



# HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

November 2023

## GENERAL MEETING

**The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 15 November at 6pm when John Ralph will present a talk on 'Music of the European settlers in the Swan River Colony, 1829 -1839'. Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.**



In 1829 free settlers from Great Britain and Ireland arrived at the Swan River Colony bringing with them their music. What role would this have played in the establishment of a colony at the far reaches of the British Empire? Might they have turned to music to recreate memories of home? Might the music that was created and performed in such trying circumstances have encouraged the breakdown of strict social barriers and led to greater bonding? Or might the music employed by different strands of society have strengthened the differences between settlers?

There is evidence from diaries of the early settlers that some of the music produced in the first ten years began to adopt a distinctly Western Australian focus. Here we see an interesting phenomenon where the colonists were beginning to look forward and away from the Britain they had left

behind, to a future in a new colony. By examining the music prevalent in Britain in 1829 it will be possible to create a soundscape of music in the Swan River Colony and notice if there was a transformation in its mode of composition, production and use. However, the repertoire itself cannot be viewed in isolation. I will explore how, where, why and by whom the music was performed.

**John Ralph** is a musician, teacher and composer. He has taught classical guitar for the Education Department and plays regularly with the Perth Guitar Orchestra of which in 2011 he was musical director and for which he has written extended pieces of music. He also performs with Plectra, the WAAPA classical guitar ensemble. He is a folk musician performing in clubs and festivals in Australia and the UK. He was chairman of the WA Folk Federation until recently and runs a folk club at Warwick in the northern suburbs. This musical passion coupled with an interest in history has encouraged him to enrol for a Master of Musicology at WAAPA studying the music of the first ten years of European settlement in WA.



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### Stop Press!

#### *In search of new premises...* **Resolution of Special General Meeting of the Society on 11 October**

That this Special General Meeting of the members of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society Inc supports the elected Council in its endeavours to find new premises for the Society and to operate those premises as the History West Community Centre. It is understood that this entails selling our present freehold property at 49 Broadway, Nedlands, to enable purchase of alternative premises within the finances of the Society. This meeting notes that the Council, on behalf of the Society, is proceeding in the manner outlined in the motion and may act accordingly.

### Call for books for the 2024 Giant Second Hand Book Sale



Donate any books you no longer want to a good cause.

Bring them to Stirling House or call 9386 3841 to arrange a pick up.

All books, except textbooks and encyclopedias, are wanted.

Many thanks from us all.

The Royal WA Historical Society (Inc.) | 49 Broadway | NEDLANDS Western Australia 6009  
TELEPHONE: (08) 9386 3841 | FACSIMILE: (08) 9386 3309 | EMAIL: [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)  
FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/histwest](https://facebook.com/histwest) | WEB: [www.histwest.org.au](http://www.histwest.org.au) | ABN: 43 607 110 473  
LIBRARY EMAIL: [library@histwest.org.au](mailto:library@histwest.org.au) | MUSEUM EMAIL: [museum@histwest.org.au](mailto:museum@histwest.org.au)

# Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

Or ring the office 9386 3841 [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)



**Stirling House, Nedlands**

**Thursday 16 November, 5.30 -7.00pm**

**Dorothy Erickson**

***Inspired by Light & Land.  
Designers and Makers in Western Australia  
1970 to the 21st Century.***

Works of precious stone, wood, textile and clay,  
woven, stitched, fired and forged are detailed

[Click here to book](#)



**Stirling House, Nedlands**

**Thursday 23 November, 10 for 10.30am**

**Wendy Lugg**

**A shoe box, a love affair,  
and the Great War exhibitions**

A story of intrigue, uneasy alliances and war  
photographs on a grand scale.



[Click here to book](#)

## EVENT



**Booked in for a Cuppa Xmas Edition 2023**

**Stirling House, Nedlands**

**Tuesday 5 December, 10 for 10.30am**

Just in time for Christmas new WA book releases  
presented by an inspiring panel of guest speakers  
while you enjoy a festive cuppa and slice.

A selection of children's book will also be available  
Cost \$10 per person. Everyone welcome.



