



HISTORY WEST

July 2026

GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting is on Wednesday 15 July at 6pm when Bruce Baskerville will present a talk titled 'Westralia – Choosing a history: Western Australian history, Western Australian independence movements and the early years of the Western Australian Historical Society'.

History West Centre, 109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands

Refreshments available from 5.30pm



The interwar years were a period of intense public discussion about Western Australian, or Westralian, identity. Economic and legal historians have examined the secession movement but it has been largely ignored as a social and cultural phenomenon. This 'Westralia of the Heart' has been lost in the historiography but in the 1930s it was central to the secession campaigns.



The formation of the WA Historical Society (WAHS) in 1926 provided a forum for voicing this heartfelt Westralianism. At one level it operated through projects such as fixing plaques on historic sites, papers published in *Early Days*, and the Society's adoption of a coat of arms. Perhaps most publicly it could be heard in the arguments put forward by WAHS leaders, notably Edith Cowan for independence and Dr James Batty against.

The thread running through these activities revolves around two versions of Western Australian history: the black swan version and the southern cross version. Each imagined a different past that offered a pathway to two different futures. This paper will discuss these two competing worldviews and their legacies, and provide some insights into how, after 1935, Westralians became Western Australians, at least outwardly.

Dr Bruce Baskerville grew up in Dongara, Greenough and the Abrolhos Islands. He has worked in heritage in WA, NSW and Norfolk Island, where he managed the KAVHA World Heritage site, and currently operates as a public historian in Dongara. Bruce has been involved with local historical societies for decades and has presented several papers on the histories of WA secession and independence movements, including 'Western Australian Independence and Secession Movements: A Brief History', *Early Days*, 105, 2021.

History West Blog

We have just added a 'blog' section to the History West website.

A blog (short for 'weblog') is a regularly updated section of a website where content is published in reverse chronological order. Posts typically feature short written articles, photos or videos that inform and entertain.

Blogs are an effective way of driving traffic to a specific website and, if updated regularly, encourage return visits.

The intention of our blog is to publicise our activities, report on recent events, create interest in our collections and boost trade for our online bookshop. This will be done by regular weekly additions to the blog (sometimes more than one a week) on different aspects of the Society's doings.

If anyone would like to contribute short stories, photographs, notification of history-related events in your area, please send them to our Webmaster (Richard Offen) at webmaster@histwest.org.au.

You can find links to the blog on the front page of our website: histwest.org.au

Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book online!

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

HISTORY IN THE CITY



Gathering up WA history

Steve Errington

Citiplace Community Centre, Upper-Level
Perth Railway Station Concourse

Wednesday 1 July, 2pm

The talk will explore History West's one hundred years of voluntary labour. Were you or a family member one of them? This will take us from the days of the WA Historical Society (1926) to the Royal WA Historical Society (1963) and now to History West (2026).

COMMUNITY TALK



By his own hand: commentary on the loss of C Y O'Connor, Western Australia's engineering genius
Mercurio Cicchini, Clinical Psychologist

History West Centre,
109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands

Thursday 23 July, 10 for 10.30am

WA's Engineer in Chief C Y O'Connor died by suicide on 10 March 1902 leaving a widow and children, a monumental legacy of infrastructure achievements and a mystery: why did a man with such a brilliant mind, record of outstanding accomplishments and excellent capacity to problem-solve, make a seemingly rash, finite decision to violently end his own life?

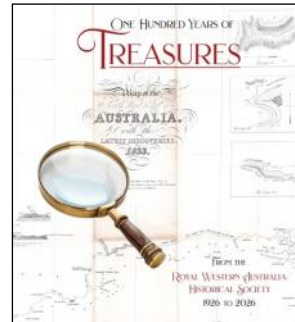
Hear a clinical psychologist's exploration of O'Connor's life story, including two periods of trauma, to help us understand.

Cost \$10 Members / \$15 Non Members
Bookings essential via the office 9386 3841
Or click on the link or scan the QR code

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



CENTENARY BOOK LAUNCH



One Hundred Years of Treasures

Friday 17 July, 5 for 5.30

History West Centre,
109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands

To be launched by the
Hon Bob Nicholson

As part of History West's centenary celebrations, a commemorative book has been put together highlighting 100 incredible treasures from the Society's collections.

It is a rare and eclectic collection, selected with an eye for how each item fits into WA's unfolding history. From ceramics to furniture, scientific instruments to a beetle-wing ornamented dress, this book presents images which are only a fraction of the incredible collections held in the Society's archives, library and museum. It gives a glimpse into the social history of Western Australia that will fascinate and enthral readers.

This event is free, so bring a friend but book early as places are limited.

Book by using Tri-booking.

<https://www.trybooking.com/DMVQT>

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

JUMBO Second-Hand Booksale



A History West tradition

Carpark, History West Centre

109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands,
corner Baird Ave

Saturday 1 August 9am-5pm

Sunday 2 August 9am-3pm

This year several of our bibliophiles have downsized their libraries so there will be many WA history books at bargain prices.

NEW SYSTEM – coloured dots represent price

Loads of bargain books on all subjects from \$2 – yellow dots

Specials independently priced

Fiction (the lot) \$5 each – green dot – or 3 for \$10

Special reductions on Sunday

Something for everyone

Welcome to new members!

Bill & Nerida Allen, Victoria Alexander, Rhuwina Griffiths, Orion Hasluck, Bev Hewitt, Janet Lankester, Ross Ledger Margaret Little, Moira Maley, Elisabeth Marris, Jeannine Millstead, Andrew Pickford, Oral History of WA (Affiliates), Wal Slaven, Joy Thomas, Allan Wills

Call to all members!

