



Founded 1926

HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

January-February 2026

Welcome to the Society's Centennial Year 1926-2026

In this special year we plan to celebrate our past and make some significant changes to our naming and visibility in order to strengthen our future.

We look back with pride on a century of voluntary work to preserve, research and present Western Australian history. We move forward into our next century to continue this work effectively by incorporating new ideas and approaches to ensure we remain a lively part of Western Australia's 21st century society.

A new logo



A new trading name

HISTORY WEST

ESTD — 1926

A new home



THE HISTORY WEST CENTRE

Our new logo, trading name and premises are modern and streamlined. They will serve us well as we reach out to engage with everyone interested in Western Australia's past. We seek to build on our past work and expand our reach by acknowledging that we are continually changing as is Western Australian society.

THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ESTD — 1926



ANNIVERSARY

We began in September 1926 as the Western Australian Historical Society and were granted the Royal title in 1963. The name represents a past of which we are proud. It has done good service and remains our legal name.

The Society's original logo was a coat of arms adopted in 1931. In pride of place along with the kangaroos are black swans, Western Australia's most notable emblem which has been highlighted in our new modern design.

The motto 'Seek the Light of History' remains a worthy goal although we might no longer use Latin to express it. Other aspects of the old coat of arms – Hartog, Dampier and Stirling – remain significant in our history although they are now only part of a longer story which reaches back to WA's original Aboriginal societies and forward to the amazing transformation of our State in the 20th and 21st centuries.

We seek to explore this long and rich history together.

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

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 18 February at 6pm** when **Dorothy Erickson** will present a talk titled **'The Story of the History West Collections'**
The History West Centre, 109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands
Refreshments available from 5.30pm

This talk will provide a glimpse into the treasured objects in History West's multifaceted collection. The Society has played a pioneering role in the conservation and interpretation not only of WA's social history but also of our portable cultural heritage which brings 'colour' to written history. The talk will explore how the collection evolved from what we think is the first gift to the museum – by Edith Cowan in 1929.

The people who built the initial collection will be featured together with information on the objects themselves. Highlights are the extensive costume collection, the valuable artworks and 'a few of my favourite things'. Of necessity this will be only a fraction of the thousands of objects held and just a few of the many volunteers who served on the museum committee. You will hear of the role played by the founders and their aspirations, of Dircksey Cowan and Ray Oldham soliciting objects, of Tatiana de Fircks conserving them, of Nancy Kelly and Kitty Woodman's tireless work, and the generous bequest of Jennifer Wright in 2017.

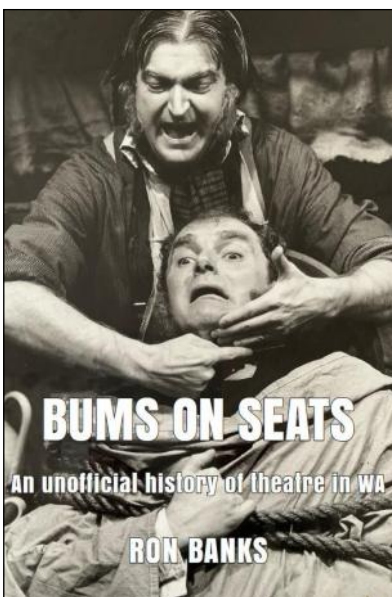


Dr Dorothy Erickson's work has been collected by prestigious art museums in Britain, USA, Europe and Australia. She is also an author with books on WA decorative arts and design. Dorothy has received many honours, including induction into the Australian Design Institute Hall of Fame and the WA Women's Hall of Fame. She is a Fellow of the RWAHS who, when time permits and with the help of Val Hutch and others on the museum committee, has been auditing the collection since 2011 searching out the history of the objects, their owners and their makers.



Community Talk

Highlights of WA's theatre history



Ron Banks
journalist & critic

Tuesday 24 February
10 for 10.30am

The History West Centre
109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands

Cost: \$15.00 Bookings essential
 Click on link or scan QR code

<https://square.link/u/ZqfWDqk3>



Come and hear about the development of theatre in WA and some of its interesting highlights. Ron has just published *Bums on Seats: An Unofficial History of Theatre in WA* and has spent many hours interviewing actors and directors and reviewing the plays that have entertained Perth audiences for so many years. He has encouraged many of Perth's leading actors to reflect on their careers and write their personal memoirs.

