



HISTORY WEST

August 2026

GENERAL MEETING

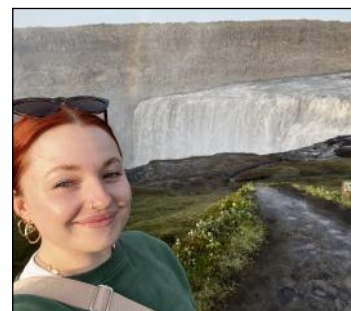
The next meeting is on Wednesday 19 August at 6pm when Lauren Tomlinson will present a talk titled 'The archaeology of superstition'.
History West Centre, 109 Stirling Hwy Nedlands
Refreshments available from 5.30pm



Superstition is engrained in the human past but how do you see these beliefs? A shoe, a cat or a simple carved circle are some of the ways that people in the past manifested belief and protection from the supernatural world and archaeology is opening this window into the past that was once considered intangible. This presentation examines evidence at Australian sites of ritual symbols and concealed objects that served the purpose of warding off evil spirits. Sites so far include the Albany Convict Gaol, Perth Hospital and homes in Hamilton, Victoria. The practices, history, patterns and interpretations of folk magic are an exciting exploration into the archaeology of superstition.



Lauren Tomlinson is an archaeologist, historian and current PhD researcher at the University of Notre Dame. Her research specialises in the archaeology of superstition as well as historical archaeology, folklore and the archaeology of stress. Primarily working as an academic, Lauren also has experience as a field archaeologist, archivist, historical researcher and heritage consultant.



**Don't forget to
book for the
State History conference**

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

You need to register for each separate
section of the conference

Once you click on one item it will then
ask you if you wish to buy more tickets

1926 – 2026
A Century of Change
Where to next?

11-13th September 2026

The Royal Western Australian Historical Society and its Affiliated Societies
61st State History Conference
Hosted by
History West/Royal Western Australian Historical Society
on Whadjuk Country

The History West Centre | 109 Stirling Highway | NEDLANDS Western Australia 6009
TELEPHONE: (08) 9386 3841 | EMAIL: admin@histwest.org.au
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/histwest | WEB: www.histwest.org.au | ABN: 43 607 110 473
LIBRARY EMAIL: library@histwest.org.au | MUSEUM EMAIL: museum@histwest.org.au

Forthcoming Events — Don't forget to book online!

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

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

Something for everyone

COMMUNITY TALK



First Nations languages as carriers of history and heritage

Sue Hanson

Senior Linguist, Goldfields Aboriginal Language
Centre Aboriginal Corporation (GALCAC)

**History West Centre
109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands**

Tuesday 1 September, 10 for 10.30am

Languages are not just the words people use but are the mouth of culture, identity, connection to specific country and a method of storing history and events.

Societies without written systems use languages as verbal libraries with songlines mapping country, story recording history, and lexical items carrying meaning. First Nations languages are rich libraries of knowledge.

This talk will illustrate the way knowledge and history are codified in First Nations languages of the Goldfields region.

Bookings essential

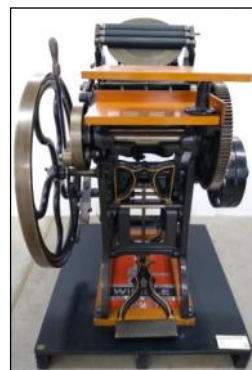
Cost \$10 Members/\$15 Non Members

Please ring the office: 9386 3841

Or click on the link

<https://square.link/u/cOiDi4nw>

HISTORY IN THE CITY



Commercial Printing: what a change!

Peter Stone

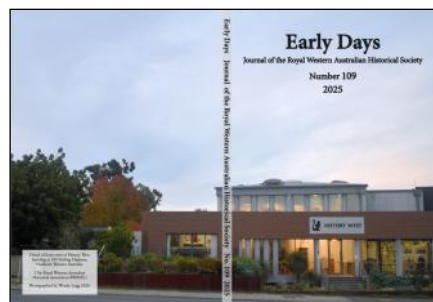
**Citiplace Community Centre, Upper-Level
Perth Railway Station Concourse**

Wednesday 5 August, 2pm

Have you wondered about the demise of the big, labour-intensive printing press machines and how they have given way to computer-operated printers?

Peter Stone will take you on a journey from the days of his great-grandfather to his current printing production methods.

LAUNCH OF *EARLY DAYS* NO. 109 2025



109 Stirling Hwy, Nedlands

Friday 28 August, 5 for 5.30pm

Please join us at 5pm for a toast to our recently deceased Councillor and volunteer Michael Nind.

Light refreshments will be served and we will celebrate the publication of the annual journal.

The authors featured in *Early Days* 109 will give three-minute talks about their topics followed by a short Q&A opportunity.

Copies available to members for collection as well as extra ones for purchase.

Please ring: 9386 3841 or email:

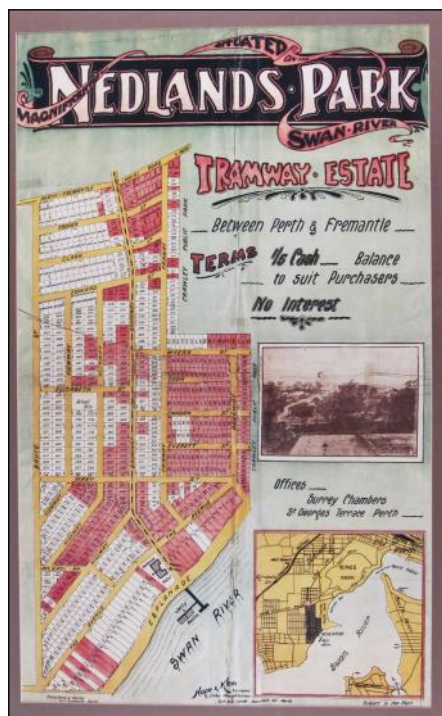
admin@histwest.org.au

or click on the link:

