



Founded 1926

# HISTORY WEST

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

May 2024

## GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 15 May at 6pm when Matt Wrigley will present a talk on 'Aboriginal people and water in the context of colonisation 1861-1896'. Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.



Hunt's dam, Karolin Rock 1865

There is little published research on the impact on Aboriginal people of the gold rushes in WA's eastern goldfields. Exploration east of modern-day Southern Cross began in earnest in 1861 with more than a dozen exploration parties traversing the region to 1892. Their observations tell us something about the nature of Aboriginal water supplies and land use. The developing relationships between explorers and the Aboriginal people they encountered likely framed Aboriginal responses to prospectors following the discovery of gold at Coolgardie in 1892.

This paper focuses on the intensifying conflict between prospectors and Aboriginal people in the northern goldfields from 1893. This conflict included widespread looting of prospector camps, the assault and killing of prospectors and violent prospector

reprisals, including at least four mass killings between 1892 and 1896. The paper then turns to a consideration of the mechanisms by which the prospector occupation of major Aboriginal water supplies generated hunger for Aboriginal people and pressed many towards the dangerous option of attacking armed encampments of prospectors, triggering increased prospector hostility and a worsening spiral of violence, hunger and social disruption.

**Matt Wrigley** is a PhD student in History at Australian National University researching the contact history of the eastern goldfields from 1846 to 1896. Matt studied linguistics and anthropology at UWA in the mid-1980s which led to work in Halls Creek as a linguist for the Kimberley Language Resource Centre from 1988 to 1995. There Matt managed a project which led to the publication of an oral history concerning Moola Bulla Native Welfare Settlement – *Moola Bulla in the Shadow of the Mountain* (Magabala Books 1996). Through his consulting business Keogh Bay, Matt has worked widely in Aboriginal Australia.



Grave of Phil Mack 1894



## HISTORY WEST ANNUAL LECTURE

UWA Club Auditorium

Thursday 6 June, 5.30 for 6pm

People's stories making Australian history

Chaired by Professor Jane Lydon, a panel of three speakers will explore the three epic stories which shape Australia today — our ancient heritage, British inheritance and multicultural transformation

### Panelists

**Steve Kinnane** – family history and Miriwoong story making,

**Mike Lefroy** – British heritage in family stories

**Susanna Iuliano** – the Italian multicultural strand in Australia's story

Book online at [www.trybooking.com/CPXGB](http://www.trybooking.com/CPXGB)



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# Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

Or ring the office 9386 3841 admin@histwest.org.au



**Stirling House, Nedlands**

**Friday 10 May, 10am-12.30pm  
with 30mins morning tea**

**Wendy Lugg**

**Safely storing heirloom textiles**

Come along to this workshop to learn how to best store and care for your treasured garments and textiles.

[Click here to book](#)



**Stirling House, Nedlands**

**Thursday 30 May, 10 for 10.30am**

**Dr Harriet Mills**

**Perth Zoo over 125-years:  
from the days of the WA Acclimatisation  
Committee to the current modern zoo,  
researching and breeding threatened  
species for release to the wild.**

[Click here to book](#)



## **History in the City May talk — Wed 1 May, 2pm**

**Citiplace Conference Room,  
Perth Rwy Station Concourse**

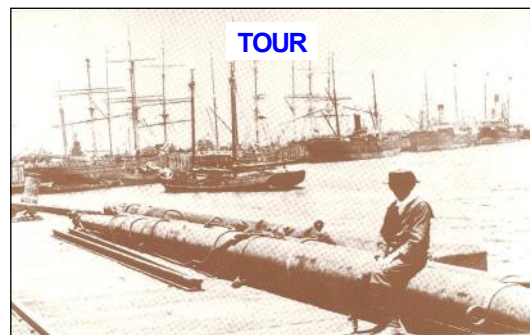
**Lady Margaret Elvire Forrest 1844–1929:  
A Premier Position**

**A talk by Chris Holyday**

To quote Frank Crowley: ‘Lady Margaret Forrest occupied a unique and prime position as the extremely capable wife of one of the State’s most powerful Premiers. She was one of the very few individuals from whom John Forrest took counsel’.

