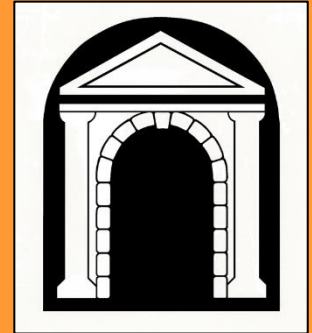


FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

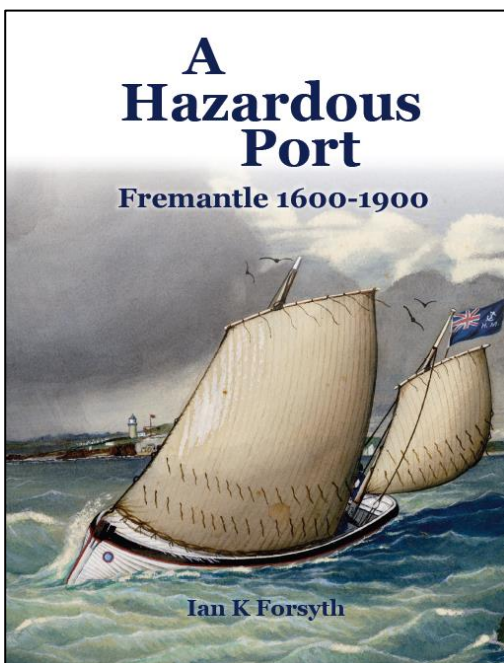
Established 1994

SUMMER EDITION, JANUARY 2025



NEXT MEETING:

Ian Forsyth - *A Hazardous Port: Fremantle 1600-1900*



Join the Fremantle History Society for a presentation with Ian Forsyth and his new book: *A Hazardous Port: Fremantle 1600–1900*. This follows up Ian's first publication written with his brother Ron in 2019: *A Hazardous Life*, about their grandfather George Forsyth.

This latest book explores the early history of the port of Fremantle and its critical role in the development of the colony of Western Australia. It gives a comprehensive account from the discovery of a continent, through the following two hundred years of exploration which preceded the founding of the Swan River Settlement, tragic shipwrecks, tense geopolitics and one man's ambition to become a person of history. To this it adds a flawed experiment in colonisation, overwhelming challenges, muddled leadership and numerous, costly errors of judgement.

Although the port's Colony of Western Australia soon became derided as a land of struggling 'sand gropers' it was, first and foremost, an isolated maritime outpost, kept afloat by hardy seafarers who had to do battle with its treacherous oceans and shores. Unlike Sydney's magnificent Port Jackson, Fremantle became a hazardous port of necessity rather than merit, with at least 168 serious maritime accidents, including 88 wrecks, during its colonial period.

The dangers of the port became a substantial impediment to the growth of the colony, which fell well behind that of the settlements to the east. Not until the colony's final years was the quest to develop a safe harbour realised, just as it became a State in the new nation of Australia.

Why did this often-quirky story unfold the way it did? And how different might it have been under somewhat altered circumstances?

The event will take place at the Fremantle History Centre on Tuesday, 18 February 2025, and showcases a decade of research, 400 pages, and over 60 historic photos and maps. Drinks and nibbles will be served around 5.00 pm, before the talk at 5.30 pm. The book will be on sale for \$45.00, with payment preferably by cash (receipted) or credit card. Ian will also have copies of *A Hazardous Life: Captain George Forsyth* for sale at \$29.00.

Welcome back everybody, I hope you've had a lovely festive season. We have events planned for the next three months for your enjoyment and perhaps enlightenment, as follows:

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Ian Forsyth - A Hazardous Port: Fremantle 1600-1900

Tuesday 18 February 5.00 pm

***Note: earlier in the month than usual**

Fremantle History Centre, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

Garth Caesar – Town Hall clock

Tuesday 25 March, 5.00 pm

Fremantle History Centre, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

Garth Caesar will be familiar to many of us who have presented him with a watch or clock to be fixed at his workshop in the Atwell Arcade, but in addition to his day job Garth took on the responsibility of maintaining the Fremantle Town Hall Clock some 30 years ago.