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

NEIGHBOURS OPEN DAY

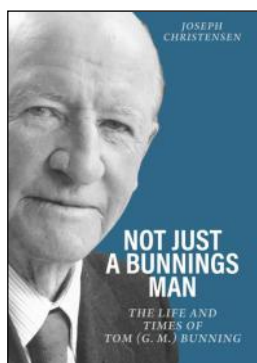
On moving to our new home – The History West Centre at 109 Stirling Hwy – Council resolved that one of the first public events after our official opening would be an afternoon gathering to introduce ourselves to our new neighbours. On Saturday 15 June we threw our doors open to Nedlands residents and 95 neighbours attended, a very full house! And a good time was had by all! Our warm thanks to Nedlands resident Sue Hobson who drew on the book she is writing on the street names of Nedlands to provide a fascinating and detailed talk on the origins of the suburb's street names that were designated when the real estate sub-divisions were opened to projective buyers in the first decades of the 20th century. Streets in the sub-divisions of Nedlands Park, Sunninghill Estate, Perth Park Estate, Kings Park Estate and Strickland Park Estate were named after the developers themselves and their families, local councillors, historical personages, members of the Royal Family as well as the more obvious geographic features. It was a fascinating, kaleidoscopic insight into past attitudes and values. Sue's talk was followed by much discussion over afternoon tea and then tours of 109 by those who wished to do so. We do hope to see our visitors again at future events now they know more about us.



COMMUNITY TALK

Tom Bunning's life

Joseph Christensen



Using many photographs to highlight his story, biographer Joseph Christensen presented the life of Tom Bunning, a lively and talented West Australian businessman. Joe explored Tom Bunning's business and personal life as well as the place of the Bunnings company in the history of WA's economic development. It was a fascinating account. Bunning's WA story began in 1886 with the arrival of brothers Robert and Albert Bunning, both building tradesmen who found a steady demand for their skills in the developing colonial society.

Thus Bunnings became 'the timber people', timber millers and suppliers of building materials. The second generation of Bunning brothers were Charles and Tom, Robert's sons, who jointly grew Bunnings Ltd as both a timber company and hardware retailer. The takeover of the retailing component of the firm by Wesfarmers in the 1980s was orchestrated by Tom and marked the culmination of Bunnings' success and its end as an independent company.

As well as an insightful account of the company's history Joe also led us through Tom's personal life – joining Bunnings on the eve of the 1930s depression, enlisting and spending more than three years as a POW in Changi, then returning to his family and a busy and successful postwar life.

History West will review the biography – *Not just a Bunnings man. The life and times of Tom (G M) Bunning* (UWAP, 2026) – in a later issue.

CENTENARY STORIES

Barbara R Harris

The sixth decade: Preservation of colonial cemeteries



East Perth Cemeteries 1920s



St Bartholomew's chapel



Revd Ted Doncaster



Ray Oldham



Paul Hasluck

The Old East Perth Cemetery (EPC), located on a hillside at the east end of the city of Perth, is the oldest colonial cemetery in WA and had its first burial in 1830 (only months after the city was founded). A dispatch dated 30 December 1828 from Sir George Murray, then Secretary of State for Colonies, to Captain Stirling contained instructions for the establishment of the settlement at Swan River, including instructions concerning the provision of burial places. In the following years burials also took place in Fremantle (1831) and in churchyards surrounding Anglican churches at Middle Swan (1838), Upper Swan (1839), Picton (1842) and Pinjarra (1843) but the East Perth Cemetery remained the main colonial burial ground for the whole of the 19th century. Over a period of 70 years, every settler who died in Perth or its vicinity was buried there. However only one Aboriginal person is known to be buried there: Tommy Dower who accompanied Alexander Forrest on his explorations in 1879.

In 1842 a large section of the Cemetery was allocated to the Church of England and, later in the decade, sections were assigned to other religious denominations who were represented in the colony: Roman Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians and the Jewish congregation. Even though the site appears as one cemetery today it originally incorporated seven individual denominational cemeteries, each separated from the others. Therefore its correct name is East Perth Cemeteries. In 1870 the little mortuary chapel of St Bartholomew was built and consecrated by the first Archbishop of Perth, Bishop Mathew Hale. The Cemeteries continued to be the chief burial ground for Perth until almost the end of the 19th century when the expansion of the city necessitated a new burial ground be established. The authorities selected a site in extensive bushland then on the outskirts of the city between Perth and Claremont and, in 1899, Karrakatta Cemetery was first used. East Perth Cemeteries was then officially designated a Disused Burial Place although a few burials were permitted in family vaults and in special circumstances. Over 10,000 people from all walks of life (except Aboriginal people) are buried there although fewer than 800 marked graves have survived.

In the following decades East Perth Cemeteries fell into a derelict state because no authority took responsibility for its maintenance. A few volunteers, concerned about the neglect, undertook some repairs but little activity took place. When the Historical Society was formed in 1926 it stressed the importance of preserving and maintaining the Cemeteries and lobbied the government, sending deputations to the Premier and Cabinet ministers. Eventually, in 1932, the government passed the East Perth Cemeteries Act which resumed the whole area from the trustees of the various religious denominations and placed its management under the State Gardens Board. A small amount of money was made available for maintenance, but this was reduced during the 1930s Depression and subsequent World War so that, again through neglect and vandalism, the Cemeteries fell into disrepair.

On his return to Perth in 1947 after the war Paul Hasluck, a founding member of the Historical Society and well-respected journalist, diplomat and historian, became aware of the execrable condition of the cemetery, in particular the damage to the grave of his grandfather Lewis Hasluck, a well-known watchmaker and jeweller. He arranged for the Premier, Ross McLarty, to visit the site. The Premier deplored the state of the graves and directed cleaning be done. Paul Hasluck also tried to encourage descendants of early settlers to take responsibility for repairing their family headstones, leading the way by paying for repairs and laying a new slab on his grandfather's grave.

