



Founded 1926

HISTORY WEST

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

June 2025

PRESIDENT'S HOUSEWARMING

Wednesday 9 July at 6pm

The President invites you to join him at 109 Stirling Highway, Nedlands

Celebrate with fellow members the first meeting in our new premises

Refreshments available from 5.30pm, courtesy of Lamont's Wines,
Hear about the opportunities afforded by our new premises and the forthcoming
centenary year. Explore the new museum, library, bookshop and office.

Booking for this free event is necessary as space is limited.

Please ring: 9386 3841 or email: admin@histwest.org.au

or click on the link: <https://www.trybooking.com/DBAZI>



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Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book!

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

HISTORY IN THE CITY



**Citiplace Community Centre, Upper-Level
City Railway Station Complex**

Wednesday 4 June, 2pm start

Ivor Treharne Birtwistle

A dapper diplomat, gentleman of journalism, master of consensus and chairperson's chair.

Jeff Walker

Birtwistle Local Studies Library, City of Armadale

One of the earliest members of the WA Historical Society founded in 1926 was Ivor Treharne Birtwistle OBE. He was a remarkable journalist and historian, and more than just a perceptive observer of events.

HWCC ANNUAL LECTURE

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.

Cost \$40 Bookings essential
Click on the link or scan the QR code
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COMMUNITY EVENT



**Sea View Golf Club
Jarrad St Cottesloe**

Plenty of parking

Wednesday 11 June, 3–5pm

***High Tea at Sea View*
with Richard Offen**

The Tours & Events Committee invites members and friends to a traditional High Tea at Sea View Golf Club. As we enjoy the delicacies on offer, Richard Offen will speak to us of Cottesloe's colourful past.

Cost \$60 Booking essential

Tel: 9386 3841 Email: admin@histwest.org.au

COMMUNITY TALK



History West Community Centre

109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands

Wednesday 30 July, 10 for 10.30-11.30am

Liz Davenport: memories of 109

Liz Davenport OAM

We welcome Liz Davenport back to the premises where she ran her successful fashion business for three decades from 1984 and look forward to her reminiscences of the place and times. These were exciting decades with an expanding fashion and fabric enterprise, many charity functions and social occasions as well as the exuberance generated by the America's Cup.

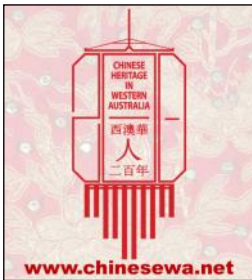
Cost \$15 Bookings essential
Click on the link or scan the QR code

<https://square.link/u/gTa8jnuF>



Community Talk

Chinese furniture makers in Western Australia



Lucy Hair

See Wah & Co. Ltd
Furniture Factory.
NAA

April's morning talk drew a good crowd including several who possessed some early twentieth century family furniture which they wanted to find out more about. Our knowledgeable speaker, **Lucy Hair**, is the project officer for UWA's 'Two Centuries of Chinese Heritage in Western Australia 1830s-2020s' project – <https://www.chinesewa.net/>

Background to 'Two Centuries of Chinese Heritage in WA' project

This digital project aims 'to collect, document, and showcase the remarkable contributions of the Chinese community to Western Australia'. 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 to enrich the collection, the legacy of WA's Chinese community will be preserved for future generations.

Do browse the website. It is a rich source of historical interest with podcasts, newspaper articles, exhibitions, community events and research outputs. There is a biographical dictionary which builds on Anne Atkinson's work as well as a work-in-progress digitising of Anne's research records.

In the first half of the 20th century

Chinese men came to WA in the 19th century mostly under indenture to work for a few years and then return home. There were few opportunities for Chinese women to accompany the men; therefore the Chinese population was always disproportionately male. The men worked chiefly in market gardening, laundry work, domestic service and furniture making. Although restrictions were placed on their entry by successive WA colonial governments it was not until the new Commonwealth parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 to enforce the White Australia policy that a steady decline in WA's Chinese-born population began. By the 1950s there were only a few old men left together with a small number of Chinese Australian families of mixed ethnic heritage. The first half of the twentieth century was a painful time for Chinese Australians.

Chinese cabinet makers in WA

There were at least a dozen furniture factories operated by Chinese employers in Perth in the early 20th century and companies such as Washing Brothers, See Wah and J W Wing became known for quality furniture made by highly skilled cabinet makers.



Midlands Advertiser (Moora) 1909



Daily News June 1909

Midlands Advertiser
(Moora) 1909

Washing Bros 1929



Washing family members

We were delighted to welcome a good number of the Washing family who were keen to show us some of the family furniture made by Washing Bros Furniture — a chair, jewellery case, carved pedestal among other items.

These factories and workshops operated under discriminatory legislation, chiefly the WA Factories Act of 1904 which required that all 'Asiatic-made furniture' must be so stamped as well as imposing other restrictions on hours of work. For instance, in 1912 J W Wing was convicted of breaching the Act.

