



HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

August 2024

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 21 August at 6pm when Susanna Iuliano will present a talk on 'Braided histories of East Perth'.

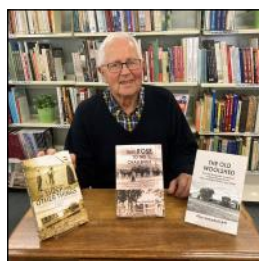
Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.



East Perth from St Anne's Hospital, Mt Lawley, 1970. SLWA

Dr Susanna Iuliano is a historian and librarian who has worked and published in the area of migration and community histories. She is currently coordinator of the Boorloo Heritage Festival with the City of Perth.

From wetlands to colonial cemeteries, heavy industry to working class housing, East Perth is a place with interwoven Aboriginal, colonial, industrial and migrant histories and heritage sites. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was home to a community of battlers and survivors where many working class Aboriginal and migrant families lived, worked and played. This talk highlights stories from the Moorditj Footprints project in which many former Noongar residents shared their stories and connections to East Perth.



Author Alex Campbell

Free entry, everyone welcome to **History Mystery Monday**

Monday 19 August, 10am-Noon
Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands

A Mystery photo in the Library
A Mystery artefact in the Museum
A Bookshop mystery revealed by Alex Campbell
Author of 'They ROSE to the Challenge'
and other books



Enjoy a free cuppa,
courtesy of
Daniel Ranshaw
of Realmark,
from the onsite coffee van

Calling all handy members! Can You Help!

AUGUST BUSY BEE

We need a willing team happy (under guidance) to clean, mend and repair amenities at Stirling House that are worn or in need of attention.

Friday 16 August, 2-4pm.

If you can help, please contact the Office – 08 9386 3841 or admin@histwest.org.au

Message to all members

We hope you are enjoying your membership of the Society and look forward to your renewal.

2024-25 membership invoices have been sent

For assistance, contact accounts@histwest.org.au or phone (08)9386 3841

Welcome to new members!

Galemo Galemo,
Jonathan Huston,
Anthony Lynch,
Rita Stinson,
Kathy Morgan

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

Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

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

AUXILIARY MORNING TEA



Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Wed 14 August, 10 for 10.30-11.30am
The History of Roses of WA
John Viska

An illustrated talk on the history of roses in WA from early settlement to the present day, describing the rose varieties that were fashionable in the different periods, how they were propagated and the rose-growing industry.

[Click here to book](#)
or scan the QR code



HISTORY IN THE CITY



Citiplace Conference Room, Perth Rwy Station Concourse
Wednesday 7 August, 2pm
The urge to fly: early aviation in Western Australia
Bill Bunbury

When World War I ended, Australian pilots like Norman Brearley and Hudson Fysh came back from the Western Front imbued with the skill to bridge the isolation of WA's vast distances. Brearley barnstormed in Perth and elsewhere and then created an airmail and passenger service to the far north of the State, and later interstate. There was much to overcome. Brearley and his fellow pilots made a major contribution to early 20th century WA, linking the outback and speeding up communication. You'll hear from those who flew and those who made civil aviation succeed.

COMMUNITY TALK



Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Wednesday 28 August
10 for 10.30-11.30am
New Statues: exploring their place & meaning
Panel – Jenny Gregory, Barbara Dundas, Suzanne John, Alison Atkinson-Phillips

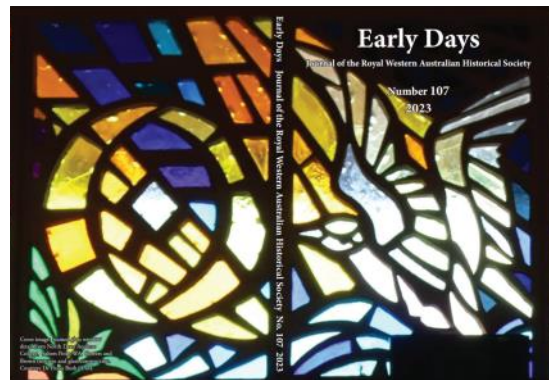
Edith Cowan, Fanny Balbuk, 10th Light Horse, Vietnamese boat people — new statues people our streets while some colonial statues are questioned.

Come and explore these new arrivals in our urban environment.

[Click here to book](#)
or scan the QR code



LAUNCH OF EARLY DAYS, NO. 107, 2023



Stirling House, 49 Broadway, Nedlands
Friday 23 August, 5 for 5.30pm
Please join the Society in welcoming the publication and complimenting the editors — with short speeches by the editors and authors, nibbles & drinks.

