

## GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting is on Wednesday 17 June at 6pm when Moira McKinnon will present a talk titled *'Hold Fast and March On: Life and Times of Mrs Mary Farrelly'*.  
History West Centre, 109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands  
Refreshments available from 5.30pm



Courtesy: Geraldton Historical Society



Lady Mitchell & Sir James Mitchell with Mrs Mary Farrelly, 1936. P2007.42FP



Von Mueller correspondence



Reasons why you should use more wheat – leaflet

Mary Farrelly was a founding member of the WA Historical Society. Born Martha Mary Maley, she grew up in Greenough in the Midwest, spending the last half of her life in Perth and Fremantle. Her life spanned the coming of the motor car and the telephone, the Great Depression and two world wars. She was well known for her extensive community work, her ardent beliefs and her broadcasts on good nutrition.

**Dr Moira McKinnon**, a great niece of Mary Farrelly, was born in Busselton, graduated in medicine in 1982 and has practised as a general practitioner and public health specialist in Australia and internationally. Moira, a birding enthusiast and now history enthusiast, lives with her husband on a small farm south of Geraldton close to the Greenough Museum and Gardens where her maternal ancestors lived.



Moira McKinnon

## Membership Update

In early May, the Society introduced a new and easier way for members to access and manage their own membership details. We have implemented **MembershipWorks**, a secure system linked to our website (though not visible on the public pages). This upgrade will streamline membership administration and reduce the workload on our bookkeepers, Treasurer, Secretary and Lesley in the front office. We also hope to appoint a volunteer Membership Manager to oversee the program. Please let us know if you are interested.

Members can now view and update their details by using the **Sign In** button on the top bar of our website: [www.histwest.org.au/](http://www.histwest.org.au/) Your **email address** is your username.

If you are signing in for the first time, simply request a password—MembershipWorks will email one to you, and you can change it once logged in.

After signing in, you will be able to see:

- Your membership history timeline
- annual payments
- future donation records
- your contact details (which you can update at any time)

We will provide short demonstrations before upcoming general meetings for anyone who would like guidance. Our thanks go to Sally Anne Hasluck Vice President, Klara Haselhurst Treasurer, and Hatchet IT for their work in setting up these new processes.

# 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



### Unsung Heroines

**Kim Edwards,**  
from *Swan River Pioneers 1829-1838*

**Citiplace Community Centre, Upper-Level  
Perth Railway Station Concourse**

**Wednesday 3 June, 2pm**

Have you thought about the women who were among the first settlers in the Swan River colony? Kim will tell you of the vital role women played in its survival.

They cooked with scarce supplies, nursed the sick, raised children in isolation, managed farms and households, and supported each other in often harsh conditions. Much of this work went unrecorded, not because it was unimportant but because it was considered normal at the time.

Their labour, expertise and resilience enabled families and communities to survive.

## NEIGHBOURS OPEN DAY



**An invitation for all Nedlands residents  
Members, help us grow the membership  
— come & invite a neighbour to  
Neighbours Day!**

**Saturday 13 June, 2pm-5pm**

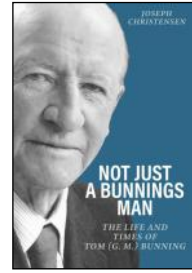
We are inviting nearby residents to explore, connect and enjoy a talk by local resident Sue Hobson at 2:15pm titled 'Origin of Nedlands Street Names', followed by afternoon tea and tours of the building.

Free Event. Bookings essential.

Please ring the office tel 9386 3841 or email [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)

Limited seating.

## COMMUNITY TALK



### The Bunning Brother: A Story of Success Joseph Christensen

**The History West Centre  
109 Stirling Highway Nedlands**

**Tuesday 23 June, 10 for 10.30am**

'Tom' Bunning helped make Bunnings one of the great successes of WA private enterprise and a household name nationwide. Tom joined Bunnings on the eve of the Great Depression and helped save the company from collapse. After three and half of years as a POW in Changi, he returned to Bunning Bros and remained at its helm throughout the long post-war boom, before laying the foundations for the eventual takeover of Bunnings by Wesfarmers in 1991.

Dr Christensen is a historian at UWA and Tom Bunning's biographer.

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



## RESERVE THE WEEKEND ! 61ST AFFILIATED SOCIETIES STATE HISTORY CONFERENCE 2026

### A Century of Change: Where to Next?

**Hosted by History West in the  
Society's centenary year**



**Friday 11—Sunday 13 September**

City of Perth Reception –  
Council House hosted by Lord Mayor  
Program of talks – Auditorium SLWA  
Conference dinner – Perth Town Hall  
Sun afternoon – Tours

# Community Talk Heroes, Villains and Vagabonds



Eliza Shaw



'Bully' Hayes



Moondyne Joe



Thomas Molloy



C Y O'Connor

Our April talk was given by Richard Offen who is a great storyteller. On this occasion he excelled himself with a set of cameos of some of the 'wonderful characters' who have peopled WA, for good or ill. Richard tells splendid yarns and here he provided a cast of 'heroes, villains and vagabonds' to entertain us.

First to occupy centre stage was Eliza Shaw of 'Belvoir' on the upper Swan. Wife of Will Shaw, one of the many half-pay officers who sought their fortune in the new colony, and mother of nine children, Eliza was brought to life via excerpts from her diary. Her life was a struggle – with constant financial difficulties, the drowning deaths of two of her children, husband Will's despair and the scattering of her surviving children around the expanding colony. A long life (1794-1877) lived as a member of the colonial elite but not an easy one.

