



## FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305  
FREMANTLE WA 6959

Summer Edition, January 2022

<https://fhs.org.au>

### GOODBYE AND FAREWELL TO ANNE

On Wednesday, 2 February 2022, thirty members of the Fremantle History Society (FHS) met at Mrs Brown's Bar in North Fremantle to say farewell to our current Treasurer, Anne Brake, who is moving to Canberra to take up a position with ACT Historic Places, a division of their Cultural Corporation.

However, to describe Anne as our current Treasurer does not do her justice as she is both a founding member and life member of the Society. Indeed, it is part of Society folklore that Anne had not been in Western Australia long and working as the newly appointed curator of Fremantle Prison when she was approached by the then Mayor, Jenny Archibald and Dianne Davidson about working with them to establish what became the Fremantle History Society. As they say the rest is (Fremantle) history and the inaugural meeting of the Fremantle History Society was held on 12 October 1994 when more than fifty people attended a meeting in the reception room of the Fremantle City Council.

Anne was an original committee member and since that inaugural meeting she has given over twenty seven years of unbroken service to the Society. In that time Anne has not only been a committee member, but has been Secretary, Treasurer, Vice President and President and so with that depth of experience and knowledge it cannot be understated just how much Anne will be missed by the Fremantle History Society.



Anne Brake



Anne with members of the FHS at Mrs Brown's Bar, North Fremantle (FHS members)



FHS farewell gift to Anne: photograph of Fremantle Harbour [c1960] (Michal Lewi)

One of the principal objectives of the Fremantle History Society is to 'encourage involvement in the study of Fremantle history and cultural diversity through research, oral history and writing.' Thus, with that aim the Society has established a great reputation with its Fremantle Studies Day and the biennial publication of *Fremantle Studies* journal and I am confident to say that those two major Society activities would not have achieved the prominence and longevity that they have without Anne's effort. Anne's initiative of the biennial scholarship in 2014, now the Ron and Dianne Davidson Research Scholarship, has resulted in four scholarships being awarded which further adds to new research of Fremantle's history

Another key activity that has been undertaken by Anne has been the production of our newsletter and between 1994 and 2022, Anne has overseen the production of 109 newsletters, (inclusive of this one.) So as this will be the last newsletter she has been responsible for, I hope this tribute to her truly recognises the outstanding contribution that she has made to the Fremantle History Society. I will close by passing on our very best wishes to her as well as saying that, while she will be missed, she will never be forgotten as her legacy to the Society will be forever remembered through that great body of work that she achieved on behalf of the Fremantle History Society.

Allen Graham  
President



## MEETING REPORTS

### Christmas party at Azelia Ley Homestead – 28<sup>th</sup> November

For the final event for the year the Fremantle History Society liaised with the Cockburn Historical Society to hold the annual Christmas party at Azelia Ley Homestead within Manning Park, Hamilton Hill. A beautiful setting, the Davilak Estate was established on land bought by wealthy Fremantle merchant, Charles Manning, in 1840 and was occupied and added to by his descendants for over 100 years.

In 1866 Charles and Matilda Manning built a large, 14 room house with outbuildings on the property. Charles' son from a previous marriage, Lucius, inherited the house in 1871 and expanded the estate planting vineyards and raising horses and cattle. He and his wife, Florence, had 7 children; Azelia Helena, born in 1872, was the second.



Azelia Ley Homestead, rooms and gardens

(FHS members)

Azelia married John 'Jack' Morgan Ley at Davilak in 1900 and the couple lived on Preston Point Road in East Fremantle. In 1915 Florence Manning, now widowed, divided the estate up amongst her children. Azelia built a second homestead, Manning Tree House, on her portion of the estate and although it was completed in 1923, she did not move in until after her husband's death in 1927.

The original Davilak House fell into ruin over the years following Florence's death in 1946 and was gutted by fire in 1960. Remnants of the limestone walls are all that is left today.