**Search for a new
Council Secretary continues...
Can You Help?**

The Secretary's role is crucial and entails compiling Council and Executive Committee agendas, taking Council and Executive minutes and relaying Council decisions back to the Community Officer and the Society's committees as required.

For further information on the role please contact Fiona — secretary@histwest.org.au

Award for Father Ted

History West heartily congratulates our Honorary Life Member **Father Ted Doncaster** on his award of OAM in the recent King's Birthday honours list.

The Venerable Edward 'Ted' William Doncaster received his award for his services to the Anglican Diocese of Perth as archivist, archdeacon and canon.

History West is especially grateful to Father Ted for officiating for many years at the Society's Annual Pioneers' Memorial services at East Perth Cemeteries.

Our good wishes on this very well-deserved recognition.

ALMANAC - July 1926

Major flooding of the Swan River caused the Fremantle Railway Bridge to collapse just after a train crossed it. The Upper Swan Bridge was also damaged by the flood.

The floods also seriously affected Northam, Guildford, Perth and Collie

Hotel Australia reopened its doors after being rebuilt, its predecessor having been condemned because of its dilapidated condition. Designed by William Wolf, the new hotel of four floors boasted saloon, public and lounge bars, and 54 bedrooms, all with hot and cold running water!



109 signage completed

Affiliates Newsletter

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

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

CENTENARY STORIES

Barbara R Harris

The contribution of benefactors, donors, sponsors & volunteers

The Society's fifth decade (1966-1976) was one of consolidation marking, at its end, fifty years of life. The half-century anniversary was an occasion to reflect on the Society's achievements and the generosity and efforts of so many people.

The Society's mission to preserve and promote Western Australia's history has been made possible only with substantial donations from many people to its library and museum collections. In 1938, several hundred books from the library of William Edmund Carew Moss were given to the Society by his widow and these formed the nucleus of the Society's library collection (referred to as 'The Moss Collection'). Moss, a surveyor, became the first mayor of Narrogin and had a special interest in 19th century Australia. His library included *A Voyage to the Swan River* by Jane Roberts (1834), Ogle's *The Colony of Western Australia* (1839), *Dampier's Life and Voyages* and *Eyre's Expeditions to Central Australia*.

The Society's now substantial library collection has been built over the years, mostly through numerous donations; in particular, important donations of WA history books have been made from the libraries of Sir Paul Hasluck (2007), Geoffrey Bolton (2016), and F I 'Sonny' Bray (1951). In addition, the library has received important donations of private papers, photographs, and maps. Significant among these is the John Forrest archive of personal papers, donated by Nicholas Hasluck from the estate of his father, the late Sir Paul Hasluck (2018), the private papers of Edmund Clifton and family, and a donation of 80 early real estate posters by the family of the late Lindsay Peet. The Forrest collection contains items related to Sir John Forrest's time as a surveyor and explorer, as well as his political life, and includes press cuttings, speech notes and travel plans; and the Peet posters provide a fascinating insight into the development of Perth and its suburbs from the early twentieth century. In addition to giving important information about Perth at the time, they are examples of the creative advertising used in the early days of the real estate industry.

Through the years, the Society's museum has also benefitted from the donation of thousands of items of historical and social significance, including furniture, costumes, china, silver, jewellery, embroidery and farm implements. A special endowment was made by Pauline Riley, the daughter of the Anglican Archbishop C O L Riley (Bishop and Archbishop of Perth from 1895-1929) including several 'handsome velvet gowns' worn by her mother at social functions held in Perth in the 1890s, children's hand-made clothes and storybooks, the Cream cashmere christening cloak worn by T L Riley and some household items, including a wooden washstand complete with a charming six-piece China bedroom toilet set and a copper-lined preserving pan which was in use at the Bishop's house for over 70 years.



Riley donation: blue & white semi-China toilet wash bowl MA1984.198



Riley donation: velvet gown & christening cloak



19th century book from Moss Collection



Peet Poster of Kalamunda

Always having been a non-profit organisation, the Society has been mainly self-supporting; relying on membership fees, donations, grants, sponsorships and general fundraising to maintain its operations and allow it to preserve and promote Western Australia's history. In 1966, its membership was 910 and subscription fees were a significant source of finance but several individuals made 'monetary donations' and these were acknowledged in the monthly Newsletters. Noteworthy was the Society's first bequest of £5, from the estate of Mary Gilholy (a teacher at various schools). Another benefactor was J W Sewell, an indefatigable worker for the Society who donated quietly.

In June 1984, the pastoral business Elders IXL (formerly known as Elder, Stirling & Co., Elder Smith and Co. and, in 1986, named Elders Ltd) generously agreed to contribute towards the cost of printing the Society's newsletter and continued this sponsorship until February 1988. Since 1839, Elders had played a significant role in Australia's colonial history, providing agricultural goods and services to primary producers in Australia, and in 1903 the long-established firm joined with the equally well-known Fremantle business of Sir George Shenton to form a company known as Elder Shenton & Co. Ltd. The company grew from humble beginnings to become the third largest in Australia. For the years that Elders contributed towards the cost of printing the Society's newsletter, each edition published extracts from the history of the pastoral house as 'The Elder's Pastoral Story'.



Last, but by no means least, is the contribution of the hundreds of volunteers who worked (and continue to work) to establish the Society as a strong community-based institution, intent on preserving and promoting Western Australian history through its collections, research, exhibitions, publications and talks.

