



# HISTORY WEST™

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

November 2025

## GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting is on Wednesday 19 November at 6pm when Bernice Berry will present a talk titled 'The Capel Conundrum'

109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands  
Refreshments available from 5.30pm



Daniel Alder senior, 1823

The subject of this talk, Elizabeth Capel Carter, is known in WA for her connection with the Bussell family and her part in raising funds for the building of St Mary's Church, Busselton, but she has always remained a shadowy figure and details of her life have been elusive. How and when was Capel orphaned? Why did her guardian, 'Grandpapa Joseph', send her to live with his son and daughter-in-law? What was the nature of her relationship with her Bussell cousins? How did she acquire and then lose her fortune?

This paper connects two different places: the Capel/Coolingup area in WA, and the county of Devon in England, where the patriarch of the Bussell family married in 1766, uniting the names 'Bussell' and 'Capel'. It fills gaps in the history of the Carters and Bussells, and details the unusual circumstances of Capel Carter's childhood, including the distressing occurrences that affected her for the rest of her life, the relationship that ruined her financially, and the suspicious events in her final months that impacted on her adopted family in WA.

**Bernice Barry** is a West Australian writer and historian with a background as a teacher, adviser for literacy and consultant for curriculum innovation. Her books include non-fiction and historical fiction, reflecting her passion for discovering women's stories where truth has been obscured by time. Originally from

Cornwall in the UK, Bernice has lived for 25 years near Wooditjup/Margaret River. She enjoys researching WA history and is a regular speaker on a range of topics including the life and work of 19th century botanist, Georgiana Molloy.



Bernice Barry

**Dates for your diary!**  
At our new home - 109 Stirling Hwy

### Secondhand Book Sale

Fri 7, Sat 8, Sun 9 November  
Fri 4-6pm, Sat & Sun 9am-4pm

What do we have on offer?

All sorts of books: WA & Australian history, military history, children's books, every type of fiction, big books for \$5 & much more...

... As well, an auction of maps & WA books on Sat @ 11am in Wright Family Community Hall

### Textile Sale

Sat 8 & Sun 9 November ONLY  
9am-4pm

in Margaret Medcalf meeting room

Select from a range of vintage textiles, new fabrics & craft books or browse pre-loved handwork for repurposing in creative projects. Revisit old favourites, explore hand blocked batiks and indulge in journal joy!

### NO PARKING

There will be no parking in the car park at 109 from 5 to 9 November  
All available space will be taken up with our book sale

### Welcome to new members!

John Bell, Kristy Briggs, Dallas Hickman, Karja Lee, Dimity Torpy, Doug Walsh

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# Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book online!

Or ring the office 9386 3841 [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)

## HISTORY IN THE CITY



**Citiplace Community Centre, Upper-Level  
City Railway Station Complex  
Wednesday 5 November, 2pm start  
Not your ordinary pigeons  
Rob Sheehy**

Pigeon Racing Federation WA (Inc.)

Our guest speaker will explore the role that pigeons have played throughout history, including times of conflict, and how racing pigeons differ from those we see scavenging scraps of food in public places.

## TOUR



**A specially organised visit to the  
Digitisation Centre of WA  
at Barry J Marshall Library,  
University of Western Australia**

**Wednesday 12 November, 9.30 for 10-11am  
Digitisation: how WA's history  
is being preserved**

This exciting one-hour guided tour, with Q&A welcomed throughout, will give members a unique opportunity to see how WA's rich cultural heritage is being preserved and made accessible for us to view. Janet Luk, Coordinator of the Centre, will lead the tour.

Meet in foyer Barry J Marshall Library,  
UWA Crawley Campus

Parking for visitors Car Park 43, Fairway Entrance 4.  
Also street parking along Myers Street and Parkway

Cost: \$15 Bookings essential 15 places only  
Click on link or scan QR code  
<https://square.link/u/amoKy5of>



## COMMUNITY TALK



**109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands  
Tuesday 4 November, 10 for 10.30-11.30am  
Prof Jo McDonald  
Director of Centre for Rock Art Research  
+ Management at UWA  
Rock Art**

This talk discusses collaborative research done over the last 13 years between researchers at UWA with custodians of Murujuga Cultural Landscape World Heritage. It highlights the archaeological work – recording rock art and stone structures, excavating midden and rockshelter sites and developing a collaborative research framework with the archipelago's custodians.