William 'Bully' Hayes – captain, pirate, bigamist – followed. He arrived in the colony as master of the *CW Bradeley* in 1857 and remained in WA waters for three years by which time he was labelled 'a notorious maritime swindler'. His later exploits in the Pacific became even more notorious until mutiny led to his death in 1877. 'Scoundrel' and 'rascal' were labels commonly applied to him.

Then came Moondyne Joe – Joseph Bolitho Johns (1826-1900) – convict and bushranger. He was famous as a prison escapee but finally died in Fremantle Prison in a cell specially constructed to prevent his further escape. Both famous and notorious in his time, he has gathered more sympathy as time has passed.

Thomas Molloy (1852-1938) followed in this cavalcade. A Canadian who migrated to WA as a child in 1862, he made a success of his public life as a baker, businessman, Perth real estate speculator and landowner, MLA for Perth (1892-1894), Mayor (1908 & 1911) and city builder (notably the Theatre Royal and His Majesty's). His politics were reformist, indeed radical, but his volatile, argumentative and litigious character limited his political success. In later life he yearned for a knighthood but it was not forthcoming. However the Pope made him a papal knight in 1931 and he forthwith used the title 'Sir', including on his tombstone.

Finally we were reminded of the significance of C Y O'Connor in WA's story. Born in County Meath in Ireland, he migrated to New Zealand where he established himself as a successful engineer before migrating to WA to become its most famous engineer — building Fremantle Harbour and the 530k water pipeline from Mundaring to Kalgoorlie. His suicide in 1902 marked a tragic ending to his story and an enormous loss to WA.

The morning concluded with a lively discussion of other characters whose story could have been included, until the chair of proceedings, Jeanette Longwood, drew the interesting event to its end.

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## Commemorating Albany's Bicentenary, 1826-2026

**Albany/Kinjarling Historical Society** is in the midst of a busy year as it commemorates the bicentenary of British colonisation. Imperial Britain first named the place King George III's Sound, a name that quickly changed to King George's Sound and further to King George Sound in the 20th century. A military settlement sent from NSW was established by Major Lockyer in December 1826, marking Britain's first permanent footprint in Western Australia. While Albany developed in ways similar to other parts of Australia's western third it began differently – as a military and penal settlement with relatively peaceful and non-violent frontier interactions with the local Menang people. Albany has a proud past and enjoys inviting others to discover more about it. Its members' magazine is a highlight of its advertising.

The recent issue (Autumn 2026, Issue 2) contains, among many other features, an eight-page account of the life of Lady Ann Warden Spencer, wife of Albany's Government Resident Capt. Sir Richard Spencer (1833-1839). Sub-titled 'A Life from English Gentry to Pioneer and Colonial Matriarch', we learn of a mother of twelve children who endured the loss of four of her sons at young ages. She proved an effective colonist and partner to her husband who, after his death, lived as a widow in Albany for sixteen years. A second extended biography concerns Frederick North (1861-1949), the son of a convict. He began on labouring jobs, at Lockeville sawmill and as a seaman and wharf labourer. He eventually became a successful Albany farmer, active in local affairs and a member of the Albany Road Board.

The issue contains a variety of stories – including one section on 'Murderous moments in the Great Southern: uncovering lost murder cases' which details four murders committed between 1855 and 1934, two of them domestic violence cases. In contrast is an account of a rose – Rosa *Madame Isaac Pereire*. 'This remarkable Bourbon rose is far more than a garden favourite, it is a living connection to a fascinating story that stretches from the nurseries of nineteenth-century France to the grand salons of Parisian society'. There is something for everyone in this issue!

For more information on the Albany Historical Society go to – <https://www.historicalbany.com.au/team>

## CENTENARY STORIES

Barbara Harris

### The fourth decade: Finally, a home – Stirling House

For nearly 40 years, the Society did not have premises of its own. Meetings were held at first at the Karrakatta Club and then in the Methodist Mission Hall (285-289 Murray Street) and Boans' Chandelier Room (afternoon tea meetings); and the many donated historical items were variously stored: many at the homes of Council members, more valuable records in the Supreme Court vault and, after 1931, in a room in the Treasury Building as well as in other repositories spread around Perth. By the early 1960s a permanent headquarters had become an urgent necessity. Requests to government for help were unsuccessful, and it was largely due to the persuasive efforts of Dircksey Cowan and Dorothy Henderson (the dedicated Keepers of the Records) and the drive of the Secretary Erskine Shackson Whiteley that, in February 1964, the Society decided to purchase its own property, a building suitable for a museum and library as well as administrative headquarters.

A special committee was appointed to inspect potential properties and, a month later, it was resolved to purchase the property at 49 Broadway, Nedlands, on the corner of Clark Street near the University of WA. The house was built about 1920 by a builder for his family but it became the home of the Cullity family in 1928. Thomas Cullity, a cardiologist and 'father of the South-west wine region', lived there with his wife and family until 1954 when it was sold to his son Denis and his wife Anne (daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Meagher) who lived there with their family until 1961.

The property at 49 Broadway was very suitable for the Society because a large brick, stone and iron building in the back garden, although in need of renovation, made an excellent museum and storage space. As well the garden on three sides with a large back garden made an attractive place for summer parties and afternoon teas on the popular Fourth Sunday Openings.

The Society paid £8,000 for the building and named it 'Stirling House'. Not long after its formation in 1926, the Society had formulated as one of its objectives a permanent memorial to WA's first Governor Captain James Stirling, and a Stirling Fund was opened, although at that stage no decision was made as to the exact form this memorial would take. Approximately £1,000 was contributed but, when the 1930s depression hit followed by war, the appeal was halted and the plan postponed. When the Broadway property was procured, Council decided to devote the original Stirling Fund to this purpose and to name the building 'Stirling House'.