Azelia did not have children and appears to have lived a fairly reclusive life, running her farm and managing her properties into her eighties. The homestead fell into disrepair after her death in 1954 and it was not until the 1980s that the Cockburn Council took it on, along with some prominent local citizens, to repair and repurpose the building as a museum.

The Azelia Ley Museum was officially opened 12<sup>th</sup> November 1983, the running and administration is overseen by the Cockburn Historical Society. Each of the ten rooms has been beautifully restored to near original condition, filled with displays of memorabilia relating to the history of the Manning family and wider Cockburn district.

A good turnout of Society members spent the afternoon wandering through the Museum and Wagon House admiring this extensive collection, before enjoying afternoon tea out on the wide verandah.

Information from City of Cockburn website - <https://history.cockburn.wa.gov.au/Azelia-Ley-Museum>

## COMING EVENTS

### FREMANTLE HOSPITAL MUSEUM

**Fremantle Hospital**  
**Alma Street, Fremantle**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> February 5.00 pm**



Fremantle Hospital Museum

(Judith Robison)

Our first meeting for 2022 will be held at the Fremantle Hospital Museum at 5.00 pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. The Museum is situated in the grounds of the hospital and accessed from Alma Street. Entry to the nearest carpark is via Gate 6 opposite Brennan Street – walk past Block M.

We will be met by Ruth Letts, the founder of the museum, which is situated inside the building which houses the old hyperbaric chambers. Ruth and a dedicated group of volunteers have

collected and preserved a fascinating and extensive collection of records dating from 1897, together with medical instruments, photos, nurses uniforms, etc. As Ruth says: “ It is a social history, it’s culture, it’s nursing, it’s a history of the prison and the port and how they connected to Fremantle.”

After an introductory talk by Ruth, members will be able to explore the collection and ask questions.

Depending on the Covid situation members may wish to meet for drinks afterwards at the Norfolk Hotel.



## **TOUR OF NEW FREMANTLE LIBRARY AND HISTORY CENTRE, AND LAUNCH OF FREMANTLE STUDIES VOLUME 11**

**Fremantle Library  
Walyalup Civic Centre  
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160  
22 March, 5.30 pm**

Four years later Fremantle’s new civic centre, Walyalup Koort, has opened, the new library and history centre are up and running. Our March meeting includes a tour of the new premises and launch of the much anticipated latest volume of Fremantle Studies by Fremantle Mayor, Hannah Fitzhardinge.

Supper will be served following the launch. Join us on the 22<sup>nd</sup> for what promises to be an interesting meeting.

## **NORTH FREMANTLE’S AMALGAMATION**

**North Fremantle Town Hall  
222 Queen Victoria Street, North Fremantle  
26 April 6.00 pm**

Our April meeting will be held in the library section of the iconic North Fremantle Town Hall known as the Guild Hall and adjacent to Matilda’s Antique Centre. This replaces the June meeting cancelled last year which was to mark the 60th anniversary of the merger of North Fremantle Council with the City of Fremantle. Ann Forma will give a talk on the history of the Town Hall and the municipality of North Fremantle. Ann is a long-term North Fremantle resident, former North Ward Councillor and has been involved with the North Fremantle community for over 40 years.



North Fremantle Town Hall early 1940s  
(FHC ref. 370)

Following her talk we will be given the opportunity to have a look around the interior of the building, after which we will have our regular light supper.



## FREMANTLE LIBRARY – GLIMPSES OF THE EARLY YEARS

Extracts from an interview with Betty McGeever by Heather Campbell

Betty McGeever applied for a job as junior library assistant at the Evan Davies Civic Library in Fremantle in 1957 and found what she described as 'the perfect nook in life'. She gained librarianship qualifications in the 1960s and apart from two working holidays overseas, remained with the Evan Davies Civic Library and subsequently the Fremantle City Library for her entire career (45 years over a 48 year period) becoming City Librarian in 1974.

