



THE GOLDEN PIPELINE
A NATIONAL TRUST PROJECT

CHARLES YELVERTON (CY) O'CONNOR

The work of CY O'Connor changed the face and fortunes of Western Australian society. He was responsible for planning and building major public works during the 1890s that stimulated the development of Western Australia. CY O'Connor achieved one of Australia's greatest engineering feats of the nineteenth century when he designed the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme. This scheme still operates today, testimony to his skill and foresight. The National Trust of Australia (WA) is committed to conserving and interpreting the scheme through its Golden Pipeline Project.

IRELAND AND NEW ZEALAND

CY O'Connor was born on 11 January 1843 in Ireland. He trained as a civil engineer and worked on Irish railways. Opportunities in the British colonies beckoned and O'Connor left for New Zealand in 1865 where he worked for 26 years and became the colony's Marine Engineer. In 1891 O'Connor accepted Premier John Forrest's offer to come to Western Australia, to work on what Forrest described as 'Railways, harbours, everything'.

ARRIVAL IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Western Australia in the 1890s was a changing society. The colony had achieved self-government and Premier Forrest was keen to implement a vigorous policy of development. O'Connor took up the positions of Engineer-in-Chief of Public Works and Manager of Railways.

HARBOUR AND RAILWAYS

The lack of a deepwater port near Perth was stifling the colony so O'Connor's first project was to build a harbour at Fremantle. The colony's railways were also in urgent need of overhaul. Aspects of O'Connor's plans for both the harbour and the railways attracted criticism, but both proved successful. Although O'Connor had Forrest's support, others regarded him as an 'outsider'.

GOLD AND WATER

Gold was discovered firstly at Coolgardie in 1892, then at Kalgoorlie in 1893 and thousands flocked to the arid Goldfields. Water was scarce and became more expensive than whiskey. Water supplies, such as artesian bores and condensing plants, provided some but there was not enough for the thousands of diggers and their families. The lack of fresh water led to poor sanitation and diseases such as typhoid, which caused



CY O'Connor c.1897 BL 54379P

PERSONAL DETAILS:

O'Connor was an Irish Protestant. He married Susan Ness in New Zealand. He was the father of eight children, one of whom died at an early age. He was compassionate, generous and an advocate of workers rights. He instigated an eight hour working day and better wages for his staff and encouraged them to form their own union.



CY O'Connor and family, 1891

BL 009044D

many deaths. Goldfields residents agitated politicians for a reliable supply and in 1895 Forrest requested O'Connor devise a plan.

GOLDFIELDS WATER SUPPLY SCHEME

O'Connor devised a simple solution but one of great magnitude and cost. Using hydraulics and steam, water would be pumped from coastal storage in the Darling Range, through a pipeline 520 km to Coolgardie. Due to the growth of Kalgoorlie, it was extended to 560 km. His plan incorporated new technology and methods and also utilised the new harbour and railway to receive and transport supplies and equipment.

The scheme faced many hurdles - delays in funding; political resistance; and extreme criticism, particularly from the media. A formal government enquiry into the scheme, along with accusations of corruption, took a heavy personal toll on O'Connor and tragically, he took his own life on 10 March 1902.

Ten months after his death, the pipeline was completed and officially opened at Mount Charlotte, Kalgoorlie on 24 January 1903. Water has flowed to the Goldfields ever since. The corruption charges against O'Connor were unfounded and the final cost of the scheme was just over the original estimate made seven years earlier, despite taking longer than anticipated and traveling a further 40 km to Kalgoorlie.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION GO TO

GOLDEN PIPELINE WEBSITE:
www.goldenpipeline.com.au
 WATER CORPORATION WEBSITE:
www.watercorporation.com.au

READ

Cyril Ayris,
CY O'Connor: the man for the time
 Cyril Ayris Freelance, 1996

Anthony Evans,
CY O'Connor: his life and legacy
 UWA Press, 2001

National Trust, *The Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail Guide*, 2002

J Lefroy, D Frylinck and M Duke,
The Pipeline CY O'Connor Built.
 Fremantle Arts Centre Press,
 Western Australia, 2003

VISIT

No 1 Pump Station,
 Mundaring Weir,
 Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail,
 Fremantle Harbour and
 O'Connor's statue,
 Railway Tunnel at Swan View

The National Trust promotes the value of heritage and uses its heritage assets to build a better future for Western Australia. The National Trust seeks to encourage and educate the community about the appreciation, enjoyment and use of its unique cultural and natural heritage, and to provide long-term social, economic and environmental benefit to all Western Australians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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