Finances have always been a major concern for the Society and raising the money to purchase Stirling House presented an enormous challenge. A committee of three (Ivor Birtwistle, Victor Courtney and George Barrett-Leonard) was established to devise ways and means of raising the necessary funds. As well as the £1,000 in the Stirling Fund, the government gifted £1,000 and the Society secured a bank overdraft for £5,500. A public appeal to liquidate the debt on the property and establish the museum and library raised about £1,500, and donations of 50 guineas or more qualified the donor for enrolment as a benefactor of the Society. Donations were listed in the Society's newsletter. The Women's Auxiliary was formed and set about fundraising, including jumble sales and bridge afternoons. Overall, a host of people helped pay for the new headquarters in cash or work or both.

The cost of paying for and running Stirling House left nothing for furniture and the Society managed with gifts or cast-offs from members and government departments. The presentation of a fine brass four-poster bed, brought to WA in 1830 on the ship *Tranby* by the Yorkshire farmer John Wall Hardy, inspired the naming of one room in his honour (Tranby Room).

The purchase of Stirling House enabled the Society to bring items out of storage and gather them together for research and display. There were thousands of donated items including photographs, furniture, letters, books, personal papers, costumes, china, silver, jewellery, embroidery and farm implements. It was decided to separate the collection into two sections: 'Library and Research' and 'Museum'. Erskine Whiteley assumed responsibility for the former and Dorothy Henderson for the latter (although she retained the title of Keeper of Records until 1970).

The task of locating, sorting, indexing and displaying items was onerous and it was decided to organise working bees to undertake this work under the supervision of Dorothy Henderson. She sought advice from Molly Lukis, State Archivist and Librarian, and the working bees followed a plan drawn up by Molly for sorting, classifying and card-indexing the historic collection. That work continued for three months.

Without full-time office staff, a roster of members was drawn up so that the museum could be open to the public, at least for a few hours on Sunday and Wednesday.

Stirling House was officially opened on the morning of 5 June 1965 and, despite inclement weather, it was a memorable occasion. His Excellency the Governor, Major-General Sir Douglas Kendrew undertook the opening and the Minister for Industrial Development, Charles Court, represented the government, giving an address. His Excellency stressed that the achievement was made possible only by the efforts of many people, including Ivor Birtwistle, Paul Hasluck, Malcolm Uren and Dorothy Henderson. Lady Kendrew, using the Stirling Sword loaned by the WA Art Gallery, cut a cake on which was a model of the 'Parmelia'. The cake was served with Parmelia wine, made from the grapes of John Septimus Roe's Sandalford Vineyard. A few days later, on 8 June, a Sherry Party was held for members of Council and their spouses to celebrate the occupation of the new premises.

Council appointed Vice-President Ray Oldham and her husband John to curate the first museum exhibition. John Oldham had considerable experience in designing and setting up a number of large exhibitions for the Commonwealth government during and after the war. With no funds, Ray sought donations and enlisted the voluntary help of display expert Allan Baker, Assistant-Director of the Perth Art Gallery. She enlisted other



Stirling House  
P1999.7127



Governor Kendrew at opening function  
P2010.282



Honour Guard  
P2010.280

volunteers as well: Dr Ryde, Director of the Perth Museum, Mr Halls who was in charge of the Arms and Armaments Section of the Museum, and a number of young architects. She also obtained a loan from the Art Gallery of a selection of Lady Forrest's wildflower paintings for the official Exhibition opening on Sunday 4 October.

Whilst 'Stirling House' offered a 'home', the Society was not completely satisfied because it lacked cultural status as well as suitable space, particularly for a meeting room. It was 'a stepping stone' and the Society continued to search for larger premises. Overtures were made for Crawley House, the Cloisters and Old Perth Boys School but these efforts were unsuccessful. Instead, the Society commissioned building alterations and, when these were completed in the late 1970s, 'Stirling House' comprised an office, library, museum, and rooms for meetings and small social functions.

These premises then served well as the Society's home for 60 years but, by the 1990s, both limitations of space and the condition of the building became problematic and conversations began as to how these issues could be overcome. One proposal was to extend the building by constructing a second storey but this was rejected because it would mean relocating the collection for a lengthy period. Re-building on the site proved too costly so, in 2025, the Society left 'Stirling House' and moved to new premises, named the History West Centre, at 109 Stirling Highway, Nedlands.

## Busy volunteers in these years

**Dorothy Henderson** took over from Dircksey Cowan as Keeper of Records in late 1952 and continued in the role until the establishment of 'Stirling House' when she became the first museum committee convenor. Dorothy Erickson described the change:

**Dorothy Henderson** retired as Keeper of the Records in 1964 to start a Museum Committee. This comprised **Rica Erickson, Mary Tamblyn, Rod Kelly and Murray Mason**. Rica, a retired farmer's wife was a naturalist, artist and author. She had opened the pioneering Toodyay Gaol Museum and later started the Biographical Index of Western Australians that resulted in a series of dictionaries documenting the citizens of WA from the very beginning of European settlement. Rod was an antique dealer with distinct ideas about museum arrangements, son of Nancy Kelly (1915-2018) who so diligently indexed the photographic collection in the 1980s. Mary was a high school teacher who organised the Society's enjoyable and informative tours from 1966, and Murray was a teacher and later a well-known art critic. Even though storage space was a premium Rod was keen to acquire more furniture for the building. They decided the men would have the garage cum shed for the miscellaneous objects, instruments, tools and equipment. Meanwhile the women wrapped objects for storage and, after securing some glass topped cabinets, arranged displays of delicate treasures, framed artworks and garments.

