



# HISTORY WEST

THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

## President's Report 2025

I think it would be fair to say it has been one hell of a year for the Society and what has been achieved during that period is truly amazing.

The outstanding achievement has been the move to our new premises at 109, Stirling Highway, Nedlands. This move has not been without its anxieties and problems (mainly not of our own making!), but it has also seen a veritable army of volunteers work extremely hard on every aspect of the relocation to achieve the impossible in a remarkably short period of time ...the swan swimming serenely down the river, whilst its legs are paddling furiously under the surface of the water, springs to mind. Thank you to everyone involved – we could not have done it without you all.

During the period of transition, we tried to maintain 'business as usual' for as long as we could. However, the old meeting room had to be turned into a packing room very early on in the process and we are most grateful to the Rector and Parish Council of St Andrew's Church, West Nedlands for allowing us to use their parish hall for our monthly meetings and community talks.

Sadly, a number of members have died during the year, and we remember with gratitude their contribution to the Society:

Reg Appleyard, Fellow  
Ian Berryman  
Merle Bignell, OAM Fellow  
Colin Catyless  
Winston Foulkes-Taylor  
Anne Hairsine  
Gabor Hamory

Kevin Hogan OAM  
Adelphie King (and York Society)  
Mary Lilburne  
Ruth Marchant James, Fellow  
Janice Munt  
Rob O'Connor  
June Shenton-Turner

May they rest in peace.

Communication with our members and the wider public is a vital component of the Society's work and I thank Lenore Layman, who edits History West, our monthly newsletter so skilfully and Barry Sullivan who transforms the material into the very pleasing format we look forward to receiving every month. This is no small undertaking as is demonstrated by the amount of information contained in every edition. To those who contribute to this monthly digest, please keep the articles and news items coming; this makes the editor's job so much easier.

One of the jewels in the Society's crown is our annual journal, 'Early Days'. The first edition was published in 1927, and it has been published annually ever since. It was pointed out to me at the launch of this year's edition that 'Early Days' is now the only annual publication devoted to Western Australian history, which makes it a very significant journal. The journal has a wide readership, with copies going to libraries as far away as New York and Boston, USA.

As with previous editions, this year's 'Early Days' is very a high-quality publication, both in terms of its content and its reproduction. High praise goes to the Readings and Publications Committee, who oversee its production, with special mention going to Heather Campbell and Jennie Carter, the joint editors, who's hard work has produced yet another stellar edition. The publication was launched at a very enjoyable event at our new headquarters on Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> August.

Our 'on-line' presence is also vital as a means of communicating with members and we thank our Webmaster, Jeanette Longwood, for her work in keeping the website up to date and to all the contributors who supply information to her. Another important communication tool for the Society is our Facebook page, and thanks go to James Cassidy for keeping this up to date and interesting.

Because of the extra work involved in the purchase and commissioning of our new building, along with work on our governance and a branding refreshment, the Society's Council have meet in almost every month to manage our affairs, with the Executive Committee meeting as necessary to ensure the day-to-day smooth running of the Society. The Treasurer has continued her work on streamlining, improving and updating our accounting system, making it more efficient and compliant with modern accounting standards. I would also like to thank John Lukin, who has not renominated for Council this year. John has done an immense amount of work for the Society in updating our constitution document and many of our policies. His painstaking approach to this work has been much appreciated.

Our 'final fling' at Stirling House was the annual second-hand book sale over the weekend 4-6 April 2025. It was a slightly smaller affair this year as we could not use much of the internal space of the building, but the event was well patronised and produced around \$19,000 for the Society. As usual, at the end of the sale, a team of volunteers packed books to be sent to various charities shops in Perth. Then there were tables to be dismantled and signs to be taken down — a superb all-round effort completed the day. Our thanks go to the very hardworking team, under the leadership of Pamela and Nick, who once again enabled the Society to swell its coffers by a significant amount.

Unfortunately, after many years running the annual book sale Pamela and Nick have decided to retire from running the second-hand book sale, probably mainly for the sake of Nick's back when heaving heavy boxes of books around! We are hugely grateful to them for not only their organising skills, but also for storing much of the book stock in their garage. This of course leaves us with a vacuum, and I am wondering if there is anyone out there who would be willing to take on the role of organising the 'Jumbo Book Sale'? If not, we need to find a less labour-intensive event that would raise as much as the book sale to replace it.

Our Annual Lecture, 'Weaving History into Film Making', was held on Wednesday 2 July at UWA Club Auditorium. A large audience enjoyed Film and television producer Paul Barron's talk on his experience of weaving history into his long career in film making. Paul told us of his enjoyment in producing his 'Such was Life' project, for which he has now completed two series. These retellings of regional histories in film bring communities to life at particular points in time.

The Society's weekday morning community talks go from strength to strength and always draw a good audience. An excellent spin-off from the talks is the number of new members recruited at these events. Thanks go to those who organise the talks and the morning tea providers, who add a lovely, homely hospitality to the talks.

The bulk of the work of the Society is carried by our nine committees and our enthusiastic volunteers. I am sure their work to ensure a lively and active Society is very much appreciated by our membership. It never ceases to amaze me how much time our loyal, and very hardworking, group of volunteers gives to the Society. In a normal year the recorded volunteer hours average over 1,000 per month. However, I am willing to bet the figure was far higher per month this year because of all the work involved in moving house. What is also wonderful is that our volunteer force is one of the most-cheery group of people I know, which make it a pleasure to be amongst them. A heartfelt 'thank you' to you all: the Society would not survive without your loyalty and support.

The reports of these committees form an appendix to this document.

I would also like to pay tribute to our Community Officer, Lesley Burnett. She is the public face of the Society; a role she carries out with great aplomb. More than that, Lesley frequently goes above and beyond the call of duty to make sure our daily affairs run as smoothly as possible. Thank you, Lesley.

Looking ahead, next year is the centenary of the formation of the RWAHS, which gives us a superb opportunity to raise the profile of the Society and the work it does in recording the history of Western Australia. The anniversary, plus the fact we now have our headquarters in a very prominent position on the Stirling Highway, should enable us to be imaginative in the way we promote ourselves to the community at large. The Council is already thinking of ways to celebrate, for instance, the History Conference next year will take place in the State Library, with a centenary dinner in Perth Town Hall as part of the event.

By raising the Society's public profile, I hope we will be able to recruit a significant number of new members, which will greatly help our bank balance and, hopefully, find us some new volunteers to help with the day to day running of the organisation. To help organise our volunteer force, the Society's Council would like to find someone who would be willing to act as Volunteer Coordinator to help Lesley with recruiting, training, and managing volunteers to ensure their skills are effectively used to support our work. Please let either me or Lesley know if you would be interested.

We also need to think up some new fundraising events to help boost our finances, which are, not unnaturally after expenses of moving house, somewhat depleted. Anyone willing to take on the book sale, or any other major fundraising events would be very welcome.

Thank you to everyone who helps us to achieve our mission of ensuring present and future generations have access to the history of Western Australia your efforts are much appreciated.

Richard Offen  
President and Chair of Council  
October, 2025