The Society's first benefactor

Miss Mary Theresa Gilholy

Who was Miss Gilholy? The answer to this question, like so many others, was to be found in the library and History West thanks library volunteers for the information.



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In the library collection is a tiny research note (Box 68/041) from Dircksey Cowan, first Keeper of Records, recording that 'Miss Gilholy left a bequest of £5 to the W A Hist. Society – this is its first bequest'. It was a wonderful gift from a small estate in 1935. As her title indicates, Miss Gilholy did not marry and left no family in WA. She did, however, leave a circle of friends and it is from them that her traces exist in the collection.

Miss Gilholy's story reminds us that it is usually family members – children and grandchildren – who preserve their forebears' memory. Those without descendants are generally more quickly forgotten, and such has been the case with Miss Gilholy. She did not grow up in WA and no other family members settled here. Researching her biography has been further complicated by the various spellings her surname has invited (Gilholy, Gilholly, Gilholey, Gilhooly, Gilhooley) as well as the loss of Ireland's official birth records prior to 1868. This story has been pieced together from fragmentary sources and History West would appreciate any further information readers can provide.

Mary Theresa Gilholy arrived in Fremantle in August 1872 on the *Robert Morrison*. She seems to have been travelling alone and, if we accept her age at death as 90 in 1935, then she would have been 27 years old. Perth was not her destination but only a brief stopover before departing on the same ship a month later, bound for Champion Bay. Details of her time in the northern district, lasting five years until September 1877, are sketchy and suggestive only. We do know she was the star of a concert program in Geraldton in July 1875 singing 'Come back to Erin' and that she sang with the Gwalla Choir under the guidance of Maud Burges (Mrs Tom Burges) at Northampton in August 1876. Evidence suggests a connection between Miss Gilholy and the Burges family who came from County Tipperary in Ireland. When Miss Gilholy bought her first colonial residence, a house in North Fremantle, she named it Knocklofty, also a place in County Tipperary.

Miss Gilholy worked as a governess before 1880 when she became a schoolteacher, so perhaps she arrived as governess to the children of Maud and Tom Burges at Bowes Station north of Northampton? Between 1861 and 1888 the couple had ten children of whom only four survived to adulthood. One of them was William 'Willie' Burges (1865-1942) who grew up to marry Rose Brown, half-sister of Edith Cowan. Rose was brought up by John and Eliza Drummond close by on their Gwalla property. It was Rose (Mrs Willie Burges) who donated nine of Miss Gilholy's photographs to the Society after her death. These threads appear to link Miss Gilholy to the Burges family.

In October 1877 Miss Gilholy moved to Perth to live and work, presumably as a governess. In 1880 she was employed by the Shenton family at Crawley as governess for their eldest daughter Wihelmina and, in the same year, she began her transition to school teaching. This transition was not unusual; most of the colony's early schoolteachers had been governesses or tutors. Bishop Hale advertised the establishment of Bishop's Girls' College with Miss Gilholy in charge of instruction in August 1880. The school survived for just a few months. She must have faced uncertain employment in the early 1880s as she sought to transition to school teaching.

In 1887 she became a teacher at Fremantle Public Girls' School, a position she held until 1897, taking advantage of the establishment of a public education system in these years to ensure secure, long-term employment. Credentials were essential and she obtained a teacher's certificate of efficiency, second class, in 1893. In the same year she was appointed headmistress in charge of Fremantle Girls' School. Teaching appointments to North Fremantle (1897-1899), Brunswick (1899-1902), and Quellington (1902-1906) followed. Perhaps it was more than coincidental that Quellington is the location of 'Tipperary', the original farm of the Burges brothers, acquired in the 1830s. She was an early member of the WA Teachers Union.

After retirement in June 1906 Miss Gilholy lived in West Perth where she purchased a house at 12 Mayfair St in which she remained until her death in 1935. She had bought her first house in north Fremantle when she taught there and let it when she moved to the southwest in 1899. Her initial annual pension of £10 was raised to £32 in 1912. Whether she had any additional income is unknown. On retirement she visited Ireland and later holidayed in the southwest and visited the eastern states. Most importantly in retirement she was an active member of St Mary's Church, acknowledged as the oldest member of the Church Ladies Guild in 1933. She was an active worker for the Red Cross and Battalion Comforts during the Great War.

Miss Gilholy was well connected with Perth society from her arrival. She was invited to balls and receptions at Government House, attended Perth races and enjoyed Burges and O'Connor family weddings and visits to the Finnerty family, among many others. She died on 15 August 1935 and is buried in the Anglican section of Karrakatta Cemetery.

Most of her estate (the house and household furniture) was left to her nephew Frederick Fletcher, whose address was Liverpool, UK. She bequeathed his wife Florence [Flora] her 'plated spoons and forks, and copper kettle'. The St Mary's Ladies Guild and Parkerville Home were left £5 each as was the Perth Historical Society [sic]. Her friend Mrs Elizabeth Mason was also left £5 and the furniture in the bedroom 'at present occupied by her at my residence'. It was from this bedroom in 1934 that Mrs Mason advertised her dressmaking services. Such dressmakers plied their trade from similar rooms around the city across the first half on the 20th century and were well-patronised by wealthier women.

Such was Miss Gilholy's life, giving us glimpses of the experience of a single woman always in paid employment. Hers was a busy life well-lived and we remember her generosity to the Society.

FOUNDER

Edith Dircksey Cowan

Hilary Silbert



Edith was a founding member of the WA Historical Society with her eldest daughter, Dircksey and the minutes of early Council meetings record her significant contribution to the establishment of the new Society. She was crucial to its formation and early growth.