The bells, approximately 7 tonnes in weight, were cast in Birmingham, England, in 1887. High Street watchmaker and jeweller, William Hooper, supplied and installed the clock when it arrived from England in 1888. It was dragged down High Street by 16 horses, and was hoisted up through a pulley system through a hole cut out of the floor in the tower. In 1949 William Hooper was quoted in the *Sunday Times* 31st July as saying: provided it has the proper attention, the clock should still be giving Fremantle citizens the time in another 100 years.

His Atwell Arcade workshop is now closed but Garth still comes, once a week, to make sure the clock is ticking away as it should. Last year some of the cogs and wheels were found to be worn and needed replacing, the first time in its 137-year history. William Hooper would be so proud.

Garth will come talk to us about his work with the Fremantle Town Hall clock, the trials and tribulations, and, no doubt, share some amusing anecdotes.

Steve Wells – Tales from a tip: A talk about rubbish or a rubbish talk?!

Tuesday 29 April, 5.00 pm

Fremantle History Centre, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

What can we learn about how people lived and went about their daily lives from looking at a rubbish tip? This talk seeks to answer this question by revealing some details of excavations carried out at the old East Fremantle Rubbish Tip. A combination of research, artefacts and joining of dots should provide an insight into some aspects about the people of Fremantle during the early part of the twentieth century.

MEETING REPORTS

Christmas celebration – 24th November Miller Bakehouse Museum

A good number of our members and friends gathered at the Miller Bakehouse, home of the Melville History Society, for the final event of the year. Melville Society President, Chris Soutar, made us welcome, and our society members provided a sensational afternoon tea. There had been a speaker arranged to tell us about the history of the Miller Bakehouse and business; unfortunately he was unable to get back from Rottnest in time. However, Fremantle History Society member Steve Wells had, by this time, walked around the museum, looked at the displays, read the information there, and volunteered to step into the breach and provide an excellent impromptu talk. Thank you Steve, we look forward to your own event coming up in April.

The three-room bakery was built in 1935 for Mr Henry Miller, master baker, trained in bread, pastry and cake making. Also champion featherweight boxer in the early 1900s.

The Miller Bakery had bread rounds in Palmyra/Bicton, East Fremantle and into North Fremantle, all done with horse-drawn vans. Customers were asked to place a container with cash payment on their verandas for fresh bread delivered every day. In 1966 a Vienna loaf cost 12 cents. Other bakers were trading in the same areas but being the bakery "farthest East", Miller was naturally better placed to pick up new customers as residential expansion towards the Canning River continued.



The Second World War saw the introduction of Manpower Planning. One of the measures introduced was to designate districts to each bakery (bread zoning), thus utilising delivery services more efficiently. After the war, the old system did not return and larger bakeries upgraded their facilities and took over smaller ones to expand their business. The Miller Bakery installed a Cleveland Moulder to speed up the process of filling the baking tins, after the dough had been mixed, in an attempt to increase their production. Unfortunately the machine was not really suitable for the size of their operation and was hardly used.

In 1951 sliced and wrapped breads were introduced to Western Australia but Miller's continued to produce the old style bread. Inevitably the mechanisation of bakeries caught up with the family eventually, as they'd continued to produce old-style loaves while others moved to the sliced and wrapped loaves that today fill supermarket shelves.

The cost of revamping the whole bakery proved prohibitive and it was closed in 1976 and sold off to Melville council for a park. The building fell into neglect and was due to be demolished, but was saved by the Melville History Society and a Bicentenary grant.

2025 - Elections, elections, and more elections

Heather Campbell

By the end of 2025, we could have had our fill of elections, politicians, and of newspapers and other media beating us over the head with their message, not realising that it is often counterproductive. I, for example take great satisfaction in lining the rubbish bins with the newspaper whose political persuasion is opposite to mine.

