



Founded 1926

HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

March 2025

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting is on Wednesday 19 March at 6pm when Jim Cameron will present a talk titled 'The rise and fall of the Port Gregory hiring station'

Venue: Church of St Andrews, Anglican Parish of West Nedlands

177 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands

Refreshments available from 5.30pm



Depot – 1855 or 1856

The convict hiring station at Port Gregory is Western Australia's Port Arthur. Intended, in part at least, as a support for the colony's embryonic mining industry, its ruins are a mute testament to WA's convict past. Its creation was strongly contested and it never fulfilled the expectations held for it. The depot closed without fanfare in 1858, less than five years after the first foundations were laid, but the story of its rise and fall is worth telling for the insights it generates into WA's colonial and convict past. It also points to the site's significant heritage value which remains largely unrecognised.

Jim Cameron, son of an immigrant bricklayer-stonemason, grew up in Northampton in the 1950s, living successively in a derelict dairy farm, miner's cottage and what had once been the manse for the inter-denominational church at Gwalla. He caught the bus to high school in Geraldton standing near the terminus of WA's first railway line and could see the church ruins, with its walled cemetery, as he stepped off the front veranda in the morning. Unsurprisingly, he developed an early appreciation of the historical significance of the built environment which flowed into a lifelong interest in the historical geography of the colony about which he has researched and written for nearly sixty years.

We are on our way



Jordan, Natalie & Wendy busy packing

It was marvellous to see so many members at the Open Day at our new premises at 109 Stirling Highway on Thursday 23 January. What a hot day it was but we were well served by the coffee van courtesy of our member Daniel Ranshaw. Many thanks indeed to Daniel! The cakes provided by Georgina Wigley and Billy Hawes were literally the 'icing on the cake' of the occasion. Members were delighted by the spaces and its modern appearance. Thank you to those who have supported the call for donations for the purchase of the furniture fit-out. The call continues.

The removal of the dilapidated shipping container on our present site, courtesy of our librarian Jeanette Longwood, has taken a load off our shoulders. It was going to be a big expensive task but now it's done. Most grateful to Jeanette's family.



Container departing

The museum volunteers are packing the fragile collection in the meeting room; hence it is not available for talks and general meetings. The library is about to embark on transferring 1,500 maps held in the present seven map drawer units to two vertical map cabinets. What a task for the volunteers and our grateful thanks to them for all this extra work.

The plans for the fit-out are with two companies for quotes and by the time you read this we should be able to have a time-line for the move to the new premises. The fit-out will probably take four to six weeks. Our Hon Architect Maria Gillman has worked tirelessly on the plans.

We will keep you informed as plans progress.

Sally Anne Hasluck
Chair HWCC Planning Committee

Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

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

HISTORY IN THE CITY



**Citiplace Conference Room,
Perth Rwy Station Concourse
Wednesday 5 March 2025, 2pm**

Denise Pepper – artist

A graduate of Edith Cowan University, Denise Pepper combines her art practice with her life, family and friends. Most of her work is sculptural and she was honoured to receive the 2024 Alcoa Aluminium Prize at Sculpture by the Sea, Cottesloe, for her piece 'Women Wear Trousers'. This marked her tenth exhibition at the event, where she explores themes of gender representation in the arts. In 2021 she participated in the Channel 10 production 'Making It Australia'.

FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES



Professional Learning Zoomed Workshop

12 March 2025 10.00-11.30am

New visitors, members, volunteers & leaders: Positive approaches to finding and retaining all of them

Dr Rosalie Triolo

How can we attract new people with knowledge and skills to historical societies? Some societies are benefitting from targeted approaches to different age and community groups as well as setting membership goals to help structure activities. Not only have numbers increased but existing members have found fresh purpose and energy. This zoomed workshop offers a wealth of ideas to help attract and retain new volunteers.