At the first meeting on 23 September 1926 the draft constitution and rules were considered and Mrs Cowan seconded Dr Battye's motion to endorse them. By the time of this inaugural meeting Edith had been elected as Australia's first woman parliamentarian. She was also only the second woman parliamentarian in the British Empire. She was elected in her own right and won on her own merit. Edith had also been awarded an Order of the British Empire by King George V in 1920 in the second group of women to be so recognised. She was amongst the first twenty women in the British Empire to receive this new award.

As a founder Edith brought to the table a unique set of skills. When she was elected to parliament, the only woman in the room, she had a Bill successfully passed within a year. In 1922 she was the first woman to have passed a Bill in any parliament in the British

Empire. By the time she finished her first term, she had steered through two Bills, including the life-changing Women's Legal Status Bill in 1923. Women in WA could now enter the professions in addition to teaching and nursing. Even today, first-term politicians rarely succeed in having a bill passed, and Edith achieved two!

The Society's second Council meeting, held on 27 October 1926, debated the location of future general meetings. Mrs Farrelly moved and Mrs Cowan seconded that the Karrakatta Club be approached for use of its lecture hall. This request was successful. The Karrakatta Club was located at 186 St George's Tce at this time, and Edith was also a founder of that club; a useful link.

By the third meeting, the program for 1927 was on the agenda. The proposed July session was 'The Early History of Geraldton'. The minutes stated: 'Dr Battye to treat the public history of the district and Mrs Cowan to prepare selections from private letters'. Edith was also appointed to review submitted papers.

At the November 1927 meeting Edith moved: 'That the Society press for a Centennial Hall primarily to house a historical museum and also offering accommodation for various learned and scientific societies; further, this Society favours using the central position of the James street site for that purpose'. The motion was carried.

The fifth meeting in January 1928 tentatively adopted subjects for presentations to members including one in July: 'Early Fashions by Mrs Cowan'. This was one of three papers she was to present at the Society: 1927 – 'Letters of Early Settlers'; 1928 – 'Early Social Life and Fashions'; and 1930 – 'Bishop Hale and Secondary Education'.

For WA's Centenary commemorations in 1929, Edith was chairperson of the Old Times Ball at Government House Ballroom.

One of the issues of concern to Edith was the provision of headquarters for the organisation: 'Mrs Cowan urged that the Society's funds should be first used in providing headquarters for the Society. Consideration of the sites listed in the letter under consideration from the State Centenary Executive Committee was referred to the sub-committee: Mrs Cowan, Dr Battye, Messrs Clifton, de Mouncey, Birtwhistle'.

The first Annual Meeting was not held until February 1928, two and a half years after the inaugural Council meeting. Edith was elected a Vice President. She remained in this role and served on the executive until her death in June 1932.

At the September Council 1930 meeting:

Mrs Cowan suggested that in future, when wreaths were laid on public memorials a wreath of laurel or gum leaves be used instead of a funeral wreath, that the ceremony be held on Saturday afternoon nearest to the anniversary commemorated and that a programme of speeches were arranged. The suggestion was agreed to.

Foundation Day celebration was discussed at the December 1931 meeting: 'A committee of five formed to examine proposals in detail and to form the nucleus of an organising committee, power being given to them to call together representatives of other organisations and public bodies to join in the work of the organisation. Mrs Cowan appointed'.

By early 1932 Edith was too ill to attend meetings. Then at the Council meeting of 14 June 1932 the Chairman moved:

This Council records with deepest regret the death of Mrs James Cowan OBE, a vice-president of the Society and one of its founders. It cherishes the recollection of her long and honourable record of public service, not the least part of which was helping create respect for things historical in the community. It remembers her unselfish service to the public and to the Society and extends sincerest sympathy to the family hoping that they will be comforted in their bereavement by the knowledge that Mrs Cowan's work will remain an inspiration to all who were associated with her.

The motion was carried by members standing.

Edith Dircksey Cowan died on 9 June 1932, suffering from pancreatic cancer. She was a founder of twelve organisations, president or chairperson of eleven, vice president of twelve and was made life member of three.

FOUNDER

Mabel Louisa Maley, née Bateman 1882-1975

Bruce Baskerville



Mabel Bateman,
later Maley, c1910
Greenough
Museum & Gardens

Mrs Mabel Maley, along with her better-known sister-in-law Mary Farrelly (née Maley) and close friend Edith Cowan (née Brown), was one in a Victoria District ‘set’ of influential women important in the foundation years of the Society. However, unlike her two compatriots, Mabel Maley’s story has slipped into the background.

Mabel was born 21 October 1882 in Fremantle to John Bateman and Mary née Armstrong and died 19 June 1975 in Nedlands. At the age of 29 Mabel married Henry Kennedy ‘HK’ Maley on 7 June 1911 in the Johnson Memorial Church, Fremantle, in a well-attended society wedding and reception.

The new Mrs Maley left Fremantle almost immediately for her new home, ‘Home Cottage’, at Greenough. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law Mary Farrelly had just left ‘Home Cottage’ for Three Springs. The young Mrs Maley no doubt approached her new home with some trepidation but soon her position as chatelaine was assured, dispensing the hospitality and charity expected from a woman of her class and social standing. It was a training that put her in good stead.