In 1950 a government committee was formed to advise on how preservation and maintenance of the EPC could be assured in the future. The committee advised that all headstones be removed and one general memorial be erected, recording the names of all those buried there. The proposed removal of headstones and levelling of graves was opposed by the Historical Society and the public. It was finally decided to rehabilitate the Cemeteries by preserving all the identifiable individual graves whilst removing others and creating a grassed Pioneers Park.

Several Society members began work to maintain the grounds and record details about East Perth and other colonial cemeteries. Dorothy Henderson devoted many hours over the years to compiling a list of the recorded burials there; Kate Caldwell compiled part of the register of deceased persons, transcribed from church records, at Alma Street and Skinner Street Cemeteries, Fremantle; and, in 1952 Revd Ted Doncaster, in his twenties, employed at the Government Statistician's Office, compiled an accurate dossier of graves in the Anglican portion of EPC.

Ray Oldham worked both to record all the burials and restore the EPC, becoming convenor of the Society's East Perth Cemetery Project with Dr James Richardson who was co-opted as research officer. In 1983 she moved a motion at an Affiliated Societies' meeting that all Societies should undertake the recording of memorial tablets and colonial cemeteries in their districts. She also advertised for descendants of pioneers buried in the Old East Perth Cemetery to meet at Stirling House and bring brief biographical details of their ancestors. Members of the committee then met every Friday to type a comprehensive record of burials and copy entries in a card index.

At the same time, James Richardson and David Davies (a ranger for CALM) continued the documentation work and published three volumes based on their surveys for the Society. The publication of *East Perth Cemetery: Resting Place of Western Australian Pioneers* was the culmination of the Society's East Perth Cemetery Project and was published to mark the Society's Diamond Jubilee in 1986. The book covers the cemetery's history, including an alphabetical index of all headstones with grid plans by which graves can be located together with biographical material, photographs, drawings and information on the place's cultural, artistic and social history.

In 1954 Revd Alex Bateman, the Priest-in-Charge of the Anglican Church in East Perth, suggested to the Society that a non-denominational service be held annually to commemorate the pioneers whose remains lie buried in the Cemeteries. The Society, at the forefront of a campaign to preserve disused colonial cemeteries, saw these events as an opportunity to promote this agenda. The first of these events was held on Sunday 6 June 1954 on what used to be called Foundation Day (now Western Australia Day). It was held in the open air near the old chapel of St Batholomew and attended by approximately 300 people. A brass band provided music, the Revd Joseph Green of the Methodist Church gave the address, prayers were offered by Revd John Watson and the Society's Women's Auxiliary member Eileen Elliott offered the use of her home in Adelaide Terrace for afternoon tea.

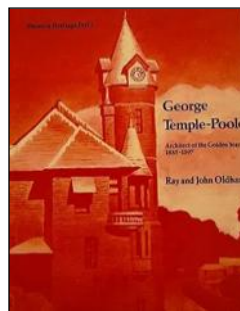
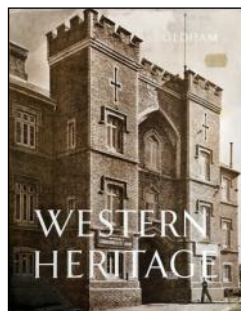
For many years Pioneer Memorial Services were held at East Perth Cemeteries on the Sunday nearest to Foundation Day and they followed the same service procedure. Until 1964 groups of pioneers were commemorated and then individual pioneers. In the Society's sixth decade pioneers who were honoured included Peter Brown (first Colonial Secretary), Eleanor Wimbridge (nurse), Charles Finnerty (Commandant of the Pensioner Military Force) and John Rowland Jones (former convict who established himself as Hansard reporter and journalist).

In 2023 the Pioneer Memorial Service was re-named the 'East Perth Cemeteries Memorial Service' (in recognition of changing times and changing views of colonial pioneers) and the occasion moved to Stirling House, with a talk and no service. The event had seen reduced attendance in its last decade and no longer seemed relevant or popular with members or the public, and there was declining community interest in a religious service. East Perth Cemeteries itself however survives as a well-conserved National Trust property largely because of the Society's efforts which engaged a great many volunteers over four decades.

VOLUNTEER

Ray Oldham

Ray Oldham was by profession a journalist who wrote for the *West Australian* newspaper and the *Sunday Times* (using the pen name Jane Scott). She and her husband, landscape architect John Oldham, were early campaigners for the preservation of WA's historic built environment and founding members of the National Trust (WA). In 1961 they published an authoritative book on WA's colonial architecture titled *Western Heritage: a study of the colonial architecture of Perth, Western Australia* and in 1980 a biography of *George Temple-Poole: architect of the golden years 1885-1897*.



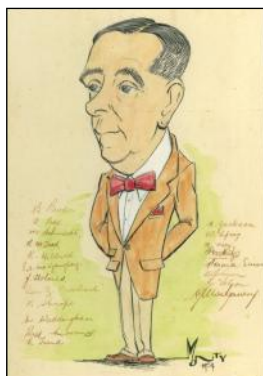
Ray joined the Historical Society's Council (1960-1962), becoming a Vice President (1962-1968). In these years she was a leader of the Society's Barracks Defence Council formed in 1961. She became a key figure in the long campaign from 1961 to 1966 that eventually saved just the Barracks Arch. It was a fierce and memorable dispute which placed the issue of demolition or conservation of Perth's iconic buildings on the public agenda.