In 2004 Betty gave a talk - 'Sex, Lies and Videotape' at the AGM of Library members and these notes on the history of the library following are gleaned from that. If you'd like to know more – and there is a lot more – the Fremantle History Centre holds an eight-hour interview with Betty McGeever conducted by Heather Campbell in 2010.

Fremantle's public library service is one long unbroken thread going back to the Mechanics Institute of 1851,

In 1959 the only free libraries in the metropolitan area were Claremont, Kwinana and Fremantle but throughout the 1960s the WA Library Board opened many more and librarians had to be imported from the UK to cope with the demand. UK librarians had great depth and breadth of knowledge and were well chosen imports. More men came onto staff at this time.

1959-1960 the library lent out 300,000 books. There was no television so the public relaxed by reading light fiction. Light fiction could be read quickly so turnover was rapid. In 1956 Fremantle had joined the Library Board Scheme and the public lapped up the range of stock, new books, and range of non-fiction (not a feature before). Two books on sex and marriage were held but were locked in the workroom and had to be asked for.

In the 1960s-1970s the Evan Davies Civic Library had a staff of seven. Mrs Anderson, a wonderful person, a widow, had been sent to NSW by Fremantle Council to qualify in the 1940s as a librarian (enlightened of council) in order to run the Fremantle Free Lending Library as it was known between the Literary Institute and the public library as we know it. Miss Lily Organ, a spinster lady, probably in her fifties, was a memorable character who could be kind, but formidable; no one argued with her, including readers. She worked the late shift every day by choice and cleaned a bank in the mornings so she could afford to run a car, a very unusual thing for a woman to do back then. There were three other ladies and the two juniors, Betty and Wendy, who worked lending, mending, filing and shelving and were very busy. Popular authors were mended again and again. Mending was done on an old linoleum covered kitchen table in the workroom. The Evan Davies Civic Library was on South Terrace where the Dome café is



Betty McGeever, celebrating 40 years' service at Fremantle Library

today, but in the 60s it was a seedy quarter of town and very dark at night. Staff were paid in cash but there were never any problems with theft.

The big event of the 1960s was the introduction and impact of TV. Loans had peaked at 300,000 in late 1950s, but by the mid-1960s had dropped to just over 200,000. TV satisfied the recreational needs that libraries had met in the past. The novelty of TV did wear off eventually and people returned to libraries, but not in same numbers as previously.

The 1970s was a decade of service development and change. Librarians' working hours improved, a homebound service was established. 1974 saw the library move to new premises with increased space therefore an increase in stock. In 1977 a cassette collection was established and in 1979 the local history collection was started in a three-drawer filing cabinet!

The Americas Cup in the 1980s brought lots to do socially. There was quite a bit of money about and the library received some of it. 1983 saw improved opening hours and there were new furnishings in the late '80s. Videos came out of state funded book stock quota, but there was no attempt to compete with video libraries.

The 1990s heralded major change. In 1996 automation was effected after a 2-year lead in period. It was successful though expensive, but was an enormous investment in the library, which came in on budget. Betty McGeever could see the potential of the internet and in 1997 launched public access to the internet on four terminals. It was a popular service with people using it to access other worlds.

Betty said however, 'Nevertheless the book remains the most wonderful technology...' and I for one, would not argue with that.



## **FREMANTLE'S NEW HISTORY CENTRE**

Stewart Alger



The City's Local History Librarian Stewart Alger is excited to report that the Fremantle Local History Centre has its own dedicated space in the new library. The prized 46-year-old collection with unique historical pieces such as rare books, an extensive photographic collection and council archives is happily housed in its new location with the impressive additions of an interactive 65-inch screen for viewing digital resources, a microfilm reader and an accessible reference collection.

"Our new space is more inviting for people to come in and explore our history, particularly with its spacious workstations that can be booked for research," Stewart said. "We hope to have more people engaging with our history collection than ever before, especially now that we're back in the heart of Fremantle."