Mabel’s first son, Colin, was born at ‘Home Cottage’ in 1912, followed by Alan in 1914 and Herbert in 1916. HK was secretary to the Greenough Roads Board, a powerful position in a rural community that brought him into contact with local businessmen, farmers and community leaders as well as State politicians and VIPs. HK was involved with the local co-operative movement, other business interests and the new Country Party of which he was a founding member. Interests frequently took him from end to end of the Victoria District. Mabel continued the hospitable reputation of ‘Home Cottage’, and son Alan later recalled:

We had frequent visitors ... the train of visitors seemed endless ... I never seemed to be able to separate who was who, and who was not related among the families along the river – all seemed to be either grannies, aunts or uncles ... all were netted in an esoteric society.

Mabel actively supported her husband’s work, hosting events and exercising quiet influence.

The death of Mrs Maley senior in 1917 came at the same time as HK was elected to the WA parliament for the seat of Greenough, events with profound consequences for Mabel. In June 1921 HK, Mabel and the children left Greenough and made Subiaco their permanent residence. They acquired a house at 72 Subiaco Road, handy to Parliament House, and it appears they remained there until late in life.

Among those present at the foundation meeting of the Historical Society in 1926 were Mabel Maley, Mary Farrelly and Edith Cowan. Edith Cowan and Mary Farrelly were elected to the inaugural Council, both becoming vice-presidents. Mabel was elected to the Council in 1932. Her attention was on building the Society’s social capital, and Ivor Birtwistle remembers Mabel as being

from the outset chairman of the ladies’ auxiliary which abundantly helped the social life of the society and for many years provided the suppers which concluded the society’s general meetings, and which did much to hold members together.

The Society hosted numerous fundraising events in which Mabel was prominent. The 1929 Old Time Ball at Government House celebrating WA’s centenary was organised and decorated with wattle and templetonia by Mabel, Mary and Edith. The ball raised £500 (\$48,000 in 2025 money). Premier Mitchell paid tribute to their organising skills: ‘if the country could be run by women in the same successful manner, it would be a great thing’. Another was an ‘old time evening party’ in 1932, with Mary Farrelly ‘picturesque in an old-world frock of eau de nil brocade of 1830, and a most becoming cap of old Honiton lace’ and Mabel Maley ‘picturesque in a crinoline flounce frock of turquoise blue taffeta and lace’. Mabel was one of the organisers of a 1940 Historical Society Social Committee Foundation Day naval ball to raise funds for the Naval Welfare Fund. Mabel also shared the Maleys’ skills in historical research and writing. An article from 1928 on Greenough’s history was co-authored by Mabel Maley and Mary Farrelly [*Early Days*, 1, 2, 1928].



Mabel Maley,
c1960
Greenough
Museum & Gardens

Mabel’s social skills were put to work helping her husband’s career. He was Minister for Agriculture 1921-1924, and Leader of the Country Party 1922-1923 and Mabel’s social skills were a desirable asset. When HK’s parliamentary career ended in 1924, he was elected to Subiaco Municipal Council, and Mabel often played the role of hostess at municipal functions until he lost his Council seat in 1943.

By this time Mabel and Henry were in their sixties. Mary Farrelly was unwell, dying in 1943. HK died in 1956 and was interred in Karrakatta cemetery. Mabel had stepped down from the Historical Society Council in 1942, and by 1963 she was no longer recorded as a member. Mabel died in 1975 and was interred with Henry. The home in Subiaco Road was demolished around 1980, and their shared grave has now been ‘renewed’. ‘Home Cottage’ survives as the Greenough Museum.

Mabel Maley was surrounded by those in the limelight: HK, Mary, Edith. It is easy for someone like Mabel to fall through history’s cracks but, in her way, she enabled the creation of the ‘society’ in WAHS. Ivor Birtwistle’s assessment stands as an epitaph: ‘she abundantly helped the social life of the society and did much to hold members together’.

MEMENTO EXHIBITION

Wendy Lugg

Congratulations to convenor Wendy Lugg and the museum team for the impressive 'Memento' project which succeeded on all fronts. Perhaps most important of all was its success in engaging the interest of young TAFE students with historical artefacts and, through these objects, with history itself.

'Memento', held at the Perth Town Hall as part of the 2026 Boorloo Heritage Festival, was enthusiastically received by exhibition visitors who enjoyed the combination of contemporary garments and the historical artefacts that inspired them.

The 'Memento' project was History West's second successful collaboration with the North Metropolitan TAFE Fashion Department and an important part of our Centenary celebrations. Not only did we reach a wider and younger audience but we had the joy of seeing the fashion students excited about engaging with history.

Huge credit must be given to the TAFE staff, particularly Anna Kotai, for the dedication and preparation they put into ensuring Memento was such a success. What was most exciting was that Anna built a strong historical research element into the project. This engaged the students at a much deeper level than merely using our objects for design inspiration.

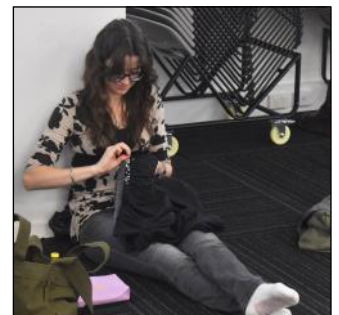
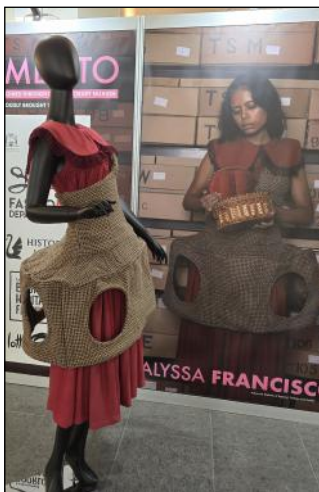
The visit of sixteen students on the first day of term commenced with a slide presentation demonstrating how personal mementos, everyday objects, play an important role in understanding what life was like in the past. We then presented the group with a carefully curated selection of museum objects that could be seen as mementos and invited them each to choose one as inspiration for making a garment.