Maylands Peninsula Walk



Maylands Peninsula on a sweeping loop of the Swan River is a place of tranquillity and of historical and environmental treasures. These treasures were the focus of a Saturday morning amble led by the dynamic team of Keith and Sue Cundale, President and Secretary of the Maylands Historical and Peninsula Association (MHPA).



Twenty of us met at the Maylands Golf Club, originally part of the Maylands Aerodrome which operated from 1924 to 1963. Whilst enjoying a complimentary cuppa, we were given a brief overview of the walk. Participants learned of Maylands residents' passion to foster links between the Peninsula's history and maintaining the area's wetlands. For example, residents campaigned to stop the infill of the claypits which once supplied the local brickworks. Instead these claypits were left to fill with water to form Lake Bungana and Lake Brearley, now a welcoming habitat for many native fauna, including the elusive Oblong turtle.



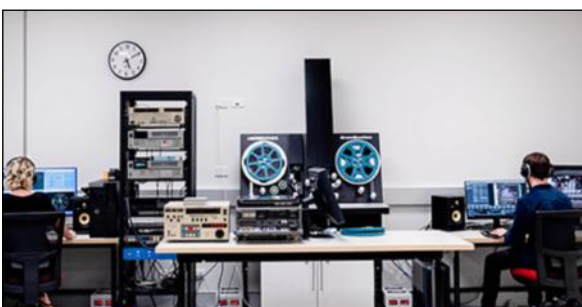
A particular highlight was the visit to Peninsula Farm (Tranby House). The land where the residence stands was granted to the Hardey brothers in 1830. It was spiritually important to the Whadjuk Noongar people for thousands of years as well as a rich source of food. Today Tranby House is managed by the National Trust. We enjoyed small group tours by volunteers who had opened the building especially for us.



The final phase of the walk was a viewing of the heritage-listed Maylands Brickworks which operated from 1927 to 1983 and is now one of Perth's 'most notable sights'. As participants thanked the Cundales many remarked on the beauty and serenity of the Peninsula as well as the area's diverse history.

If you wish to do the walk yourself, go to www.maylandshistorical.com.au for details of a self-guided walk prepared by MHPA.

Visit to the UWA Digitisation Centre of WA



Late last year we were fortunate to be invited on a tour of the UWA Digitisation Centre of WA. Visitor numbers were limited to fifteen. We were met by the coordinator, Janet Luk, and taken on an hour's tour.

The Digitisation Centre (DCWA) was set up in 2021 with the goal of digitising collections of national and international significance from around the State in accordance with national and international standards. The Centre employs approximately six staff members. It was a most interesting tour, with staff explaining their work and many questions being asked.

A wonderful donation to the Library Western Australian Explorers Diaries



The Library has recently received a most generous gift from Hesperian Press and the Western Australian Explorers Diaries Project Inc. They have donated the complete set to date of the Explorers Diaries, 36 volumes in all taking over a metre of shelf space. This gift is of high value and all History West members are delighted and honoured to receive it.

Peter Bridge and Kim Epton have provided the following explanation so that the story of the Explorers Diaries Project will be better understood —

The Western Australian Explorers' Diaries Project Incorporating the Historical Records of Western Australia was created in 1981 by Peter Bridge and Kim Epton. However, with the exigencies of economic survival, the project did not commence until 2001.

As with many such projects there were those who both wanted to control the process but do little work – the well-established 'Henny Penny syndrome'. Both creators were adamant that that this was not going to happen and gradually a solid team of dedicated volunteers, non-professional historians, editors, genealogists, researchers and hard-working typists and proofreaders was assembled.

There was of course little funding available, but the Heritage Council granted \$20,000 which covered some out-of-pocket expenses and later the WA History Foundation granted \$11,000 towards the third volume. However the creators covered the majority of costs from their own resources until recently when the generosity of Bill Richmond, prospector, has enabled the completion of many volumes.

From the outset we determined that the publications were to be of a quality that complemented the content; that is good paper, case bound, section-sewn, dust-jacketed, and printed in Western Australia. We have held to that until recently when globalism and inflation caught up with the printing industry and local sewing and case binding has become difficult.