One Jack, the keeper of a Chinese furniture factory, trading as J W Wing, at 335 Newcastle Street, was charged at the City Court this morning with having (1) on June 21 sold certain furniture without having stamped it in the prescribed form with the words "Asiatic labor" and (2) on June 25 employed Chen Mun after 5pm. [*Daily News* 1912]

One Jack was found guilty and fined on both counts. Although the furniture had been stamped with the required words the Factories Inspector reported that the imprint was 'very faint' when it was required to be 'burnt in, and easily discernible'.

The restrictions under which Chinese-owned factories operated limited their commercial success but much more important in the decline and eventual demise of the businesses was an aging and shrinking workforce which could not be replenished. It is a distressing and fascinating historical story and Lucy's account provoked a number of lingering discussions after the formal proceedings closed.

Community Walk

Carnaby's Cockatoos in the suburbs

Dr Christine Groom

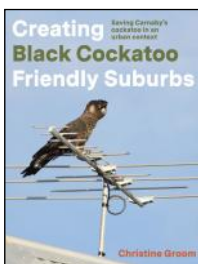


A lovely ramble. Illuminating and knowledgeable – so much info. A pleasant walk under leafy trees and even a flight of cockatoos flew over in pairs loudly making their presence felt. It was very worthwhile.

[Melvista Ave/ Loton Rd Claremont walk, 12 May]



Christine led our group of fifteen on a fascinating morning walk to show us some of the places where Carnaby's Cockatoos like to forage, drink and roost, and to suggest what we, as suburbanites, can do to make our local environment more cockatoo friendly. Carnaby's Cockatoos today are an endangered species, struggling to find enough living space, food and water to survive because of habitat degradation and loss. Depletion of water resources combined with high summer temperatures make the metropolitan region more important for the cockatoos' survival than has been the case in the past. And Christine's aim is to help us understand what we can do to help create an environment more pleasing for both the birds and human residents.



During the walk we admired the extent and density of Claremont's tree canopy and identified the Carnaby's food trees – jarrah, marri, peppermints, pines, liquid amber, tipuana and nut trees as well as banksias, callistemon, and hakeas. There were some good tips for garden plantings and also on the benefits of bird baths if they are large enough and positioned in clear spaces so that the birds feel safe to land and drink. Christine was keen to stress that a better environment for the birds was also a better one for people as well.

Christine is the author of *Creating Black Cockatoo Friendly Suburbs* (UWA Publishing 2024), an informative and interesting book aimed at a general community readership while based on detailed doctoral research. We recommend it to you if you have regard for the survival of the cockatoos.

Some historical background

The first Swan River colonists found a land teeming with wildlife and were delighted to hunt and eat the game that was readily available to them. Their guns cut a swathe through the local fauna. This food initially sustained almost all ranks in the new society.

There are plenty of wild ducks, widgeons, black swans, parrots, cockatoos, parroquets, and quails – all good eating; fine emus than which I never tasted anything more delicious.

Phillip Dodd, Nov. 1829

We have plenty of Ducks in the river, and Swans, hundreds of Cockatoos, butiful [sic] eating, plenty of Pigeons, quails.

William Foster, Feb. 1832

As the colonists began to eat their farm produce, they relied less on killing wildlife. Nevertheless they continued to hunt and fish extensively without regulation.

In the latter decades of the 19th century the first fauna protection Acts were passed; but both the *Game Acts 1874 & 1892* were concerned with protecting introduced 'game' (deer, pheasants) to which some indigenous animals were added, specifically during their breeding season (eg malleefowl, ducks). The legislation was intended to preserve the species for continued hunting. Not until the *Fauna Protection Act 1950* was a change of social attitude evident. The aim became the preservation of all indigenous animals (unless they were harmful to people, stock or crops). The *Conservation and Land Management Act 1983* reflected even greater changes in community attitudes. The rise of environmentalism in the last decades of the 20th century insists on the necessity to preserve entire ecosystems. And, as it has become clearer that WA faces a drier, hotter climate, threats to the natural environment have become a political issue of growing importance.

Environmental history is now one of the most lively areas of historical study. If it interests you, we recommend –

Dr Ian Abbott, 'Aborigines, settlers and native animals: A Zoological history of the South-west', *Early Days*, 12 (3) 2003.

References

I Berryman, *Swan River Letters vol. 1*, 2002

A Burbidge, 'Milestones & stepping stones in WA's nature conservation history', *Landscape*, 23 (1) 2007
<https://museum.wa.gov.au/explore/online-exhibitions/cockatoo-care>

Stories from the Storerooms

Euphemia's afternoon dress

Dorothy Erickson



Afternoon dress belonging to Euphemia Mackintosh (née Drummond) 1860s. C1979.210



Mrs Euphemia Mackintosh 1860. P1999.1143

Euphemia Drummond (1826-1921) was only three years old when she arrived in the Swan River colony in 1829. She was the youngest of six children of the Scottish botanist and plant collector James Drummond (c1787-1863), former curator of the Cork Botanical Gardens in Ireland, and his Irish-born wife Sarah Mackintosh (1782-1864). The family arrived on the *Parmelia*.