[Click here to book](#)

## CHRISTMAS PARTY



**Mosman Park Bowling Club**

**Wednesday 13 December, 6-8pm**

Members, partners & friends are invited

Cost \$40 per person  
finger food and first drink included



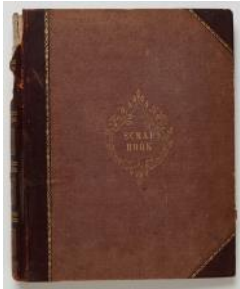
[Click here to book](#)



# Community Talk

## Digitising John Forrest Scrapbook – 1869, 1870, 1874

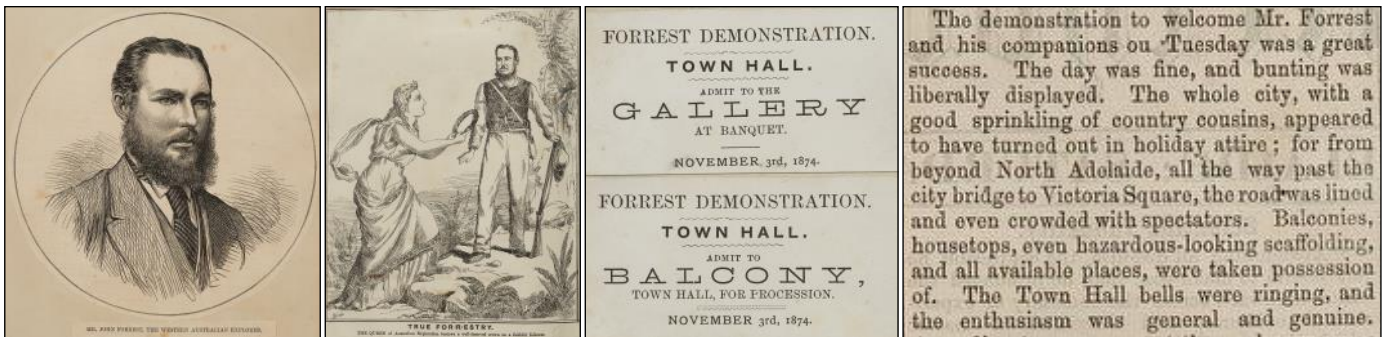
Sally Anne Hasluck



Our interesting September talk by Vice President Sally Anne Hasluck explored the content of the scrapbook which the young surveyor John Forrest created to preserve the story of his three exploration journeys. The book has now been digitised (thanks to a grant from the Minderoo Foundation) and can be viewed on the Society's website.

Sally Anne's presentation sought to bring John Forrest to life through this personal record. She revealed a young man who documented his achievements not as a diary but in a collection of letters, telegrams and reports in newspapers — mostly accolades of his difficult journeys as the leader of a close-knit team. The most arduous of them, in 1874, was from Geraldton across to the north/south telegraph line and down to Adelaide.

The story of the Forrest family is a fascinating one — John was the fourth of ten children of Margaret and William Forrest who migrated to the Swan River Colony in 1829 as indentured servants to John Ferguson. It is difficult to exaggerate John Forrest's importance in the history of the developing colony and this scrapbook is one part of the historical mosaic.



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## History in the City

Rachel Roe



Professor Jane Lydon's October talk on the Legacies of British Slavery was most thought provoking. This is a topic not often spoken about. Beginning with the broader issues shaping British history during the 18th and 19th centuries, Jane took us on a journey of discovery explaining how slave ownership was an important means by which the fruits of slavery were transmitted to metropolitan Britain. To introduce the Australian context we saw a map of the myriad Aboriginal language groups throughout our continent at that time. Western Australia was colonised four years prior to the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833.

Researchers are looking more closely at individuals and their extended families who prospered from the slave trade and it was a revelation to hear names of prominent WA colonists with either direct links to the slave trade or links through extended family members — men such as Walcott, Archibald Burt and James Stirling. The ribbon system of land

grants utilised in the early WA colony was similar to former plantation allotments used in the slave colony Demerara, now Guyana.

The University College London website titled *Legacies of British Slavery* is located at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> — and typing in a family name will reveal if the family name had an involvement in slavery. This topic adds a new dimension to family history research.

Please join us for our talks at Citiplace Community Centre at 2pm - \$10 entry includes delicious afternoon tea. No bookings required.

**1 November:** Bill Cutler – C Y O'Connor and the Pipeline

**6 December:** Richard Offen – WA, An Historical Boast – from Pilbara fossils to early Swan River buildings.

## Father John Fahey DSO, Chaplain, 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 1st AIF

Dr Peter Gifford

*Peter pays tribute to Father Fahey, remembering that his grandmother was also a Fahey, but they were unrelated. 'I'd gladly claim him', Peter writes.*



Not all war heroes become such for killing the enemy. Take, for example, Martin O'Meara, the Irish-born stretcher-bearer who won the Victoria Cross while serving with an Australian unit on the Western Front in 1916. His award was for saving life rather than taking it.