We did not provide each object's provenance, giving only the item name and the period in which it would have been used. The students were charged with inventing a story about the owner of the object and why it held importance as a memento.

Under Anna's guidance, the students then visited the State Library to further research the objects, the period when they were used and life in WA at the time. They also explored historical fashion from the period. This research was used as the basis for the stories they wrote and the garments they made.

At the exhibition launch, conducted by the students, they described how excited they were by both History West's treasures and the amazing resources available at the State Library. Their invented stories demonstrated that they had relished the research. In fact, some stated that they became so engaged with the research that it was difficult to move on to the design and construction of their garments. They expressed an eagerness to return both to History West and the State Library to make further use of their rich resources.

The eight-hour fashion shoot, a few days before the exhibition install, was held in History West's costume store. The students settled in upstairs in the Wright Family Community Hall to await their turn. Seeing them so relaxed and comfortable, happily taking over the space, was a wonderful endorsement for our light and airy new premises, so much more welcoming than our old home. It was also evidence of an easy relationship, which is an exciting prospect for the future.



Childbirth in Perth in 1926

Margaret Furphy

This year the Writers' Group resolved to recognise the Society's centenary by exploring life in WA in 1926. In the April issue Elizabeth Eaton told us of the first Miss Australia, Beryl Mills. This month two very different aspects of life are explored – Margaret Furphy highlights a childbirth danger and Meredith Wilkie re-examines the Forrest River Massacre.

My grandmother's distressing 1926 confinement

'The Cow's Tail', my mother's handwritten story of her childhood, describes how her mother was one of the unlucky women giving birth in 1926. Rona Jenkins, née de Castilla, brought my mother into the world on 6 August that year. Officially registered as Winsome Marychurch Jenkins, my mother was always called Bobbie. Her account of what she had been told about her birth explains what happened.

I suppose I had a normal enough childhood for my era. I was born in 1926 before all the wonder drugs of today and it was decided, I have never been sure whether for financial reasons or for fear of my mother contracting the then dreaded child bed fever, that I would arrive in a little unlined weather board cottage at North Beach. This cottage was crouched behind a slight break of sand dunes covered with rushes which protected it slightly from the furies of the westerlies.

The night of my birth, so I am told, the poor little cottage was beset by a hurricane. I don't have to imagine what it sounded like for I have heard that dear little cottage during hurricanes on a number of occasions since. It squeaked, rattled shook – sand sprayed under the front door until the place was filled with grit, the kitchen chimney whistled until one could well believe in the furies of ghosts and bogles. Hurricane lamps flickered, oil lamps shuddered and threw grotesque shadows and sometimes blew out.

In the kitchen huddled over the woodstove with his feet in the oven was one poor old family doctor – I supposed he wasn't so old then, but I'm sure he was tired. He had driven out from town on shocking unlit roads in one of those wonderful cars of my youth – I do hope he had the protection of side screens, they whistled and rattled but they did keep out most of the rain. He had greeted mother cheerily oozing confidence as doctors seemed to do in those days, gave her a cup of chloroform and said 'Sniff that dearie when the pains get too bad.' Rough and ready yes – and to the point – yes and effective. Mothers like all of the women of her day had not dieted to keep down the weight of her babies. My brother had been close on 12lbs my sister a dainty 8 and I was about 10 and mother was normally 7 stone and 5ft 3½ ins in height – she was blessed with big hips but ye gods not that big, in fact she had a lovely trim little figure.

She tells me it was six weeks before she could sit up and of course she contracted the child bed fever that the poor old doctor had brought all the way from the city from his hospital patients. Poor man he had done what he could to protect her and I know he worked like a galley slave to save her life, no doubt he was aided by her indomitable will to live for she survived and I thrived.

Bobbie's account gives the impression that Rona was alone at North Beach except for the doctor. However, the memoirs of Rona's son and one of her nephews add further information. David Jenkins' first memory, when he was three and a half years old, was of a tremendous storm at North Beach. The wind hurled the crests of the waves onto the corrugated roof of the cottage, the thunder was deafening and the rain made the cottage walls shiver. The next morning he and his sister Anne found that Winsome their baby sister had been born. David then knew that having a baby required a big storm!

In his memoir, Peter Atkins described his parents' North Beach cottage on West Coast Highway which they had named 'Reste'. He confirmed that Rona, his mother's eldest sister, had given birth there to her third child. He added that his grandmother was the midwife. Thankfully Rona had her mother, Violet de Castilla née Bussell, and her two other children there during her battle with childbed fever.

Beginning of change in the 1920s

The medical term for childbed fever is puerperal sepsis and Rona and her family were right to be fearful of this serious and too often fatal infection. It was sad and perhaps shameful that Perth still had cases of puerperal fever in the 1920s. In 1926 it infected 15 women in childbirth. Almost a century earlier in the 1840s the Hungarian physician, Ignaz Semmelweis (1818–1865), had shown that disinfectants effectively prevented the transmission of infection.

WA's infant mortality rates were higher than those in New Zealand and the WA government, children's charities and social reformers were anxious to redress this. The 1920s saw a series of changes in the care for women with a gradual transition from births at home assisted by midwives with some practical training to increasing numbers of births in small 'lying in' hospitals run by nurses in their own homes and the opening of dedicated private maternity hospitals. Founded in 1916, King Edward Memorial Hospital was the first maternity hospital for public patients. It also trained nurses.

