

# *SAOA Historical Series No 67*

## *Alfred George Edquist (1873-1966)*

### *A Passionate Educator and Conservationist*

#### **Family History**

The name Edquist has intrigued me for many years, so I was not surprised to learn that Alfred George Edquist's father was born in Sweden. His given name was Andrew Edquist, perhaps suggesting a Scottish or English origin for at least one of his parents, but I cannot find more information about his antecedents. When Andrew died in Adelaide on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1890, his age was 64 years, so he was born in about 1826. Andrew's wife, Eliza (née Turner) was born in Sutton at Hone, Kent, in 1841 and emigrated in the *Clara* in 1859. Her first marriage to Daniel Bavian Davies took place in 1866 in Victoria and then in 1873 she married Andrew Edquist. Their two sons were born in the goldfields region around Talbot and Amherst in Victoria: Alfred George on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1873 and Arthur John in about 1876. By 1889 the family was living in Adelaide where Alfred began as a student teacher at the Hindmarsh School.

At the age of 34 Alfred married Marion Forbes, aged 27, the daughter of William Forbes, at the residence of John Adamson in Woodville on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1907. The previous year in October, his brother Arthur had married Ada Annie Goodall, aged about 36, at her mother's residence in Hindmarsh. There is no record of children from either of these marriages. Alfred and Arthur's mother, Eliza, died on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1919 at Hindmarsh, Ada Edquist died on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1949, Marion Edquist died on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1958 and Arthur resided at North Adelaide where he died on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1963, aged 86. Arthur and Ada are buried in the Hindmarsh Cemetery.

Alfred seems to have had several places of residence, including initially with his parents in the Hindmarsh district. In 1911 the Royal Society of SA's list of members gives his address as Tate Terrace, Croydon, then in 1922 as Second Avenue, Sefton Park, and in 1935 as 10 Farrell Street, Glenelg. On his death on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1966, Alfred

was living in Glenelg. Both Alfred and Marion are buried at Centennial Park Cemetery.

#### **Teaching Career**

In 1889 at the tender age of fifteen, Alfred began as a student or pupil teacher at Hindmarsh School. The Hindmarsh Model School was constructed in 1878 soon after the passing of a new *Education Act* and by 1883 there were just under 900 students attending the school (Marsden 1983/84). Pupil teachers were introduced into South Australian government schools in the early 1870s to remedy a shortage of teachers. Candidates for pupil teachers had to be no less than 14 years old, healthy, of good character and had to pass an examination based on the curriculum for the last year of primary school. Their apprenticeship lasted for four years and their transition to the following year depended on satisfactory results from

an exam, reports from the head teacher and teaching assessments. Head teachers were responsible for instructing the pupil teachers for an hour before school as well as providing homework for an hour in the evenings.

There were many inadequacies with this system, including the immaturity of the pupil teachers to be in the role of teacher, the difficulties of combining being a pupil and a teacher at such a young age, as well as lack of time and resources to adequately train the pupil teachers

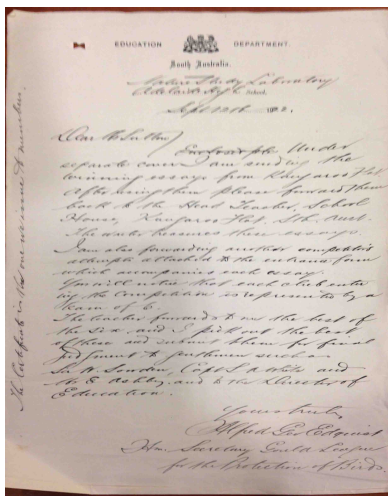
"on the job". It is a testament to Alfred's perseverance and intelligence that he completed the four-year apprenticeship, with his assessments ranging from "fair" through "fair to moderate" to "good". In 1876 a Training College with thirty places was established to provide further practical experience in a greater range of subjects for the pupil teachers. Alfred began at this College in 1894 but it must have been on a very part-time basis, as it was not until 1896 that students were allocated even two afternoons each week there. Photo 1 shows the class of 1894 with Alfred standing second from the left in the very back row, with a rather smug expression on his face.



Photo 1. Teacher Training College students, 1894 - A.G. Edquist is standing 2<sup>nd</sup> from left in far back row (From the collection of the State Library of South Australia, B17538)

Regrettably his name is given as the misspelt "A.E. Edgnist"! Too late for Alfred, the University of Adelaide stepped in and used a bequest from Sir Thomas Elder to take over the Training College in 1898 to provide a two year course free of charge to the government.

Alfred's first posting was to Kadina in 1895 and he moved to various schools including Brompton, Strathalbyn and Riverton, over the next 12 years, until in 1907 he was sent to Melbourne "for a year to learn the principles of the New Education theory which included Nature Study as a separate subject" (Reid 2000). Edquist was accompanied to Melbourne by another distinguished South Australian educationalist, William James Adey. In January 1908, following his recent marriage, he was appointed Lecturer in Nature Study. Photo 2 shows an example letter from Edquist on Departmental letterhead.