Affiliates Newsletter

If you would like to read about Affiliates' activities, please visit—

<https://histwest.org.au/affiliates-news/>

History Mystery Mondays

- the third Monday in each month

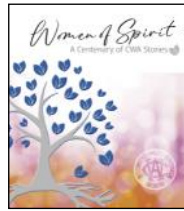
A good deal of fun is to be had on Mystery Mondays at Stirling House! It is a splendid morning of exploring, sleuthing and conversation over a cuppa. If you are interested, come along on the third Monday in August — 15 August — to join in the fun!



Christine Foulkes Taylor with herself — a then and now moment

Community Talk

Celebrating the CWA's Centenary, 1924-2024



2024 marks the centenary of the Country Women's Association (CWA) of WA and the Society joined in the celebrations at June's Community Talk. We welcomed a CWA panel consisting of the CEO Trish Langdon, honorary life member Vivienne Rowney and writer & editor Alan Jones to hear about the CWA's centennial storybook — *Women of Spirit – A Centenary of CWA Stories*, which tells 100 stories of women from remote, rural and metropolitan WA.

The stories in this centennial publication are drawn from the CWA's network of over 120 branch societies stretching from the Kimberley to Esperance. Since 1924 the CWA has been busy helping the lives of country women — with restrooms, holiday camps, student boarding hostels, infant health centres, homes for seniors, camps for Aboriginal girls, youth leadership courses, education for women in public leadership, scholarships, food hampers, clothing donations and advocacy in road safety, drought relief, children's education, domestic violence and in many more ways.

The CWA richly deserves its fame and respect, and continues to plan its work as it moves into a second century.



Welcome New Volunteers



New Museum Volunteers Galemo (left) and Lynette (centre) assist Jacqui with items requested for viewing.

from Ship to Shore

Captain John Thomas

Bruce Hoar



Capt John Thomas
P2013.1269

John Thomas (1814-1907) came to the Swan River colony with his parents as a fourteen year old on the *Gilmore* in December 1829, five months after the colony was proclaimed. His parents were part of a group of immigrants brought to the colony by Thomas Peel and promised land between the Swan and Canning Rivers. Instead they were allocated poor quality land in Rockingham/Baldivis.

John Thomas became Captain Thomas, a well-respected sailor, navigator and trader. He was initially engaged in cutting timber for house-building around Rockingham, often under guard for protection from local Nyungah people. In 1832 he began farming in Kelmscott and had a number of close calls as local Nyungahs resisted the loss of their land. He then moved on to fishing and 'lightering', which involved the transfer of goods from visiting ships to smaller boats and barges and then to the river areas of the coastal settlements.

By 1839 he had saved sufficient capital to build his first cutter, the 22-ton *Venus* which carried freight from Fremantle to Bunbury and the Vasse. The venture succeeded beyond his expectations and, when the opportunity offered, he turned his attention to the trade between Fremantle and Singapore, delivering sandalwood and returning with tea, sugar and spices as well as the overland mail from Europe. In 1846 he built the *Empress* of 125 tons and later, in 1858, bought the barque *Rory O'More* of 296 tons, which carried a crew of approximately 12.

In 1859 he and his wife and eight children bought property at Ravenswood. He continued to operate ships carrying freight around the WA coast and further afield to places such as Adelaide, Hobart, Mauritius and the Cape.

After a flood in 1862, they rebuilt Ravenswood, later joining a son in a hotel licence. He also built the Albert Hotel in Fremantle. In 1876 Thomas retired to live in Fremantle before dying in 1907, aged 92. He served five terms as chairman of the Fremantle Town Trust.

After leaving the sea, Captain Thomas taught navigational and other skills to many of the coastal skippers. His navigational drawing instruments in a velvet-lined mahogany box –containing compass, dividers, drawing pens, pen points, protractors and parallel lines rulers – are believed to date back to the 1830s. They were donated by W G Halliday and are currently on display in a maritime exhibit at the Society.