Researching my mother's statements in 'The Cow's Tail' made me aware how close Rona's seven grandchildren came to missing out on a grandmother. We have been grateful that she did survive to give us our happy memories of Nona, our grandmother.

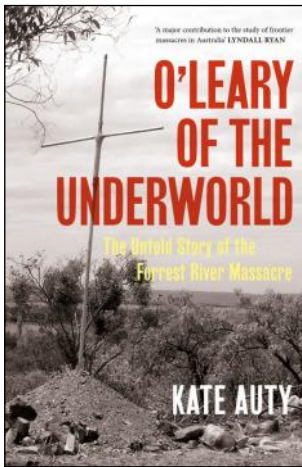
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Book Reviews

Kate Auty, *O'Leary of the Underworld, The Untold Story of the Forrest River Massacre, La Trobe Uni Press in conjunction with Black Inc, 2023. In Library.*

Reviewer: Meredith Wilkie



In May 1926, having participated in the ‘dispersal’ of a ceremonial gathering of local Aboriginal people, Leo Overheu returned to his station north of Wyndham to find his business partner, Frederick Hay, dead. Hay had been speared. The search for Hay’s killers quickly became cover for a campaign of extermination led in fact if not in law, according to Auty, by the O’Leary of her book’s title. Patrick O’Leary was a neighbour of Overheu and Hay, an experienced expeditioner (having participated in a similar exercise in 1922) and more than a decade older than the police constables he accompanied.

Over several weeks from May to July, the expedition, comprising two police constables, two special constables (one of whom was O’Leary), other local whites and Aboriginal trackers, hunted down, chained up and shot Aboriginal men and women, then burnt their bodies in fires hot enough to split rocks. At least twenty people were murdered. ‘Halfway through the hunt’ Forrest River missionary Revd Ernest Gribble identified Hay’s killer as Lumbia, a senior custodian who was soon apprehended (p.2).

Auty’s book had its genesis in research undertaken in the late 1970s for her BA honours thesis on the Royal Commission established in 1927 to inquire into the alleged massacres. In 2000 she researched the topic further for her doctorate. Among relevant positions held, Auty was a senior counsel to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and also served as a magistrate in regional WA.

In an introduction, Auty sets out the intent of her book. It is ‘a deconstruction of O’Leary, the hero of the herd, revealing the sophisticated and sly liar he was’ (p.3). She explains her focus on O’Leary as follows: ‘If focusing on people, rather than the oppressive systems we create, takes us to the truth then that is the course to follow. O’Leary is a vehicle’ (p.4).

Readers will judge for themselves whether O’Leary’s ‘real’ history ‘gives us a dishonest brute’, ‘vicious and brazen’, who ‘relished a life on the edge’ and ‘made trouble with zeal’ (pp.2, 22). Auty’s sources include his upbringing by ‘his card-sharp, dishonest and manipulative hotel-keeping mother and his gambling, alcoholic police constable father’ (p.21), the conduct towards Kimberley Aboriginal people on the part of his neighbours and other associates, and two death threats he made to Revd Gribble in retaliation for the latter’s campaign against extermination raids (pp.104-5).

O’Leary lied in evidence to the Royal Commission. He denied the murders. They all did (as Commissioner Wood found, p.37). However disgraceful, that should perhaps not be surprising. The two police constables in particular faced hanging for murder and were in fact charged, then discharged.

But Auty takes it further. O’Leary was the prime mover (p.103), the leader of the ‘armed mob’ (as the pack was described by A O Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, p.29) and the instigator of the web of lies told to the Royal Commission. I’m not entirely sure Auty has established this as more than a possibility.

The more compelling sections of Auty’s narrative expose the friability of the State’s legal system at the time, its vulnerability to manipulation, witness intimidation and perjury and its disinclination to insist on justice for Aboriginal people. The ineffectuality of the men representing the Aboriginal interests was a key factor.

Readers would, I think, gain a clearer understanding of the way the Royal Commission proceeded and was undermined had more direct quotations from the transcript and Commissioner Wood’s report been included. Even the allegedly skewed terms of reference are not quoted.

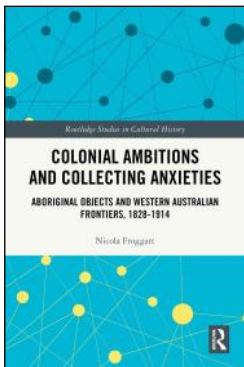
The three chapters describing O’Leary’s extended family and their many brushes with the law are interesting and well documented. Their central thesis appears to be that O’Leary learnt his contempt for authority and pathological dishonesty at his mother’s knee and ‘running with the violent underclass’ (p.147).

The book’s final two chapters document the law’s dealing with Lumbia, the man who speared Hay, thereby providing the excuse for the massacres. Lumbia was convicted of Hay’s murder. Neither provocation nor self-defence was raised at trial (p.211). His automatic death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was released after nine years and, a decade later, killed his then wife (not the wife Hay had abused in the period before his death).

For this second killing Lumbia was charged with manslaughter but, invalidly, convicted of wilful murder. The Executive Council granted a pardon (p.224). Auty concludes that Lumbia’s 1945 case file shows the government’s acceptance that his 1927 conviction for Hay’s murder was also unfair. Hay had ridden down on him wielding a stock whip and fired a shot which at least grazed his skull. Lumbia acted in self-defence.

Nicola Froggatt, *Colonial Ambitions and Collecting Anxieties. Aboriginal Objects and Western Australian Frontiers, 1828-1914*, Routledge, New York & London, 2025. In Library.