**Photo 2 — a letter from Edquist on Departmental letterhead**

By this time Edquist was combining his love for birds and their protection with his teaching skills and the publication of 'Protected Native Birds of South Australia' (Duffield 1910) no doubt helped fill a gap in resources for South Australian schools. In tandem was the introduction of the Silver Cup Challenge for the best essay on bird protection by a student and the equivalent of the Gould League into South Australian schools (Truran 2000).

A change of professional direction occurred in 1921 when Alfred joined the staff of the Adelaide Teachers College and in 1928 he became the first Inspector of Elementary Agriculture for the Education Department (Reid 2000). Through all this time though he remained in charge of the teaching of nature study across the state until his retirement in 1939, aged 65 (Reid 2000).

### Association with Natural History Societies

While the study and protection of birds was an important part of Alfred Edquist's life, his natural history interests were very broad, as evidenced by his membership and contributions to various natural history associations. He joined the Royal Society of South Australia in 1902 as quite a young man, and was a member of the Field Naturalists' Section of the Royal Society (later an Honorary Member, Blaylock 2000), and the South Australian Anthropological and Astronomical Societies (Cleland 1968).

An example of the breadth of his interests is found in his contributions in the *South Australian Naturalist*, starting in Volume 1 with an essay on a plant, "the soursop", through talks on clouds, and excursions looking at Aboriginal artefacts and pond life at the Grange and petrified remains of trees.

### Association with the SAOA

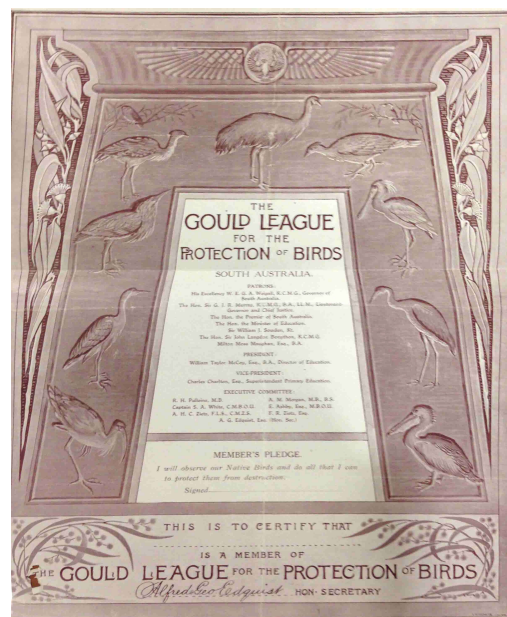
Alfred joined the South Australian Ornithological Association (SAOA) in 1910, serving as Vice-President in 1916 and President in 1917. He was also a member of the Editorial Committee for the *Ornithologist* for two periods, from 1918-1926 and from 1942-1951, the latter term following his retirement from the Education Department. The esteem with which he was regarded by fellow members was recognised by his election as an Honorary Member on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1964.

While a keen and knowledgeable observer, Alfred did not publish many articles in the *Ornithologist*. His distinguished association with the SAOA is hard to tease apart from his endeavours in the fields of bird study, teaching and conservation and these are dealt with in the next section.

Gregory Mathews (1916), in Volume 7 of *The Birds of Australia*, described a new subgenus entitled *Edquista* for the Paradise Kingfisher. It is likely that Mathews and Edquist met on the occasion of Mathew's visit to South Australia in 1914, when Mathews attended two meetings of the SAOA (Paton 2017). The Paradise Kingfisher is now placed in *Tanysiptera*, so Edquist's brief fling with eternal nomenclatural fame did not last for long.

### Conservation Activities

An article entitled 'Junior Ornithologists' tells the story of the inauguration of School Bird Protection Clubs in the Public Schools of South Australia in 1910 (Edquist 1922). Photo 3 shows a certificate from the South Australian branch of the Gould League for the Protection of Birds signed by Edquist as the Honorary Secretary.



**Photo 3 — a certificate from the South Australian branch of the Gould League for the Protection of Birds**



In early 1911 there were 116 clubs and by 1922 there were over 500 in the state with more than 15,000 members (Reid 1974). The SAOA members early showed their practical support by generously funding a magnificent cup, the Schools' Competition Cup (Photo 4), the first prize in an essay-writing and drawing competition. Competitors were required to write two essays, one on a bird and the other on a plant, showing that Edquist appreciated that birds and their habitat are inextricably linked. Prize-winning essays were sometimes published in the *Ornithologist*. Regrettably the present whereabouts of the cup is unknown.