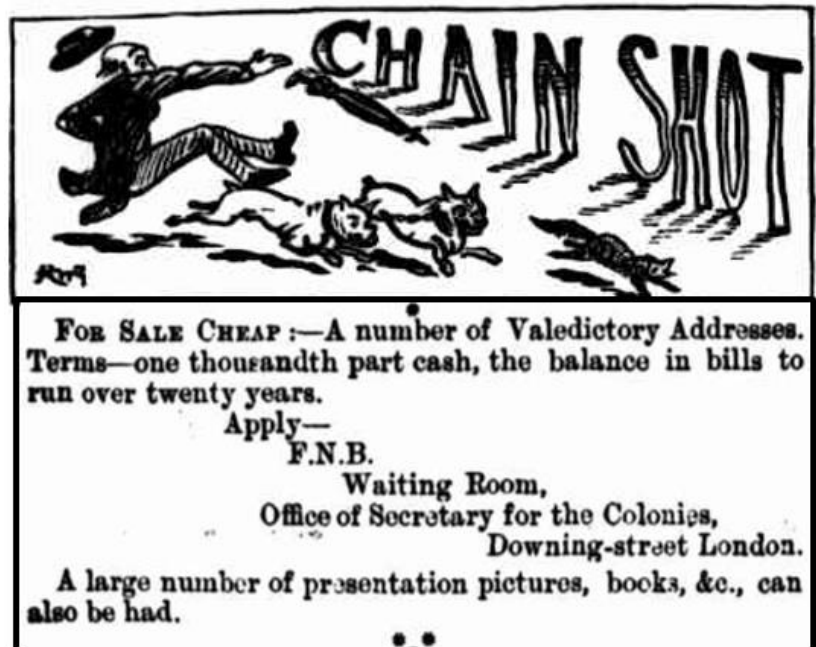
It was ever thus. Frederick Napier Broome [1842-1896], Governor of WA 1883-1889, was a polarising figure. He was a man 'of strong determination and fixity of purpose' which brought him 'into collisions on occasions with other public men' resulting in his six years in office being 'tumultuous with continuous clashes with senior officials'.¹

Broome's most sensational dispute was with Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Onslow, after he sought advice on appeals for remissions of sentences. 'Mutual recrimination was followed by public disputation, and as the combatants became heated they lost all sense of proportion ...and the bitterness spilled over into the press.'²

The issue was enthusiastically taken up by Jerry Hart, a well-known newspaper journalist. Through 1887, using 'blunt force editorials', Hart became a notable commentator on the 'Onslow Affair' and the 'unseemly clash, fanned by the popular press, resulted in Broome suspending Onslow from office, occasioning public outrage and demonstrations' with Hart 'gleefully' feeding the flames. 'He called for the Governor's *'speedy removal from the colony'* and continued to snipe at every opportunity'.³

Subsequently Broome suspended Onslow from office and 'in due course both parties were admonished, and Onslow was reinstated. The acrimony remained however and took longer to dissipate, fuelled by the divergent views of various publications. Broome's reputation in the Colonial Office suffered and prevented fulfilment of his hopes for an extension of his term in Western Australia.'⁴

When Broome's term of office was over, Hart could not resist publishing a sarcastic farewell in his column 'Chain Shot'.⁵



1 'Death of Sir F N Broome', *West Australian*, 28 November 1896, p 5 and Sir Frederick Napier Broome, KCMG – Government

House Western Australia [accessed 9/1/2025]

2 [Biography - Sir Frederick Napier Broome - Australian Dictionary of Biography](#) [accessed 9/1/2025]

3 B Kelly, 'Francis Jerome Ernest Hart', *Early Days* 102, Royal WA Historical Society, 2018, p 55.

4 [Biography - Sir Frederick Napier Broome - Australian Dictionary of Biography](#) [accessed 9/1/2025]

5 'Chain Shot' *WA Bulletin*, 28 Dec 1889, p 5.

Memories of the Fremantle Arts Centre

Tim Grant

My connection with the Fremantle Arts Centre has been lifelong and strong. In the late 1960s when I was a South Fremantle High School student, I planned to meet up with a couple of school friends for a Sunday adventure. It was a hot mid-summer's Sabbath and Fremantle was deserted. The adults avoided the heat and remained indoors luxuriating in their only day off. That left us kids, as usual, to rule the streets.