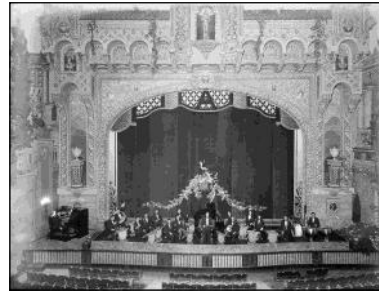
The Zoom link will be emailed to registrants several days before the workshop. PowerPoint and workshop readings will be emailed immediately after.

Rosalie Triolo is President of FAHS. She has enjoyed over 40 years in professional and volunteer history contexts, including numerous leadership, advocacy, presentation and publication roles.

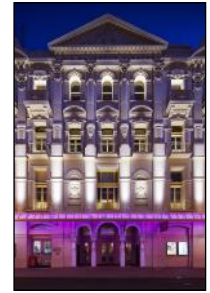
\$20 per member of any WA historical society (to be named at registration); \$25 per non-member

Registration: Email FAHS Treasurer, Nick Drew, for bank details: nickdrew@bigpond.com

COMMUNITY TALK



Ambassadors Theatre c1932



His Majesty's Theatre

**Venue: Church Hall, St Andrews,
Anglican Parish of West Nedlands,
177 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands**

**Thursday 27 March 2025,
10 for 10.30-11.30am**

A history of Perth's cinemas and theatres

Richard Offen

In the early days of the Swan River colony most theatrical and musical entertainment took place in private residences or in the Court House (now the Old Court House Law Museum in Stirling Gardens).

However, it was the first gold boom and the advent of cinema which caused custom-built theatres and cinemas to appear on the streets of Perth.

The talk will trace the history of the places of entertainment, looking at some of the lavish venues built during the halcyon days before television.

HWCC ANNUAL LECTURE

**SAVE THE DATE!
HISTORY WEST ANNUAL LECTURE**



**UWA Club Auditorium
Wednesday 2 July, 6 for 6.30pm**

Weaving history into film making
from Logie-winning 'Tracks of Glory'
to today's 'Such Was Life' on SBS
Paul Barron

Film and television producer and writer

Our digital multi-media world presents new and exciting opportunities for bringing history to modern audiences.

Explore with Paul how his passion for history is woven into his film making.

Don't forget to tell your diary
Booking details in April

Textile Sale Success

As a result of a generous donation of new and pre-loved textiles, the museum committee held a textile sale in November last year. Publicity in the local papers and a call-out to members to add to the original donation resulted in a great variety of items for sale. These included a large collection of doyleys, tablecloths, knitted and crocheted rugs, knitted baby and children's jackets, a wide range of haberdashery items and a particularly large collection of lace-making bobbins. 'Mystery' bags containing four or five mixed embroidered items were a huge hit!

It was exciting to have a queue waiting at the door for the bell to ring at 10am to signal 'Doors Open'. The sale had been well-publicised on local media platforms and especially shared with interested textile and embroiderers groups. Many of the buyers were first-time visitors to our Society.

Museum volunteer Lynette and her willing team of young helpers – Jordan, Geri and Galemo – had spent many hours sorting and pricing the items and particular thanks go to them for the smooth running of the day.

A profit of almost \$5,000 was very rewarding and made their efforts worthwhile. Almost three quarters of the items were sold on the day, and it was agreed that a stall be included at our next giant second-hand book sale to offer those who were not able to attend, or would like a second chance, the opportunity to pick up some exclusive items at bargain prices.

Val Hutch, museum committee



Affiliates Newsletter

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

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

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Moving on after Sixty Years

Steve Errington



19 Dec 2024, Community Officer Lesley Burnett locks up to end sixty years of regular business at Stirling House.

Sixty years of RWAHS events at Stirling House on Broadway ended quietly at 4 pm, Thursday 19 December 2024 when Community Officer Lesley Burnett turned off the lights and air conditioners, put up the 'Closed' sign, set the alarm, locked the front door and drove away.