As the wife of the Premier she was able to mix with other like-minded women, and gradually exert an influence for change and for a shift in the role of women in society. One example of this change was the formation of the Karrakatta Club in 1894, in which both Lady Forrest and Edith Cowan played a significant role to broaden women’s outlook and education by bringing them into contact with the fine arts, literature and the latest developments in politics.

Copies of Chris’ book, of the same title, will be available for sale (cash sales only – price tba).



**Fremantle Port Walking tour**

**Thursday 13 June 2024 10.30am - 12.30pm**

Come join us on our Port Walk, an historic tribute to C Y O’Connor. Afterwards tea at Gage Roads Café. Then we continue our walk to the Shipwreck Museum to discover the amazing history of shipwrecks along our coast.

Meet at the Fremantle Port Authority Building, 1 Cliff Street Fremantle at 10.30am

Ticket parking at Victoria Quay, near C and D Sheds.

Cost: \$25.00 includes morning tea.

Book early – maximum of 25

Terms and Conditions on RWAHS website

[Click here to book](#)



# History Mystery Monday launch

They came. They sleuthed. They solved.

A great morning was had on 18 March by all who participated in our first History Mystery Monday. As soon as the doors were unlocked a group of visitors streamed in ready to discover a mystery of history on a Monday.

The three rooms with three mysteries was a big hit. Declarations of ‘this is so much fun’ and ‘I love history’ were interspersed with clever observations and deductive reasoning.

A cuppa and chocolate brownies hit the spot after the quest and inspired three new memberships. All promised to be back for the **next History Mystery Monday on Monday 15 April 10am - noon.**



In the Library the two mystery photos were found to be of Cottesloe Beach Jetty and Rottnest Island salt lakes & salt stores



In the Museum the mystery artefact was a foot-warmer footstool used for travelling c1920.



In the Bookshop the mystery guest was Allen Graham, author of a new publication *Inns & Outs of Fremantle*

**Welcome to new members who joined on History Mystery Monday**  
Arlene Philp, Des Bradley, John Andrewartha

## Have you ever wondered?

Why was your street, suburb or local town so named? When and who decided their names? Did your house ever have its own name? Places were sometimes re-named – was yours?

Friendly volunteers in the Library can assist you to discover answers to your queries. They use databases such as Trove and the Library’s online catalogue. Relevant reference books, photographs and maps held in the Library Collection may be used to reveal answers.

**Contact us on [library@histwest.org.au](mailto:library@histwest.org.au) or visit us at Stirling House.**

**Jeanette Longwood**  
Honorary Librarian



Welcome to Anne Jones, new library volunteer

## WILLIAMS / LEE STEERE PUBLICATION PRIZE 2024

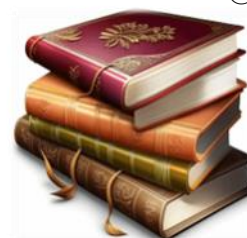
Have you published a non-fiction publication, either in print or electronic (pdf) form, on Western Australian history, between 1 June 2023 and 31 March 2024? Entries must be over 20,000 words in length.

If so, do think about submitting it for the Society’s publication prize.

Closing date: 28 June 2024.

For full details see — <https://histwest.org.au/history-prizes-competition/>

Entries must be submitted to:  
Royal Western Australian Historical Society 49  
Broadway, Nedlands WA 6009  
Tel (08) 9386 3841 Email: [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)



# Community Talk

## Reefs, Wrecks and Daring Sailors: maritime stories from Rottnest Island

Helena Johnstone

Maritime stories from Rottnest Island filled our first Community Talk for the year on 28 February. Helena Johnstone, a Rottnest guide, took us on an interesting journey through geological time when the island was part of the mainland, and onwards to explore highlights of the Island’s more recent maritime history. She explained the lure of spices and the discovery of the Brower route across the Indian Ocean to halve the time it took the Dutch East India Co. to reach the East Indies. We followed the stories of Abraham Leeman, Flinders, Baudin and Hamelin, Rose de Freycinet and the many Dutch shipwrecks along the WA coast. Then followed the dramas of shipwrecks in the 19th century and the work of the pilots and rescue crews, the lighthouse keepers and crucial telephone line, all saving lives. While there were still maritime tragedies, skill and determination reduced their number.