Another such Irish-Australian hero was Father John Fahey, Roman Catholic priest and chaplain to the 11th Battalion, 1st AIF.

Father Fahey was born on 3 October 1883 at Glenough, county Tipperary, Ireland, and ordained a priest in Italy in May 1907. He left almost immediately for Western Australia and served mainly among the timberworkers of Yarloop-Pinjarra, the rough bush experience providing him with excellent preparation for the Australian Imperial Force which he joined on 8 September 1914 as a chaplain fourth class, equivalent to a captain.

He was assigned to the all-Western Australian 11th Battalion and landed with them at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Chaplains had been told not to disembark because all available spaces on the boats were needed for fighting men, but Father Fahey took no notice, asserting that it was his duty to go into danger with his men. Ashore, he consoled the wounded, buried the dead and encouraged the living, becoming popular and exemplifying the active, robust priesthood then much admired in Australia.

Padre Fahey was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Order for 'gallantry under fire' on Gallipoli, where he was shot twice through his overcoat without being wounded, had a book shot out of his hands and had the jam tin from which he was eating shot through. Evacuated sick in July, he went back to Gallipoli in September and remained there until November.

In March 1916 Padre Fahey left the Middle East for France with his battalion, where a new experience awaited them. To the horrors of Gallipoli were added the might of heavy artillery – it was diabolical, he said, and 'it is wonderful how anyone escapes'. He remained on the Western Front until November the following year, by which time he was the longest serving front-line Australian chaplain of any denomination.

War service had aroused in him a deep admiration for Australian soldiers, whose bravery, he said, had 'been written in deeds that will live to the end of the world'. He himself was feted as a hero – against his wishes – when he returned to Perth in 1918.

Father Fahey remained in WA for the rest of his life, serving in various city and country areas. A friend of mine who grew up in the Cottesloe area, former ABC announcer Murray Jennings, had this to say about him:

Father Fahey was the priest at Star of the Sea, Cottesloe and my mother knew him well, as it was her parish church and she played organ there quite a lot. My father used to drive her to and from church after she stopped driving and sometimes when Mum was playing for a special choir practice / event or whatever, Father Fahey would invite Dad in to share a whisky and chat with him until the choir had finished.

They got along very well – Dad being an agnostic, Father Fahey a broad minded Catholic, often discussing politics, even the church and its failings at the time, ie 1950s.

Father Fahey kept up his AIF contacts until his death as parish priest at Cottesloe on 28 April 1959. At least 2000 people attended his funeral.

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### The Dempster & Lynburn Homesteads

Karli Florisson, a researcher and writer from Esperance, and documentary filmmaker Jennene Riggs from Riggs Australia have recently produced a series of short documentaries about historic homesteads located in the Esperance region.

The first two documentary episodes, featuring Dempster Homestead and Lynburn Station, have already been completed, and are available to view on YouTube. The links are as follows.

<https://youtu.be/jfglt48AJOs?si=fr8muj9QK818rvLE>  
and  
<https://youtu.be/toBmLmHtcHI?si=4Q1j6bGHOg5715i7>

#### ADVERTISEMENT

Thinking about property? I have new properties available off-market and launching soon.

If you do need any real estate advice regarding buying, selling, investing or leasing, please contact me anytime. I'm very happy to assist you.

Kind regards, Daniel Ranshaw

**Daniel Ranshaw**

0415 181 664

or

[dranshaw@realmark.com.au](mailto:dranshaw@realmark.com.au)



**Realmark**

# Ghost in the Gallery: A Bunbury tale

Brendan Kelly



In April 2019 a ghost-hunting team visited the Regional Art Gallery in Wittenoom Street, Bunbury. The team came to investigate the presence of a spectral spirit purported to haunt the old building. Over the years I had heard a number of stories about the lingering ghost in the Gallery, mostly told in hushed tones with raised eyebrows. It was speculated that the apparition was of an old nun who had died on the premises some time in the past.

The Gallery was originally the Sisters of Mercy convent, so I asked the knowledgeable Tresslyn Smith whether she had heard of the ghost story and who the spirit might be. Tresslyn, without an opinion on the veracity of ghosts, suggested that it could be that of Sister Mary Angela Costello, a legendary Reverend Mother of the convent. It was understood that Sister Costello had died there. A little digging into the history proceeded.