**Ernest 'Ern' S Whiteley** served on Council for much of the 1950s and 1960s as vice-president (1953-1957), chair of Council (1958) and secretary (1964-1967), his service recognised with the award of an honorary life membership in 1967. Ern was always an active historical researcher and fittingly, as an 'insurance man', his first paper presented to the Society concerned 'The Birth and Progress of Insurance', a detailed account of the development of insurance in 19th century WA (*Early Days*, 10, Dec. 1948). He and his wife Grace undertook detailed research on HMS *Sulphur* which accompanied the *Parmelia* and carried a detachment of the 63rd Regiment to the colony. They produced an index of 'The first five hundred' (settlers who arrived between June and November 1829) as well as a general survey of the early military establishment, details of military posts, a biographical index and statistical information on each regiment. The couple's research paid tribute to the Royal Navy and Army personnel who helped establish the Swan River colony. These 1960s manuscripts were privately circulated and copies located in the Society's library and the State Library, testimony to the challenge of private publishing prior to the arrival of digital technology. Hesperian Press published E S Whiteley & C G S Whiteley, *The Military Establishment in Western Australia 1829-1863* in 2010.

*History West has no photograph of Ern Whiteley and would be delighted if any reader can help us fill this gap.*



Dorothy Henderson in period costume for a Society function.  
P1999.1669

# Centenary Lecture

## Perth in the 1920s

with speakers **Malcolm Quekett & Richard Offen**

Approximately 150 members and friends enjoyed an interesting talk commemorating History West's centenary – a look back at WA, focusing on Perth, a century ago. What was Perth like then and what were West Australians experiencing when our Society was established? We welcomed Marina Valmadre, president of the Karrakatta Club, as MC for the evening. She reminded us of the long-time connections of the Club and the Society, our meetings being held at the Club's rooms in St Georges Tce for the first twenty years of our existence and our memberships overlapping, particularly in the early decades (a notable instance being Edith Cowan). Special guests for the evening were Mr Brett Fullerton, CEO of Peet Ltd, and descendants of Peet Ltd's founder, J T Peet.

Malcolm Quekett, journalist, news editor and deputy editor of the *West Australian* newspaper, set the 1920s scene, beginning with the long and painful legacy of the Great War, which caused continued suffering and grief stretching through the postwar years. Malcolm reminded us of the c32,000 who enlisted and the 6,400 West Australians who died as a result. Few families were left untouched. The Spanish flu followed immediately and added more misery. Premier Mitchell's land development schemes promised a land of milk and honey but delivered little of it indeed to the 'Groupies'. The visit of the dashing Prince of Wales, Prince Edward, in mid-1920 was a completely happy occasion, even though it included a worrying train derailment. Malcolm then reminded us of the 1925 Governor's ball murder when aggrieved lover Audrey Campbell Jacob shot Cyril Gidley. With the assistance of her lawyer, Arthur Haynes, she was sensationally acquitted in the 'trial of the decade'. The 1920s also saw the birth of aviation and Malcolm's talk culminated with the 1929 Centenary pageant. Altogether a series of vivid snapshots of the decade.

President Richard Offen followed, focusing on the growth of Perth, which he described as 'little more than a large country town' at the time. The success of Peet's land sales feature here, with rapid suburban growth across the interwar decades. Wireless (6WF) was another wonder of the decade, first broadcasting in 1924. Automobile ownership grew and car sales and maintenance firms, such as Winterbottoms, grew alongside the numbers of private cars. In 1926 the Main Roads Dept was established as attention turned to the creation of more driveable roads. Most city dwellers, however, depended on the wonders of electric trams to move between home and work and entertainments. The tram network crisscrossed the suburbs and linked them to the CBD. Shoppers flocked to the grand department stores (Boans, Foy & Gibson, Bairds), the city's heartbeat in these interwar years. Cinemas screening the latest film shows were another highlight of entertainment in the city. White City (or Ugly Land) at the foot of William St provided popular entertainment for a while but also drew much social opprobrium. It was demolished at the close of the decade as the depression hit. Crawley Baths and other river baths had longer lives and remained popular, especially for swimming lessons, through to the 1950s.

The 1920s proved a decade of change for Perth. Both Malcolm and Richard provided vivid slide shows of the events and fabric of the city across the decade, making the evening a fascinating journey back in time to an interwar city. MC Marina Valmadre thanked the speakers and Vice President Sally Anne Hasluck thanked everyone who made the evening an enjoyable one. And we all adjourned for celebratory drinks, courtesy of Peet Ltd.



## James Thomas Peet: A Remarkable Man

Georgina Wigley



Creative, adventurous, community-minded, visionary are just some of the words that come to mind when examining the life of James Thomas Peet, the man who founded Peet & Co. in 1895. James Thomas Peet was born in Nottingham, England, in 1862. His keen intellect was recognised early. According to family folklore, Peet was one of the two children selected each year by the local squire to be educated at Hawkstone School. The opportunity this provided the young Peet was immeasurable.

After several years working on the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain as a surveyor and draftsman, developing skills which would serve him well in his future career, the adventurous Peet set sail for Brisbane in 1886. His love of challenges came to the fore again when he left Queensland's Lands and Titles Office in 1888 to find employment in Victoria's booming economy. There he worked as a draftsman on the Mildura and

Renmark irrigation scheme. By 1891 the ambitious, land-focused Peet had moved to Melbourne and set up a real estate partnership with Austin Bastow, later to become Mayor of Subiaco. However a downturn in Victoria's economy prompted the ever-entrepreneurial Peet to look further afield and set his sights on WA's burgeoning economy, a product of the goldrushes.