The Drummonds began their time establishing Government gardens in Perth but, after a disagreement with the Governor, her father took up land in the Toodyay Valley where the family established the prominent property 'Hawthornden'. They travelled to Toodyay in a cart piled high with their belongings. This took six days in the rain on rutted tracks, a most uncomfortable journey Euphemia never forgot. Euphemia's elder sister Jane married one of the neighbouring Clarkson boys leaving Euphemia the only daughter to assist her mother and the servants with the household chores.

It is hard these days to conceive of the foresight and planning needed by these women on their country properties. Supplies from England were ordered once a year when the wool clip was sent to the port, for the goods were paid for with the proceeds of the clip. Copies of old lists were preserved as guides for humble items such as corks, tacks or needles. The lists were long in good times but small luxuries, such as muslin for a new gown or lace to trim an old frock, were scratched out by the men when times were tough. They needed to buy in quantity because, by the terms of their agreement, the indentured servants were both fed and clothed by the master. All of this was good training for Euphemia in the later running of her own establishment.

The 1840s were years of economic depression and the Drummonds and two thirds of the settlers faced ruin. Sheep prices fell from £6 to 6/- and cows from £30 to £5. The thrifty shepherds were paid in sheep which they grazed on unclaimed land until they completed their indentures and were able to take up land for themselves. By 1849 former shepherd Ewan Mackintosh was the leading agriculturalist and pastoralist of the district. With over four thousand sheep he leased George Leake's Coondle Estate. The 37-year-old Scottish shepherd 'made good' and was a cousin of the wealthy Macpherson shepherds at New Norcia. He had arrived in 1841 on the *Ganges*. This gentle giant of a man was 199 centimetres tall, very broad and, clad in highland dress, made an imposing figure. Accompanied by his two collie dogs he had been engaged to shepherd for the Drummonds and, during the lean years under the system of being paid in sheep, was soon a prominent flock owner. When the 20-year-old Euphemia announced that she intended to marry him, her brothers burnt the dress she had proposed wearing for the wedding. Her father was away but her mother supported her and asked Charles Harper to perform the ceremony. None of her brothers attended.

As well as raising eleven children, Euphemia had a strong sense of purpose and great skill in the breeding of dairy cattle which contributed much to her husband's success. While he concentrated on sheep and the breeding of good farm horses, she developed their Bejording-Avon Valley property 'Glendearg' into the colony's leading producer of fine-quality dairy produce. The quality of the property's bloodstock and the planning of its facilities set standards well beyond the average of the time and provided an example for many. After the death of her husband in 1881 Euphemia continued to manage 'Glendearg' unaided for nearly 40 years. Her skill at breeding stock and farm management were legendary. She has been installed in the Royal Agricultural Society's Agricultural Hall of Fame.

As 'Glendearg' prospered, Euphemia could afford a beautiful home and lovely dresses like this one in the costume collection. It is a pale mauve taffeta crinoline dress with a shaped bodice, round neck with a white cotton lace collar, and eight rows of mauve, fringed braid across the front. The bodice is boned with wide sleeves trimmed with a zigzag of braid, four purple fringed rosettes down the length of the sleeves and two rows of braid at the bottom. Undersleeves of white net have drawstrings of black ribbon. The skirt, gathered into the waist, has three deep frills, each with stripes of darker mauve woven into the fabric. The dress fastens in the front with fourteen hooks and hand-sewn loops. It is lined with cream cotton fabric and is entirely hand-sewn. Euphemia Mackintosh's descendant, Euphemia Mair (née Mackintosh), donated the dress to the Society.

Life at the Society in the early 1960s

Stories from the *WA Historical Society Newsletters*

In Western Australia we face the prospect of unexampled development – those resounding changes which [Sir James] Mitchell for one, always believed would come. I can imagine his portly, fast-moving figure stepping out somewhere on the horizon and that rather tight, high-pitched voice calling: ‘Come on, you people! The Society’s got to keep up with this, you know!’ [President Ivor Birtwhistle March 1965]

The 1960s in Western Australia was a time of rising prosperity, population growth, rapid urbanisation and cultural change, and the Society recognised that, to ensure the story of WA’s past was presented to this changing world, the Society would have to do some things differently. First, it needed to communicate more directly with its members and its new branches. Thus the *WA Historical Society Newsletter* (now *History West*) was born in May 1962. No longer could advertising depend on word-of-mouth communications among members nor on coverage of the Society’s affairs in the *Western Australian* and *Western Mail* newspapers. A monthly roneoed news sheet folded into four pages was begun, free to members and 3d to non-members. It had three purposes – to remind members of general meetings, report on the Society’s affairs and keep in touch with the growing number of country branches.

Early issues of the newsletter focused on built heritage issues, reporting with satisfaction on the public’s growing interest in ‘old sites and buildings’ and expressing delight at local governments’ growing attention to their built heritage. For instance, Old Toodyay Gaol was restored and re-used as an historical museum. Fremantle City Council supported the restoration of the Old Woman’s Home while No. 1 Pumping Station beside Mundaring Weir was to be converted to a museum. Legislation to establish the National Trust WA was steered through parliament successfully and the Society helped to lead the struggle to save the old Barracks (and, when that failed, the Barracks Arch).