*The Southern Times* of 14 December 1897 reported the permanent foundation at Bunbury of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy. Bishop Gibney blessed the ground for a new convent and inducted Sister Angela Costello as Reverend Mother. This was the first instance in which a colonial-born Sister had been elevated to the position of Reverend Mother. The new convent was completed and became Mother Angela's final home; at least when she was alive, and maybe in the hereafter too.

Angela Costello (Ellen) was born of Irish parents in Bunbury on 31 August 1855. Her father John Costello was a Pensioner Guard who held the various positions of lighthouse keeper, tide waiter and cooper in the Customs House. The Costello family lived in Stirling Street. At the age of ten, Ellen became a 'second class' boarder at the Victoria Square convent in Perth and earned 'the most distinguished pupil' award in the Mercy School examinations. She was professed into the Mercy Order in 1880.

The characteristics of the Gallery ghost are vague, as any ghost might be. However she is definitely a nun in a habit and coif. Mother Angela was noted for her asceticism and penitential spirit, her love of prayer and her work for the poor. She had a reputation as an accomplished teacher and firm disciplinarian. To some of her students she appeared rather prim; to others kind and motherly. She was an amiable woman, not missing a thing, whose obituary described her as having a 'lovable personality'.

Former director of the Gallery Julian Bowron told me he had heard that the ghost was indeed thought to be that of an elderly nun. She had died on the premises, upstairs, near one of the present-day meeting rooms. These upstairs rooms were originally the nuns' cells, the convent's sleeping quarters. The cells these days certainly hold a feeling about them. Julian had gathered that the ghost manifested itself in a quiet way, not seen, but rather heard, or held responsible for unusual occurrences, such as a mysteriously locked door, an unaccounted footfall or a missing item. He himself noted strange creaking in the old building.

My good friend, the late Meryl Gardiner, also well versed in local history and folklore, told me the story told to her by a lady friend who was familiar with the ghost story. As it goes, Meryl's friend told of an old nun who would be seen standing on the top of the stairs, before turning to disappear into a cell. Meryl did say that in those days there may always have been nuns coming and going silently, so perhaps this might have been a real presence, or not. Sometimes it was hard to tell. Whatever the case, the tale of the Gallery ghost has been spoken of in Bunbury for many years.

Mother Angela's spirit of integrity and her administrative ability were obviously much appreciated by her own community, for they re-elected her after each three-year term in office, either as Reverend Mother or Mother Assistant, until 1928. She died in her cell in the convent on 4 October 1930 and became the fifth Sister of Mercy to be buried in Bunbury cemetery. Her mortal remains rest there while perhaps, one way or another, her spirit lives on.

## Sources

Tresslyn Smith, pers. comm., 17 April 2019; Julian Bowron, 19 April 2019; Meryl Gardiner, 19 April 2019.

*Southern Times*, 14 December 1897.

*South Western Tribune*, 7 October 1930.

Anne McLay, *Women Out of Their Sphere. A History of the Sisters of Mercy in WA*.



# Affiliates News

## Congratulations to Maylands Historical and Peninsula Association 2023 Merit Award



Keith (President) & Suzanne Cundale (Secretary/Treasurer) at the State History Conference receiving the Merit Award from RWAHS President Richard Offen & Affiliates committee chair Nick Drew

Maylands received the Merit Award in recognition of its use of innovative methods to raise its profile in the community which has led to an increase in the numbers of people attending monthly talks as well as a sizeable increase in membership numbers. These innovations include recording meeting talks on video, making them available on the Association's You Tube Channel and re-presenting some of them during the day at Maylands library. Much of the success of attendances at meetings has been through a wide range of advertising.

The Association's community engagement has been impressive. They hosted several guided walking tours in November 2022 as part of Maylands History and Heritage month which marked 30 years for the Association. These tours encompassed not only familiar buildings and places in the suburb but also places of worship. Most importantly, the research undertaken for these tours has been preserved by the development of printed cards that enable visitors to take their own self-guided walks.

The Association has also been successful in obtaining several grants which will be put towards improvements to their IT capabilities.

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**Denmark Historical Society's** *Koorabup* celebrates the oldest school band in WA — funded in Denmark farmer John Clark's will 63 years ago. There was money for a bandstand and the formation of a brass band. A series of photographs record the band over those years.