The majority of such diaries were difficult to access and little referenced. But they are exceedingly valuable sources of information on the land and its resources as it was at the time of first settlement. We considered that cultural and biological questions could not be decided without the use of such primary sources.

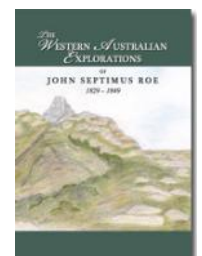
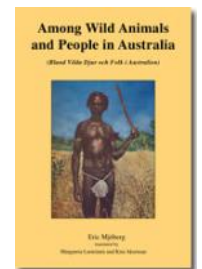
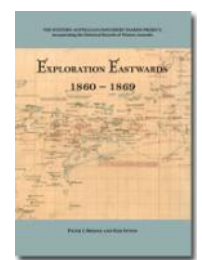
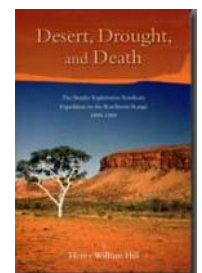
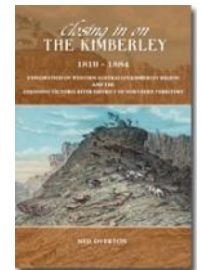
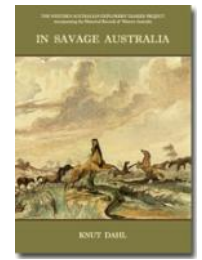
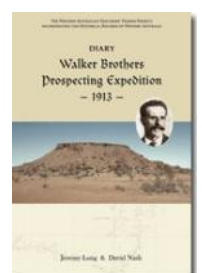
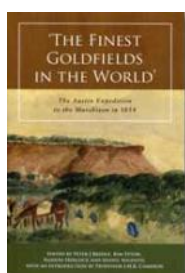
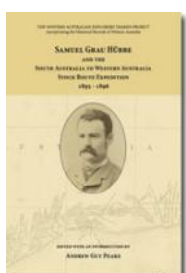
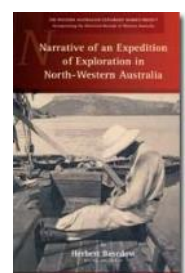
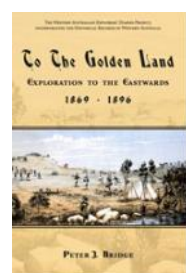
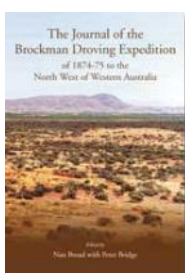
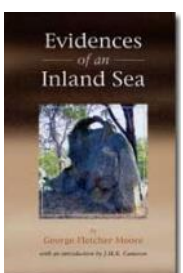
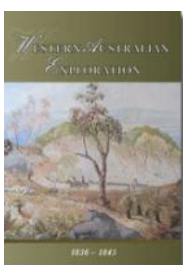
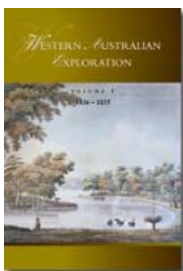
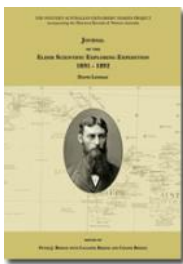
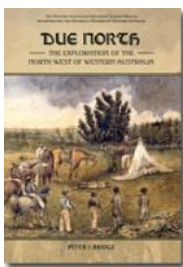
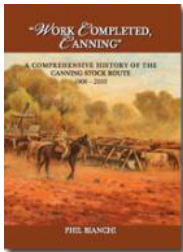
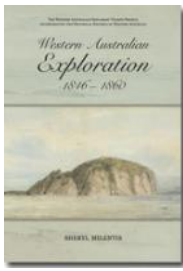
We were adamant that this was to be a project to record all the explorers, and not just the Captains. From the leaders to native guides, all were to be recorded. Tracking the original documents was no easy task as in some cases a century and more of rewrites had obscured the sources. In one case the original handwritten leather-bound volume was being used as a doorstop. So-called archivists considered the exploits of the lower classes of little interest and there were many rescue operations.