In 1895 Peet established his real estate business in the colony's fledgling capital, Perth. To him 'the West' was a place of promise, a vision he promoted with vigour for the remainder of his life. He understood that the wealth generated by gold would trigger rapid population growth and foster Perth's expansion. The buying and selling of land was always at the heart of his enterprise, his passion for land captured in a comment he made in 1912: 'Business may fail, stock and shares may disappear, but land remains unchanged and indestructible, forever'.

Peet married Mabel (née Urch) from Kalamunda in 1896. Initially they resided in Adelaide Tce before moving to 403 Newcastle St, West Perth, in 1903. He named this place 'Hawkstone', a salute to his origins. It was close enough for him to cycle to his office in William St and later St George's Tce. Cyril, his eldest son, fondly remembered his father cycling home for lunch each day.

Peet consistently sought ways to improve his business. In 1896 he was appointed a sworn valuator to add to his company's offerings. Soon his acumen attracted the attention of decision-makers and in 1899 he was appointed a Government Land Agent, a position held till 1905. Not one to stop here, Peet went on to increase the range of services available to prospective clients, including rent collection, insurance brokerage, auctioneering and finance. However land sales and subdivision implementation across Perth's expanding urban landscape, and later rural areas, remained the core of Peet's work.

In 1905 Peet & Co. Ltd was legally incorporated, reflecting the success of his enterprise. The *Sunday Times* in 1907 extolled the virtues of 'this up-to-date company'. '[It] had plans of nearly every subdivision made within the last 12 years in Perth and suburbs'. Peet's impact on Perth's growth and spread was enormous. By 1912 the company's portfolio was responsible for 96 estates encompassing an area extending north to Scarborough, east to the Darling Range and, to a limited extent, south (although the Swan River posed a barrier).

Peet's impact was much more than land subdivisions. For example, he was a pioneer in the field of land finance. He believed individuals had a right to land and home ownership and, to enable this, he sold land on a small deposit and a small monthly payment. Cyril Peet commented (1978), 'father was the first to introduce land sales in W.A. on a pound deposit and ten shillings a month, free of interest'. In his quest to market affordable housing Peet went a step further and, from 1910, offered potential homeowners a reasonably priced tent to live in whilst their homes were being built to avoid the burden of rent. His advertising caught people's attention with the catchy slogan, 'If you're on a building bent and haven't a cent, we'll start you with a tent. Go to Peet'.

Advertising was another area where he broke new ground. Peet's personal *Album of Opinions*, now held in History West's library, reveals his love of riddles, rhymes, humorous stories, jokes and limericks. He transferred this love to create advertising posters peppered with words and eye-catching illustrations carefully curated to woo potential customers to visit his sale sites. For example, in 1913 he encouraged buyers to inspect 'Delightful Dalkeith: The Cream of Claremont', picturing a well-dressed couple in a seductive pose inviting customers to 'OBEY THAT IMPULSE'. As this estate was not close to a train station he added more incentives, including a clever design feature at its centre called Circe Circle. The advertising proclaimed a break from the formal patterning of streets and blocks and the advent of 'The Suburb Beautiful' which used crescents, curves and graceful lines to develop a picturesque place to live. Another masterful touch, recalled by his grandson Lindsay Peet, was to purchase a De Dion Bouton car and employ a full-time chauffeur to drive interested clients to inspect the subdivision. Lindsay recalled a family legend that if the clients did not buy a block they had to walk back to the train station. The personalised driving of clients to his many subdivisions became an integral part of his marketing style.

As well as being a market leader in real estate Peet was a philanthropist. Numerous letters of thanks held in History West's collection make it clear that no community cause was too small to attract his attention. During World War I he patriotically supported the making of sandbags to send to troops overseas, declaring that 'one bag may save a man's life'. In 1916 he donated a block of land in Mt Hawthorn to build ANZAC Cottage, a memorial to those who served in Gallipoli and a home for a wounded soldier and his family; now managed by the National Trust WA. His gifts to charitable organisations over his life were said to have amounted to more than £10,000.

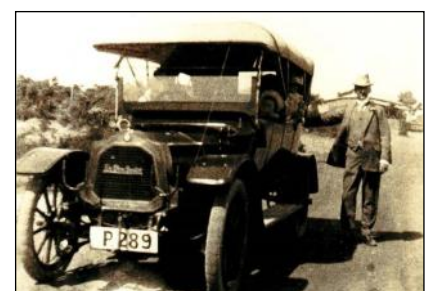
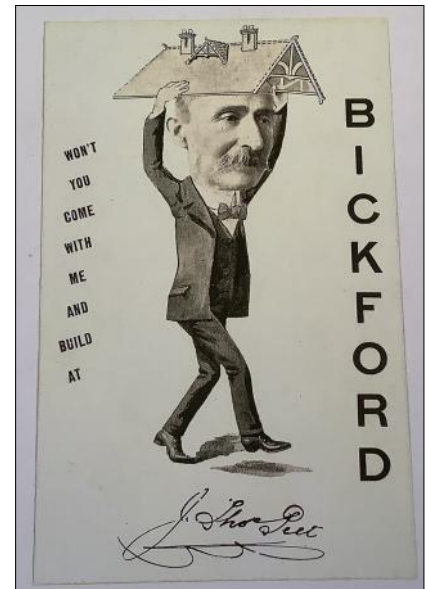
The letters Mabel received after her husband died, available in History West's library, describe a positive, caring, kind, family-oriented, generous person who was ahead of his time in business dealings. Peet worked tirelessly to create liveable and affordable housing communities to suit a range of budgets. The legacy created by this remarkable man still lives on over 130 years later as Peet Limited, now a national enterprise.