Over at Rottnest, the Rottnest Island Board has agreed to preserve the old Cemetery. This relates back to the period when the Islands served as a native prison. The graves are those of warders and their children, the earliest being dated 1853. One wonders what happened to the bodies of native prisoners, pathetic victims of the white man’s justice.

The conversion of old buildings into historical museums benefitted the growing number of Affiliated societies – Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Denmark, Donnybrook, Eastern Goldfields, Katanning, Kojonup, Irwin, Plantagenet, Swan-Guildford, Toodyay-Bolgart and Victoria Districts (Geraldton) – who were frequently provided with historic buildings as premises, together with responsibility (as volunteers) for establishing local museum collections. The creation of a network of local historical societies was the Society’s second major achievement of these years.

The Society’s third and perhaps most significant success was the purchase of premises of its own. In May 1964 the Society bought 49 Broadway and named it Stirling House, its official opening held in June 1965. A permanent home meant that the Society’s collection of ‘relics’, catalogued by the Keeper of Records (Dircksey Cowan followed by Dorothy Henderson) and stored in various repositories, was moved to Stirling House. A series of Working Bees produced the first public display of artifacts at the Society’s new home. As well, a start was made on creating both a museum and library.

Much still remains to be done ... We have not yet begun to classify, sort, index, store or display any of our collection of historic costumes, nor the trunks of books, papers, documents in our possession. [March 1965]

Not only did the Society now have a public presence on the street but both the new premises and the newsletters created greater cohesion and identity among members and branches. This common identity was fundamental to the Society. In the 1960s the long-established program of recording the reminiscences of elderly West Australians was incorporated in a Birthday Scheme which recognised members who were turning 75 and had lived in WA for more than 70 years. Each was contacted personally with a card. One interesting response (in August 1962) came from Mrs Sarah McDonald (née Norrish) who wrote from Undercliffe Rest Home:

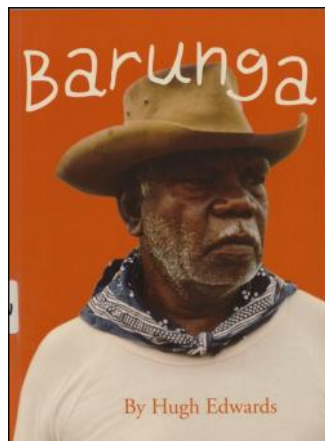
My mother who was born in 1845 lived with me for seventeen years before her death in 1942 and we talked a lot together in the evenings by the fireside. Many trips she spoke of I could remember myself. Of her youth in Albany I loved to hear – of the Octagon church and of how it was usually filled to overflowing, then of the building of St John’s Church in York St and how the organ was on a loft above the door and played very often by Bessie Fowler, the Aboriginal girl who was so musical. My mother spoke of the convicts filling the four back pews, two on each side of the aisle and a guard with fixed bayonet sitting at the outer part of the pew. Such a lot of perfectly harmless men, said my mother – which I can quite believe as my father employed many of them later at Eticup.

General meetings continued to present research papers which became articles in *Early Days*. Only occasionally did they rouse historical dispute. An exception was the general meeting in September 1962 when Dr Bergman’s paper on Solomon Levey was read.

Mrs Alexandra Hasluck challenged Dr Bergman’s interpretation of the Peel-Levey relationship. From this interesting two-fold analysis the following questions emerged to interest the audience: Did Peel enveigle Levey into his schemes or was Levey the force that drove Peel to such disastrous co-partnership? Was Peel a weak and incompetent organizer or did Levey cause Peel’s inaction by failing to supply the promised and very essential stores? Who was the victim? – The Jewish financier who through his own struggles had risen from convict to merchant prince or the English gentleman who was cousin to the Prime Minister? By joining issue Dr Bergman and Mrs Hasluck provided one of the most interesting evenings of the year.

Day tours continued to be popular and benefitted from the knowledge, skills and contacts of Ray Oldham and Mary Tambllyn. At the same time the separate women’s program, which had always been part of the Society’s life, faded as women’s place in public life expanded and diversified.

Albert Barunga: an addition to the Library's archival collection



In 2015 Derby's Dambimangari Aboriginal Foundation published Hugh Edwards' biography of Albert Barunga, titled simply *Barunga*. This book had a long gestation. Encouraged by Mary Durack, researcher/author Hugh Edwards agreed with Albert Barunga in the 1970s to write Barunga's life story based on his oral recall. The collaboration went well and a manuscript was completed in 1976. Then Barunga's unexpected sudden death in 1977 made the planned filming and book publication impossible, and the manuscript was set aside for over 30 years.

The project was revived in 2010 and discussed with Barunga's sons when sufficient time had passed for their father's story to be publicly told. The author, however, realised that much had changed in the cross-cultural context and in Kimberley life in the intervening decades. So he felt he needed to produce an additional manuscript telling of the interview process and its contemporary context, to add to Barunga's story as told three decades before. Together, these two manuscripts with additional images were published as *Barunga* in 2015.