Kim produced a series of systematic guidelines for the project which were adhered to through personnel changes and time.

Systematic biographies of all expedition participants were produced and biologists, botanists and other experts wrote solid analyses of their specialties from the content of each volume.

The first volume appeared in 2005, and since then others have appeared on an erratically regular basis. It is expected that, God willing and the dollar holding, the final exploration volume of around 30 volumes will be published in late 2026.

However, ancillary volumes, and those of the Historical Records may continue for some time.



Library News

Kathleen Goodall's scrapbook of Fremantle

Barbara Harris



A recent donation to the Library collection of historical documents provides a rich source of information about the social and cultural life of Fremantle in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Donated by Jennifer Fyfe, the collection comprises photographs and a scrapbook which was owned by her great grandmother Kathleen Goodall (née Fanning). It features programs of amateur theatre productions and concerts in which Kathleen's father, Peter Joseph Fanning, performed, and other items related to him, including references to his employment as a customs collector. As well as these items, the scrapbook includes newspaper reports, telegrams and announcements about events in Fremantle and provides a wonderful insight into the cultural and social life of many in the affluent community at a time of burgeoning growth and prosperity following the discovery of gold in the eastern goldfields.



Kathleen was born in Perth in 1903 and grew up here before marrying her husband John Goodall and living for most of her life in Melbourne. There she became an accomplished opera singer who performed in various venues in Australia and regularly on ABC radio broadcasts. It seems her father passed his talent and passion for performance on to his daughter.

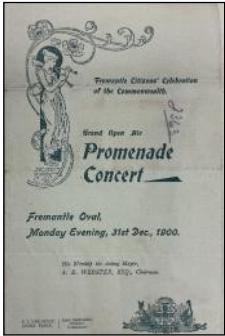
Amateur dramatic societies were active in Fremantle in the 1890s-1900s and notable examples referred to in the programs included the 'Fremantle Lyric, Operatic, and Dramatic Club' and the 'Innisfail Amateur Dramatic Company', the latter founded in 1893 and exclusively producing Irish plays. Plays and musicals tended to be traditional English ones, mostly light-hearted, and Gilbert and Sullivan productions were particularly popular.

Concerts were held regularly, most often in the Fremantle Town Hall. These were quite formal affairs and included vocal and instrumental performances, dancing and recitations that showcased the talents of members of the community, including young women. The programs were formally arranged, and content was often classical and Anglocentric. Performances often included toasts to the Queen and always concluded with singing the National Anthem (and sometimes Rule Britannia as well).



Concerts were frequently held to celebrate significant historical events, including the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia and a service held at Fremantle Oval to celebrate the Declaration of Peace in 1918. These were patriotic affairs, attended by government leaders and incorporating formal toasts. Concerts were held, too, to mark other occasions: retirements, welcomes, farewells and even the 'completion of the First Round of Matches for the Cricket Season'.

The amateur productions often raised funds to aid a range of charities, such as the Transvaal Nurses Fund, Bushmen's Fund, Patriotic Fund, Fremantle Football Fund and the Fremantle Catholic Institute.



Several programs in the scrapbook detail other special interest groups and clubs and societies that prospered during the 1890s. 'Smoke socials' were male-only events where large groups of men gathered to smoke tobacco together. These events were typically run by football clubs, charitable organisations, trade unions and governments and were often coupled with a formal dinner, annual general meeting or musical revue. While men who participated were drawn from all social classes, the smoke nights were considered classy affairs, as evidenced by the pale pink silk program for the Smoke Social held on 1 January 1901 to celebrate the establishment of the Commonwealth.

Performances were frequently held in the Town Hall but also in hotels and included abundant supplies of alcohol. In response to this hard-drinking culture, the Good Templars instituted several temperance lodges in Fremantle in the late 19th century to combat the evil drink. The Crystal Stream Lodge and White Rose Lodge were two such lodges and, modeled on the structure of Freemasonry, they offered entertainment without alcohol.

Many of the venues used for cultural events around 1900 were recently constructed and their grand style (known as Federation architecture) reflects the prosperity of Fremantle at this time: the Town Hall (1887), Victoria Hall (1897), named for the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, Albert Hall (1900), Federal Hotel, Literary Institute (1899) and Fremantle Market Hall (1897).