The barque *Rory O'More*
BHC 3589 – Royal Museum Greenwich



(Navigational Ruler MA2012.13)
Donor: W G Halliday

The magical Houtman Abrolhos Archipelago versus the human footprint

Nan Broad with John Fitzhardinge and Bruce Baskerville

This group of islands lies 60 kilometres west of Geraldton and consists of low-lying coral reefs, lagoons and sand dunes carrying sparse vegetation. The islands comprise the most southerly coral reef system in the Indian Ocean, sustaining a mixture of tropical/temperate habitats for a unique collection of wildlife, in spite of the absence of potable ground water and only small rain-fill in coral crevices.

Over 300 years spasmodic human intervention has caused a legacy of change to the detriment of the original environment. While this scenario has been repeated worldwide since human time, it is distressing to consider the ecological change to this group when they could have remained uniquely pristine (within natural forces) to enlighten science and provide wonder to visitors.

The vegetation and the wildlife it supports, separated from the mainland some 6000 years ago, results in adaptations unique to the islands. Plant life is amazingly varied consisting of spinifex grasses which stabilise the sand dunes; samphire along lagoon edges; low bushes such as Dwarf Saltbush, Coastal Daisy, Rose Diplolaena and Stalked Guinea Flower; the occasional larger Nitrate Bush growing edible berries and the small tree, Weeping Pittosporum, forced by the weather to grow horizontally. The dominant vegetation is mangrove thickets along shore edges.

A species of Tammar wallaby lives on some islands, drinking salt water. These were described by early Dutch seaman as 'hopping cats'. Crabs and a variety of reptiles exist, among them carpet snakes. Native rats survive as well as a variety of insects and small creatures, mostly unseen and unknown.

But the birds: an amazing variety and volume of seabirds visited annually to nest and a contingent of land birds continue to make the islands home. Many seabirds burrow in the sandy dunes while the Lesser Noddy nests in the mangroves, dropping guano which fertilises the trees and sea plants, which, in turn, the birds harvest to build nests. Other Noddys are the Roseate, Fairy, Sooty, Crested, Brown and Bridled species; silver gulls, Caspian Terns, Pacific Gulls, Curlews, Wedge Tailed Shearwaters, Sand Pipers, Great Knots, Pied Cormorants, Ospreys and White Bellied Sea Eagles. There are, no doubt, others not mentioned. The Painted Quail is a land bird as are Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones, Shearwaters and Silvereyes. A J Campbell wrote in 1890: 'The Houtman Abrolhos are certainly the greatest rookery for seabirds in Australia'.

This is not the case today where the bird population has been curtailed along with destruction of vegetation and particularly land profile. Guano mining has removed topsoil and nesting sites on rocky islands leaving the ground bare. In 1879 John Forrest reported the availability of over 5000 tons of guano while subsequent mining exported 48000 tons. Broadhurst Macneil & Co mined the islands for guano between 1883 and 1904 and the British Phosphate Company took out another 19700 tons during World War II.

Introduced species included rats, cats, dogs, rabbits and sheep while crayfish canning was carried out from the 1930s. From the 1950s on-seasonal settlements developed on the islands for fishermen and their families complete with jetties and cliff edge latrines. The islands remain a key lobster fishery for WA. The Houtman Abrolhos National Park was gazetted in 2019 and with increasing numbers of holiday visitors. A well respected code of conduct is obligatory for all to follow:

- Do not cross an island – keep to the edges
- Keep off sandy areas and off vegetation
- Do not approach nesting birds
- Do not light fires
- Take your litter home



Diplolaena dampieri, commonly known on the islands as the Island Rose



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 Conference webpage, '2024 State History Conference'

Stories from the Storerooms

Vittoria Ellen Jane Meares

Dorothy Erickson



Regency Style Dress C2005.34

This simple muslin dress – a Regency-style day gown – is said to have belonged to Vittoria Meares but may well be older. Mr and Mrs W Burges donated the treasured family possession to the Society in 2005 and it is one of the oldest gowns in the collection.

The style is ‘Empire line c1804-8’ of muslin with tambour lace sprigs. It was not a style in fashion in the 1820s – that is, in the early years of the colony – so was most likely a treasured dress of Vittoria’s mother Ellen, rather than worn by her daughter. This is the style worn at the time of Ellen’s wedding (1808) and the battle of Waterloo (1815) in which her husband, Captain Richard Goldsmith Meares, fought. At that period white was the colour of choice for clothing at any time of the day and, as morning weddings were usual, it could even have been Ellen’s wedding gown. As reported for the balls held just prior to the battle of Waterloo some of the more risqué ladies of the day were wont to dampen the muslin fabric to make it cling and better show off their figures.