In the long-drawn-out process of researching and writing the book and achieving its publication, Hugh Edwards gathered two small folders of personal papers, the first relating to the years 1966-1978, and the second to the 2006-2010 period. These folders were donated to the Society by Ruth Phelps (née Rowell). Read in conjunction with the book, they illuminate the research and publication process which has enabled Barunga's story to be made available for all of us to read.

So who was Albert Barunga (c1910-1977)?

He was a Worora man born at Kunmunya, near Derby, into a family group who still lived as hunter gatherers. He learnt sailing and fishing skills before being taken to the Kunmunya Presbyterian Mission where he added pastoral skills and came under the religious influence of missionary J R B Love. He guided Australian and American naval vessels during World War II. Barunga became a community leader and, with other leaders including David Mowaljarlai, led the establishment of the Mowanjum community on the outskirts of Derby in 1956 and its successful integration with Derby townspeople. The people who settled there were from the Ngarinyin, Wunambal and Worora peoples. He became an activist and an influential voice in the developing Indigenous rights movement.



A leading councillor at Mowanjum, he was also active on a range of other State and Federal committees, and emerged as a spokesman for tribal Australia. In 1972 he delivered a paper, 'Sacred Sites and their Protection', to a national seminar organized in Canberra by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies He lobbied ministers for Aboriginal Affairs and advocated 'friendship and harmony between black and white'. [Dix, ADB]

On a visit to New Zealand to meet with Maori leaders Barunga was impressed to see the continuing pride in traditional Maori culture and its celebration. He realised that such cultural renewal was possible for Indigenous Australians. At Mowanjum he worked to maintain and revive community traditions, including traditional arts and crafts. He was proud to be presented, with his wife Pudja, to Queen Elizabeth II during her 1977 Silver Jubilee visit, gifting her a crafted slate plaque in the stylised shape of the continent of Australia and depicting a traditional hunting scene.

Hugh Edwards (1933-2024) was a journalist, diver, shipwreck discoverer, shark expert, photographer and author of c35 books, mostly concerning maritime history. He wrote Dutch shipwreck stories, histories of Broome and the Kimberley, books about sharks and crocodiles, and books for children. Also notable is *Joe Nangan's Dreaming* (1976, co-authored with Indigenous lawman Joe Nangan). He was involved in the discovery of the *Batavia* at the Abrolhos Islands and was leader of an expedition to recover treasures and human remains from the shipwreck. He also found the main wreck of the *Zeewyk* at the Abrolhos. As a family member commented on his death, 'he had a big life'.

References

Warwick Dix, 'Barunga, Albert (1910?-1977)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1993.
 Old Mowanjum Mission site, Heritage Council WA – <https://inherit.dplh.wa.gov.au/>
 Royal Collection Trust – <https://www.rct.uk/collection/slate-plaque>
<https://ellymcdonaldwriter.com/2024/05/10/obituary-for-my-uncle-author-hugh-edwards-oam/>

Inmates of Swan Boys Home, Middle Swan

Darren Foster



Swan Orphanage Industrial School for Protestant Boys, Guildford. 1900

Source: Dept for Child Protection & Family Support, Superintendent of Public Charities & Inspector of Industrial & Reformatory Schools, Report 1900

The main orphanage building, Brown House (1874), is an impressive two-storey brick building with a sharply pitched roof in the English style with quoins of Donnybrook stone. Nearby is St Mary's church and graveyard (established in 1869).

There were 67 boys on the roll by the end of 1899, the number rising to 75 in 1900. The Superintendent of Relief and Inspector of Charitable Institutions, James Longmore, reported that, of the 75 boys at the school at the end of 1900, 54 had one or both parents dead. Longmore was fulsome in his praise of the institution.

The boys in the Institution have every appearance of being well cared for. They look bright and happy. The clothing of the inmates is, on the whole, clean and tidy ... the Superintendent and Matron show the utmost solicitude for the care of the inmates, and with the larger staff they now have to assist them should be the means of turning out well trained, useful lads, a credit to the Institution and the State.

Longmore's report also noted that a library had been started and new water supply added, together with a piggery, fowl house and proper yard for butchering purposes. He commended the agricultural training of the boys, who had land under cultivation and were tending cows, sheep, goats and horses as well as learning boot repairing, carpentry and blacksmithing.

The Chief Inspector of the Education Dept, Mr Walton, was generally positive although noting that there 'were only sufficient inkwells to supply one class at a time' and that the 'weakest classes in the school were the infants, who cannot be said to receive suitable instruction' because of a lack of staff.

An indication of the daily routine at the orphanage can be gained from the rules laid down at its foundation. Rule 9 stated:

The elder children shall rise at 6am, winter and summer; the younger at 6.30. Breakfast at 7.30, summer and winter. School hours, 9 to 11.30am and 2 to 3.30pm. Dinner at 1 o'clock, tea at 6 o'clock, and in winter to bed by 8, summer by 9.

The boy's diet was equally regimented with specific rations of bread, meat, potatoes, vegetables, rice, salt, sugar, tea, milk and soup to be served on particular days. It was further specified that

on the days when soup is issued, puddings which are to be made of sago, rice, suet (with treacle), raisins, currants or summer fruit, are to be given to the children. The soup to be made with rice and vegetables. Potatoes are not to be used when other vegetables are supplied.