## References

C Jeffery, Cyril Peet interview, 1978 SLWA.

B Rogers, *Peet: 120 Years (1895-2015)*, Peet Ltd, Perth, 2015.

*Post*, 26 March 2011, p 15. *Sunday Times*, 3 Nov 1907, p 5. *West Australian*, 28 Aug 1935, p 17.



## A recent donation to the museum collection Montgomery's Travelling Pocket Watch

Bruce Hoar

*The Society is delighted to receive the donation of a silver travel watch from a great granddaughter of Sydney Hamilton Rowan Montgomery, the first 'Inspector General of the Insane' in Western Australia. Montgomery played a key role in the development of WA's mental health services in the early years of the 20th century and his watch is a tangible reminder of his life.*



Travelling pocket watch MA2026.8

The watch is dated 6-2-10 and it is likely that it was a gift from colleagues and friends when he was appointed branch president of the British Medical Association in the State. It has been engraved with the names of his colleagues, including Dr John Theodore Anderson (and wife Hazel). Anderson succeeded Montgomery as Inspector General in 1916. There is also a signature of Captain Dr James Bentley, who succeeded Dr Anderson in 1926. Dr Bentley served in Gallipoli and France with distinction

during World War I. Another signature is that of Michael Gibson Lavan, a well-known lawyer in Perth in the early 20th century who successfully represented Montgomery in his libel case against the *West Australian* newspaper.

The hallmarks on the travel watch casing showing an anchor with lion passant signify that it was made in Birmingham and the letters H and M that it was the work of silversmith Harry Matthews in 1907. Matthews' business was in Vittoria Street (from 1894 to 1930) and was a famous part of the 'Jewellery Quarter' in Birmingham. Edwardian-era travelling pocket watches (from the years 1901-1910), made in Birmingham, often featured robust high-quality silver cases as this one does. It also has a moveable leg enabling the watch to stand beside a bedside or on an occasional table. It was a versatile timepiece for a busy professional man.

Montgomery had a challenge ahead of him on arrival. From 1852 mental patients in the colony had been accommodated at the Fremantle Asylum (now the Walyalup Fremantle Arts Centre) and later also at Whitby Falls in Serpentine. By the late 1890s these facilities were overcrowded and their management in disarray.

In 1900 the Government set up a Select Committee to find an experienced person to administer asylums in WA. Dr Sydney Montgomery, a graduate of the Royal University in Belfast (1894) was recruited and arrived with his wife in 1901. Montgomery had started as a ship's surgeon then took up a position as a medical officer specialising in the treatment of the insane in Nottinghamshire. In addition, he came into close contact with a local architect who designed asylums throughout England. This was to stand him in good stead on the other side of the world.



Sydney  
Montgomery

On his arrival in WA, Montgomery hit the ground running. Firstly, he accompanied the WA Government Architect John Grainger to the eastern states to inspect similar facilities and to discuss the various Lunacy Acts in place there. He returned to Perth and set about finding a new site for an asylum. A site in Claremont (now Mt Claremont) was eventually chosen, and Montgomery went on to work closely with Grainger to design the new facility. At the same time he was working on a new WA Lunacy Act which was enacted in 1904. He received the title of 'Inspector General of the Insane' and the new facility became the Claremont Hospital for the Insane (later Swanbourne and Graylands) and was opened in stages over the following years.

The facilities included a farm where Montgomery pioneered open wards for some of the 'harmless' patients who worked the farm, cooked their own meals and abided by a 10pm curfew. These asylum inmates often won awards at the Royal Agricultural Show for their breeding of cattle and pigs. Montgomery also began a training course for the education of mental-care nursing staff, the first graduating students in 1906.

Despite many accolades for his tenacity and far-sightedness, Montgomery was also criticised in the press, often because of prejudice and indifference towards those with mental health issues. At one stage he sued the *West Australian* newspaper for libel when they printed disparaging remarks on the operations of the hospital. He ultimately won the case and was awarded damages with costs.

With his family growing, Montgomery also worked with Grainger to design and build a new residence for the Inspector General which stands today at 1 Grainger Close in Mt Claremont. It was completed in 1910 and six of the seven directors (formerly called Inspector Generals) who followed Montgomery also lived in this residence. The park next door is named Director's Gardens.

Montgomery played his part in the local community. He was a member of the Weld Club, was a Freemason, President of the local branch of the British Medical Association and played golf, tennis, rugby, lacrosse and billiards. Sadly he died in 1916 from a heart attack (his second) after playing a strenuous game of tennis on a hot day. He was only 47 years old and left a wife and five young children, including a one-year-old.

His contribution to mental health in WA was enormous, with many of his ideas still relevant today. The main building in Mt Claremont accommodating the original dining room and theatre was named Montgomery Hall in his honour, and today is available as a venue for weddings, corporate events and private functions. The other buildings that still remain have been restored and converted to an Aegis aged-care facility called Aegis Montgomery House.

### Reference

A S Ellis, 'Montgomery of Claremont- The First Fifteen Years', *Early Days*, 7 (7) 1975.

## What's in a picture?

### The Coal Arch

Julie Taylor



Coal Arch P2002.300



Timber Arch  
P2002.305



Chamber of  
Commerce Arch  
P1999.1770



Chinese Arch P1999.1772



Railway Arch P1999.532



Gold Arch 1999.538b

This intriguing structure was the 'Coal Arch'. It was one of twelve decorative arches which were constructed to span central Perth streets along the route taken by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, later King George V and Queen Mary, on their visit to Perth in March 1901. Western Australia was the couple's last port of call in Australia after they attended the opening of the first Australian federal parliament in Melbourne in May 1901. At that event the duke performed his primary royal duty, reading a message from his father, Edward VII, to the new nation. Thus, for Perth, the occasion was a double celebration – a royal visit and Australia's federation.