Cost: \$15.00 Bookings essential  
Click on link or scan QR code  
<https://square.link/u/917bOTDg>



## BOOKED IN FOR A CUPPA



**Booked in for a Cuppa Xmas Edition 2025  
Thursday 27 November 10 for 10:30am start**

**Venue 109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands**

Experience first hand the insights of these authors on their newly released books

Great WA reads, perfect gifts for Christmas  
A selection of recommended children's books will also be available

And of course a cuppa and a festive slice for you to enjoy

Everyone welcome

Cost: \$10.00 Bookings essential  
Click on link or scan QR code  
<https://square.link/u/mMqSofze>



## CHRISTMAS PARTY



Members and their partners are invited to be part of History West's first Christmas party at

**109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands**  
**Wednesday 10 December, 6-8 pm**

Cost: \$40 per person

RSVP: Monday 1 December

Canapés & drinks included

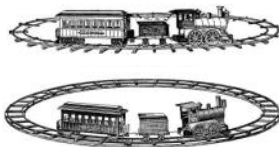
As always there will be a fantastic Christmas raffle, tickets \$5 each

Click on link or scan QR code  
<https://square.link/u/wUPeMYs>



## COMMUNITY TALKS 2026

### Sharing your collection



**A passion for collecting is a voyage of discovery.**

**We invite you to share your collection and discoveries with us**

Thank you to everyone who has responded to our previous call to members with a collecting passion.

We will shortly be in touch as we plan the community talks program for 2026.

We intend to hold a series of talks to hear all about these collections.

If you are a collector and have not yet contacted us, please email with a short explanation of your collection.

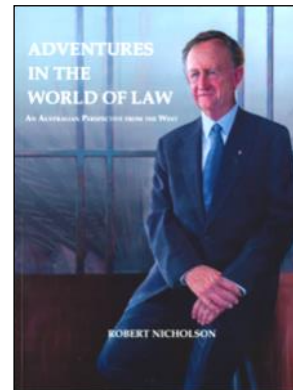
We would love to hear from you.

Lenore Layman (on behalf of Community Talks team)

[admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)  
[layman@westnet.com.au](mailto:layman@westnet.com.au)

## BOOK LAUNCH

**109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands**  
**Friday 14 November, 5 for 5.30pm**



***Adventures in the World of Law. An Australian Perspective from the West***

**Robert Nicholson**

To be launched by Nicholas Hasluck AM  
Past President, the Hon. Robert Nicholson AO, is a former Judge of the Supreme Court of WA & later a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia.

Do join us for the occasion and speak to the author  
Drinks & nibbles

Please book by clicking on the link  
<https://www.trybooking.com/DFZDW>

### Expression of Interest

Council invites any member interested in representing the Society on the Council of the National Trust of WA to contact the Secretary. This is a statutory position on NTWA Council which keeps both organisations informed on the current heritage and history issues engaging the community. Members of NTWA Council meet five times a year.

If you are interested, please contact –  
[secretary@histwest.org.au](mailto:secretary@histwest.org.au) 0423 142 864

### The Editor, History West

October's edition of History West is notable for its inclusion of Ruth James and Ian Berryman. I contemplated the question 'Where does all this history go?' Ruth's work as an historian is the very fabric of what makes the RWAHS. It is mentioned that much of Ian's research remains unpublished. Occasionally, I think about the vast research notes left by authors like Ruth and Ian. Those indeterminable journeys into the rich basket of Western Australian history, every stitch picked or unpicked. I don't wish to ruin an already stretched metaphor, but it reminded me just how lucky the RWAHS is in its coat of many colours. As RWAHS moves towards a 100-year commemoration, may the celebration enrich the significance. The curtain that rises and falls on historical endeavours at the Royals is pretty cool.

**Brendan Kelly**



## State History Conference 2025 History meets nature at Cockburn

Congratulations to **conference convenor Denise Cook, the City of Cockburn and Cockburn Historical Society** for hosting an excellent conference in the comfortable Jakovich Centre at Henderson. This was the 60th State History Conference, last held at Cockburn in 2009. The three-day event truly highlighted the ‘faces and places’ of Cockburn and gave all of us a richer understanding of the local environment and people’s histories within it. We were welcomed to Country by Vaughan McGuire who sang an old men’s song about the trap door spider for us. It was an evocative introduction.