Edquist also instigated in 1910 the concept of a Bird Day, run in conjunction with Arbor Day; the *Education Gazette* published each year a special section on Bird and Tree Day, with articles on bird life and protection by Edquist, Captain White, Dr Morgan and others (Reid 1974). The Director of Education placed a copy of the aforementioned book on protected native birds in every school in South Australia in 1911, and in 1919 the Minister of Industry issued to all members of the School Bird Clubs a sheet explaining the provisions of the *Birds and Animals Protection Act* (Reid 1974).

In 1928 the Sandy Creek School advised the SAOA that their school had won the Bird and Tree Day trophy for the second year running (Anon 1929). Two years later Mr F.B. Shoobridge offered three cash prizes for a school essay competition on birds seen by students in the upcoming holidays; he also offered to donate a pair of canaries to each of the winners (Anon 1931). The competition was run and Dr Morgan and J.N. McGilp were asked to adjudicate, which they did and the winners were Joan Cleland of Presbyterian Girls' College (1<sup>st</sup> prize), Chris Cain of Port Augusta Public School (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Mary Jolley of Presbyterian Girls' College (3<sup>rd</sup>) (Anon 1932). For members with long memories, Joan Cleland was of course the late Joan Paton, a Past President of the SAOA, and Chris Cain was the subject of Historical Series No. 7 (Bradley 2003).

There are no more reports of the Bird and Tree Day competition or any successor to it in the *Ornithologist*, but from April 1934 descriptions of monthly meetings were no longer described in the journal, so no avenue for such publicity existed. However in the SAOA Correspondence (held in the State Library of South Australia) there is a letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> January 1937 from M. Scriven of the Correspondence School, Gilles Street, Adelaide, letting the SAOA know that their school had again won the Gold and Silver Medals and the Silver Shield and Cup and asking if

John Sutton (the Secretary) could present the cup. He declined but suggested that the new Secretary, Mr Terrill, would do so. This is the last mention of the competition that I can find, which is interesting as it almost coincides with Alfred Edquist's retirement from the Education Department in 1939. Perhaps with his retirement from the Department the impetus to continue running the competition was lost.

Outside the school system Edquist was active in bird protection in other ways. The late nineteenth century saw an increased push for legislation to protect a wider range of native birds than the earlier Acts of 1874, 1885 and

1886, and three organisations were at the forefront of this movement: the SAOA, the Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Flora and Fauna Protection Committee of the Field Naturalists' Section. After much lobbying a *Birds Protection Act* was passed in 1900, which gave increased protection to a wide range of native birds and later established some sanctuaries for birds (Reid 1974). Alfred Edquist was a member of the Protection Committee. His work on fostering a love of natural history in school students and efforts to protect native fauna, particularly birds, led the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to award him the Society's Montague Sharpe Medal (Reid 2000). The efforts of the RSPB and other organisations eventually led to the cessation of the trade in plumes from wild birds (Truran 2000).

### Publications

While not as prolific in the publishing arena as some of his contemporaries, like J.B. Cleland and S.A. White, Edquist wrote or contributed to a few important pamphlets and books. One, already mentioned, was the 30 page pamphlet on protected native birds (Duffield 1910) to which Edquist contributed the introduction and the bird descriptions. Technical terms were omitted to make the book easy to use for the lay person and birds

that were well known to the public, like kookaburras and magpies, were not illustrated or described. Thomas Duffield, the Secretary to the Commissioner for Crown Lands, was a bird-lover and he and Edquist were keen to offer more protection to those birds which often fell prey to "thoughtless boys and sportsmen". The pamphlet was distributed to every public school and every police officer in South Australia.

*Nature Studies in Australasia* (Edquist 1916) was a more substantial publication of 176 pages. An introduction explained why the study of nature was important through laying the foundation for other subjects by honing



**Photo 4 — Schools' Competition Cup**  
First Prize in competition for essays and drawings of native flora and birds in SA Public Schools  
(Reproduced from *SA Ornithologist* 6 (8):172 from a block originally lent by the Editor, 'The Children's Hour')

observational skills and engaging all the senses. Edquist described the importance of outdoor lessons and hands-on practical examples, like observation of pond life in an aquarium. Lesson plans covering a multitude of themes were explored within the framework of the four seasons of the year. In 1921 a series of articles on mosquitos and how to combat them written by Edquist as a series of nature study lessons, was republished as a Supplement to the *Education Gazette*, entitled *The Mosquito or Gnat* (Edquist 1921).

*The Register* for 26<sup>th</sup> September 1924 printed a photo of a group of teachers with their supervisor, A.G. Edquist, who were attending an agricultural and horticultural course at the Edwardstown Public School. Cleland (1968) lists a publication, *Elementary Agriculture and Horticulture*, by Edquist, dated 1924, so I wonder if he produced this work for the students of this course. I cannot locate the publication to verify this.

Other publications were notes and articles in the *South Australian Naturalist*, the *South Australian Ornithologist* and the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of South Australia*.

### Acknowledgments

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