Each street arch was designed to represent an important part of Western Australian life. The Coal Arch was built of pillars of coal which supported turrets topped in heraldry, flags and bunting. It stood on St Georges Terrace near Trinity Church and carried the inscriptions: 'Welcome shall they be' and 'Let a British Ensign wave friendly'. Why coal? The State was proud of its emerging coal industry at Collie where the mineral had been discovered in the 1880s. The Collie Coal Mining District was declared in 1896 and the crucial railway connection to carry coal to Perth was completed in 1898. Coal began to power furnaces as the State established its first secondary industries and the possibilities of coal-fired generation to produce electricity was just beginning to be understood. Coal was, at this time, a modern mineral with bountiful promise to power society into the 20th century.

Arches also celebrated other important industries – agriculture, gold, timber and railways – as well as the Chamber of Commerce, the Chinese community and Kings Park. Most of the arches were decorated with garlands and flags and built in the style of castles or classical architecture. The exception was the futuristic Gold Arch: four simple arcs held aloft a golden ball. As well as the decorative arches, many buildings were festooned with inscriptions, flags and garlands. Other tokens of welcome, such as illuminated addresses, were presented to the visitors.

The weather had been very wet in the lead-up to the visit and the completion of the decorations was delayed. Some worried that everything would be spoiled. But all was completed just in time and everything looked splendid once the sun came out. The press declared that Perth's decorations were the equal of those in the larger cities of the eastern states.

Citizens who had wanted to greet the royal visitors at Fremantle as the *Ophir* docked were disappointed. A violent northwesterly gale forced the *Ophir* to double back to Albany and the duke and duchess disembarked there. A special train was quickly arranged and the royal visitors arrived in East Perth at midnight on Sunday 21 July. It rained incessantly on that day but there was 'glorious golden sunlight' for the next five days of the visit.

The arches and other decorations were temporary but there are lasting reminders of the visit, one of which was the naming of Kings Park. During the visit the duke officially named the park in honour of Edward VII, and the new circular road in the park was named May Drive – the duchess was known to family and friends as May. An arch decorated with garlands made from plants in the park overlooked the ceremony.

While the duke and duchess fulfilled their official duties, the *Ophir* steamed from Albany to Fremantle and took on coal for the onward voyage. After the final formalities in Fremantle the couple departed for South Africa on Friday 26 July in the afternoon. A large crowd gathered to wave them goodbye.

This royal tour of the Empire lasted in all for almost eight months, most of it spent in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa, with brief stops at Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Ceylon, Singapore and Mauritius. The couple travelled almost 50,000 miles. The Orient Steam Navigation Company's luxurious mail steamer *Ophir* served as royal yacht for the duration of the tour.

# In the early days of the colony: 'vine dressers and market gardeners' struggle to survive

Hilaire Natt



For early settlers in the Swan River Colony, survival was a struggle in an alien environment with upside down seasons and strange plants, animals and people. Isolation and lack of regular shipping made it vital to grow their own food. But how? Many settlers had their gardens and vineyards but traditional methods of agriculture often failed in the sandy soils and harsh climate.

## Enter 'Spanish vine dresser' John Bancells

In a letter to the editor of the *Inquirer* on 1 April 1863, 'H T DEVINISH, Guildford', is enthusiastic in his praise of that 'sadly under rated practical vine dresser, Mr John Bancells ... the treatment my vines have had from the hands of John Bancells has been the means of their bearing such a fine crop this year and also accounts for the very heathy state they are now in'.

John Bancells had arrived as a missionary with Bishop Salvado on board the *John Panter* in 1853. He was one of the Spanish Benedictine Brothers who later left the Mission to make his way as a colonist. Juan Pedro Vancells (aka John Peter Bancells) was born on 14 May 1827 in Massanet de la Selva, Gerona, Spain to Pedro Marti Vancells and Josepha Mollare (or Mullera). He trained as a tailor and was 25 years old when he joined Salvado's missionary group in Barcelona in 1852. Little is known of his life in Spain but, judging from his skill as a 'Spanish vine dresser' and market gardener in WA, he probably worked in a vineyard and/or market garden in his youth.

On arrival in Fremantle, he was sent by Bishop Salvado with the missionary group to develop the New Norcia Mission. They spent nearly two years there working in primitive conditions to develop a farm, 'fencing, planting crops, caring for the flocks of sheep' (Salvado Report 1884). There was little demand for tailors but Salvado insisted the Mission farm be self-supporting and Bancells developed his skills as a market gardener in unfamiliar conditions. In mid-1855 he was among those recalled to Perth by Bishop Serra to work on Serra's monastic buildings and, like many others, disillusioned by the lack of missionary opportunities, left the Benedictines on 1 April 1856 to settle in the colony.

On 6 June 1861 John was a witness at the wedding of fellow ex-missionary, carpenter Isidro Oriol and Irishwoman Mary Leahy, who had arrived in the colony in 1859. The other witness was Mary's friend Catherine Walsh who had arrived with her on the same ship (Natt, *From Barcelona to the Swan River. The Oriol Family from 1825 to 1962*). A year later in 1862 John and Catherine were married at the same little Catholic Church and a few years later John had established a thriving market garden business at Brandon Hill (or Rivervale) on Guildford Road.

## Bancells market gardener

Bancells was an energetic entrepreneur and over the next decades employed 46 ticket-of-leave men as gardeners and labourers in his market garden while he sold his produce from a horse and cart around the colony. We know much about Bancells' life thanks to his eldest daughter Angela Mary, born in 1862, who travelled with him in the late 1860s and 1870s, and wrote reminiscences which were published in the *Western Mail* in the 1930s and 1940s.