Ray renewed her involvement with the Society in the 1980s, becoming a Vice President (1981-1982) and, in 1983, the Society's first female President, serving a three-year term. She was a busy President, focused particularly on ensuring the East Perth Cemeteries project was completed successfully. As well, between 1980 and 1988 she provided seven articles for *Early Days* – on the Barracks Arch, George Phillip Stevens, William Wade's reminiscences, the Brooks family of Balbinia Station, the Oldham family in Australia and finally, in 1988, the Old East Perth Cemetery, 1829-1988.

The Society benefited greatly from Ray Oldham's knowledge and commitment. In turn the Society provided this passionate conservation campaigner with the organisational structure and support to empower her drive to preserve two iconic relics of WA's colonial past – the Pensioner Barracks and the East Perth Cemeteries.

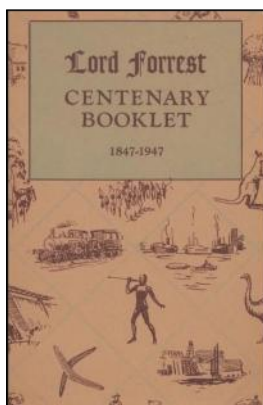
VOLUNTEER

John P Stokes



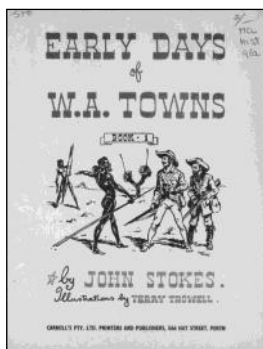
John Placid Stokes was one of the most influential of the Society's volunteers in the post-World War decades from 1945 to 1972. He joined the Society in 1938 and Council in 1945, became a Vice President (1947-1952, 1955-1958), Chair of Council (1953-1957, 1967-1968) and President (1969). He remained a Councillor until 1972, making his 27 years on Council a record. His belief in the importance of inculcating historical knowledge and understanding through schooling grew stronger as his teaching career progressed and he brought this belief to his volunteering at the Society.

John Stokes' lifetime career as a schoolteacher took him to no fewer than fifteen schools around the southern part of the State – Coranning (1913-1914), Bedfordale (1915-1916), Cunderdin South (1917-1918), Coomberdale (1919-1920), Sawyers Valley (1921-1934), Meckering (1935-1938), Middle Swan (1939-1941), Carlisle (1942), Nedlands (1943), Harvey (1944), Fremantle North (1945), Kalgoorlie North (1946), Bayswater (1947-1948), Thomas Street (1949-1951) and Mosman Park (1952-1958). He retired, aged 65, in 1958.



His busy public life as schoolmaster can be followed in local newspapers as he involved himself in the succession of communities to which his career took him. His doings were constantly in the news, organising concerts, sports days, gardening, fundraising, Empire Day celebrations and local history projects for a generation of schoolchildren. As well, he joined a plethora of local organisations – agricultural societies, hospital boards, picnic race meetings, football, tennis and cricket clubs, and musical festivals; committees to raise funds for local hospitals, a new piano in a town hall, a local library and so forth – most often as secretary, later as president. He gave talks on a variety of topics in literature and foreign places, and adjudicated debates. During the 1930s Depression he was active in the Eastern Hills Unemployment Relief Committee and the Necessitous Women's and Children's Fund. His energy and commitment seem to have been boundless; he was an ideal country headmaster.

He established a Junior Historical Society at Fremantle North school in 1945 and at Kalgoorlie North school in 1946, encouraging his students to research and write about their districts' histories. At Bayswater school in 1947 he ran a program of 'Doorstep History' where students researched the origins of street names in their district. He also convened the 1946 public meeting which established the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society, the WAHS's first Affiliated Society, and was its first president. Another Affiliated Society was formed at York in 1949 under his guidance.



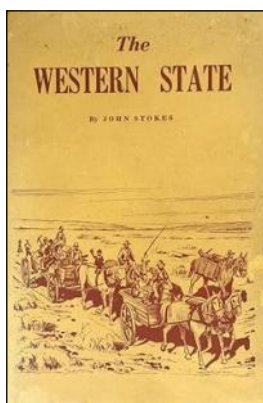
To mark the centenary of John Forrest's birth the Education Dept published the *Lord Forrest Centenary Booklet (1847-1947)*, a collection of essays, maps, poems and drawings by schoolchildren, which John Stokes (chair of the Centennial Committee) compiled and edited. Of the eighteen entries he selected, three were from children at Carrolup Native Settlement school: Vera Wallam wrote of the recollections of Neebrung, a man from the Murchison then living at Carrolup, who as a boy watched Forrest's expedition pass through his country; Reynold Hart and Dulcie Penny wrote of Tommy Windich's importance to the expeditions; and an unattributed crayon drawing (by Parnell Dempster) pictured conflict with Aboriginal people at Weld Springs. By making this selection he brought the talents of the Carrolup schoolchildren to public notice in Perth, sharing their art with journalists and assisting in staging a successful Carrolup art exhibition at Boans store in October 1947. Three years later, when the government closed Carrolup, he expressed his astonishment and regret in a newspaper article:

Many will profoundly regret that a light that promised much to an often neglected and despised section of people of this country, after burning bravely for five years, has been quenched. Is it too much to hope that the lamp will at some future time be re-lit? [*West Australian*, 24 Feb 1951, p.18]

He published two school texts – *Early Days of WA Towns Book 1* (Carrolls, 1949), a well-illustrated book for mid-primary students, and *The Western State: some of its people and ports* (Paterson Brokensha, 1958) for high school students. However most of his writing from the 1940s onwards was directed to newspaper publication. These articles were commonly biographies of influential people – for instance, Ernest Giles, Yagan ('A "Wallace" among Swan River natives'), James Drummond, Governors Strickland,

Fitzgerald, Hampton and Weld, Mary Anne Broome and David Carnegie – as well as quizzes to test readers' knowledge of WA's past. (*History West* will include some questions from these quizzes to test our readers).