*Perth Jewish Roots*, newsletter of the **Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society of WA**, contains interesting reflections by member Mark Allison in the search for his elusive father's history. It is a fascinating story and clearly demonstrates the great benefit that Ancestry DNA brings to all who have reached dead

ends in their search for particular ancestors. The test can uncover unknown relations and open new avenues for research and re-connection.

**Kalamunda & Districts Historical Society** organised a splendid visit from Eva, from Guide Dogs for the Blind, and her support team. As well as training to assist people with visual disabilities, these beautiful dogs are trained for assistance for those with autism and various disabilities.

Saturday 4-Sunday 12 November is History & Heritage week for **Maylands Historical & Peninsula Assn.** With walks and talks, an exhibition launch and street festival it promises to be an exciting week. Congratulations as well to the Association on being awarded the 2022-23 Award of Merit at the Affiliates State History Conference, in recognition of the Association's range of activities over the past year and its increased levels of engagement with members, guests and the Maylands community.

**Melville History Society** recently welcomed Alex George who 'treated members to a very engaging talk and visual feast' focusing on WA's black swan emblem in arts and culture. If you would like to explore the topic fully you should read Alex George & Charmaine Cave, *Swanning around Perth* (2016).

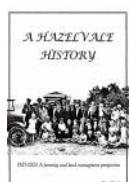
**Rockingham Historian** reports the result of Sylvia Reed's research on the landscape and life of Kwinana Beach before the district was transformed by the industrial development of the 1940s/1950s. Only tiny fragments of this past beachscape survive on the ground, so we rely on our records to preserve the stories of this history.

Do visit the **Swan Guildford Historical Society's** splendid new website at — <https://swanguildfordhistoricalsociety.org.au/> It is full of interest: notice of tours, talks and other coming attractions, newsletters, information on the Society's key sites — the colonial gaol, Taylor's Cottage and the old washhouse — and even more online historical materials. Take advantage of this new online portal.

**Walpole Nornalup & District Historical Society** announces the publication of two new local history books, both available for purchase online at [wndhs.org.au](http://wndhs.org.au)

*Towards the West River* is the work of the late Lee & Geoff Fernie who, in 1987, recorded the establishment of Tinglewood. The new book has been extracted from their original manuscript and compiled to mark Tinglewood's Centenary (1924-2024).

*A Hazelvale History* contains the stories of rural life from more than twenty contributors, ranging from the first hard days of group settlement in 1927 through the great depression and war years to life today.



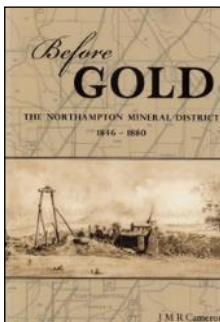
## A HISTORY OF HAZELVALE

New book ... **recently arrived!** by Dawn Martin  
[hazelvalehistory@wndhs.org.au](mailto:hazelvalehistory@wndhs.org.au)

# Presentation of the Williams/Lee Steere Prize

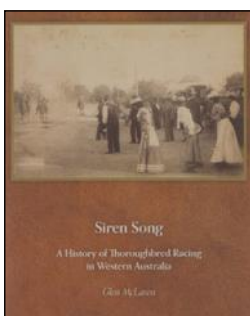


The Society's AGM on 20 September was busy with the formalities of the annual general meeting as well as the presentation by President Richard Offen of prize winners in our annual Williams/Lee Steere publication prize in Western Australian history. This year the Society was delighted to receive a record nineteen entries, all of which add something to our understanding of WA's past. Several entries were strong contenders for the prize. However one book stood out as the prize-winner —

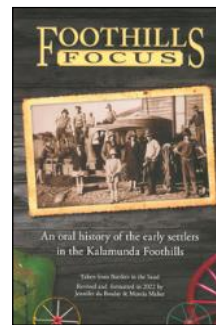


**J M R Cameron, *Before Gold: the Northampton Mineral District 1846-1880***, published by Hesperian Press. *Before Gold* is a well-researched and excellently referenced history demonstrating a high standard of scholarship and a wide range of sources. It is the first published work to explore the birth of the WA mining industry covering the period between convicts and gold; so it fills a large gap in WA historical writing. Jim employs the skills of both geographer and historian to range far and wide, including to market prices for ore in London and Wales, transport and shipping difficulties, and colonial government policies, all supported with maps, tables and graphs. The depth of research leaves readers with a sense that the author knows the people he writes about! The book is fully indexed and written in an engaging and informative style. *Before Gold* is a landmark publication.

