



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305
FREMANTLE WA 6959

**Winter Edition
2004**

Editors: Ron Davidson, Anne Brake



Six of the original 'interim' committee were at the 10th birthday celebrations. From left: Margaret McPherson, Anne Brake, David Tessler, Bob Reece, Suzan Miles and Dianne Davidson wielding the knife.

WE ARE TEN YEARS OLD!

Champagne corks were popping, cakes were cut and toasts were drunk as the Fremantle History Society celebrated its tenth anniversary at its July Annual General Meeting appropriately held at Fremantle's iconic Victoria Hall.

The Society's founder and inaugural president Dianne Davidson recalled the difficulties faced by the original organisers in 1994 – three former attempts at forming such a body had all failed – and their relief when the meeting they had advertised attracted over fifty people and the Society was triumphantly launched at last. She identified a number of those present at the AGM who had served on the inaugural committee formed at the launch: Margaret McPherson, Suzan Miles, David Tessler, Bob Reece – and the irreplaceable Anne Brake, the only one of the original group still serving on the committee!

The newly formed committee set to work with great energy: regular monthly meetings were started immediately; the first newsletter went out shortly after the inaugural meeting and has appeared quarterly without fail for the past ten years. Some of the highlights from the Society's first decade were the introduction of the annual Fremantle Studies Day, a tradition of annual..

pub lunches and the publication of the biennial *Fremantle Studies*, the only journal published by a local history society in Western Australia. The publication of the second volume of our journal contributed to earning us a Fremantle City Council Heritage Award in 2002.

There was also a relatively early general meeting which set in train a major sequence of events. In 1997 the Society organised a tour of some historic graves at the Fremantle Cemetery. At the time this was seen as an outlandish activity: Dianne received a phone call from Ted Bull at 6WF and was interviewed about the bizarre notion of visiting a series of graves! However, the idea paid off. Despite cold and rainy weather, a large number of members turned up for the tour which became one of the year's highlights. Some time later the Society was contacted by the CEO of the Fremantle Cemetery Board and asked to help devise a historic trail of notable graves which could be published in a booklet for tourists. We agreed and, after many meetings and consultations, a trail was decided on and committee member Ron Davidson was commissioned to write a short biography for each grave to be visited. The booklet, *Heroes and Villains*, was launched in June 2003 and this year won a Fremantle City Council Heritage Award. Ken Hopkins and Geoff Higham have continued our association with the cemetery by leading walks as part of this year's Heritage Festival.

Dianne noted that the Society had lately expanded its sphere of operations, taking part in the discussions which resulted in the formation of the History Council of WA, putting in a submission on the Draft Master Plan for the future of Fremantle Prison, and agreeing to host the 2005 Royal WA Historical Society's Affiliated Societies conference.

In closing, Dianne pointed to an area still awaiting exploration. In the first year of the Society's existence an unprecedented

number of people attended a monthly meeting advertised as 'Fremantle families – who were they and where have they gone?' This was not aimed at the celebrities and merchant princes, but at gathering the stories of the ordinary families who had for generations been the social fabric of Fremantle before gentrification began in the late 1970s. And they came by the dozen – Regans, Neeshams, Sheedys, Doigs, Silichs, Bliccos, not to mention countless Smiths. They all had Fremantle stories to tell. We just didn't quite know what to do with them.

They're still out there, waiting to be recorded.

The Fremantle History Society has achieved much in its first decade, and Dianne concluded by wishing 'her baby' a happy birthday and many more fruitful years to come



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

This is the new committee as per the 2004 AGM with the addition of Jean Cecil who was seconded on to the committee after the meeting. The secretary's position remains vacant and we are hopeful that one of you, the members, will put your hand up to join the committee. We'd love to have some new blood and we NEED a secretary. Please call any of the committee members listed below if you are interested.