The gown, which is shorter in the front than the back, falls into a curved train. It has short sleeves with fluted cuffs and a cotton lace trim to the drawstring neckline. Three small, hand-made buttons trim the back opening. As was customary it is hand-sewn.

For the upper echelons of society, fashion dictated that clothes were changed several times a day. There were morning gowns (usually simple) and those for afternoon (more elaborate) when calls were made as well as décolleté evening wear. Some strata of colonial society still kept to this custom. Many a young lady had to make her gown before going to a ball or even a morning stroll in the garden. The Bussell and Moore diaries tell us all about these

social events. According to George Fletcher Moore, dress fashion was more adhered to in the colony than he was accustomed to in the British Isles.

Vittoria Ellen Jane Meares (1813-1891), third daughter of Richard Goldsmith Meares (1780-1862) and his wife Eleanor (Ellen) Seymour (1785-1854) who had married in England at Newcastle in 1808 and arrived in the Swan River Colony with their family and servants on the *Gilmore* in 1829. The family was part of Peel’s settlement but soon moved to ‘The Bower’ at Guildford where they had a fine house and large garden. Vittoria had been named for a decisive battle in Spain in which her father had been fighting just before her birth.

Vittoria married Samuel Evans Burges of ‘Tipperary’, York, on 2 December 1842 a few months after the family moved from Guildford to their land grant at York when her father became the Resident Magistrate. Samuel was the son of Lockier Clare Burges, a doctor of Knockbrack, Tipperary. Vittoria had known the Burges ‘boys’ when they all lived in the Guildford area and then, after the Burges moved to York, Samuel mentions dining at Meares and walking with Vittoria and Mrs Hamersley when visiting Guildford from their property ‘Over the Hills’ for the Christmas holidays in 1841. They had both been present too at the grand christening / birthday party of young Hugh Hamersley earlier in July when, after a 1am supper, the guests danced in the ballroom until 4am.

When his brothers moved to Champion Bay Samuel and Vittoria remained to develop ‘Tipperary’ and found a dynasty. They had seven children. The estate’s buildings soon included a flour mill, livery stables, carriage shed, storerooms, living rooms, ballroom and servants’ quarters and became a Western Australian showplace where governors came to visit and in 1954 Queen Elizabeth II. Vittoria died shortly before her 78th birthday.

References

Bussell papers 1830–1837, 139A, SLWA.

R Erickson, comp, *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians pre-1829-1888*, vol. I, p. 2138.

P Hasluck, ‘Farming in the Forties – The Burges Journals’, *Early Days*, Vol. 1, part IX, pp. 34-44.

Inquirer, 7 Sept 1842, p. 6.

G F Moore, *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia and also a Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language of the Aborigines*, 1884; facsimile edn, 1978.

Walking Tour of Fremantle Port

Glen Morgan

Members met recently under a brilliant blue sky at the Fremantle Port Authority to learn about the construction of the port and to pay homage to the man who instigated the deepening of the inner-port to its present size, C Y O'Connor.

Standing under O'Connor's towering statue, we listened to Port Authority guides explain the difficulties – and controversies – of blasting one million cubic metres of sandstone that needed to be dredged away to complete the deepening. It was achieved against much criticism, which, unfortunately, became a common theme for O'Connor's great works. 'Small minds quail before great enterprises', to quote Patrick White's *Voss*, and those of the critical persuasion lambasted the plan, saying the idea was impossibly conceived and would come to nothing and, further, waste taxpayers' money. O'Connor proved the doubters wrong, however, and the port received its first large liner in 1900. It was also explained to us how then-premier Sir John Forrest appointed O'Connor commissioner of railways. In this role he became responsible for many of the country railway tracks still in use today.

Manning Clark, in his magisterial *History of Australia*, referred to the 'enlargers of life', those who propose and achieve great things against determined opposition – and O'Connor, according to Clark, was one such – a man of prodigious energy, ideas and talent, yet regrettably possessed with demonic self-doubt. Sensitive to criticism, he nonetheless presented a seemingly outrageous plan to build a 600km pipeline from Mundaring to Kalgoorlie to service the booming Kalgoorlie region. With the urgent need for fresh water supplies following the 1890s gold rush, water was not only scarce, it was often polluted, hence fresh water was vital for the growth of gold mining and the agricultural expansion that was to come later along the life-giving pipeline.