Members have the opportunity to come along and see for themselves at the March meeting when we will be given a tour of both the History Centre and the new Fremantle Library.

## TREASURES FROM TROVE – Browsing in the library

Heather Campbell

As early as 1878 the Legislative Council discussed the suggestion for a public library in Fremantle. It was reported that Mr Pearse:

...’ in moving that the sum of a hundred pounds be placed on the estimates towards the erection of a room for a public library at Fremantle, said that similar assistance had been granted to other institutions of the same kind, and that in a place like Fremantle a public library was of great importance.’

After discussion about how many literary institutions there were already ‘*all cutting each other’s throats*’, further discussion was postponed.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime the Fremantle Library Institute filled the void and included additional activities of an erudite educational nature, including a series of University Extension Lectures in 1902 on electricity and electromagnetism, and an explanation of ‘*the Rontgen rays and Marconi’s system of telegraphy*’.<sup>2</sup> By 1905 the Literary Institute was ‘*in a very flourishing condition*’ having made ‘*considerable additions to the library during the past year*’. For the less intellectual of its supporters ‘*a billiard room, which was established ... proved a great success, being largely availed of by the members.*’<sup>3</sup>

Despite the billiard table, it appears that the Institute was:

‘least appreciated by the citizens of the Port. ... Comparisons are said to be odious, but anybody who has belonged to the Institutes of both Perth and Fremantle cannot fail to make them, and the consensus of opinion must after due consideration be heavily in favor of the local Institute. ... [as] the general arrangements made for the convenience of members, is far and away more complete in the Fremantle Institute.

A few facts about the advantages offered to Fremantle citizens by the local Institute may incite them to take the interest in it which is surely its due. To begin with there are 7000 odd volumes, including all works of fiction, science, books of reference, etc, to choose from, all these volumes are tabulated and arranged under the names of their various authors, and on application to the secretary for any particular work desired by a member can be obtained immediately, or if it is not at the time of application, the secretary on reference to his very complete books can at once say where it is and when it is likely to be obtainable.

The Institute keeps all the latest editions of a vast number of magazines and periodicals of both English and Australian publication, in its reading room, and in addition to this provides comfortable chairs, and airy cool rooms and a verandah in which they may be perused at the convenience of the subscriber. There is a fine billiard room containing two tables, on which members can play, paying just half the price charged in ordinary saloons; there are also smoking rooms, in which are card tables and also draught and chess boards, at which people can while away their spare hours in comfort and comparative privacy.

The ladies are not forgotten either, a special room being provided for them in which are to be seen all the latest periodicals published specially for the edification of the fairer sex.

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<sup>1</sup> *Herald* (Fremantle), 6 July 1878, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Fremantle Courier*, 9 July 1902, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily News*, 27 July 1905, p. 3.

The spacious balcony has lately been furnished with ten 16-candle power electric lights of the latest type, in order that a member may sit outside and enjoy the cool air while they are reading the contents of their fav rite periodicals, and all these advantages can be obtained for £1/1/ a year, for which sum three books may be taken out at a time, of, if preferred, 2/6 entrance fee can be paid and for 1/ per month one book may be taken, for 1/6 two books, or for 2/ three books.

...There are only 700 members belonging to this excellent Institute, and the writer feels sure that people only require to be informed of the excellence of the management and general equipment of the concern to ensure the number of its membership being doubled or trebled.<sup>4</sup>

Seventy years after a public library for Fremantle was first mooted in Parliament, in 1948 the Fremantle Municipal Council was being congratulated through the columns of the *West Australian* 'for its progressive action in this direction'<sup>5</sup>

In August 1949, it was reported that Dr J S Batty would open the City of Fremantle's free lending library on 5 September:

'Renovations and alterations which had been started in April after the library had been taken over from the Fremantle Literary Institute should be completed by that date. It will be the first free lending library controlled by a local governing authority in this State and the council intends to spend at least £2,000 a year on its conduct and maintenance. The council carried a recommendation of the library committee that an experimental library for children should be established in conjunction with the West Australian Children's Book Council. Under the proposed scheme, the Fremantle City Council would provide a room in the library building and staff to keep records and to conduct the children's library. The Children's Book Council would supply the books during the first three years. After that time the books would revert to the council.'<sup>6</sup>

It was apparently the 'accepted practice' in free municipal libraries for borrowers to be permitted to take two books at a time, one fiction and one general. The intention of this ruling was 'to stimulate interest in literature other than pure fiction'. 'Browser' from South Coogee, was not happy:

'Grumble Column – IT'S FREE BUT IT'S NOT EASY

THE Fremantle "free" library should find another word in place of "free."

It seems that you're free only to join. Then you're told that only one book of fiction is allowed, and you're shown shelves of books on history, geography, biology, physiology and so on, with the instruction that you must take one of each. The idea of a free library is completely defeated by this ruling, and I for one shall find another library where I can browse among the books and take what I really want.'<sup>7</sup>

Wouldn't 'Browser' love to browse in these more enlightened times - and in our new library?!!



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<sup>4</sup> *Evening Mail*, 26 January 1906, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *West Australian*, 17 December 1948, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *West Australian*, 16 August 1949, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily News*, 17 September 1949, p. 7.

**The State Library of WA presents:**

Izzy: Exhibition of Abraham 'Izzy' Orloff's Photographs

State Library of WA  
Fri 28 Jan – Sun 17 April 2022  
Ground Floor Gallery  
Free exhibition, no tickets required



Izzy Orloff's rich collection of photographs reveals glimpses of Fremantle's public and private lives during this time.

Orloff was a much loved community figure who worked as a professional studio and press photographer. He had an exceptional eye for human subjects in panoramic streetscapes, architecture and maritime arrivals. He examined Perth's social, domestic and political spheres through a distinct worldview shaped by his experiences growing up in Ukraine and Palestine and as a Jewish migrant coming to WA.

**The Everyday life of a Fremantle Girl: 40s, 50s, and into the 60s**

Beth Powell



1956 in my Third Year at Princess May complete with my Prefect's Badge which I had taken from me for talking on the landing outside the Principal, Miss Anderson's office!  
(Photo: Beth Powell)

I am 80 years old and have lived in Bull Creek for the last 40 years. Woven into the fabric of my life however has been my experience of living in Fremantle and its environs throughout my earlier and formative years. I read Fay Campbell's article from the 2021 Summer Edition of this Newsletter with great interest and some excitement. I shared many of Fay's experiences and realised that I too have a story which you the readers might enjoy, and which could further trigger memories of an earlier and a different Freo.

In the 40s, and even earlier, many women went to the Hillcrest Maternity Hospital in Harvest Road, North Fremantle to have their babies. Myself, and my mother before me, were amongst such babies. The hospital had been opened by the Salvation Army in 1922 to continue on the services of the maternity hospital known as the Open Door (1903 -1922). Hillcrest Maternity Hospital itself closed its doors in 1974 and the home is now used for aged care.

In his youth my father lived not far from my birthplace in an old stone cottage at the top of Rule Street in North Fremantle. Growing up and visiting Grandpa I recall how I loved to look out from his front



Princess May High School girls.  
Beth front right

window. The view stretched out beyond Gage Roads and the ocean seemed limitless to a young girl. I saw the ships sailing into Fremantle Harbour and asked questions about where they had come from and where they were going. Could I go too? The view is still there of course, if not the old stone house which sadly has been renovated beyond recognition.

In the late '30s my father began his apprenticeship as a panel beater with Howard Porter. The Porter business, originally based on coach building and construction of timber horse carts, was founded by Howard Porter in 1936. The business had been taken over from Bolton and Sons Coaching and Carriage Builders which was established in William St, Fremantle in 1885.