The Fremantle Sailors' Rest was another venue that held weekly concerts. Opened in 1900, it was run as a hostel for sailors by the Fremantle Bethel Union Society and provided opportunities for seamen to enjoy their leisure time.

Newspaper articles in the scrapbook reveal much about the trends and values of the time. Social events and 'amusements' (as the performances were named) were extensively reported, and performances and fashions described in some detail. One report of a wedding not only listed guests but also all the gifts bestowed on the wedding couple, naming the guests who gave each item.

The performance programs also featured extensive advertising by local businesses, revealing the predilections of the time: Silbert and Sharp fruiterers, Hunter's Boot Palace, Webb & Webb Photographers, Wilson Bros Pianos, Jane Bros Premier Tailors, Fish Beard & Co. Milliners and Matador Cigars.

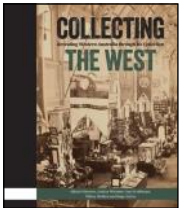
Kathleen's scrapbook contains mementos that were important to her and her family; but these assembled pages are much more, because they serve as a rich historical record of cultural life in Fremantle at a critical point in the city's history.

*Scrapbook:
Concert and
Theatrical
Programs of
Kathleen Goodall's
Father. D2025/014*

Booked in for a Cuppa

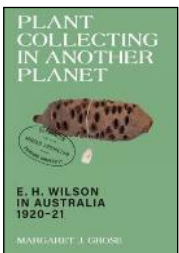


Our end-of-year event for booklovers was held at the close of November, chaired this year by member Jack Vercoe. Five speakers entertained us with enthusiastic accounts of their new publications all hitting the bookshops in time for leisurely summer reads. Few in the audience could resist the lure of this splendid array of varied new non-fiction.



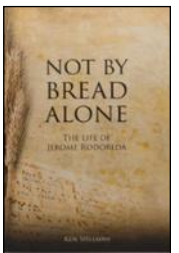
Alistair Paterson, Andrea Witcomb, Gaye Sculthorpe, Tiffany Shellam & Baige Zylstra, *Collecting the West. Revealing Western Australia through its Collection* (UWAP, 2025)

Baige spoke for her fellow contributors in a show-and-tell of the book which records the wonders of collections of Western Australian objects gathered across 400 years. What has been collected? Who were the collectors and why were these collections assembled? What of the histories of the libraries, archives, art galleries and museums which were created to catalogue and research the artefacts, natural history specimens, books and papers that have been accumulated? This book is full of images – 200 in all – which give the reader a feel for the objects as their stories are told. Today historians are re-discovering these collections as a new avenue to understanding the past and its connections to the present.



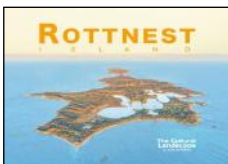
Margaret J Grose, *Plant Collecting in another Planet. E H Wilson in Australia 1920-21* (UWAP, 2025)

Margaret answered the question on most lips – who was E H Wilson? How fleeting is fame! A Harvard scholar, he was the last of the great plant collectors who travelled, collected, classified and named plants from ‘foreign’ parts. His huge reputation was forged in his collecting trips in China from 1899 to 1911. When he came to Australia in 1920, however, he was amazed at WA’s diverse flora, different from elsewhere. We now know that we live in a global botanical biodiversity hotspot but it was not a common understanding in the early 20th century. Wilson collected enthusiastically yet, when Margaret visited the Harvard collection, they did not know what they had from WA because their focus had been on Wilson’s China specimens. She found approximately 600 specimens from his Western Australian expeditions. Nevertheless Margaret was insistent that the wonder of her book lies in its stories not of the collector but of the Australian landscapes themselves.



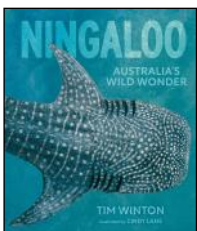
Ken Spillman, *Not by Bread Alone. The Life of Jerome Rodoreda* (Abbey Press, 2025)

Gillian Rodoreda, who (together with Tom Stephens) undertook most of the research on which this story is based, described the book as the story of a research journey. Fragments of Jerome’s life and times were pieced together over many years. It was not a straightforward task. His was a fascinating life from his arrival in the colony as an eighteen-year-old Benedictine novice to his success as a Perth baker and businessman, and founder of a large family which has spread around Australia. This 19th century story of a Catalan man who became part of WA history testifies to the diversity of WA society from the commencement of colonisation.