By then, the Society no longer owned the building, having sold it a few days earlier. Happily, the new owners have generously allowed the Society to remain for several months at a peppercorn rental to ensure an orderly transfer to new headquarters at 109 Stirling Highway. Inside all was still normal: books still filled the Bookshop shelves; in the kitchen the tin of biscuits remained though the dishwasher was silent and the electric kettles were unplugged; the art collection numbered and wrapped in brown paper remained unseen in its windowless place which in grander times had been the maid's room; donated treasures filled the adjacent former bathroom; up the corridor, towers of acid-free boxes still held the renowned costume collection.

Next door the Tranby Room, nerve centre for museum volunteers, was just on pause. In the heady days of the 1960s when the previously homeless Society acquired a whole house in which to display its collection, there was room to display a four-poster bed that had arrived on the brig *Tranby* in 1830. Across the corridor in the one-time lounge room, the last new library book had somehow been squeezed into its appointed alphabetical place on the loaded shelves. Its annex – once the Society's office but now rarely visited by members – remained undisturbed as the cluttered home to thousands of photographs, maps, early newspapers and the rare book collection. The biggest room with its air conditioner, fans, specially designed sound system and a clock rescued from the reading room of the old State Library building, will never host another monthly lecture; nor a Community Talk, Booked in for a Cuppa, annual meeting or even monthly Council meeting.

The 36-year-old Western Australian Historical Society had commenced 1963 in a grace-and-favour room in the Old Government Printing Office in Murray Street. But by October, with approval from Queen Elizabeth II, it was the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, and in need of more dignified headquarters.

Since 1953 the Council had harboured an ambition for permanent headquarters near the (only) University. They already had a name for it. They would call it Stirling House to honour the founder of the colony of Western Australia. They had a dormant Museum and Library Building Fund which now became tax-deductible. The Council wasn't overly ambitious, their dream only extending to an office, space to display museum treasures and paintings, shelves for donated books and proper storage space for hundreds of historic documents. The dream didn't extend to a hall for the monthly research lectures.

In 1964 they found what they were looking for at 49 Broadway. The building block (Lot 402) was bought in 1912 by a colourful character named Herbert Henry Opie. In April 1915 it was sold to Mrs Myrtle Thomas who, with her builder husband James, was already living somewhere on Broadway. The Thomases lived at number 49 until October 1928 when they sold to Thomas and Margaret Cullity whose son Denis Cullity took ownership in 1958. After March 1961 there were two short-term owners before it was bought by the Society in April 1964. It cost £8500 with the State Government tipping in £1000.



Parmelia sea rangers form a guard of honour, June 1965.

By May 1964 the Society had an office and a familiar-looking phone number, 86 3841. Museum items were retrieved from all over, including members' homes, and volunteers began preparing displays. Council met in the sleepout on the back veranda. In October 1964 a conference of country branches was arranged to coincide with the Royal Show. Only Donnybrook representatives appeared but the honour board acknowledges the small event as the first State History Conference. The building was officially opened on 5 June 1965 by the Governor Sir Douglas Kendrew with the Parmelia sea rangers forming a guard of honour along the curved path from the front gate.

The luxury of having space to display four-poster beds (and pianos) didn't last when more donated items arrived. Monthly research papers continued but at the Central Methodist Mission hall in Murray Street and then at the Secondary Teachers College on Hampden Road. After ten years, the Society began planning extensions. When this was done, it produced a new front door facing Clark Street to which the office was relocated. There was also room for a bookshop, new toilets and a big room covering the original front lawn which had space for tall display cases and room for eighty members to enjoy the monthly research papers.

The additions were officially opened on 19 March 1978 by Sir Paul Hasluck, former Governor-General and, before that, MP for the Curtin federal electorate. He had also been there at the beginning of the Society, being appointed Research Secretary at the first meeting in 1926 before stepping up to be Hon. Secretary in 1930. His wife Mrs Alexandra Hasluck writes fondly in her autobiography (*Portrait in a Mirror*) of the months in 1934 when journalist husband Paul was away up north on a long assignment and she had the honour and pleasure of being Acting Secretary. In 1938 and 1939 Paul co-edited *Early Days*, the first to be issued under that name.