Many people’s stories followed over the two days, beginning with those of Midgegooroo and his son Yagan whose country it was when colonists first arrived in 1829. His home at Mendyarrup has not yet been located on maps but his role as patriarch and warrior is well-known. The conference began with a presentation which explored his and Yagan’s resistance and deaths seen from a Whadjuk perspective, making good use of G F Moore’s diary. The district’s history as a world of market gardens and nurseries, most of them run by recently arrived (and struggling) southern European families, was told via a panel consisting of Jeanette Paulik, Rita Lovreta and Maria Blagaich. They recalled growing up and working in the gardens seven days a week in the interwar and postwar years as ‘really hard work’; ‘life was tough’ but ‘work didn’t kill us’. Erik and Joshua Surjan remembered with affection ‘Dida Ante’s Vino’ and their pleasure in the three-generation continuation of their Dalmatian-Croatian heritage of winemaking at Spearwood.

Ross Anderson explored the district’s maritime history telling of shipwrecks and the creation of maritime heritage sites. Criena Fitzgerald told of the 1890s camel trade when approximately 1,000 camels a month were imported, agisted and then transported mostly to the goldfields. Her story was a dark one of intrigue and the 1896 murder of Abu Hussain by his servant Moochand. Michael O’Connor explored the life of Wandu Dixon (c1880-1950), an Aboriginal boxer and stockman who, for most of his life, was part of the Cockburn community. Maeve Harvey traced the varied history of Coogee Beach from the ‘garden of the West’ through the period when it accommodated noxious industries to its current boom in residential development. The talks concluded with Andrea Gaynor’s fascinating account of the district’s areas of reserves and parks, how they survived to flourish into the future.

**Passion and Protest: Cockburn Community Speaks Up?**, curated by Jo Darbyshire, proved a stirring exhibition to browse between sessions.

Altogether a splendid conference and our thanks to everyone who made it such a success!





## Conference Tours

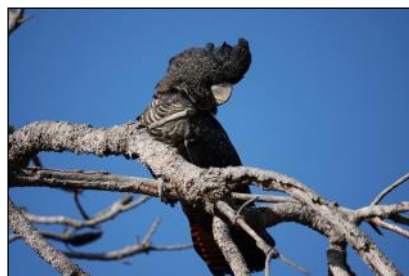
Tours held on both afternoons were enjoyed although the weather proved challenging, particularly on Sunday when storms swept through the district. Nevertheless the intrepid were undeterred as the following accounts indicate.

Jeanette Longwood enjoyed visiting **Bibra Lake/ Walliabup**: ‘Appropriately we set off in pouring rain, the bus parting water like a sturdy boat. A commentary during the drive pointed out revegetation sites and significant trees. We arrived at the amazing Wetlands Centre, the culmination of a concerted effort by determined volunteers. Nandi Chinna explained the Centre’s history while Lynnette Coomer spoke of her memories of living at the Shenton Park Camp and later in a house near Bibra Lake. She told of walking to local schools with family, playing in the bush, and how the kids caught gilgies in the lake. Some visitors then took the opportunity for a brief walk near the Centre while others enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea’.

Georgina Wigley visited **Manning Park**: ‘Tony Bird, City of Cockburn’s Museum Officer, spoke of the rich history of these biodiverse wetlands which are an environmental treasure housing many threatened species, including the snake-necked turtle. It is a reminder of the importance of maintaining these ecosystems given the pressures of advancing urbanisation. The Azelia Ley Homestead Museum is surrounded by stately tuart trees, once a dominant species in the Spearwood dune system. Azelia was part of the wealthy merchant Manning family and grew up within the confines of the park in a home called ‘Davitak’, now a ruin. Today archaeologists view this place as a source of artefacts which they can use to unravel the area’s material history. Azelia returned as a widow to live in what she called Manning Tree House, now the Azelia Ley Homestead. History remembers Azelia as a well-read, grumpy recluse who was liable to take pot-shots at anyone trespassing on her land. After her death in 1954 the homestead fell into disrepair and it was not restored until the 1980s. Today it is a beautifully maintained museum filled with displays telling Azalia’s story as well as the diverse history of Cockburn and its surrounds’.