As well the judges made two commendations this year —



First, to the runner-up, **Glen McLaren for *Siren Song: a history of thoroughbred racing in Western Australia***, produced by Racing and Wagering Western Australia. This well-written book, by an author with a deep-lived knowledge of the industry, has added significantly to the history of racing and gaming in WA and to Jenny Tomlinson's prior history of horse racing. Glen has taken a broader view, including the political and social issues of the times as well as transport difficulties and all the drama of the field. He apologises for not going more deeply into several topics but his sure touch provides something more satisfactory — a rounded view of a multi-faceted industry. The judges found *Siren Song* a readable, colourful and informative book.

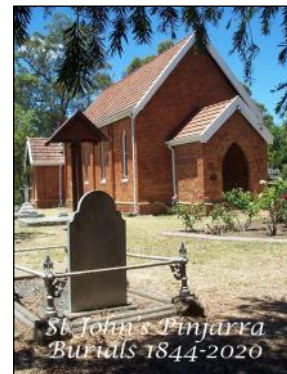


The second commendation went to **Kalamunda and Districts Historical Society's *Foothills Focus: an oral history of the early settlers in the Kalamunda***. The Society is to be congratulated on producing this excellent oral history of their district, focussed on lived experience and social and community life, making it an interesting and informative history.

It is attractively presented and builds on the memories of residents so aptly captured in quotations on various subjects. These are treasures that will assuredly be used many times in the future to give texts realism.

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## A new publication from Swan Genealogy *St John's Pinjarra Burials 1844-2020*



containing biographical information for all identified burials in the churchyard; 393 pages.

The earliest surviving headstones commemorate the untimely death of Jane Pollard on 10 January 1844 and George Pollard on 21 February 1844, murdered by John Gavin. The first recorded burial was of Joseph Foss Cooper, son of Joseph Cooper, buried on 25 July 1864.

Every endeavour has been made to identify every burial in the St John's Churchyard. If you have information on a burial or wish to clarify any details herein, please contact either the Murray Districts Historical Society or Swan Genealogy.

**Published by Swan Genealogy**

**Available for sale**  
through [www.swangenealogy.com.au](http://www.swangenealogy.com.au) as a digital download \$20.00 or USB \$23.00 + postage



## Book Review

**Ursula M. Brimble, *Silvina Lanyon, Business Woman and Theatre Proprietor: Tracing her Footsteps into Western Australia*, Ursula M Brimble, 2022. In Library.**

**Reviewer: Carol Leigh**



This book is the life story of Silvina Lanyon who became a successful business entrepreneur in the field of entertainment in the Peel region. She was also a prominent landowner, artist and committed member of the various communities in which she lived.

The early 1900s were not noted for female entrepreneurs, but one astute businesswoman bucked the trend and

launched a series of successful businesses. Silvina Lanyon started her business empire with the simple offer of rooms and a dining service from her home in Murrin Murrin, a goldmining community east of Leonora. This venture failed, but Silvina went on to operate a confectionery and fruit stall in Midland Junction, where she lived whilst her husband James was away fighting in World War 1. When James returned from the war wounded and shellshocked, the family moved back to Kalgoorlie. James died in 1919

prompting Silvina to move back to Midland Junction where she opened another greengrocer stall.

In 1923 her house burnt down. Rather than despairing, she used the insurance payout as well as the money from her husband's estate to invest in a van and a mobile projector and travelled to timber mill towns in the Peel region showing films. She ran picture shows and organised dances and cabarets at the Mechanics Hall in Pinjarra and, within a year, opened an outdoor cinema garden in Mandurah. In 1928 she built her first picture theatre, Hotham Valley Theatre, next to her open-air picture garden. Hotham Valley Theatre was a great success and the dances and cabaret shows organised after the film were extremely popular.

Silvina continued to expand her empire, building the Memorial Capitol Theatre in Mandurah in 1934. She was also an artist and a committed fundraiser for the RSL and Red Cross. She died in 1960 aged 77. An enterprising woman, it is pleasing to see her story told.

This well-illustrated publication makes an interesting contribution to WA's social history although it would have benefited from some editing. The major research source is newspapers, well supplemented by family documents and others from the State Records Office, Mandurah Museum and Landgate.

### Welcome to New Members!

Harvey History Online, Jennifer Mattiske,  
Beverley McCagh, Eric Shane

**Community Officer:**

Lesley Burnett

**Editor *History West*:**

Dr Lenore Layman

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