The Hasluck contribution didn't end in 1978. Paul and Alexandra's daughter-in-law Sally Anne Hasluck served as president 2014–2016 then spent the years since driving a move to secure a bigger replacement for Stirling House, fundraising and seeking out suitable buildings. The upcoming move to 109 is a tribute to Sally Anne's determination, powers of persuasion, resilience and untiring energy.

Farewell to long-standing member Rob O'Connor



Rob O'Connor at Armadale 2016

We record with regret the death on 12 January of Robert Kenneth (Rob) O'Connor QC, a valued member of the Society of 35 years standing. He died at the age of 81. Rob was a Councillor of the Society (2001-2003) and always an active member, regularly attending general meetings, conferences and especially our second hand-book sales

where he could never resist a bargain or two or three or many more! He enjoyed history, both researching and writing himself and listening to others report their findings. Rob was an active member and supporter of many community organisations. He is remembered with affection and will be missed.

Happy 90th birthday to life member Hilaire Natt



Welcome to new members

Felipe Casaprima, Ian Casey, Jane Lodge, Kim McDonald, Jean Stone, Margie Tannock

History West missing issues

The Library is seeking the following issues of *History West* in print form for its archives:

- 2008 February
- 2010 January, February, March, November
- 2011 April, August, September, October, December
- 2019 March, September
- 2020 December
- 2021 May
- 2024 March, December

Library volunteers would be delighted to hear from you.

Giant Second Hand Book Sale 2025

Date: TBA – sometime in April



We are currently uncertain of the exact date in April of our book sale because of the upheaval of moving premises. We will advise you as soon as we can.

We are still accepting small donations of books – small because we are over-flowing with donated material. However WA books are never unwanted.

Our book sale will be the last event held at Stirling House. Let's make it a big party!

Continuing the call for assistance for our move to 109 Stirling Hwy

Would you like to donate for a new stackable chair for the community hall, audiovisual equipment, library and museum storage shelving, glassware-fast dishwasher?

All donations welcome and tax deductible

Please leave your name with Lesley at the office — 08 9386 3841 or admin@histwest.org.au

Call for Nominations for the 2025 Margaret Medcalf Award

This award recognises excellence in research and use of the State Archives Collection held by the State Records Office

It also honours Margaret Medcalf OAM, WA's second State Archivist, for her valuable contribution to the development of the state archives

<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/announcements/nominations-are-called-the-2025-margaret-medcalf-award>

The last day to nominate a work is Friday 4 April 2025

YouTube videos of the 2024 State History Conference

Irwin Districts Historical Society has made available these presentations on its website at [Irwin Districts Historical Society \(irwinhistory.org.au\)](http://Irwin Districts Historical Society (irwinhistory.org.au)). Select *Events* and *YouTube Videos of Conference Presentations*. Available videos are:

- Gary Martin – 'Moving Beyond Pioneers'
- Thomas Cameron – Welcome to Country and 'History of the Littewell Project'
- Jeff Murray – 'Cartographic Chronicles'
- Tarun Preet Singh – 'Sikh History in WA'
- Heather Hunwick – 'Appetite for Change'
- Su Dhu – 'Flat Sea Project'
- Howard Gray – 'Batavia, the wreck that keeps on giving'
- Bruce Baskerville – 'Commoners and Cooperators'
- Matt Pavlinovich – 'The Midland Railway Co of WA'
- Paul Barron – 'Reflections on the "Such Was Life" Project'

The Mysterious Mr Cooper

Darren Foster

Member Darren Foster explores an historical mystery, showing how careful research can uncover much of the story but that, in this case as in many other past puzzles, some questions remain unanswered.