John Stokes believed that greater interest in Western Australian history among teachers was needed to ensure their students learnt about WA's past. To this end he persuaded Sir Ernest Lee-Steere to fund an annual award, open to students at the teacher training colleges and early-career teachers, to recognise the best research essays on a Western Australian history topic. He chaired the Award committee from its commencement in 1949. The Lee-Steere Award proved a great success for the Society and, after twenty years and several hundred essays, *Early Days* (vol 6 pt 8) published a special issue of prize-winning essays in 1969, appropriately the year of John Stokes' presidency of the Society. It was a fitting tribute to almost thirty years of volunteering by this lively educator.



A tribute to MICHAEL NIND (1962-2026)



We sadly farewell Councillor Michael Nind who has died after a long illness. Michael remained busy and committed to all his volunteering work until the very end of his life, making it hard to believe that he is gone. We will miss him.

Michael had a long public service career as a librarian and archivist at the J S Battye Library of WA History, the Dept of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, and Dept of Land Administration. He carried his professional commitment to the preservation of and care for historical records into the community in his volunteering activities.

Michael joined the Society in 1980 and was always an active and engaged member. He was a Councillor for ten years in two periods (1986-1989 & 2020-2026) and was a member of both the Reading & Publications Committee and the Library Committee. He helped judge the annual Williams/Lee Steere Publication Prize, wrote book reviews for *History West* and assisted at book sales. He presented five research articles for *Early Days* across four decades, focusing mostly on the development of historical research and concurrently of State archival record-keeping. Death intervened before he could present his sixth paper, this one an assessment of J S Battye as an historian.

Michael was a keen committeeman active in many community organisations which promoted his commitments to history, libraries and archives. He was a committee member of the Friends of Battye Library, a founding member of Professional Historians' Assn (WA) and Vice President of the History Council of WA.

We farewell Michael with gratitude for his assistance in the ongoing life of the Society.

Welcome to new members!

Barbara Allen, Cambridge Library Macquarie Univ Library, Wendy Garstone, Janelle Hauser, Moira McKinnon, Diane Pope, Michael Sutherland, Ian Warner, Wendy Webb, Lyn Williams

Worksafe Plan

To comply with government regulations, the Society needs to adopt a 'WorkSafe Plan'. This document guides an assessment process which is used as an audit tool to rate an organisation's health and safety management system.

To achieve this outcome Council is seeking a volunteer, preferably with previous experience of work health and safety matters, to help create such a plan using the government's information booklet as a guide.

Please let the President or Secretary know if you would be willing to help with this important project.

richardoffen@outlook.com
secretary@histwest.org.au

Nominations for Council 2026-27

The election of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and four Councillors will take place at the forthcoming AGM on Wednesday 21 October.

If you are interested in nominating, please contact Lesley Burnett (email: admin@histwest.org.au) to obtain a nomination form.

Nominations close at 4pm on Wednesday 16 September

J P Stokes — Quizzes for Foundation (now WA) Days

Do you know your history?

*These quiz questions were written in the 1940s/1950s and capture the historical interests of the time.
How far are they important to us today?*

1(a) In 1629 the Dutch warship *Batavia* was wrecked on one of the Abrolhos Islands. Who was the captain of the ship?

1(b) In his journal, the captain wrote 'This day I saw a cat the size of a hare with short forepaws and long hind legs on which it walks'. Name the animal he describes.

2 Who were the men, later to become famous, who captained these ships when they first entered West Australian waters? (a) *Eendraght* (b) *Investigator* (c) *Challenger* (d) *Success*

3 One of the major causes of the deep depression which settled over the Swan River colony in the 1840s was the shortage of labour. This scarcity was eased considerably by a measure introduced in 1850 and continued for eighteen years. What was this?

4 'He was a first-class huntsman, very useful in collecting the horses, and really invaluable in finding water'. John Forrest wrote this concerning an Aborigine who was in all his expeditions. What was the Aborigine's name?

5 He was the Governor who gave the colony of WA its first railway, its first telegraph line, and its first steamboat service. Who was he?

6 Two surveyors blazed the trail to the world-famous goldfields of Coolgardie & Kalgoorlie. Who were they?

7 The bird emblem of WA is the black swan and the floral emblem the kangaroo paw. What is the animal emblem?

8 High speed communication between WA and the outside world was achieved in 1877. Name the WA station that was the connecting link.

Garden Island tour: stepping back in time

Georgina Wigley, Tours & Events convenor



Members and friends, 37 in all, who joined the Society's tour to Garden Island on Tuesday 2 June breathed a sigh of relief as the wet wintry conditions started to abate. Exactly 197 years earlier Lieutenant-Governor James Stirling was not so fortunate. 'Boisterous' weather greeted him as he steered the *Parmelia* into Cockburn Sound running the barque aground on a shoal. Later, in a letter to his brother, Stirling admitted: 'On account of my over-confident pilotage we took the ground and the night becoming stormy ... I expected the ship to go to pieces'. Fortunately on the following day in 1829 the *Parmelia* floated off the bank and disembarkation commenced at Cliff Head.

Garden Island, known as Meeandip to the Whadjuk Noongar people, has a rich history and many stories to tell as we discovered during the coach ride to the island. Pamela Satham Drew's informative talk spanned 7,000 years from the time when rising sea levels left the island isolated from the mainland to the development of today's rapidly expanding RAN base named HMAS *Stirling*. The origin of the federal government's decision in the late 1960s to make the island a permanent naval base has a direct link to Pamela's family history. Her father, Colonel Frank Satham, in 1964 headed the team which undertook the work to determine the feasibility of this project. A highlight of the day occurred when our attentive escort, Chief Petty Officer Mick Kirby, showed participants Satham Street, something Pamela had never seen.