### Rottnest Voluntary Guide Association’s Archives

After the talk some in the audience wanted to learn more about Rottnest’s rich history, including access to the RVGA’s Archives. The Archives are found in the Rottnest Island Authority Building at Fremantle. Dr Lesley Silvester, RVGA archivist/historian, advised *History West* that the archives are not open to the general public. However she will show people around on request. Also Dr Silvester is happy to speak to people who may have a Rottnest tale to tell or have any Rottnest-focused items or research topics they wish to share. Her contact details are archives@rvga.asn.au or phone 0451 069 376. If anyone wishes to know more about RVGA and inquire about becoming a guide, the person to contact is Vanessa O’Brien, training coordinator. Her email is training@rvga.asn.au or 0407 199 470.

All in the audience enjoyed a lively and informative morning. Thanks to all who made it so, and particularly to talented volunteer **Billy Hawes** who created, in the foyer, one of her attractive tables of books and decorations, this one relating to the ocean, shipwrecks and Rottnest. Thank you Billy.



\* \* \* \* \*

## *from Ship to Shore*

### Maritime Tales from the 19th Century

This new museum exhibit displays items with a nautical theme and the people and events behind them. In particular, three sets of navigational instruments evoke tales of three families – the Sherratt, Thomas and McKenzie families – all of whom played an important part in Western Australia’s early colonial maritime history. Also displayed is a painting by a talented harbour master, a castor oil bottle from a shipwreck and a cannonball and grape shot from Sulphur Town Garden Island, the little known very first colonial settlement of the Swan River Colony.

These tales will be recounted in upcoming issues of *History West*.



# Can You Help?

## On the trail of the leadlight windows

Museum volunteer **Bruce Hoar** reports that he has been on the trail of some leadlight glass panels that were originally in the Capitol Theatre, which was a theatre and cinema designed by architects Temple Poole and Mouritzen, and built in William St, Perth, in 1929. Arthur Clarke of Barnett Brothers in East Perth was commissioned to make the windows, depicting the City of Perth in the 1870s and 1920s. The theatre interior was decorated in art nouveau style and the leaded glass panels were placed in the mezzanine lounge.

In 1968 the building was demolished to make way for an office building and the leadlight windows began their travels. They were saved by the RWAHS and stored at the WA Museum for safekeeping, and then restored and installed at PIFT (Perth Institute for Film and Television) in the old Boys School building in Adelaide Tce, Fremantle, which became the Film and Television Institute (FTI) building in 1984. When FTI moved to Northbridge and became Screenwest, an attempt was made to sell them.

Bruce found that the City of Vincent was planning to incorporate the windows in a new aged care facility (Rosewood in West Perth) as a public art package. However the City reported that they viewed the leadlight windows in a basement in Northbridge in 2018/2019 but found them in a state of disrepair and decided that it would be too expensive to refurbish them.

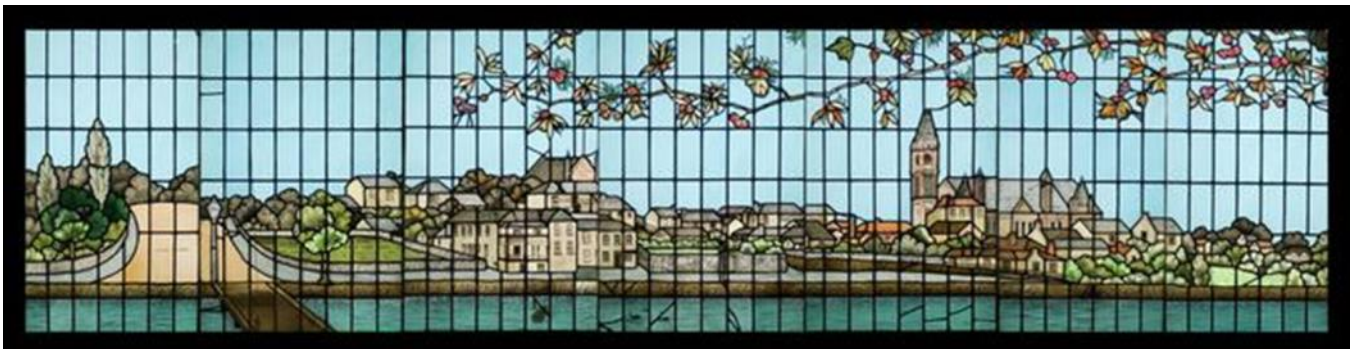
What happened to them after that is unknown. As these windows have historic value and were in the Society's possession for some time we would like locate them if they still exist.