Plans for the laying of an incredible 60,000 pipes, and the necessary eight pump stations, took three years; all meticulously laid out by O'Connor and his team. During this time, he received undiminished howls of protest from all sides of the community – from the 'constrainers' as labelled by Manning Clark; those who mock any great plan. The newspapers were particularly belligerent; the *Sunday Times* labelling the scheme sheer madness, even becoming personal, calling him 'batty'. Similar sentiments came from members of the WA parliament and much of the public, but he was undeterred, and the project began after an appropriation bill tabled by Forrest passed parliament in 1900. The pipeline was completed two years later.

It is remarkable that some 300 kilometres of pipeline is still *in situ* and working, over 120 years later. New pipes are replacing damaged ones, other links are being buried against possible future external damage. The burying of some of the pipes is hotly contested, with protest groups claiming it will destroy the visual heritage of the line; others point out that tourism plays an important part of the pipeline with many walking and bicycle trails, and vehicle sections, accessible and much-used by interested tourists.

Criticism became so hostile against O'Connor that it affected his nerves and health badly. So much so, before the completion of his mammoth project he rode out one morning into the sea at Robb Jetty and shot himself. The pipeline opened successfully less than a year later. Standing beneath O'Connor's statue that morning, some of Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* came to mind:

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour;
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

Charles Yelverton O'Connor rests peacefully at Fremantle cemetery, a beautiful memorial that stands testament to one of Western Australia's greatest, if not most maligned, sons.



Romantic episodes of sea history — preserved in the Library

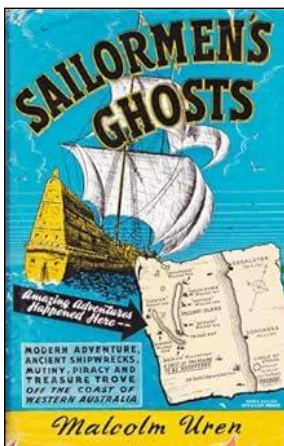
Jeanette Longwood, Hon. Librarian

‘There are some wonderfully romantic episodes connected with the early days of the sea history of this state and I feel that, unless something is written during my generation, records might disappear and the strivings of our forefathers remain forever unknown.’

M J L Uren, in a letter to Miss Dircksey Cowan, dated 17 July 1931.

The Library holds Malcolm Uren’s book on the Abrolhos, published in 1944, in which he explores part of that romantic history of the sea.

Malcolm Uren, *Sailormen's ghosts: the Abrolhos Islands in three hundred years of romance, history and adventure*, Robertson & Mullens, 1944. In Library.



Sailormen's Ghosts provides a fascinating blend of events, facts and stories to uncover the histories of the then barely-known Abrolhos Islands. Undertaking a journey with three of his friends, Uren reveals local stories of people and treasure in New Norcia, Dongarra and Geraldton. He tells stories of the wrecks and the people associated with Pelsart Islands. Lively conversations between the survivors of the *Batavia* wreck are created to

provide an immediacy to his text. Excerpts from newspapers, photographs and maps provide the context of Amsterdam and the Dutch trade in the 17th and 18th centuries, the era of wreck of the *Batavia*. An index provides ready access to places and people contained in the text.

This book at times reads like a wonderful work of fiction but is actually a tapestry of stories told by locals, imagined conversations, and information gathered before and after their journey. Reading this book 85 years after its first publication reveals people and a lifestyle we no longer encounter.

Peter Moyes Anglican Community School History, 2000-2025

The School seeks a qualified and experienced historian to prepare a history to commemorate the School’s 25th anniversary in 2025. The project will include conducting and documenting interviews with key people.

For further information, contact the School Principal, Benjamin Lomas.

blomas@pmacs.wa.edu.au

ADVERTISEMENT

“I think Daniel’s experience in selling homes and respect, respect for the property and our family connection with the property. I don’t think you can buy that. I don’t think you can produce it, it’s who you are. I would recommend Daniel 110%. He took care of all the loose ends, and that was wonderful.

Barbara-15 Bulimba Rd, Nedlands”

Daniel Ranshaw

0415 181 664

or

dranshaw@realmark.com.au



Realmark

Community Officer: Lesley Burnett
Editor History West: Dr Lenore Layman

Opinions expressed in *History West* are not necessarily those of the Royal WA Historical Society (Inc.).

If you’re a member who receives this newsletter in hard copy by post, and you’re happy to receive it by email, please contact 9386 3841 or admin@histwest.org.au with your email address, and save money and trees by receiving it online!