As a result of strict security protocols on the island we were allocated two escorts for the day, Mick and Jade. The coach was not permitted to cross the causeway until each participant's name sent in advance from the Society was checked against individual photo ID. Fortunately everyone remembered to bring ID and we each received an identification wristband to be worn whilst on base. Our first stop was to visit the Services Reconnaissance Dept War Memorial, unveiled in 1949. Garden Island was selected as the site for this memorial because of the importance of Careening Bay in the World War II training of the Special Unit Z-Force. Also important was the island's isolation. This enabled the launch of many highly secretive missions to sabotage the Japanese war effort in southeast Asia.

Before heading to the original site of British settlement of the Swan River colony we enjoyed a hearty morning tea prepared by the Navy's team at The Anchorage. We then moved to the Cliff Head historic site where Shane Burke, an archaeologist from Notre Dame University, took over the narrative. He explained that after Stirling's almost disastrous start to the colony he quickly set crew members clearing vegetation, erecting temporary housing, digging wells, making enclosures for livestock and planting gardens. In addition to *in situ* artefact evidence Shane has used diary accounts, letters, contemporary drawings and sketches to develop a comprehensive picture of this initial settlement. His passionate discourse and extensive knowledge made this landscape live and gave us glimpses of how these settlers adapted to an unfamiliar environment.

After this step back in time we returned to The Anchorage and lunch followed by a visit to the Navy's Museum. It was an opportunity to reflect on the information we had learnt and to swap impressions of the tour. Many commented that they would love to 'bush bash' with Shane to learn more about the original settlement. Others enjoyed the organisation of the day and the history they had learnt. As one participant commented, 'thank you for an informative experience, good fun, good company and good food'.

A recent donation to the museum collection

A Pair of Old Boots

Bruce Hoar

History West members will remember many a Christmas celebration at the Wordsworth family home at 8 The Esplanade in Peppermint Grove. Former WA government minister David Wordsworth died in 2024 and the family decided to sell the house.



Back in 2015, a pair of old boots was found under the house when the bathroom was renovated. They have recently been donated to the Society. Hearsay is that these boots belonged to the stonemason on the original house built in 1901.

The discovery of shoes or boots buried under or hidden within buildings is part of a 19th century British tradition known as ‘concealed shoes’ or ‘apotropaic marks’.

These items, often well-worn, were deliberately placed under floorboards or in walls during construction to ward off evil spirits, demons or witches and to bring good luck to the home. Shoes or boots were chosen because, unlike other clothing, they retain the shape of the wearer’s foot and were believed to hold a human presence.

The house at 8 The Esplanade itself has quite a history with three well-known West Australian families – the Fairbairns, Foulkes-Taylors and Wordsworths – occupying it for most of its 125 years. The original house was built for the Fairbairn family of Fremantle, one of a group of early prestige bungalows constructed in the year of federation. It was designed by architect Edward Deane-Smith who later became a partner in the well-known architectural firm of (Talbot) Hobbs, Smith and Forbes.

Robert Fairbairn was born in Bunbury in 1841. With no schools available at that time, he was educated at home by his father. Following four years as a teacher at Perth Boys School, Fairbairn spent the rest of his life in the service of the colonial government in posts spread from Albany to the Kimberley. His title varied over the years from Government Resident to Resident Magistrate to Police Magistrate. Fundamentally these positions were both political and administrative positions representing the Crown as well as being a legal appointment responsible for maintaining law and order.

Fairbairn was acknowledged as an administrator who got things done. In Geraldton in the 1870s, he investigated lead poisoning at the Geraldine mine near Northampton and in Shark Bay investigated and put an end to the ill-treatment of Malays in the local pearling industry. In the early 1880s he was appointed a special commissioner to investigate allegations of mistreatment of the local Aborigines by landowners in the Gascoyne and Murchison. Although unpopular with the locals, his report was welcomed and actioned by the colonial government. He was then appointed the first Government Resident to the Kimberley and supposedly founded and named the town of Derby. In his capacity as Government Resident, he received the first gold found near Halls Creek which resulted in a significant gold rush.

Fairbairn’s dedication to duty earned him in 1886 the prestigious appointment of Resident Magistrate in Fremantle and Visiting Justice of Fremantle Gaol. He was suitably recognised in 1906 with an Imperial Service Order (ISO) by King Edward VII. Fairbairn also contributed to the local community. He was president of the Caledonian Society, president of the Fremantle Rowing Club, patron of the local football club, a member of the Weld Club, a Freemason and Justice of the Peace. He retired in 1908 and enjoyed living at 8 The Esplanade (named ‘The Pindan’) until his death in 1922.



The Fairbairn family continued living in the house for many years. Robert Fairbairn junior was a doctor and the *Sunday Times* reported in 1931 that the family opened their house and property to 70 young members of the YWCA to hold their summer camp there. The programme included sports, swimming, boating, picnics, campfires, plays, music and outdoor worship.

In 1937, the house was bought by (Douglas) Charles Foulkes-Taylor and his wife Rosemary. The Foulkes-Taylor family was wealthy, Charles’ grandfather owning shipping companies and running packet ships between England and Australia. His father owned farming properties in Dardanup and then in York. Charles was educated at Hale School and went farming

before enlisting in the 10th Light Horse Regiment in 1915. He served with distinction during World War I and was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry.

After the war Charles formed a pastoral company with his brother Ernest and purchased ‘Glenorn’ near Leonora and ‘Yuin’, approximately 100kms northeast of Mullewa, in 1929. He spent his time between the house in Peppermint Grove and the station until his death in 1952.

In 1975 the house was bought by David Wordsworth and his wife Marie Louise. David grew up in Tasmania where his father was a liberal senator in the Commonwealth parliament from 1950 to 1959. In 1961 David brought his family to Esperance where he established a major sheep and cattle enterprise and restored the historic Dempster homestead. He became active in the Liberal Party and won the Legislative Council seat of South Province in 1971 and again in 1977 and 1983, serving as Minister for Transport and later Minister for Lands and Forests in the Court government. He was the MLC for the Agricultural Region until his retirement in 1993.