Executive:

Bob Woollett (President)	9335 7451
Lisa Williams (wk)	9430 7966
Beres Coley (Treasurer)	9335 9473
Secretary remains vacant	

Committee:

Elaine Berry	9336 1906
Anne Brake	9336 5206
Jean Cecil	9335 2352
David Hutchison	9335 1594
Ron Davidson	9430 6096

Loretta O'Reilly (wk) 9432 9739
Ken Hopkins 9339 7399

Fremantle History Society's committee meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

If you have something you would like discussed at a meeting, please contact one of the members at the numbers shown above.

General meetings of the Society are generally held on the 4th Tuesday of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter and reminders are placed in the local press. As we have Sunday afternoon meetings occasionally (and this month a Saturday meeting), please be sure to check details.



COMING EVENTS

WINTER PUB LUNCH AT THE SWAN HOTEL
COST \$15.00

Enjoy a main course, dessert and tea or coffee from the kitchen of Bibik Chan at the Swan Hotel for only \$15.00 at this year's annual Pub Lunch. Main course choices include: crispy fried chicken with chips and vegetables or salad, fish and chips (battered or grilled) with vegetables or salad, steak – T-bone or porterhouse with chips and vegetables or salad, stir fried noodles with vegetables and tofu.

Drinks available at own cost.

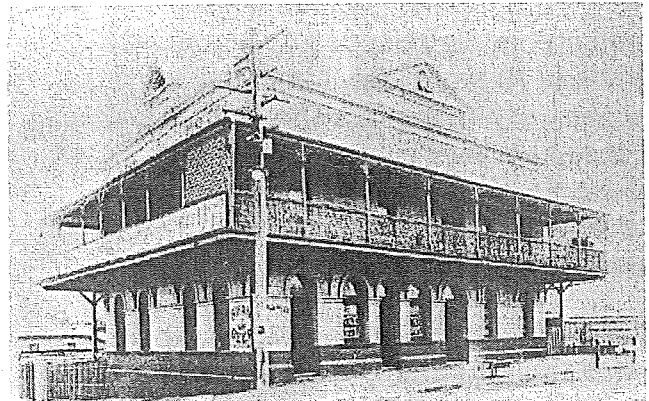
And for our listening pleasure ... Richard Rennie from the award-winning *Sound and Light Discovery Centre* (based at the Fremantle History Museum) will talk about his great-grandfather, also a Richard Rennie.

Richard Rennie (1870-1936) was a building contractor, and 'rough diamond'. Arriving in Fremantle in 1896, he was instrumental in the construction of many of Fremantle's now

historic buildings, including work on the new Swan Hotel.

His civic work included becoming a Fremantle Town Councillor and Board Member of various local businesses. Richard Rennie left a permanent impression on the City of Fremantle.

Saturday 28 August, 12.15 pm
Swan Hotel, Stirling Highway (just off the Old Traffic Bridge), North Fremantle
RSVP by Tuesday 24 August to Bob Woollett on 9335 7451



Original Swan Hotel, 1910. Courtesy FLHC 7B-5

The present Swan was built in 1922 by contractor Richard Rennie and designed by Fremantle architects Eales and Cohen. It still features swans in render which were also a feature of the original building.

The new Swan Inn is the only surviving building of early North Fremantle character which exists among a varied collection of industrial structures. Its adjoining companion, the Bridge Hotel, a coach and river-barge stopping place, was demolished to make way for the new railway bridge. It would have cost another \$30 000 to save the original hotel by selecting a new route for the railway.

RAILWAYS IN FREO

Jeff Austin, the historian for the Australian Railway Historical Society will give the Society an overview of railway activities in Fremantle with a particular focus on the

tramway from the Convict Establishment to the port.

Tuesday 28 September at the Function Room, Ship Wreck Galleries, Cliff St, Fremantle, 7.00 pm.