Cale McMillen, *Rottnest Island: The Cultural Landscape* (Cale McMillen, 2025)

Rottnest guide Dr Lesley Sylvester told of her love of Rottnest and her delight in Cale’s photographs which capture so much of the memorable island landscape and life. This beautiful book of photographs is the result of a decade’s photographic work by Cale as he cycled everywhere on the island. We were delighted to welcome Cale to the event.



Tim Winton (writer), Cindy Lane (illustrator), *Ningaloo. Australia’s Wild Wonder* (Fremantle Press, 2025)

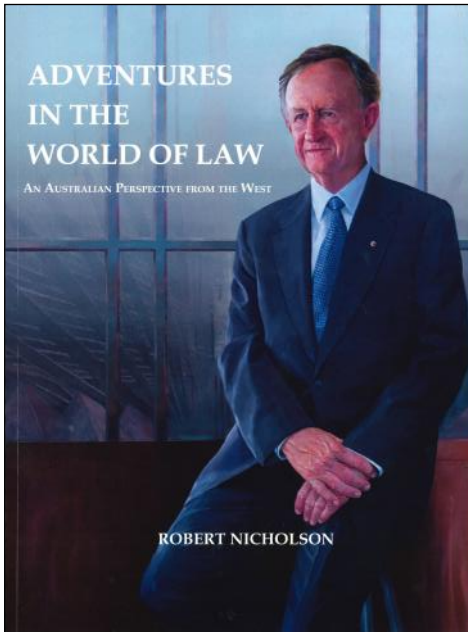
Society volunteer Natalie Richards took the audience on a rapid but delightful survey of new children’s books available to the Christmas market. One highlight was Tim Winton’s latest – a picture book. Fremantle Press quoted Tim as explaining: ‘Ningaloo has been a big part of my life. I’ve spent over 30 years learning about this remarkable and unrepeatable place, and I’m so pleased to be able to share it in this way with young people all over the world.’

Many thanks to all the Society’s volunteers who made the morning event a success but especially to our Community Officer Lesley Burnett who organised the occasion.

Bob Nicholson's memoir, *Adventures in the World of Law* (2025)

Nicholas Hasluck

History West is delighted to print (in part) Nick Hasluck's launch of Bob's autobiography. We congratulate our former president on his success as an author, this being his second publication in two months! Bob's books are on sale in the Bookshop.



The author has devoted a large part of his life to the ways of the legal profession. Related pursuits include a devotion to history, as evidenced by his two earlier books, *Shaping Australia's West: The Life of John Nicholson* and his recently published work about another of his forebears *Captain Robert Laurie and the Maritime Development of Fremantle*.

Bob was born in Perth, shortly before World War II. His schooling included a stint at the East Claremont Practising School. He went on to Hale School. Matriculation led to enrolment at UWA Law School, for his grandfather, John Nicholson, had been a legal practitioner and his father and uncle were still busy running a small family law firm.

Many of his friends at the Law School became leading figures in the local profession. Like most of his vintage, Bob had to perform national service training, an experience that prompted him to write a two-part article for *Pelican*, the student magazine, in which he set out the pros and cons of the system, an article indicating the sort of professional he was destined to become – a participant inclined to dwell upon and seek to improve any system or communal endeavour in which he was involved. Not surprisingly, then, Bob eventually became a successful President of the Guild of Undergraduates and was active also in the National Union of Australian University Students.

The goal of legal education for Bob and most of his classmates was to qualify for admission to the Supreme Court of WA as a barrister and solicitor. After obtaining a law degree, a would-be lawyer was required to serve two years as an articled clerk. In a youthful mood of independence, Bob didn't go to his father's firm for articles but to a neighbouring firm where he began performing the menial tasks expected of an articled clerk. In December 1960 his father moved his admission to the bar.