After 22 years in parliament, David developed a vineyard at Harvey and served on the Murdoch University Senate and other community organisations. His wife Marie Louise was also a staunch Liberal and a former WA Young Liberal President. They were both passionate historians and collected some treasures of West Australian history that have recently been auctioned, including a portrait of Governor James Stirling, 19th century paintings, maps, furniture, engravings, early photographic collections and numerous Aboriginal artefacts.

The beetle-wing Dress

Em. Prof. Jenny Gregory



The Jewel Beetle (*Buprestidae*)



Miss Corry Richardson-Bunbury
wearing the beetle-wing dress,
1929, SLWA 5634B

Amongst its costume collection, History West holds a muslin dress embroidered with fragile iridescent green beetle wings. The beetle-wing embroidery on the two-tier skirt is designed in a floral pattern with the motif repeated around the neckline.

The dress was donated by Mrs Walter Gale (née Georgiana Richardson-Bunbury) who inherited it from her mother Amelia Richardson-Bunbury (née Molloy). It is believed to have been acquired for Amelia in the 1850s. Their families had settled at the Vasse in the early years of the Swan River colony. Of genteel background, the women of these families displayed a keen interest in the arts of embroidery and lace making.

Amelia (1838-1910) was the third daughter of Captain John and Georgiana Molloy, who arrived in the Swan River colony in 1830. In 1857, she married William Richardson-Bunbury, then assistant to the Government Resident at Bunbury and from a titled Irish family. It is not known how Amelia acquired her beetle-wing gown but it is likely to have been made in England. While the beetle wings originated in India, the style of metal thread embroidery indicates that it was executed in Britain, according to the Victoria & Albert Museum. It is not as elaborate as Indian beetle-wing embroidery in which the metal thread usually surrounds each wing case. Amelia was the mother of a large family of eleven children, all of whom lived to adulthood. It is believed that her beetle-wing dress was passed down to her fifth child, Georgina, who is said to have worn it on many occasions. Amelia's granddaughter Corry (Caroline) Richardson-Bunbury (later Coote) wore the beetle-wing gown in a centenary pageant at the Lord Mayor's garden party in Queen's Gardens in 1929.

Georgina had married Walter Gale (later Clerk to the House of Representatives) in 1896. After his sudden death in 1927, she regularly visited family and friends in WA and began to dispose of family treasures, giving a number to the Society, including the beetle-wing dress in February 1933.

Dresses embroidered with the wings of jewel beetles are fragile and extremely rare. They gained popularity amongst the British in India who were dazzled by the wealth of the Mughal courts and the beauty of traditional Indian embroidery. Embroidered Indian textiles were introduced to Europe by traders in the late 18th century and British newspapers of the late 1820s report of women at court wearing dresses decorated with beetle wings. By the 1860s large volumes of beetle wings were being imported to Britain for application on textiles. They were not difficult to harvest as beetles swarm when they mate and then die *en masse*. The wings were cut, shaped and arranged in stylised floral patterns and glittered in candlelight with an iridescent jewel-like effect.

There are few surviving examples of these rare gowns. Made in Madras in the 1820s they are held by the National Museum of Scotland, West Highland Museum and Cheltenham Museum. The Victoria & Albert Museum holds a dress with beetle-wing embroidery made in Britain in 1868-1869. Beetle-wing embroidery was widely popularised when actress Ellen Terry, playing Lady Macbeth in a 1888 London production, wore a magnificent gown sewn with 1000 beetle wings. The dress is now one of the most important items in the National Trust's collection in England and was immortalised by John Singer Sergeant's portrait now in the Tate Gallery.

The fashion was part of the Victorian obsession with natural history. The late 19th century witnessed unparalleled growth in the number of natural history museums in Europe and the USA, created to educate the growing middle class. The interest in natural history was taken to extremes in fashion. In 1882, the American magazine *The Art Amateur* warned women against '[t]his detestable fashion of wearing the stuffed bodies of birds as ornaments to female attire now goes hand in hand with...the practise of wearing all manner of horribly gaudy and glittering beetles'.

The only Australian museum collection to hold a beetle-wing dress is History West. There is a length of fabric decorated with beetle wings made in India c1880 held at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. It may have come from the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 which included a dress and pieces of muslin embroidered with beetles' wings made in Madras. The WA Museum holds six square panels of beetle-wing embroidery on muslin, but little is known of their provenance.

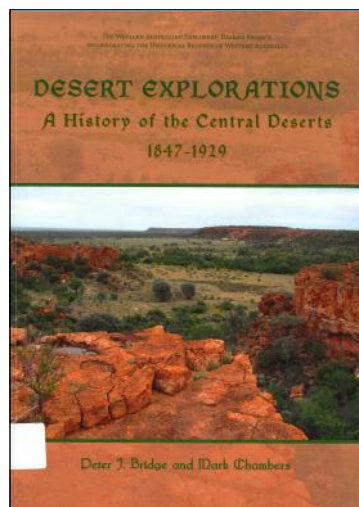
Press reports of beetle-wing dresses in Australia are rare. The earliest appeared in the English *Bulletin* in an article 'Jottings from Melbourne' discussing Cup Day in November 1880. The 'lady correspondent' noted '[a]t luncheon my appetite was a secondary consideration, for as I was in close proximity to Mrs. Hurtle Fisher, I lost, or rather spent, most of my time in admiring her dress, which was all silk and lace and beetles' wings, and so exquisitely made that it belies description'. Beetle-wing dresses were reported to have been amongst a collection of Indian curios exhibited at a Grand Australian Fair in 1897 in Sydney. The only beetle-wing dress to be noted in the WA press was worn in 1911 at State ball held in honour of the coronation of King George V and Queen May. Elsie Drummond, visiting from England and one of the official party, wore 'a striking frock of emerald ninon over an *eau-de-nil* satin underdress trimmed with Indian beetle-wing embroidery'.