In this way the administrators of the orphanage ensured the boys were well nourished so they could manage their schoolwork and other chores and agricultural tasks. But the boys' perspective may have been quite different. An insight is given by a former inmate from the 1930s, L N Collins, who described an almost identical menu:

Neglected and destitute children are often voiceless or invisible in historical narratives given the absence of diaries or other first-hand testimony but their experiences can be reconstructed at least in part using official records and newspaper accounts. This article explores the experiences of inmates at the Swan Boys Home at Middle Swan – now known as the Swanleigh precinct. It was established in 1874 as a Church of England orphanage for boys although the site had been a native mission since 1836. It was home for many boys from destitute circumstances – not necessarily orphans – and continued operating until 1960.

if I live to be 105 I'll never forget the meals. It was not so much the quality of them but the sheer monotony ... you knew that in two months, three weeks and four days time, if it fell on a Tuesday, it would be toad-in-the-hole.

Life at the orphanage did not exclude recreation. In his 1902 Report Longmore said the boys played cricket and football, swam daily in the river during summer and had regular outings to Perth and Midland Junction. A 1901 photograph shows the boys in lace-up boots, long socks, shorts and tunics with starched white collars and straw boaters – a picture of respectability – in Perth for a Royal Visit. There were annual visits to the Zoo, and summer holiday camps were held on the banks of the river at Cottesloe in 1903, and in the following years at Point Walter and Rottnest Island. In 1908 the boys walked from Middle Swan to a camping site at North Beach.

The Revd Alfred Burton, manager of the orphanage, saw great value in the excursions, commenting in his 1907 report that a month spent at Rottnest 'worked wonders with the boys, and they were able to face the Winter with an even greater reserve of energy than usual'. L N Collins observed about an annual camping holiday at Rockingham in the 1930s:

I wasn't particularly excited at this so-called 'holiday', and neither were any of the boys. No doubt the powers that be meant well ... there was plenty of swimming, but most of us preferred the fresh water of the Swan River. We had no money, so there was no ice cream, no cool drinks. We had no fishing lines. We spent a great deal of time in our tents, and tents can be very hot when out in the low scrub and sand. I don't think any of us were sorry when the 'holiday' was over.

Burton also regularly reported on the conduct of the boys. For instance, in 1904 he said that 'the boys' behaviour has been uniformly good' and that 'no trouble whatever has been experienced in maintaining order and discipline'. A surviving orphanage punishment book, which begins in 1904, reveals why. George Foster, then about eleven years old, was one of many boys who received four or six cuts for various misdemeanours, in his case for 'neglect of work', 'gross laziness', 'at river at non-swimming time', 'misbehaviour after repeated warnings', 'going in kitchen', 'out of bounds', 'using a kitchen knife (for) cutting up clothes pegs', and 'unpunctuality'.

The orphanage's aim was to turn out boys well skilled for agricultural work and life beyond the institution. In his 1907 report, Burton cites the example of one boy who had successfully completed a five-year apprenticeship with an employer.

This furnishes an instance of what any ordinary boy can accomplish, by five years steady work under a kind and capable master. I am glad to say that I have already arranged with this employer, to send shortly the best boy available, for another five years.

Glowing reports about the orphanage were contradicted by the *Sunday Times*, which conducted a vigorous campaign from 1902 to 1911 accusing the orphanage of underfeeding the boys and subjecting them to neglect and brutality. The paper also took aim at the government administration for failing in its duty to supervise the institution. A 1908 editorial reported the brutal punishment of an Aboriginal youth for a minor misdemeanour at the North Beach camp holiday:

Mark George was seized, his hands and feet tied together, and a slip-knot thrown over his head, and, thus trussed, the loose end of the slip-knot was fastened to the tent pole ... arming himself with a driving rein, Superintendent Wiltshire proceeded to beat a tattoo on the back of his victim ... his pitiful shrieks for mercy were disregarded.

In 1911, the tragic death of nine-year-old inmate George Everett Jones from toxæmia resulted in a coronial Inquiry with a jury. Many of the boys gave evidence at the inquest. Before the findings were reported, and under sustained pressure from the *Sunday Times*, Revd Burton resigned. Superintendent Longmore admitted in his evidence that he did not conduct surprise visits to the orphanage.

The jury found Jones' death was 'accelerated by the gross negligence and want of attention on the part of the Matron of the Swan Boys Orphanage'. It also made damning findings about the managers of the orphanage and found the State Children's Department guilty of neglect. The *Sunday Times* published a triumphalist editorial on 25 June 1911.

As the whole horrible story is gradually being brought step by step out of the mouths of children ... it will be readily understood why the *Sunday Times* took up the surgical knife to cut out such a cancerous social growth as the Swan Orphanage.

In the absence of a significant volume of first-hand accounts of boys who attended the orphanage, it is difficult to draw overall conclusions about the treatment, care and training of all inmates. It can be inferred from the reported testimony at the George Jones inquest, the surviving punishment books, and some of the newspapers stories (discounting the hyperbole), that conditions at the charitable institution were harsh, and brutal at least for some.