**If you can help, please contact the Office 9386 3841 or [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)**

### Reference

*Perth Now*, 12 May 2017.

<https://www.perthnow.com.au/community-news/eastern-reporter/sale-of-historic-stained-glass-windows-to-help-film-and-television-institute-c-810529>



*The second scene overlooks the Swan River from Kings Park*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Preparing for the giant second-hand booksale & wishing member Margaret Medcalf a very happy 98th birthday!



# The roller coaster ride of a convict, builder and Dongara settler

## Robert Cousins 1823–1892

### Nan Broad



Poor House UK. K. Stepson

Robert Cousins' pathway in life was initially rocky for he was born illegitimate in a Suffolk Poorhouse. Growing up he worked as a labourer and picked up knowledge of timber, for wood was the staple material used for every manner of living, from tools to utensils to dwellings to bridges and boats. However, he was caught poaching and sentenced to fifteen years' transportation to the Swan River Colony, spending almost two years incarcerated in a prison hulk near Portsmouth where shocking conditions prevailed. In January 1851 he left England on the *Mermaid*, arriving at Swan River on 17 May.

His register on reaching the Colony noted 'Trade Farm Labourer Character Good Protestant single' and, because of his satisfactory attitude while engaged in the usual convict work parties, he was given his Ticket of Leave

after fifteen months. This enabled him to take on private jobs and also to marry Harriot Mary Bishop in the Wesleyan Chapel, Perth, in December 1853.

Cousins submitted a tender to build a bridge over the Gingin Brook at Neergabby on the path of the North Road for Walter Padbury and Robert de Burgh, influential landholders in the district. The government contributed to the cost because they were confident Cousins invited 'perfect confidence that you will see the work is properly performed'. The government also engaged Cousins in 1860 to repair the Claisebrook drain where much work had already been done to drain the series of lakes coming from Lake Monger, through present-day Perth into the Swan River. He used convict labour, either employing ticketed men or government work parties. During this period Cousins received his Conditional Pardon, which allowed him freedom as long as he remained in the colony. Now firmly established, Cousins contracted to repair the Upper Swan Bridge, which was well over twenty years old and flood-ravaged.



During the following years work may have slowed around Perth or, more likely, the exciting new settlements forming in the Victoria District around Dongarra and Champion Bay (Geraldton) attracted him because the area showed great promise for agriculture and mining. By 1867 the Cousins family had moved north to Champion Bay where Benjamin Mason, the foremost timber merchant in the colony, engaged him as foreman to repair the jetty at the Bay. Following this, Mason's team was contracted to build two jetties at Port Denison (Dongarra), a small makeshift one at the western end of Arurine Bay and a permanent structure further east in the bay. Here they encountered a limestone reef and could not proceed until, after much

discussion and government inspection, the jetty was deviated and completed. Mason was fined £100.10.0 and his small accommodation huts on the beach were taken as part payment. This jetty remained *in situ* for many years but it now consists of a few pylons standing forlornly out in the bay.

Cousins with his family remained at Dongara where he found varied opportunities, one being in sandalwood gathering while continuing to take on carpentering work, which included making coffins. One task connected to this work was to cart a coffin out into the bush where a body had been located 'provided it was not too decomposed', carry it home and arrange a burial. Otherwise the police had the onerous task of burying the remains on the spot. Many people travelled the North road (track) and deaths from sheer exhaustion often occurred.