Fiona Bush described her visit to **Woodman Point**, the former Quarantine Station, as ‘a tour through history’: ‘Land at Woodman Point was set aside for quarantine purposes by 1836 although initial facilities were poor to non-existent. The arrival of scarlet fever on board a ship in Fremantle in 1886 saw authorities scramble to provide accommodation for those who needed to be quarantined. By this stage quarters for visiting medical staff had been constructed but nothing more and passengers had to be accommodated on cargo ships. Additional buildings were gradually added to the site including an isolation hospital, observation ward and, later still, dormitories for passengers. The interior of the main dining hall, constructed c1912, features an unusual truss roof which has been attributed to its designer, a shipwright whose inspiration came from the upside-down hull of a boat. Patients who died at the station were cremated. Constructed in the 1890s, it was Australia’s first crematorium and registered as the State’s first bubonic plague crematorium in 1903 in response to an outbreak of this disease. It was last used in April 1943 for a smallpox victim. The station was placed on the State’s Heritage Register in 2006, its buildings now used for recreational purposes’.

*Many thanks to historian and ‘birder’ Leonie Stella who shared photographs she has taken over the years of Bibra Lake’s many wonderful birds.*



## What's in a picture? The launch of the paddle steamer *Nirimba* Julie Taylor



P1999.4000

On Wednesday 23 October 1895 a large crowd, including important invited guests (and at least one dog!), gathered at the boatyard of Messrs W & S Lawrence on Bazaar Terrace, Perth. The occasion, captured in this photograph from the collection, was the launch of the paddle steamer *Nirimba*. As can be seen, the launch has a festive air with many flags fluttering in the breeze.

The *Nirimba* was built to the order of the Swan River Shipping Company.

Lady Forrest, wife of the Premier Sir John Forrest, had the honour of christening the new steamer. She can be seen standing at the bow, bottle of champagne in hand, ready to perform the ceremony.

The bottle was duly smashed and the *Nirimba* slid gracefully into the river without any hiccups. Guests repaired to a large marquee for refreshments. Rousing speeches commended the Lawrences for their workmanship and the *Nirimba*'s owner for its entrepreneurship.

The *Nirimba* was built of jarrah and the engines were locally built. Only the boiler was imported – from Adelaide. A trial voyage took place on Saturday 16 November. At 3.30pm the *Nirimba* cast off from the Swan River Shipping Company's wharf on Bazaar Terrace. A second trial took place on the following Wednesday, in which the *Nirimba* took a half load of wool to Fremantle. It was reported that she managed 12mph against a stiff sea breeze. A writer for the *West Australian* concluded that the *Nirimba* would 'prove a valuable addition to the company's fleet'.

The *Nirimba* became a familiar sight on the Swan. She transported goods between Fremantle and Perth, carrying cargo in her holds and towing lighters. The *Nirimba* was also fitted out for passengers; during holidays she took excursionists and picnickers between Perth and Fremantle, stopping at Point Walter and the Osborne Hotel on the way.

Goods had been carried on the river since the earliest days of the colony. By the time the *Nirimba* was launched, questions were being asked about the viability of the river trade in the face of competition from the railway. It was said that protecting the river trade was one of the reasons advanced for not building the Fremantle–Guildford railway in the early 1880s!

When the new Fremantle harbour was opened, the Railway Department was running the wharves and it was charging significant dues to the lighterage companies. The Swan River Shipping Company's general manager described the situation as a disgrace but there was an opportunity. The port was beset by congestion in goods traffic and the company suggested that English shippers with goods for Perth should write their bills of lading to Perth, not Fremantle.

The lighterage companies received goods directly from ships anchored in Gage Roads, thereby bypassing the blockage at the wharves (and the railway dues), and delivered the goods directly to merchants in Perth. Interviewed in February 1896, the Swan River Shipping Company said that it was carrying 200 tons of goods per day to Perth. It also explained that lighterage from Gage Roads directly to Perth saved 6d per ton over unloading at Fremantle and carriage by railway.

In the end the *Nirimba* steamed on the river for only ten years. In 1906 her machinery was advertised for sale by tender. The *Nirimba* joined the company's fleet of lighters and she continued to carry cargo on the river until October 1938.