Jewel beetles were also used in jewellery, set in silver or gold, worn as a hatpin, made into earrings or in a bracelet or necklace. History West holds a necklace made from eleven green beetles linked by a gold chain and set in a gold claw setting. Donated by her granddaughter, it belonged to May Battye (1873-1954), who married librarian J S Battye in Melbourne in 1895.

Book Review

Peter J Bridge & Mark Chambers, *Desert explorations. A History of the Central Deserts 1847-1929*, Hesperian Press, 2026. In Library.

Reviewer: Ed Jaggard



Desert Explorations is another addition to the valued Western Australian Explorers' Diaries Project, this volume examining the exploration history of the Central Desert which covers the Great Victoria, Gibson, Tanami, Little and Great Sandy deserts. All are partly or entirely within WA. The book's primary focus is on exploration (defined as 'the action of travelling in, or through, an unfamiliar area in order to learn about it') and it is an important work of reference.

The book commences (pp. vi-9) with a summary of expeditions between 1848 and the 1880s, inevitably beginning with publications on the search for Ludwig Leichardt's 1848 disappearance. In this short section which includes explorations by John McDouall Stuart (1858-1862), John Forrest (1869-1874), Ernest Giles (1872-1873, 1873-1874, 1875, 1875) and several others, the book provides the sources for the details of the expeditions, a synopsis of each and their personnel. Thereafter the more than 400 documents, mostly newspaper extracts, are arranged in chronological order and grouped in decades. There are two indexes, one listing the names of more than 5,000 people, the other almost as many place names.

What motivated these men? Not surprisingly a high proportion of the documents are concerned with the search for gold in this harsh, unforgiving landscape.

Introducing an October 1931 article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* on a 1906 expedition led by prospector Frank Hann, the paper explained that, 'From time to time tales have drifted around the many towns and cities of Australia to the effect that hidden somewhere in the heart of Central Australia desert was a veritable "cave of gold".' Repeatedly this optimistic dream lured large expeditions, smaller parties and individual prospectors into the deserts, the documents letting those involved speak about the experience for themselves.

The documents are drawn from a scatter of newspapers including the *Murchison Times*, *Mount Magnet Miner*, *Western Mail*, *South Australian Register*, *Adelaide Observer*, *Kalgoorlie Miner*, *Pilbarra Goldfield* and others. Most of the accounts are extracts from news of the day but others are latter-day reminiscences. Another source of documented experiences is government reports; for example, geological surveys and official prospecting expeditions. Indicating that they have searched far and wide for relevant sources, the editors have also included one from an academic journal, Michael Terry's account in the *Geographical Journal* (75,3, Mar. 1930) of a 1928 journey through central Australia. Not surprisingly the extracts vary greatly in length. For example, on pages 111-128 there is the seventeen-page diary of an 1896-7 prospecting party, while on page 497 the *Adelaide Advertiser* (3 August 1928) provides the following two lines: 'Hugh Ogilby died on 3 August 1928 while prospecting in the Musgrave Range. Son of Hugh Ogilby of County Clare, Ireland'.

While exploration is about an anticipated objective, it is also about what is experienced or encountered on the journey, and in this respect the book is a goldmine of information about the central deserts. In the hundreds of documents numerous themes stand out, one being the availability of drinking water for men and camels or horses. Progress was often dictated by this necessity, constant lookout being kept for soaks, gnamma holes, springs or, hopefully, lakes. There are frequent references to prospecting parties having to backtrack because lack of water meant it was too dangerous to proceed.

Another theme is the relationship between Europeans and Aboriginal people. Parties of the latter were frequently encountered, contacts varying from one location to another. There are accounts of clashes between the two and references to white brutality, occasional spearings and stealing. On the other hand, numerous expeditions hired Aborigines to accompany them and act as guides. The names of these men are included in the personnel listed at the head of each document. Also, occasionally Aborigines were sought out for their knowledge of country where there was the presence of gold, sometimes allowing them to fool their employers with false directions.

Surprising in a work of this type is the almost complete absence of maps, of each of the deserts as well as of the most frequently mentioned locations/landmarks in each. Without maps the reader is left in the dark about distances travelled, directions, and 'on the ground' relationships between locations. However, this absence does not detract from the value of a collection that will be appreciated by those researching the history of the Western Australian deserts.

Almanac – August 1926

Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, on her 1926 Australian and New Zealand tour, stayed at the Esplanade Hotel.

A Secession League was formed in Perth. At the inaugural meeting on 3 August, Mr J McCallum Smith MLA declared that 'the time was ripe for secession. Politicians in the Eastern States are making rods for their own backs. A referendum involving little cost to the State could be taken in conjunction with the next elections'.

Perth Male Voice Choir gave its first public performance in Fremantle Town Hall on 14 August.

Affiliates Newsletter

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

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

Tours of 109 with many thanks to Jim Barns



Arlene Philps, Jim Barns, Victoria Alexander,
Virginia Riverland, Julie Calcutt



Beth Frayne, Toodyay Historical Society, viewing
Euphemia Macintosh's afternoon gown c1856

Invitation to become a guide

St George's Cathedral is seeking interested people to train to become volunteer guides at the beautiful 19th century cathedral which carries much WA history within its walls.

No experience is required, just a passion for history and sharing it with others.

If you are interested to find out more, please contact — joanne@mcleod.org.au

QUIZ ANSWERS

1(a) Pelsart

1(b) quokka

2 Dirk Hartog, Matthew Flinders, Captain Fremantle, Captain Stirling

3 The introduction of a convict labour force from Britain.

4 Tommy Windich

5 Governor Weld

6 Lefroy & Hunt

7 The numbat – one of the State's most attractive marsupials

8 Eucla

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

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