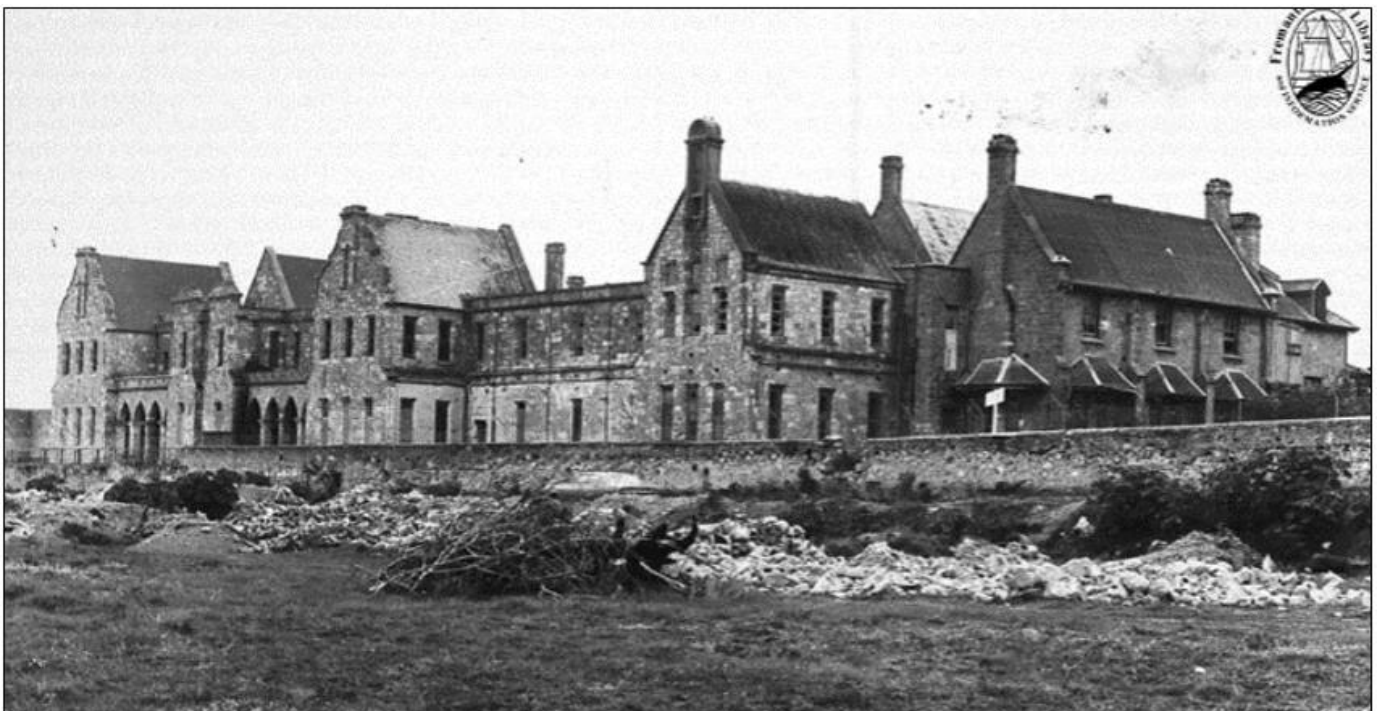
Our small posse of boys set off from East Street across the John Curtin High School oval, bravely walking over the top of the old cemetery. Along the way we'd scare each other with imaginary tales of what befell the hundreds of dead bodies buried below our feet. I recall jumping up against my mate at the suggestion of skeletal hands emerging out of the green to grab our ankles. Long before Ord Street was extended to run along the front of the swimming pool, there was vacant scrub land surrounding the southern and western fence-line of our destination.

We hiked through Goat Hill bush looking out for poisonous snakes and bucks; although the last of the wild goats were long gone by then. Our tension stacked and excitement built as we moved closer to the scary, most haunted building in town - the dilapidated convict built gothic masterpiece, which we knew as - the old *Fremantle Lunatic Asylum*.