FREMANTLE STUDIES DAY – 24 OCTOBER

During the year there have been several controversies surrounding new developments in the city and their potential effect on its heritage values. As part of the celebrations of the Year of the Built Environment, this year's Studies Day will draw together four speakers with considerable experience and expertise in the field who will review the principles and practices of heritage conservation. Speakers will include Prof David Dolan (Curtin University), Jeremy Dawkins (Planning Commission), Geoffrey London (UWA), and Anne Brake (National Trust).

A flyer will be circulated closer to the time, but for information and bookings please contact Bob Woollett on 93357451.

Fremantle Studies Day will be held at the **Function Room, Ship Wreck Galleries, Cliff St, Fremantle on Sunday 24 October.** Registrations open at 12.15 pm for a **1.00 pm start.**



MEETING REPORTS

FREMANTLE HARBOUR

Why is Fremantle Harbour the best in the world? That was the theme of historian Patricia Brown's presentation at the May general meeting. A good crowd arrived at the Education Centre of the Maritime Museum in Cliff Street to hear a repeat of Dr Brown's Ockham's Razor talk on Radio National. She described the instructions given to her by the ABC producer before she recorded her talk, 'Make the words come off the page'. She obviously achieved

that at the meeting, judging from the large number of questions her talk drew.

CHURCH OF CHRIST

Cold weather and head colds kept many members away from the June general meeting at the Church of Christ in High Street. This was sad as the visit showed our members the church's rich history and the care with which parishioners have preserved that history. Visitors saw rare photographs and documents and generally were made very welcome. The church, which was opened in 1898, has had an interesting architectural history with the addition of a memorial hall after WW I. A front porch was built in 1939 to reduce the noise of trams rattling up and down High Street.

10TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AND AGM – VICTORIA HALL COMES TO LIFE!

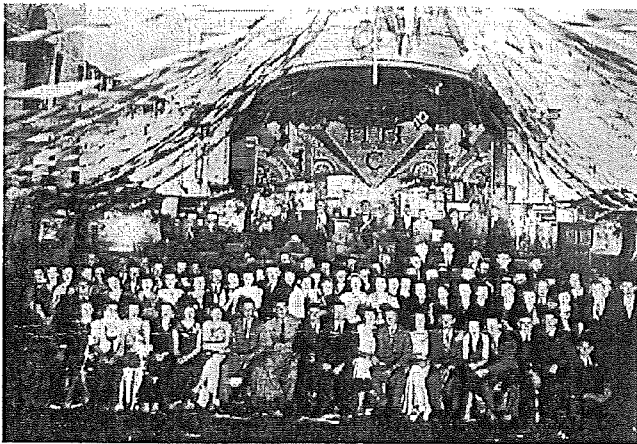
Conservation architect Chris Patterson, of Palassis Architects, took Fremantle History Society members on a fascinating journey through the Victoria Hall – and the creative mind of its architect Talbot Hobbs – at the AGM. Chris wrote the conservation plans for the building. He began by showing us Hobbs' delicate watercolours of the hall's façade – featuring the title St Johns' Hall. It was originally built as the church hall for St John's. The name was changed to Victoria Hall very soon after its construction and to celebrate the then Queen's golden jubilee.

We were also shown the contrast between the Free Classical elaboration of the façade and the fairly austere nature of the interior. But even here the architect, said Chris, had some playful moments. It is difficult to imagine Talbot Hobbs, who was an ageing World War I general, being playful, but when we had elements of the hall pointed out to us we had to agree. One of the members asked whether the upstairs 'dress circle' section of the building might be used again. Chris pointed to the low cast iron balustrade which made it easy for a member of the

audience to fall over. Apparently the answer would be to provide extra glass protection inside the cast-iron.

We also saw plans of some of the future developments including a narrow bar on the western side of the hall. This would provide an interface between the interior of the hall and the street.

As well as the architecture we caught a series of vivid glimpses of the hall as a centre of Fremantle social life. The picture (below) of Victoria Hall during the days of the Bushells Club provides an example of this.