Cousins became a respected builder and in 1873 took a contract to erect the Pell Bridge over the Irwin River east of Dongara. Cash was ever tight in the district so he received in part payment four bonds totalling £112.2.2. These bonds were owing to the shopkeepers as payment for seed wheat and rations, now transferred and owing to Cousins. One man paid the money while another worked out his debt on the bridge construction. The remainder was paid up only through the action of his solicitor du Boulay by 1878. Contracts, then as now, often slip sideways and leave debts behind them.

In spite of these problems Cousins purchased Victoria Location 1771 north of The Grange, which he settled and improved as a farm, and Location 1411 at Yardarino. By now the couple had three surviving children. Robert Cousins died at his farm in 1892 and was buried in Dongara.

What a story of one person's life from Suffolk to Dongara through its many twists and turns from abject poverty to another world of opportunity in a new colony where his skills were in demand. Robert Cousins managed to survive the first chapter and to think and act clearly through the second in order to reach freedom and use his talents to good advantage.

Research compiled by Shirley Scotter, Irwin District Historical Society

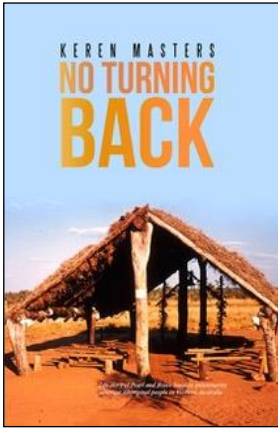


Have you thought about attending the **State History Conference, 6-8 September at the Priory Hotel, Dongara**, hosted by Irwin Districts Historical Society? Do join us for the weekend and don't forget to **book accommodation early**. See our website, [www.irwinhistory.org.au](http://www.irwinhistory.org.au) Conference webpage, '2024 State History Conference'

## Book Reviews

**Keren Masters, *No Turning Back. Life story of Pearl and Bruce Smoker, missionaries amongst Aboriginal people in Western Australia*, Ark House Press, 2023. In Library.**

**Reviewer: Lenore Layman**



This life story of two Western Australian missionaries is lovingly told by their daughter and provides readers with a compelling history of part of the Kimberley's mission world, now a world that has gone. The couple's life history is well researched, thoroughly referenced, written in a clear, readable style and well located in the wider Kimberley context. Readers will find lots to interest them here.

Pearl and Bruce grew up in the Great Southern in the 1940s, Pearl at Mt Barker and Bruce at Pingelly. Both lives were embedded in their local Baptist churches. They became committed Christians 'grounded in the teaching of the bible' and both received the 'call to mission'. This calling directed the rest of their lives. Newly married, they arrived at Fitzroy Crossing in 1951 to lead the newly established United Aborigines' Mission (UAM) there. Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek became their home for the next two decades.

The historical background to missioning in the Kimberley is told, in particular the use of missions by successive State governments which provided scarce resources and found missions useful to implement government policies relating to Aboriginal people without significant spending. Christian missions in turn were 'driven by the desire to save the first Australians from physical destruction and a conviction to see them saved spiritually'. This drive brought missions under the government's 'benevolent control' for better or worse. By 1951 assimilation was the official goal that they were expected to implement. Government funding, however, was never sufficient for even basic needs.

The Department of Native Affairs/Welfare reports combined with numerous oral interviews with the Stokers themselves, family members, other missionaries and Aboriginal people have enabled the author to write a detailed and vivid account of mid-20th century mission life. The voices of Aboriginal people lift the story from one simply telling the parents' story sympathetically to another level, which explores Indigenous points of view and the harsh controls, lack of autonomy and separation of family members under which they lived in these decades. Government policies and actions impacted harshly on both Aboriginal people and the missionaries; for instance in the decision in 1955 to sell Moola Bulla station and relocate 157 Aboriginal people to the new mission at Fitzroy Crossing.

