures rather than public duties; accounts were in complete disarray and the Treasury was empty; the land surveys were in arrears with the result that the population of more than 4000 was living under makeshift conditions around Adelaide, unable to take up their country lands; capital was being diverted from rural development to urban speculation.



Colonel George Gawler,
ca. 1865
(Town of Gawler, Gawler
Heritage Collection)

Gawler saw no alternative but to treat the situation as an emergency and on his own authority he increased the number of public officials, raised the salaries of juniors, recommended increases for the rest; organised a police force according to a plan he had submitted before leaving England and then enlarged it; re-organised the Survey Department and hired surveyors. Gawler was an intelligent man who attempted to solve the problems of the colony by expanding government expenditure. He did what was necessary without appraising the costs, expecting his decisions to be accepted by his superiors. His expenditure steadily rose and by the end of his thirty-one months in office, he had drawn bills on the South Australian Colonisation Commission for £200,500. The Commission was dissolved in 1840 and a new board of three



A tinted pen and ink sketch titled 'Sketch of the action near the hill of Barrosa, May 1811'. Thought to be the work of George Gawler, the original was presented by Canon Coombs to Gawler Institute on 4 January 1887. (Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

commissioners placed the blame squarely on Gawler for his irregularities, reckless expenditure and alleged grave errors of judgment. In April 1841, Gawler received instructions to cease drawing on the commissioners to which he responded that he would draw directly on the British Treasury. But the matter was out of his hands and he was recalled, to be replaced by Captain George Grey.

Gawler returned to England to find he had been judged and found wanting in

his absence. He tried desperately to clear his name but he was eventually told that he had no further hope of public employment and he retired into private life. His last years were spent at Southsea, where he died on 7 May 1869.

The Town

The town of Gawler was named after George Gawler. Portraits hang in the Council Chamber and also in the Reading Room of Gawler Public Library. The name of Gawler's Anglican Church, St. George's, was chosen to honour Governor Gawler; his mother was present at the laying of the foundation stone of the first church in 1847. Colonel and Mrs Gawler made several gifts to the church including a silver communion service. Funds for a stained glass window, dedicated to his memory, were raised by public subscription. He was a supporter of Gawler Institute, and gave a donation of books worth £25.

The Crest

In 1863, the Town of Gawler adopted the armorial bearings of Governor Gawler as its 'Coat of Arms'.

In 1979 enquiries were made of the Bluemantle Pursuivant of Arms, College of Arms seeking a heraldic description. The discovery was made that Colonel Gawler was not officially registered as being entitled to use the Armorial Bearings. The Coat of Arms does not comply with the principles of heraldry or the laws of arms and can only be used as the emblem of the Town of Gawler.

"The Coat of Arms purports to be blasoned as:
Argent Lion passant in bend between two cotises gules.
And for the crest:
A hawk holding in the dexter claw an ear of wheat all proper."



The Emblem of the Town of Gawler differs from the Laws of Arms in as much as the two thin bands, i.e. cotises, should be placed diagonally across the shield from the top left hand corner down to the bottom right hand corner and that the wings of the bird should be closed and not open.

Researched and written by Anne Richards, Reference and Research Librarian

References:

Australian dictionary of biography, online edition.
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