It is worth noting that some surviving Swan Boys Home inmates presented evidence in private hearings for the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse (2017). In May 2020, a sexual abuse survivor who attended Swan Homes (formerly Swan Boys Orphanage) in the 1940s, secured a favourable Supreme Court judgement against the Anglican Church.

John Lea: A Parkerville Soldier

Mike Galvin

Our thanks to member Dr Mike Galvin for sharing with us some of his research for the WA Railway Historical Society. Mike researched all the railway men who enlisted for overseas service in the Great War and died on active service. They number 374. Here is one serviceman's story.



John Lea AWM P11310.001

As a young child John Lea was resident in a Southampton orphanage when, at the age of eight, Sister Jane Ashdown from Parkerville, an Anglican children's home, brought him out to WA. Sister Jane was declared his official guardian and she explained: 'having no relatives we thought he might make good in "a new land"'.

John was educated at Parkerville before moving to Midland Junction for employment with the WA Government Railways (WAGR) as a cleaner (mostly raking out cinders from engine fireboxes). He was promoted to fireman and in 1913 enlisted to serve as a militia Private soldier in the 88th Regiment of Infantry.

When war was declared he obtained leave from the WAGR and enlisted in the 11th AIF Battalion on 24 August 1914 with the regimental number 128. He nominated Sister Jane as his next-of-kin and also made her the sole beneficiary in his Will. Following elementary training at the Blackboy Hill Camp he departed Australia aboard A11 HMAT *Ascanius* from Fremantle on 2 November 1914. The *Ascanius* joined the other ships of the First Convoy at sea. The Battalion disembarked in Egypt and established a tented camp at Mena close to the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx. In Egypt military training continued apace until the 3rd Brigade, which included the 11th Battalion sailed from Alexandria

for Lemnos where they practised the use of scrambling nets and maintained fitness with route marches.

On 25 April 1915 Pte Lea, as a member of the 11th Battalion, landed at Anzac Cove and became engaged in a furious battle with the defending Turkish Army. He was uninjured at the Landing and then participated in the early offensive actions until 11 May 1915. On that day, for unknown reasons he returned to Egypt for duty with the rear details. He never returned to the Peninsula and was absorbed into the main body of the Battalion when it arrived back in Egypt in January 1916 following the termination of the Gallipoli campaign. The Battalion was divided into two, creating a 'daughter Battalion', the 51st Battalion, but Pte Lea remained on the strength of the 11th Battalion. He sailed from Alexandria aboard HMT *Maryland* on 23 March 1916 and disembarked at Marseilles on 2 April to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Pte Lea participated in the Battles of Pozieres and Moquet Farm, both of which resulted in a great number of killed and wounded but he survived unharmed.

He was appointed to Lance Corporal on 6 December 1916 and promoted to the rank of Corporal on 10 March 1917. Corporal Lea was engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres when he was Wounded-in-Action on 1 November 1917 near Zonnebeke. He was carried from the field of battle and evacuated to 44 Casualty Clearing Station at Poperinghe where he Died-of-Wounds on 2 November. The War Diary of the 11th Battalion for 1 November reads: *The weather was fine and the lines suffered heavy shelling. Casualties were 4 other ranks KIA and 13 other ranks WIA.* Corporal Lea was buried with full military honours in the Nine Elms British Cemetery, southwest of Poperinghe.

For his service he was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The persons entitled to receive soldiers' service medals were laid out in the *Deceased Soldiers Entitlements Act 1918* which was quite independent of any Last Will. As Corporal Lea was an orphan there was no entitled person as set out in the *Act*. Army Records approached his next-of-kin (Jane Ashdown) and asked if she would receive the medals on trust and surrender them if an entitled person later made a claim. She signed the trust document and the medals were issued to her. Jane Ashdown died on 29 December 1921 at the age of 75 years and was buried at Karrakatta Cemetery. When his memorial plaque was ready for issue Army Records asked Sister Kate Clutterbuck of Parkerville if she would receive it on the same terms that his medals had been issued to Jane Ashdown. She agreed and subsequently received the memorial plaque and scroll.

Records held by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission show that K Clutterbuck paid for a single word to be engraved on John Lea's headstone. That word was MIZPAH, most commonly taken to mean 'a bond'.

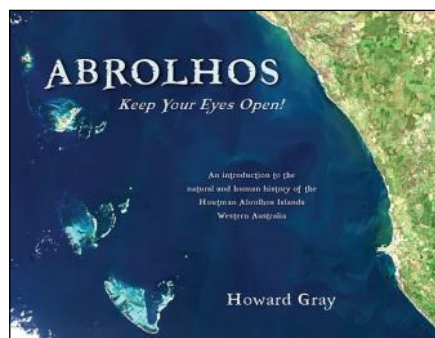
Corporal Lea is remembered on the Australian War Memorial (ACT), the State Memorial and the Railway Monument at Midland Junction. A memorial plaque (M6) was placed at a tree in Kings Park and dedicated by his 'friends'. It is not known if those friends were from Parkerville or the WAGR.