For Pearl and Bruce youthful enthusiasm faced oppressive weather, inadequate money, constant hard work and exhaustion as the mission buildings were completed, communicating in Kriol, distributing rations, establishing and running a school and hostel, and family growth and illnesses. There were never enough UAM missionaries to maintain the missions although local Aboriginal people began to supplement the mission workforce as community leaders. Despite all these problems the Stokers loved their Kimberley life and, according to well-known Kimberley historian Howard Petersen, were liked and appreciated by the local Aboriginal communities with whom they worked.

Times however were changing fast and the 1968-69 equal wages decision for the northern pastoral industry led to a flood of Aboriginal people either voluntarily leaving or being forced off neighbouring stations and arriving in towns. Missions now confronted another huge challenge as they assisted the re-settlement of these groups, many of them different language groups not wishing to be forced into close proximity with each other. Mission staff worked to register everyone for government benefits but the missions did not have the personnel or infrastructure to cope with this sudden, enormous social change. Citizenship rights making alcohol freely available intensified the disruption. Bruce Stoker described Fitzroy Crossing mission at this time as 'a refugee camp'.

The old missionary order was breaking down at the same time as Pearl's ill-health forced the Stoker family to return south in 1973. The federal UAM, which controlled the missions, failed to understand the scale of change in the Kimberley and could not adjust mission policies to the new order. Relations between missionaries on the ground and their governing body broke down and Bruce and Pearl's appointments as missionaries were ended. The organisation split and the Australian Bible Fellowship (ABF) emerged as an alternative. Bruce Stoker continued his missioning with local Aboriginal churches in the Kimberley and around the State. The Stokers' was a lifelong commitment.

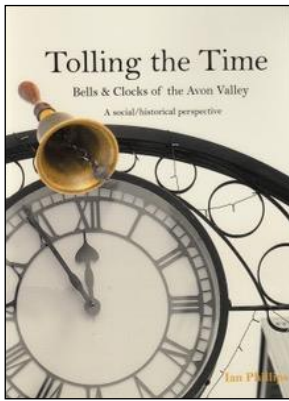
This account of Kimberley mission life is well worth reading and I recommend it. Through the prism of Pearl and Bruce's life the social and cultural landscape of the 20th century Kimberley becomes clearer. It is a compelling read.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Ian Phillips, *Tolling the Time. Bells & Clocks of the Avon Valley. A social/historical perspective*, Data Documents, Perth, 2023. In Library.**

**Reviewer: Pamela Statham Drew**

This beautifully produced little book is a treasure for all who love the sound of bells. In the introduction the author describes the type of metals used to make a bell, as well as explaining the names of the various parts of a bell. Interestingly, the tone of a bell is changed by changing the thickness of the metal – chipped away to lower the tone. Where once this was done by hand it is now electronically controlled. A fascinating four-page



spread gives a description, with pictures, of the different types of bells in the Avon Valley and the foundries from which they came.

Then each of the 16 districts with bells in the Valley is examined – with pictures to accompany detailed descriptions and, where possible, an anecdote. These districts are Mourambine, Pingelly, Brookton,

Aldersyde, Beverley, Edwards Crossing, Dangin, Gilgering, Dangin, York, Quairading, Tipperary, Muresk, Northam, Toodyay, Goomalling and Bolgart.

Little Pingelly, one of the districts furthest south in the Valley, provides a good example of the treatment each district receives. Pingelly has five bells: a Metters bell in St Patricks Anglican church which is pictured and described, as also is the Barwell bell at the high School, put in to mark the centenary in 1998. Another Barwell bell, the first church bell in the town, was originally placed in a belfry above the entry to the Methodist Church in 1906 but was relocated in 1960 to a stand outside what is now the Family Church. A Metters bell stands in a separate tower outside St Luke & St Paul’s Anglican Church to honour fallen soldiers while an Italian Marinelli Bell has rung outside at St Anne’s Catholic Church since 1960. Each of the churches mentioned is photographed in colour. The author then tells the stories of three other bells that once tolled in Pingelly but have disappeared – their existence recorded in the *Pingelly-Brookton Leader*.

The author has made extensive and productive use of Trove in his research!

The book has a closely typed bibliography and a detailed index which will be useful for those trying to track down a particular place. It is a very interesting read for others.

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