William Henry Carpenter
Courtesy: Parliament of WA

In September 1930 schoolboys, Robert Talbot and Colin Day, were rowing on the Hacking River in Sydney's Royal National Park when they discovered a body floating in the water. Sergeant McNeill of the Sutherland Police described the deceased as male, 60-65 years old, five feet eight inches tall, of medium build with grey hair, heavy dark eyebrows, brown eyes and a small grey moustache. He was dressed in a black serge suit with a white shirt, woollen singlet, black lace-up boots and navy socks. The body carried no identification but there was a clue on the buttons of his suit which were marked with the name of a tailor, McLeod's of Fremantle.

It was not until ten months later, after police inquiries in four states, and newspaper and wireless reports, that the body was identified as that of William Henry Carpenter, formerly the Member for Fremantle in the Commonwealth House of Representatives. Today, the only visible trace of Carpenter's tenure as Fremantle's representative is a stone tablet marking his participation in the 1904 opening of the Fremantle Trades Hall in Collie Street.

Carpenter was elected in 1903 as the first federal Labor Member for Fremantle, defeating the sitting MP Elias Solomon. Born in Swindon, Wiltshire, and a locomotive construction worker by trade, Carpenter arrived in Western Australia from South

Australia where he had been the Member for Encounter Bay from 1896 to 1902.

His time in federal politics was short-lived with his defeat in the 1906 general election. He unsuccessfully contested a state seat in 1908 and failed in his bid to regain the federal seat of Fremantle in 1910 before being elected state Member for Fremantle in 1911. He held the seat until 1917. The split in Labor ranks over the merits of conscription in World War I ended his tenure. At a meeting of ratepayers at Fremantle Town Hall in April 1917, Carpenter supported conscription, moving:

That this meeting of Fremantle citizens, recognising the grave dangers now threatening Great Britain and her overseas dependencies, strongly affirms the necessity for a united and patriotic National Government.

This move resulted in Carpenter's expulsion from the labour movement and the enduring enmity of his former comrades. It overshadowed a career in which he had championed an eight-hour working day, the old age pension, a living wage, manufacturing industries, the Trans Australian railway, and the break-up of shipping monopolies. His record included chairing the South Australian Royal Commission on the Relief of the Aged Poor in 1897-98. Aged 54 with his parliamentary career over, Carpenter became Secretary of the National League established to support Liberal and Nationalist candidates. He resigned in December 1924 and successfully sued the League for salary arrears of £42.

In April 1929 Carpenter's wife of 40 years, Alice Catherine, died. They had no children. A year later, in August 1930, Carpenter left his Mary Street home and travelled interstate. The *Sunday Times* reported on his plans:

Mr W H Carpenter leaves on a holiday and business trip ... he intends making a long stay at Ballarat where he first resided after leaving the Old Country, and will then journey on to other places dear to his memory.

On 10 September Carpenter arrived at a rest home in Sydney's Royal National Park where he dined and told manager Henry Hammill that his name was Cooper and that he was a journalist visiting from Melbourne. He said he was expecting to be collected by a car that evening but nobody arrived and he stayed overnight. The next day Carpenter paid for his accommodation and told the manager he was returning to the city by train but he was observed walking in the opposite direction to the railway. Mr Hammill said this was the last time he saw 'Mr Cooper' alive. 'He appeared quite normal in his manner at the time he was there. He was a well spoken man and appeared to me to be a retired clergyman'.

On the afternoon of 11 September the schoolboys discovered his body. A medical examination noted that the body had two bruises on the head and a large bruise and abrasion on the chest. In October the Sydney City Coroner delivered an open finding and found the cause of death of the 'unknown man' to be drowning.

It was not until July 1931 that a Revd William Allsop of West Geelong came forward to identify the body as that of W H Carpenter. Allsop said in his statement to the coroner:

To the best of my belief the financial position of the deceased was poor, he having suffered severe financial setback during the latter years of his life. He did not own any property whatsoever.

There are many unanswered questions surrounding Carpenter's final days. Why did he use an assumed name? What brought him to the Royal National Park? Who was he expecting to meet or was that comment also a ruse? Why was his body found without identification? What was the cause of the bruises and abrasions to his body? What were his movements between 19 August 1930 when he left Perth and his arrival at Royal National Park 22 days later? Did he stay in Ballarat as intended? Was this an accident or a long-planned suicide?