John Lea arrived in Australia as an orphan and clearly developed a deep relationship with Parkerville which was reciprocated by the use of the single word on his headstone. His death was a great loss to our society. At a later date the names of his parents were added to his record card at War Graves but there was never a claim for his medals.

Book Reviews

Howard Gray, *Abrolhos Keep Your Eyes Open!* Westralian Books, Geraldton 2024. In Library.

Reviewer: Ian Abbott



Not another book about Houtman Abrolhos, an archipelago of c.190 islands west of Geraldton! That was my visceral reaction when I became aware of this book last

year, because there are already six books about the wrecking of the Dutch ship *Batavia* in 1629 and its gruesome consequences. The first, and most original, is Henrietta Drake-Brockman's *Voyage to Disaster* (1963), though this was preceded by her novel *The Wicked and the Fair* (1957). Her 1963 non-fiction book was followed by *Islands of Angry Ghosts* (Hugh Edwards, 1966), *Batavia's Graveyard* (Mike Dash, 2002), *The Wreck of the Batavia* (Simon Leys, 2003), *To Die a Dry Death* (Greta van Der, 2010), and *Batavia* (Peter Fitzsimons, 2011).

The subtitle of Howard Gray's new book – 'An Introduction to the natural and human history of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands Western Australia' – soon dispelled my concerns about a focus on Pelsaert's misadventure. Recounting the *Batavia* event is apportioned only ten pages, and most of this is pictorial not text.

Gray's book is divided into two parts: natural history (95pp) and human history (153pp). It is well-organised and easy to navigate. It is a magnificent compression of information about many relevant themes. It begins with brief accounts of geology, island origins, climate, currents, tides, marine habitats, and the flora and fauna that live or feed there. This is followed by information about seabirds, shorebirds, and the biota of the terrestrial component of the ecosystem.

Few know of the 1727 wreck of another Dutch ship, *Zeewijk*. Even less well known is a rich history from 1801, with French, English and colonial ships visiting the archipelago. The narrative proceeds to the better-known mining of guano for fertilising agricultural crops from 1880. Attention then turns to conserving the natural world of the Abrolhos from over-fishing and more mining. The book concludes with the discovery of the Dutch shipwrecks, the daily life of crayfishers and their families, and a brief outline of the results of research by archaeologists, ornithologists, herpetologists and botanists.

The book has a comprehensive reference list but sadly no index. Nearly every page has either a colour or black & white photograph, reproduction of an old map, an item extracted from the archive or from a

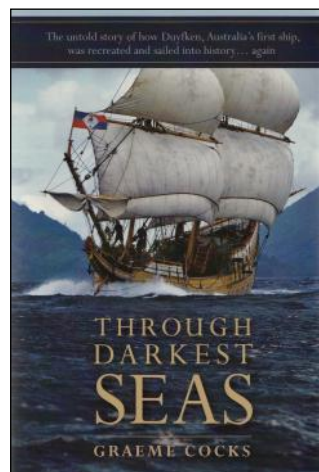
newspaper, or other relevant image. The author has been thorough in his research. He first visited the archipelago in 1980 and the subject of his PhD thesis is the rock lobster fishery.

This is a splendid book, both visually and textually, and the author's self-identification as an 'Abrolhogist' is well-merited. It is highly recommended for the tourist planning to visit, those who have visited, and the vicarious (armchair) traveller.

* * * * *

Graeme Cocks, *Through Darkest Seas: the untold story of how Duyfken, Australia's first ship was recreated and sailed into history... again*, Motoring Past Vintage Publishing 2023. In Library.

Reviewer: Michael Nind



This attractive book of over five hundred pages is the story of how the *Duyfken*, Australia's first ship, was recreated by a passionate and dedicated team and sailed into history. The author writes that it began as a memoir and became a personal journey into the soul of the *Duyfken*. Indeed the inclusion of so much personal recollection, and not only by the author, overwhelms the account

of the reconstruction project and the journey beyond.

The book is primarily a travel narrative with an understanding of the actual reconstruction woven into the text. Index and glossary are most helpful in navigating the reconstruction and the journey. The ambiguous referencing contains few sources with re-findable descriptions and the personal journals appear to remain with the owners.

The book is well-made with a range of illustrations, black and white, creating a historic impression despite the events being only a few decades old. It is not as engaging as the lavish imagery in Graeme Cocks' recent book on motoring entrepreneur Claude Deane.

Through Darkest Seas contains descriptions and reflections on life in WA in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that could have value to future historians. It documents the financial struggles so many heritage projects continue to face. That the ship did not find a home in the State is another reflection of how things work here. Seeing the magnificent ship under sail on the Swan River became a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The book is a good bookend for the *Duyfken*'s story spanning over four hundred years. It is one for the specialists and collectors.

Is the date of this year's State History Conference in your diary?



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Welcome to new members!

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Robert French, Lachlan Hunter, Gail Lee,
Joshua Letcher, Mingenew Historical Society,
Angela Quinn & Albert Hanssen,
J and K Greenwell

Affiliates Newsletter

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activities, please visit

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Message from the Treasurer

Thank you for your past support of the
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Tuesday 1st July, 2025 and we will email accounts
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season and thank you for your ongoing support!

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

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