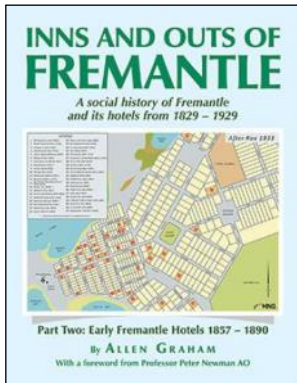
Eventually the river trade did fall away and its end came suddenly. The river trade had seen off the challenge from the railway, but motor transport finally sounded its death knell. By the end, the Swan River Shipping Company was working in co-operation with the other last surviving lighterage company, McIlwraith McEacharn Ltd. They decided that the trade was no longer viable and it ceased on Saturday 1 October 1938. Nearly sixty men – tug masters, lightermen, lumpers, clerks, watchmen, shipwrights and crewmen – were suddenly unemployed. The fleet was laid up.

In February 1945 the *Nirimba* was towed to the ships' graveyard north of Rottneest and scuttled.

## Book Reviews

**Allen Graham, *Inns and Outs of Fremantle: a social history of Fremantle and its hotels from 1829-1929, Part Two: Early Fremantle Hotels 1857-1890*, Xlibris, 2025. In Library & Bookshop \$75**

**Reviewer: Heather Campbell**



This book comprises part two of a planned trilogy on Fremantle hotels and, like part one, is an attractive and comprehensive volume. It has ten chapters arranged chronologically with enticing titles such as Ch. 1, 'A most miserably dull place 1857-1866' and Ch. 7, 'The Fenian Filibuster, coloured ribbons and coffee palaces 1881-1883',

finishing sensibly at Ch. 10 with 'State of things to come 1880-1890'. The book features an extensive list of illustrations, which appear liberally throughout and, as in part one, reproductions of Surveyor General Roe's 1833 Map of Fremantle, and a 1877 Plan of Fremantle. There is also a useful map showing the key hotels in Fremantle and a listing in order of opening.

Both parts one and two of this trilogy cover much more than hotels. As Graham says in his introduction, the book also 'tells the story of suffering and resilience of the early settlers and the hard economic and emotional deprivation they had to endure'. Meticulous research is evident in the numerous endnotes, extensive bibliography and invaluable index.

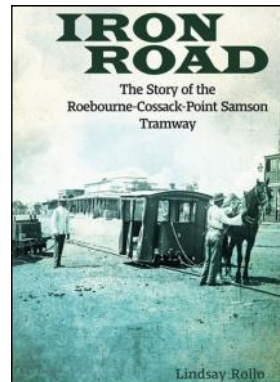
Images of newspaper cuttings are featured as well as black-and-white and colour photographs, all of which provide an evocative window into the past, as does the use of direct quotations. Local correspondent, 'Artizan', thought Perth hotels were inferior to those of Fremantle, asking:

Why, sir, should the bar rooms in Perth be so incomparably inferior to those in Fremantle? Why should not the working man be provided with decently furnished and wholesome rooms, in which they might sit in comfort, and drink their beer and enjoy their pipes amid decent surroundings, instead of being compelled to either lounge at the bar or to stay in rooms, which in every way are unfitted for the use of civilized beings? ... The working man is the publican's best customer, and I think his comfort should be attended to quite as carefully as that of the so-called upper classes. [p. 163]

In writing about the hotels of Fremantle, Allen Graham has also included the people of Fremantle who ran and patronised these places, providing the reader with insights into the lives of the ordinary people of those times.

**Lindsay Rollo, *Iron Road: The story of the Roebourne-Cossack-Point Samson Tramway*, self-published, 2025. In Library & Bookshop \$50**

**Reviewer: Heather Campbell**



*Iron Road* is a substantial history book of just over 300 pages with numerous illustrations in colour, and black and white, as well as maps, bibliography and index. It tells of much more than its title suggests, beginning by setting the scene for the ongoing story of the northwest and covering the period from 1880 to 1925 and beyond, through to a description of the northwest today.

Lindsay Rollo explores the community which fought so hard to get the tramway as well as other basic services. Strong local leadership was necessary to negotiate with a colonial government reluctant to spend money and located over 1,000km south in Perth. Another challenge arose from dealing with the various, ever-changing government departments, adept at passing responsibility for the tramway on to others. In addition, willy willies occurring every few years had devastating effects not only on the tramway itself but on the lives of residents.