My father remained with the Porter firm until his retirement in the mid-1970s. During this time he rose from the panel beating floor to Management. Chief amongst my memories was my concern about the method used in those days for repairing damaged mudguards and car bonnets. None of the current processes of filling small dents with plastic fillers or completely replacing a panel existed. Instead, the method was to use a dolly and small tapping hammer to hammer out and smooth over the dents. The dolly was held under the panel to provide a firm base for the hammering. My father needed to take me into his workshop before I believed that a 'dolly' was not a little doll being smashed around in his daily work. This dolly was, in fact, a solid piece of curved heavy metal well suited to fitting neatly into the panel beater's hand.

Our car, a T-Model Ford, was the pride of our young lives. This model of Ford came complete with running boards, detachable celluloid windows, and a dickie seat at the back. We called our car Henry. Getting the car to start was often a rather challenging task. First pull out the choke. *Oh no too much! I've flooded it.* Next strategy employed was for dad to get out the crank handle and what appeared to me to 'wind up the car.' A few turns of the crank handle, a splutter from the engine, race back into car, *give it a bit of choke*, and we were off.

Henry took us on many adventures. Driving up to the top of Monument Hill and gazing with awe on the ships in the harbour and the buildings in Fremantle town. A special treat was to go up in the evening, eat our fish and chips and wait for the lights to come on and twinkle below. And then it was down to the wharf in Fremantle Harbour to fish. Great was the excitement as the fishing lines, and bait, and bucket for the anticipated catch came out. Did we catch much? No. Did I catch much? No, not at all. In fact, I now recall that I spent much of our fishing time being very anxious that my parents might fall in, and I wasn't going anywhere near that edge. It was a long drop down to the water!

Also looming large in my memory is the tramway which ran from Stock Road, Melville into Fremantle. My sister and I loved the tram. We were warned by our parents that we should sit inside the body of the tram rather than sitting in the more open sections at the back and front of the tram.....*Dangerous*, they said. *You might fall out!* and, *Don't take the tram that goes over the bridge.* In those days some of the trams deviated across the Traffic Bridge in order to service the people living in North Fremantle. For my sister and I these were the 'bogey man' trams. I am not really sure why!



Howard Porters, cnr William and Henderson Streets, 1971  
(FHC ref. ES00293)

On reaching the tram terminus in Fremantle the conductor would leap out of the tram and swing the metal pole connecting the tram to the over-head electricity lines across to a different set of power lines. This movement meant that the tram was able to proceed in the opposite direction to complete the return route. In my memory the conductor (no women in those days of course) whistled jauntily as he moved down the tram turning the seats over to face the opposite direction.....always with a hand on each side of the aisle so two seats were turned over at the same time. I recall that he looked so proud of himself.

Beth's story will continue next issue.



Fremantle Municipal Tramways tram 1951  
(FHC ref. 2020C)



### **FOR YOUR DIARY (Note different times)**

#### **February Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>, 5.00 pm**

Fremantle Hospital Museum  
Fremantle Hospital  
Alma Street, Fremantle

#### **March Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>, 5.30 pm**

#### **New Fremantle Library and History Centre, and launch of Fremantle Studies Volume 11**

Fremantle Library  
Walyalup Civic Centre  
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

#### **April Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup>, 6.00 pm**

#### **North Fremantle's Amalgamation**

North Fremantle Town Hall  
222 Queen Victoria Street, North Fremantle

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

#### **Executive:**

Allen Graham (President) 0412 933 360  
Judith Robison (Secretary) 0434 571 666  
Anne Brake (Treasurer) 0438 445 141

#### **Committee Members:**

Fay Campbell 0419 969 678  
Pam Harris 0408 092 100  
Tania Heyne 0419 197 116  
Alan Kelsall 9336 4573  
Terry Murphy 0406 168 794

Ordinary meetings are generally held on the 4th Tuesday (or Sunday) of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter. Be sure to check details as meeting days and times may vary.