Discussing early settlers' agricultural methods Angela Mary writes that her father:

always kept pigs, chiefly for the manure, and both horses and cattle were always brought in at night and well bedded down for the same reason... Stable manure was valuable in those days and Mr Douglas, of South Perth, used to supply the police station (then situated near what is now Coode-street jetty) with straw for bedding down the horses, receiving the manure in exchange.

She also describes the selling trips with a cartload of vegetables when she and her father went 'selling from house to house' in Perth, Fremantle and Guildford, trips which lasted for several days. She would sleep in the cart and her job was to mind the horse. They had adventures too, encountering police with guns chasing escaped prisoners and, although they saw groups of prisoners crushing stone for roads (including at the site of UWA), she insists they were never molested on their travels.

In 1870 John bought 100 acres at Coonarup Brook (later Bancells Brook) and was the first settler in Wagerup, near Harvey. They gradually developed the property, including a flourishing orchard, although the family did not move there until four or five years later (c.1875). He also bought 100 acres at 'Running Brook' on the Bunbury Road near Pinjarra. (Early Days at Wagerup and Yarloop; Harvey History Online)

## John Bancells' death 1897

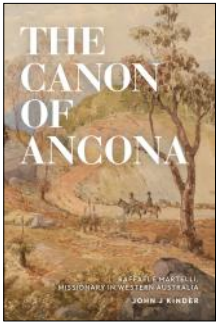
The Bancells family had been at Wagerup farm for 22 years when John died suddenly on 30 May 1897 at the age of 71. He was found lying dead in his garden. His son-in-law William J Eastcott, who had married Angela Mary and farmed an adjoining 100 acres, reported the death to the Pinjarra police.

As the death was unexpected there was an inquest and the Police Report and the depositions of witnesses give an insight into John's personality as well as his daily life. Son-in-law William's pragmatic comment that John was 'an excitable man and easily got into a passion' explains a couple of earlier incidents but, although sometimes his fruit was stolen, he had no enemies. Fittingly he died of natural causes in his garden.

## Book Review

John J Kinder, *The Canon of Ancona: Raffaele Martelli, Missionary in Western Australia*, UWAP, 2026. In Library.

Reviewer: Tom Stephens



In *The Canon of Ancona* John Kinder breathes life into a figure who might otherwise have remained a footnote in Western Australia's colonial record. Raffaele Martelli (1811–1880), an Italian priest swept up in the ideals of the Risorgimento, emerges not just as a missionary but as a man negotiating faith, identity and belonging at the edge of empire. Kinder's biography traverses two worlds: the Italy of unification – alive with patriotic song and political upheaval – and the frontier society of mid-19th century WA.

Martelli's journey from professor in Ancona to Benedictine collaborator in New Norcia reads as both spiritual calling and self-exile. Through letters, church archives and musical references, Kinder reconstructs the texture of Martelli's world, reminding us how ideas of liberty and redemption crossed oceans alongside people. One of the book's great strengths is its attention to the intertwining of culture and conviction.

After a chance encounter with Rosendo Salvado, Martelli sailed to Fremantle in 1853, at the age of 42. We are delivered a wonderful depiction of the friendship and mutual admiration of Martelli and Salvado and see the efforts of Bishop Martin Griver trying to administer and lead the diocese through those challenging times, with detailed evidence of the complex personality of Bishop Serra throughout this book. Martelli lived and worked in WA until his death in 1880, without ever returning to Italy. He bridged cultures and religious divide amid the challenges of isolation and colonial expansion.

Directed by church authorities to work among the non-Aboriginal population – in Fremantle, Toodyay and York – Martelli's passion for social justice led him not just to build Catholic churches and schools but to work side by side with Protestant pastors, always alert to the needs of the poor and downtrodden. When Martelli finally managed to work with Aboriginal people, the worsening nature of the colonial frontier presented challenges he felt unable to meet.

In WA history, Martelli's story adds nuance to our understanding of early Catholic missions – their idealism, their cultural blind spots alongside their ambition of compassion – in a landscape where virtue was not omnipresent. Martelli's partnership with Bishop Salvado and efforts among settlers and Aboriginal people are presented with empathy and candour. Kinder's scholarship turns these moments into reflections on cross-cultural encounter and the moral costs of empire.

Readable yet deeply researched, *The Canon of Ancona* illuminates a life lived between worlds. Kinder combines the precision of an academic with the narrative instinct of a storyteller, crafting a book that is both biography and cultural history. It is a work of quiet power – one that deepens our sense of Western Australia's past and honours a man whose voice, though distant, still speaks to questions of identity, service and conscience.

John Kinder has every reason to be proud of his new book. Wonderful reading.

### Welcome to new members!

Bill & Nerida Allen, Roger Cooper, Mizuho Hara, Susan Haste, Tamra Lindsay, Sean Nienaber, Andrew Pickford, Corneilius Terwindt.



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Dallas Hickman & Jeanette Longwood



Mizuho Hara & Bev Hewitt



Jasmin Leuthold & Georgina Wigley



Peter Shaw & Cate Pattison



Roger Cooper

## New members' morning tea

A gathering of 35 or so new members enjoyed meeting one another, touring the new building, testing their knowledge of some mysterious historical items, learning more about the Society's life, and snacking on morning tea while chatting to one another.

**Welcome one and all!**



Sandy & Barry Fehlberg



Russell Hamilton & Frances Hammond



Trish Harmer, Mizuho Hara & Sally Anne Hasluck



Merran Hipkins

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