17 JUNE 1938, COURTESY FLHC 3966



VOICES FROM THE WEST END: THE FREMANTLE LIVING HISTORIES PROJECT

The Centre for Social and Community Research (Murdoch University) is holding the 2004 research forum for the Voices From the West End project at the new Maritime Museum lecture theatre, on Tuesday 31 August 3-5pm. This project has been supported by the Australian Research Council in association with a consortium of local organisations in the Fremantle community, including the Fremantle History Society. The Centre for Social and Community Research would like to invite all interested members to attend the 2004 research forum. The aim of the forum is to

encourage new links between researchers, members of the public, and representatives from partner organisations, as well as to showcase the results of the project so far. Short papers will be presented, and there will be updates from the postgraduate students and a work-in-progress report on the interactive documentary being funded through the project. Drinks and finger food will be provided from 5-5.30pm. For more information on the project, please see the project website

<http://www.scase.murdoch.edu.au/projects-voices.html> .

For your diary

Saturday 28 August, 12.15 pm – Pub Lunch. Join members and their friends at the **Swan Hotel, Stirling Highway, Nth Fremantle** for this year's winter warmer. **RSVP by Tuesday 24 August to Bob Woollett on 9335 7451**

Tuesday 28 September, 7.00 pm – Railways in Freo will be presented at the **Function Room, Ship Wreck Galleries, Cliff St, Fremantle.**

Sunday 24 October, 12.15 pm – Fremantle Studies Day. Now an institution in the Fremantle calendar. Be sure to book early. **Maritime Museum Education Centre, Cliff St, Fremantle.** More information to follow.

HATS OFF TO RUSTY

As reported in the *West Australian* on 16 July 2004, the Fremantle History Society's very own larrikin and yarn spinner, Rusty Christensen, has won a national bush poetry competition held at the Waltzing Matilda Bush Poetry Festival in Winton, Queensland.

The prize includes a trip to Nevada in January next year to compete in an

international event to be held at the Cowboy Poetry Gathering, with crowds of around 10 000 expected. He also won a sculpture of a swagman sitting on a log and a cut opal mounted on a rock.

Rusty was the foundation president of the WA Bush Poets and Yarn Spinners Association. Each year on Australia Day, they hold a bush poetry event at Wireless Hill. Another Fremantle History Society member, the late Connie Herbert, was also a member of the Association.

While officially only taking up the art seven years ago, I am sure anyone who has heard Rusty (who will ever forget that wonderful performance at the Society's 2002 pub lunch at the Rose Hotel) will know that he's been a bit of a yarn spinner all his life!

Congratulations Rusty and all the best.
(thanks to Michael Zekulich's article)



OUR FIRST TEN YEARS - QUIZ

1. In which year was the first Fremantle Studies Day held?
2. As laid down in the Rules of the Society, its first objective is to encourage the study and public awareness of what?
3. What is the structure featured in the Society's logo?
4. The background picture on the front cover of *Fremantle Studies* vol 2 is a view of which street?
5. In 2001 the Society was involved in the planning of a historical trail through which facility in Fremantle?
6. In 2000 the Society assisted the Fremantle City Council in carrying out a survey. What was the subject?
7. At the AGM in the year 2000, a mock trial was performed by Society members related to an infamous incident in the city's history which took place on 17 August 1832. What was the incident?
8. Both the AGM and Christmas Party in 1995 took place in the family business

premises and home of which well known Fremantle identity?

9. The largest attendance (so far) at a monthly general meeting occurred on 24 October 1995 at the Door Gallery in High St. What was the subject of the meeting?

10. In which year was the Society a joint winner in category iv (a significant contribution made by an individual or group to the preservation of Fremantle's heritage) of the Heritage Awards made by the Fremantle City Council?

(Answers back page)



A DEFINITIVE WORK OF HISTORY

David Hutchison

Those who attended my talk about the tragic life of John Gavin, the Parkhurst Reformatory boy who was hanged in Fremantle in 1844, will be pleased to know that Andrew Gill has published his masterly and detailed account of the scheme under which the boys from the reformatory were transported to the colony of Western Australia to work as apprentices.