This led to Bob joining the Nicholson firm, situated in the Bank of Adelaide building on St Georges Terrace, but with a somewhat Dickensian interior. In his usual constructive manner Bob began making some much-needed improvements, adamant that the days of blotting paper, inkwells, drifting cigarette smoke, ancient biscuit tins and leisurely tea breaks had to go. In addition, of course, he was busily engaged in learning more about the law by attending to the needs of his clients.

An overly avid concentration on the law at an early stage can sharpen the mind by narrowing it. Bob, as always, was inclined to look further afield. He applied for a Rotary Fellowship that gave him a place at Georgetown University in Washington DC to study governmental law. His journey by ship to the USA included some encounters along the way, including a session with Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister. In Washington, he met the US Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, then President Jack Kennedy at the White House.

While working at the Nicholson firm Bob soon discerned that with the rapid expansion of the Australian mining industry in the 1960s and a widespread transformation of commercial activity and related statutory reforms, it would be difficult for small firms to provide the wide range of advice and other legal services that were needed. With this in mind, he played a crucial role in negotiating a merger of his firm with a larger local firm, Muir and Williams, a firm with widely respected partners known to Bob since his law school days, such as Gerry Honniball and a future Chief Justice, David Malcolm – a firm that in later years became a national partnership known as *Freehills*.

Bob's involvement in the affairs of the profession led to him taking up a position in Melbourne as the inaugural Secretary General of the Law Council of Australia. His task was to provide the various law societies and bar associations throughout Australia with a more dynamic form of leadership in a time of change. His wife Lynne was familiar with the workings of the Law Council. In this, and in so many other ways, she not only eased the burden of his new responsibilities but made his family life, with their three children, constantly enjoyable. Upon completion of his five-year term, the President of the Law Council said that Bob had done more than any other office-bearer to inject imagination and quality into the work of the national body. It was now a fully professional organisation.

Upon returning to Perth with his family, Bob became a Deputy President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. In 1988 he was appointed to the Supreme Court of WA. This was followed some years later by an appointment to the Federal Court. He was greatly respected for his work in all these jurisdictions. His book includes a graphic account of dealing with a wide range of matters, from criminal trials and trade practices to migration work and native title hearings in remote places.

The author, in his mastery of the law, plus a rare and abiding interest in broader communal concerns, such as his role as Chancellor of Edith Cowan University, was bound to make a creative contribution to the legal system. The book ends when he stepped down from the bench but one must keep in mind that since then he has done a great deal for the Historical Society as its President, and in his wise counsel. His latest book casts valuable light upon the transformation of the legal world in the author's time and on the ideals of the profession he served for many years.

New Representative National Trust WA Council

Many thanks to Dr Fiona Bush who has been representing us most ably on the NTWA Council. It is now time for a new representative and we are pleased to advise you that the Revd Canon Dr Philip Raymont has offered to take over the responsibility. We are delighted to accept this offer. Dr Raymont is a member of History West and the National Trust WA as well as being a member of two local Historical Societies – York Society and Beverley Historical Society. As the Anglican priest in the Avon Valley, Dr Raymont has responsibility along with the parish councils for two heritage listed sites – Holy Trinity Church, Hall, and Rectory in York and St Mary’s Church, Hall, Rectory and Tree, in Beverley. The churches of St Andrew, Greenhills, St Paul Edward’s Crossing, and St John in the Wilderness, The Dale all have heritage importance, and all have graveyards. As a means of ensuring their upkeep he conducts four services in each of these churches in each year. We are most grateful to Dr Raymont for volunteering to add this responsibility to his busy life!

Happy Christmas from the Writers Group



Welcome to new members

James De Leo, Tara Le Flohic, Kate Gunning,
Gregory Harvey, Sue & Rolf Meeking, Paul Samuels

Making connections

Cathy Baron, President of WA History Teachers Association and Principal of Lakelands Senior High School had a look over our new building at 109 Stirling Highway recently. She met with Georgina Wigley, Megan Ewing, Nick Drew and Pamela Statham Drew and discussed where our Society and the History Teachers Association could share information and expertise.

Affiliates Newsletter

If you would like to read about
Affiliates’ activities, please visit
<https://histwest.org.au/affiliates-news/>

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

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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!