Reviewer: Lenore Layman



This is a book about material culture. It concerns objects collected from Aboriginal people in colonial Western Australia now located in British and Irish museums and is based on the author's doctoral thesis at Royal Holloway, University of London. The author argues the transfer of these objects helped shape colonial relationships and that an examination of their point of exchange across the colonial frontier can help correct historical misunderstandings of Aboriginal people circulating in Britain and Ireland which have arisen from interpretations provided by non-Aboriginal people (officials, travellers and other Europeans) whose voices dominated the field until very recently. In contrast, objects made and used by Aboriginal people 'offer insights into the lived experiences of their first makers, users and owners', providing a lens through which the colonial relationship can be better understood.

The book retains much of its thesis apparatus, evident in the care taken to avoid giving offence – precise definition of multiple terms, words of caution concerning the use of now discredited, indeed racist language, and a careful location of the author's views in recent secondary literature. Nicola Froggatt treads very cautiously on precarious ground, indicating a contemporary anxiety which might in some ways parallel the colonial anxiety she identifies among collectors. There are also four valuable appendices providing greater detail of extant items and their holding institutions as well as key collectors. An extensive bibliography completes the text.

Some 3,250 objects (excluding ancestral remains) are currently to be found in British and Irish museums, just a 'fraction' of that which originally entered and circulated. It is a bleak story of neglect, absence of documentation, missing objects and, of course, transfers and sales but this is not the story the book explores further.

We learn of the key collectors whose donations entered the museums, notably Alexander Collie, government official on Menang country in the early 1830s; Edward Hardman, geologist in the Kimberley in the 1880s; Governor Broome, who collected in the northwest whilst on official duties in the 1880s, with his wife Mary Barker; and David Carnegie who collected while exploring between Coolgardie and Hall's Creek in the 1890s. There is tantalising mention of Emile Clement, mine manager among other occupations, who made the greatest number of extant donations to British and Irish museums and whose engagement with WA deserves to be better known here. A final chapter on the Cambridge Expedition of 1910-1912 adds Radcliffe Brown, Grant Watson and Daisy Bates to the collectors' list. This last chapter deals in part with the exhumation and removal of ancestral remains, a subject seemingly excluded from the rest of the book.

A West Australian reading this list of collectors will be immediately struck by the fact that they were not 'settlers'. None was a long-term resident; rather they were part of the mostly British administrative and professional elite – government officials, mine managers and technical staff, travellers and researchers. The author used the term 'careerists' to describe some of them. None stayed long, none became a WA 'settler' in the usual sense of the word. This observation is not intended to suggest that settlers would have behaved any differently but to recognise that these visitors had close connections with the imperial centre suggesting why their collections are to be found in imperial museums. Long-term settlers' collections remained more often in Australia.

The book adds to our understandings of the circumstances and intentions of this group of collectors at the point of collection, enabling readers to see a range of engagements with First Nations people. However scant documentation of these events limits any success in reaching across the frontier gap. Only one exception is evident – the frequent and well-recognised use by First Nations people of the strategy of avoidance, a deliberate withholding of information in the face of collectors' probing. Within this cohort of collectors Carnegie is unusually forthcoming, particularly via his re-writing of diary entries to make them suitable for publication in *Spinifex and Sand* (1898), thereby disguising his acts of stealing, brutality and coercive collecting to make the account fit for publication. Revealed here is a clear awareness of the power of imperial and humanitarian condemnation of frontier violence.

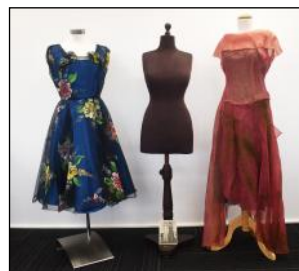
Notably absent among the extant collected objects are examples of First Nations' adaptation to their changing colonial circumstances. Very few items in the collections relate to the mining industry and the only examples of the use of colonial materials are some ceramic spear points crafted from broken overland telegraph insulators. Only 'authentic' objects were deemed suitable for collection, the definition excluding examples of First Nations' change and adaptability.

Nicola Froggatt does not attempt to engage with colonial society as it developed from the 1820s to the 1900s; her focus is fixed firmly on the frontier of First Nations-coloniser contact. This sharp focus has produced a useful reference book which adds to knowledge of past ethnographic collecting. It is well researched and referenced, completed by a scholar whose access to the British and Irish materials has benefitted us all. As she states, there is more work to do and it would certainly be pleasing to see a researcher tackle the question of where at least some of those lost museum artifacts have gone. As well these post-imperial museums might focus more effectively on the repatriation of artifacts to First Nations owners.



Community Talk Collectors and their collections Wendy Lugg

May's talk was the second in our series exploring members' personal heritage collections and Wendy delighted us with an exhibition of her two collections which occupied the entire display space in the meeting room. Showcased were valued memorabilia from her parents' lives. Her mother, Marj (Marjorie Edna) Sinclair before marriage worked as the head finisher in the sewing work room at Shirley's exclusive frock shop where she undertook the beading and fancywork. Marj's collection included workbooks, documents, patterns, samples of her beading as well as dresses she made after marriage and leaving work. Her musical memorabilia included her banjo and melodeon and complemented Wendy's father Len's collection of music. Len (Leonard Arthur) Easton had a lifelong love of music, played the piano, organ and piano accordion, wrote music and led a three-piece orchestra. The displays were fascinating, bringing to life two personal lives and, more widely, life on the homefront during World War II.



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