Andrew, who is a member of our Society, has devoted over twenty years to his very detailed research; his work, for example, includes information about each of the 234 boys and detailed analyses of the settlers who employed them. It provides new insights into the society of the colony in the 1840s.

Andrew is a pugnacious critic of earlier historians who have overlooked or underestimated the importance of the transportation of these juvenile convicts in the decade before adult convicts were transported to the colony.

Copies may be purchased from Blatellae Books, PO Box 209, Maylands 6931. Cheques or money orders should be made payable to Blatellae Books. The price is \$35.00 and add \$8.80 for postage and packing per book in Australia.



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The following is an abbreviated version of the report for the year ending 30 June 2004, which the President, Bob Woollett, presented to the Annual General Meeting in Victoria Hall on 27 July.)

It has been another eventful year and propitious 12 months for the Society. Membership and finances have remained at healthy levels and a wide range of activities have been successfully undertaken.

The monthly general meetings continue to be a central focus and have been largely well supported and certainly much enjoyed by members and visitors. Three informative talks were heard and five interesting visits were made to places of historical interest in the area. The two social events on the Society's calendar, the Winter Pub Lunch at the Fremantle Hotel and the end of year gathering at the Fremantle Lawn Tennis Club, again proved to be both popular and memorable occasions.

Our 8th Fremantle Studies Day was held at the Education Centre of the Maritime Museum in Cliff St on Sunday 26 October and was well received by the 50 members and visitors who attended. Four papers were presented, each dealing with a less well known personality or event in the history of Fremantle. Thanks are once again due to the Maritime Museum for making available such an appropriately historic venue for the occasion and to staff member Mike Brevenholt, for supervising the technical arrangements. Among our members we are indebted to David Hutchison for efficiently co-ordinating the arrangements for the day. Preparation of Volume 3 of the Fremantle Studies Journal is in hand and it is hoped to be launched at this year's Studies Day on Sunday 24 October.

The Society made what it hopes was a useful contribution to the Fremantle Heritage Festival in June. Kristy Bizacca again

served on the organising committee (Kristy as Chair). Kristy was also a member of the Awards Committee through which the Society was pleased to sponsor the Primary School prize. Ken Hopkins and Geoff Higham acted as guides on heritage walks through Fremantle Cemetery and the President's house in Norfolk St, formerly a grocer's store, was open to the public on the Saturday afternoon.

Over the year the committee has taken the initiative in a number of heritage issues. Letters were written to Fremantle City Council about the new heritage process and the qualifications of the Heritage Advisory Committee, and to both the Council and the Department of Land Administration about the lease and maintenance of the former Boys School. A lengthy submission was also made to Council about the proposed development of the Synagogue site on South Terrace, arguing that the scale of the structure would dominate the heritage building and have a detrimental effect on the sight lines to the Fremantle Prison precinct from the Parry St intersection. It is difficult, of course, for the committee to claim that it is expressing a 'Society view' on these matters but it feels confident that it is expressing the opinion of a majority of members and that it is therefore justified in taking these actions when the decisions made by Council conflict with its declared heritage policy and show a blatant disregard of its own planning regulations, particularly in regard to the height of buildings.

As a mark of our appreciation of the contribution to the history of Fremantle made by the Local History Collection of the City Library by acting as a repository of material and by assisting people undertaking research, the Society was happy during the year, to donate to the library a twin deck cassette recorder for use in building up its stock of oral history tapes. The recorder was presented to the City Librarian at the annual meeting of Library Friends in November.

I would like to pay tribute to the management committee for the initiative and commitment they have shown during the year. Unfortunately, Kristy Bizzaca resigned from the committee and her position as Vice-President in March owing to work and study commitments and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking her for the vitality and vigour she brought to the role and for the valuable contribution she made to the committee's deliberations, particularly with regard to wider heritage issues.