The unusual circumstances of Carpenter's death aged 67 add mystery to a life marked in its latter years by financial hardship and political disappointment. Carpenter's early career is a footnote in the political history of Fremantle but in Australian politics he has the rare distinction of having served in three separate Australian parliaments — those of South Australia, Western Australia and the Commonwealth.

Affiliates & Other News – exploring the online world

A good idea from Melville Historical Society: A virtual visit to Collections WA

Natalie Evans, project manager of Collections WA, took members on a virtual visit to the rich trove of documents, images, objects and oral histories that comprise Collections WA. Have you discovered this site?

<https://collectionswa.net.au/>

Our stories, our history, told by our collections.

Collections WA is managed by the Australian Museums & Galleries Assn (AMAGA) and is a searchable database of historical materials. Launched in 2020 it holds the records of 183 organisations. For example, the theme 'War & Conflict' produces 8,624 results with a great array of images from the Army Museum WA's collection. One item that particularly interested me, from the Subiaco Museum collection, is the story of Otto Lipfert and his work as WA's first taxidermist. He was an essential WA Museum employee and the results of his work have fascinated generations of visitors who have visited the various exhibits. As a start, try searching your suburb or town or district and see what pops up. Happy searching!

Albany Historical Society's new website

Celebrating 2026 Albany

<https://www.historicalalbany.com.au/>

The site focuses on promoting Albany's bicentenary in 2026, placing the town centre stage in both WA and the nation. You will find assistance in planning a visit to the town in a section on places to explore and tours to take; with a 'History for Kids' section; and some portraits of key individuals and groups; for instance, the Menang people, Major Lockyer, the ANZACS and, for a different flavour, Frederick Deeming. Significant places around the district are featured as well as Albany's art collections, and there's a whole section on some of the planned highlights of the 2026 centenary. Albany should be on everyone's visiting list in its bicentennial year and this new website is the place to begin your planning.

Mt Lawley Society project: Mount Lawley ANZACS

<https://mountlawleyanzacs.org/home/>

Congratulations to the Society for continuing to add to our knowledge and commemoration of all who served in World War I. The website is a work-in-progress. Can you help?

Two Centuries of Chinese Heritage in Western Australia 1830s–2020s

<https://www.chinesewa.net/>

This digital joint project of the University of WA and the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations plans 'to collect, document, and showcase the remarkable contributions of the Chinese community to Western Australia from the state's founding to the present day'. The collection includes archival documents, photographs, oral histories and audio-visual files. It incorporates Dr Anne Atkinson's research collection which Anne collected during the 1980s and early 1990s and includes nearly 10,000 pages of notes, photocopies and newspaper articles, capturing the lives and stories of over 3,000 Chinese Australians who lived in WA during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, 'Celebrating 200 Years' invites the Chinese community and others to contribute additional materials. By integrating both these components, the legacy of the WA's Chinese community will be preserved, presented and celebrated for future generations. The project is keen to encourage viewers to contribute additional information and materials to enhance and enrich this collection. Can you help?

Western Australian Convicts

<https://www.waconvicts.fhwa.org.au/>

How welcome is the Family History WA's new website! It is a wonderful research aid for anyone interested in the colony from the 1850s. In total 9,710 convicts were transported to WA between 1850 and 1868, and all available information about them has been uploaded. You will find links to convict records, prison records and newspaper articles telling of key events in each convict's life from their time as a convict and their lives after arriving in WA. There are images in the Photo Gallery. There are numerous indexes including one of surnames and another of convict ships.