The author brings the story to life at a human level by including personalities who worked on the tramway, as well as the washaways and regular accidents which occurred on the potentially dangerous line. For example, in 1912 and 1913 two serious accidents occurred. Little Leslie Bethuen, son of the government supervisor, must have been playing with his tricycle on the line – a driver found the trike. Later, Leslie was also found with a badly lacerated arm and bruised skull and taken unconscious to hospital. He was fortunate to survive. Early in 1913 Thomas Roche, a jockey and trainer, who had been in town for only a couple of days was found lying on the line, dead, with 'half his head taken away' having been run over by a train.

This is an excellent history book, well-researched and with a broad spectrum of references, including numerous primary sources. The author is to be congratulated on his meticulous use of those sources and for writing a cogent account of the tramway from the mass of material covered. It is more than the history of a tramway, it is part of the tale of the northwest and, as such, makes absorbing reading not just for those interested in trams and railways but also for those interested in the history of Western Australia.

### *Affiliates Newsletter*

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

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

**Christine Silbert, *How did I get here?* Christine Silbert, 2025. In Library & Bookshop \$38**

**Reviewer: Patrick Cornish**



The title is a question for the ages. And the answer, let us remember in these troubled times, is that millions of people of many backgrounds have warmed to fresh horizons in Australia. They got here because of curiosity but also because of desire for peace and prosperity.

Christine Silbert has cast her net wide but with a focus on her Jewish family. She writes that Abraham Silbert, born in Poland in 1864, ‘was financially able to travel to Australia, making it his home and persuading other family members to join him’. The persuasion worked.

So did the pilgrimage the author took in 2015 to the far eastern Polish town of Bialystok. She knew the border of the former Soviet Union was a few kilometres further east. Her book quotes two words ‘distinguished dynasty’ found on a gravestone in the cemetery. Dynasty? That continued in the southern hemisphere.

Christine expresses gratitude to a cousin, Eric Silbert, for his work on family trees. He spent many years as a Perth City Councillor, rising to deputy lord mayor and proud to have a St Georges Terrace garden named after him. His book, *Dinkum Mishpochah*, is an affectionate memoir with a title alluding to past and present. ‘Mishpochah’ is a Hebrew word for family.

Eric’s father, Barney Silbert, ran a clothing and footwear firm on one of Fremantle’s busiest corners, at Market and High Streets. It has figured in countless ‘Meet you at Barney’s’ arrangements over the decades. Christine has served not only her community but all the hopeful legions searching for a fairer life. That’s how so many got here.

## Book Note

**Ron K Forsyth & Ian K Forsyth, *A Hazardous Life: Captain George Forsyth, Mariner and First Harbour Master of the Colony of Western Australia*, 2019. In Library.**

Having just written a review of Ian Forsyth’s excellent book, *A Hazardous Port: Fremantle 1600-1900*, I was more than ready to read *A Hazardous Life: Captain George Forsyth, Mariner and First Harbour Master for the Colony of Western Australia*, by Ron and Ian Forsyth. George Forsyth features prominently in *A Hazardous Port*, particularly in the section covering the development and operation of the port (1829-1900). However *A Hazardous Life* focusses on him as an individual and, in following his career, provides insights and different perspectives on the development of Fremantle port, the changing fortunes of the colony, its social structure and the fractious personalities in government and politics. Through his work the reader is vividly reminded of the bravery of the men of the Colonial Harbour Masters Service, the dangers of work at sea and the numerous wrecks which littered the waters around Fremantle, particularly in the days of sail.

Through George’s personal life the reader sees the strict social mores of the times when he was ostracised for marrying a convict’s daughter and his potentially efficient administration and leadership was resented. This culminated in him being hounded from his role as Harbour Master and Head of the Department of Harbour and Lights at the relatively young age of 42 at the behest of a few prominent citizens. Subsequently he sought and found work as a master mariner for the next ten years, dying at the age of 52.

It is fortunate that George was a talented artist. Not only do his colour paintings show his artistic ability but also the correct details of maritime rigging of the time and the reality of a life associated with the sea in times past.

**Heather Campbell**

<b>Community Officer:</b>	Lesley Burnett
<b>Editor <i>History West</i>:</b>	Dr Lenore Layman

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