And finally I would like to acknowledge the support given by you, the members, to me and the committee through the year and to thank you for your interest and participation in the Society's activities. I look forward to enjoying with you a further period of prosperity and progress for the Society in the coming year.



THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S AFFILIATED SOCIETIES CONFERENCE

16 - 18 September 2005

As reported in the last edition of the newsletter, the Society will host the above event here in Fremantle. Please note the change of dates.

Two meetings of the working group have been held and a useful start has been made with some of the long term planning of the weekend on the theme of 'Fremantle: A point of contact'. The Fremantle Council has generously agreed to hold a Civic Reception for the delegates on the Friday evening and to make the Town Hall available on the Saturday as a venue for the conference business session and talks during the day and for the dinner in the evening. The program for the Sunday customarily consists of a bus tour to places of historical interest in the area and our current idea is to arrange a general tour of the city and its surrounds on the Fremantle Tram and subsequently offer a range of more detailed

visits to particular places using the Fremantle CAT as transport.

Running the conference is a massive undertaking for the Society and it is hoped members will lend their full support to the project by submitting any ideas they have about the program of talks and visits, by volunteering to serve on a conference management committee which will be formed towards the end of the year and certainly by making themselves available on at least one of the days of the conference weekend to help with the general arrangements. For further information contact one of the members of the working group: Bob Woollett (9335 7451); David Hutchison (9335 1594); Geoff Higham (9310 1186); Kristy Bizzaca (9361 9915); and Jacqui Sherriff (9472 1436).



EARLY WARNING

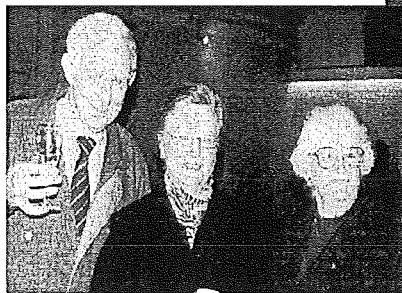
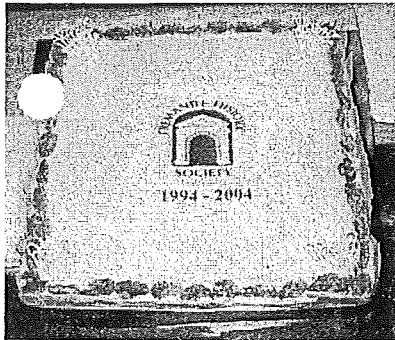
Get out your diaries and mark in the date for this year's Christmas celebrations. We have booked the Grosvenor Restaurant at the TAFE in Grosvenor St for Wednesday 1 December. 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm start. 3 course dinner will cost \$19.50. Further details to come in the next newsletter.



PLYMPTON WARD PEOPLE

Danny Cusack wants to talk to people who know about the Plympton Ward and more specifically George St. He is putting together a history of the area focusing on a series of maps that will plot the various shops and other buildings along George St in three different eras – around 1954, 1979 and the present.

If you have any information on this historic precinct Danny would love to hear from you on 9319 8946.



Members enjoying the festivities at Victoria Hall as part of the Society's 10th birthday celebrations.

Our First Ten Years Quiz: Answers

- 1. 1996
- 2. Fremantle history (1/2 mark) and heritage (1/2 mark)
- 3. A gateway or archway - reminiscent of the replica of the Batavia arch in the Shipwreck Gallery
- 4. The Mall in High St
- 4. Fremantle Cemetery
- 6. An up-date of the Council's list of heritage buildings
- 7. The duel (1/2 mark) between William Nairn Clark and George French Johnson (1/2 mark for either or

- both names)
- 8. Sir Frederick Samson
- 9. Fremantle families
- 10. 2002

(Add up the number of questions you answered correctly and award yourself a degree in History (FHS) accordingly!

- 9-10 BA Hons (1st class)
- 7-8 BA Hons (2nd class)
- 5-6 BA Hons (3rd class)
- Less than 5 BA Hons (failed)