Forestleaves blog

<https://www.forestleaves.blog/post/mrs-dance-s-tree-a-snippet-from-western-australian-history>

Member Roger Underwood's interesting exploration of the story of 'Mrs Dance's Tree' re-examines that famous event from its chopping down (represented in Pitt Morrison's 1929 painting in the AGWA) to the sewing box made from its wood (now in the WAM collection). He questions all aspects of the story to see what is myth and what is evidenced history. Being a former forester, he begins with the tree itself and what species it was. He decides it was a Western Sheoak. This is a valuable demonstration of the need to question received history, showing how accuracy can be easily lost as historical stories are oft repeated. Do enjoy re-visiting the history.

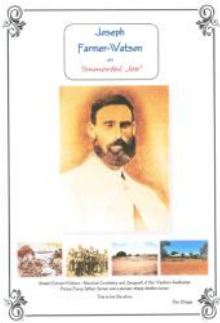
Denmark Historical Society's rail trail signage

For those who enjoy bush walking, Denmark is erecting 38 information signs along the Denmark-Nornalup Rail Trail. As you walk the trail you can learn the historical background to the rail line and its importance in opening the surrounding areas for grazing. The state government bought the line from the Millar brothers when their timber business in the district closed. The line was intended to reach Pemberton and link Albany to Perth but the line only ever reached Nornalup. It was closed in the late 1950s during a decade when so many of WA's rural rail lines closed. A Lotterywest grant has assisted the project.

Book Review

Don Briggs, *Joseph Farmer-Watson aka 'Immortal Joe'*, self-published, 2024. In Library.

Reviewer: Jeanette Longwood



How many of us could live up to a nickname of 'immortal'? Joseph Farmer-Watson did, according to Don Briggs in his latest book. The author uses a variety of sources, including photographs, genealogical sources and historical documents from the State Records Office, to tell the story of a man whose birth parents came from Wales on the *Sulphur* in 1829. The daily stresses of life in the fledging

Swan River Colony are exposed, including food shortages and caring for children in an open environment. Unfortunately, his mother was widowed while pregnant with Joseph and remarried before his birth; so he was given the surname Farmer-Watson, a combination of the names of his biological father and the man who became his father. Both these marriages were to soldiers of the 63rd Regiment. His mother was again widowed, and subsequently married Thomas Walker, a plasterer and painter. He had thirteen siblings by his mother's three marriages. Briggs includes brief outlines of the siblings' lives, many of them involved in events of Farmer-Watson's life.

As a young man, Farmer-Watson joined the constabulary and was posted to Champion Bay. His contact with local Aboriginal people enabled him to learn the local languages. His postings took him as far inland as Mullewa, and north to Northampton. The author provides details of the journeys by horse which Farmer-Watson took to find and retrieve suspects, as

required by his superiors. There are also many details of court cases with which he was involved, including as prosecutor and translator for Aboriginal people brought before the court. This text shows there was an understanding by the courts of a need to try to balance the different legal systems as understood by local Aboriginal groups and incoming settlers. This process was made more difficult by the lack of accurate language translators. Using the local language he had acquired, Farmer-Watson did his best to enable each group to understand the other. The book also provides extensive details of the Butterabby tragedy of 1864, an episode of frontier killings which resulted in the hanging of five Aboriginal men.

Farmer-Watson was posted to Strawberry on the Irwin River to establish a police station and moved there with his wife Ann and children. Their hardships included floods which destroyed their newly built home and furniture. It was rebuilt but fire destroyed this home. Ann was often left alone with their many children while her husband was away for days and weeks pursuing suspects, attending court and doing police escort duties between Champion Bay and Perth. The details of their farming at Mill Farm, Strawberry are well covered. The family was able to secure leases of marginal land out from the Champion Bay area, and subsequently established 'Yoweragabbie' station near Mt Magnet.

Reference to Farmer-Watson being 'immortal' comes from incidents which he survived while effecting arrests of alleged offenders. It appeared serious assaults did not diminish his attention to duty. On a recent trip, I glimpsed the phrase 'Constable Farmer' on signage at Arrino, south of Mingenew. It drew my mind back to this book, and the many journeys which Farmer-Watson undertook through what we now describe as 'Wildflower Country'. It reinforced the relevance of this book to the lived history of Western Australians.

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.).

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