We knew we shouldn't be there, that we were trespassing and this heightened the thrill as we snuck, low over a limestone wall and crept across the empty yard. Then we'd push through a barbed wire fence and along the southern side to the seclusion of the back areas. I was never very keen to go inside but buckled under peer pressure and followed on, scrambling barefoot over shattered glass, sheets of rusty iron and piles of junk to enter through a broken window.



Young Tim



1969 Fremantle Museum from the south west, before the construction of Ord Street

FHC 790B

Now, 50 plus years later, my memory only offers a few glimpses of what seemed then, to be a huge cavernous hall filled with half-finished life-size statues surrounded by rickety scaffolding. The musty, dusty floors were littered with severed arms, decapitated heads and other assorted body parts. As a young boy, this abandoned sculptors' studio was full of frozen ghosts about to ascend mysterious staircases that led nowhere. We never ventured in very far for fear of meeting a crazy spectre straight out of folklore. When we eventually left, emerging into the hot afternoon, it felt like I'd survived a deadly ordeal, only narrowly avoiding a plasma hand descending on my shoulder.

Way down the back of the block, a creepy guy tried to lure us into one of the dark lean-to stable sheds along the Finnerty Street wall. He added another layer of frightening weirdness to our expedition. We were young and didn't understand his invitation. Innocent to tragedy we toyed with notions; a friend once darted into the shed and ran out straight away laughing, he was dipping a toe into a possibility we had no concept of. Mostly we ignored the creepy guy and hung out in the yard throwing rocks at empty glass bottles until we had to return to the real world.

We might go under the wharf to scare the rats away or visit the cafés in Fremantle to ask the merchant seamen for foreign coins. These could be exchanged at Mott's in Market Street across the road from the station and, if we were lucky, we'd get enough money to be able to buy hot chips at Cicerello's.

Lucky for Fremantle, some ten years on from my childhood adventures, the building was saved from demolition and transformed into the Fremantle Historical and Maritime Museum. Throughout the mid to late 70s I often visited the museum, appreciating the local historical displays, remnants of shipwrecks, the *real* skeleton in its own grave, the armoury room filled with hundreds of guns, swords, knives and other weaponry all skilfully arranged in symmetrical patterns. The *pièce de résistance* was - you could actually lock your friends in a pitch black, authentic, padded cell. Yes, you could do that sort of stuff in the 70s.

In the late 1970s the centre came to my fascination again after the Fremantle Arts Centre received its first annual operating funding from the State Government. By this time I was interested in photography and used the centre as one of my earliest subjects. Every time I've taken a photo in the arts centre, I've had a sense of the unseen. I've often been surprised that nothing has ever shown up in the finished prints.



Images I took at the Fremantle Museum in the late 1970s

Then and Now...

Westgate Shopping Centre 1965

Built in 1965 the Westgate Mall was bounded by Queen, Adelaide, Point and Cantonment Streets. It was developed as a Council initiative to stimulate the city's commercial and retail industry. Hailed as an excellent example of co-operation between local government and private enterprise, this shopping complex was officially opened on 15 December 1965 by the Minister for Industrial Development the Hon Sir Charles Court.



1965 View from corner of Adelaide and Point Streets, looking south.

FHC ES00450

Photographer: Murray Edmonds



2025 View from corner of Adelaide and Point Streets, looking south.

Photographer: Kristi McNulty

TREASURES FROM TROVE - Fremantle Whaling Company

Heather Campbell

'Bay whaling was a perilous undertaking, and many men lost a leg or were drowned as a result of being caught in a spinning harpoon line or ... struck by the flukes of a whale. Danger, however, did not prevent early interest in the possibilities of the industry for the Swan River Colony. A whale fishery at Fremantle was first mooted in 1829 and by 1837 two companies were operating, one from Bather's Bay and one from Carnac Island. ...



The bluff of Arthur Head, c. 1891. Fremantle History Centre (FHC) LH001614
On the right are the abandoned premises of the Fremantle Whaling Company

The job was by no means over when the harpoon had entered the body of the whale. This was merely the preliminary to lance work at close quarters. Right whales were not savage creatures,

but a flick of the tail from one was sufficient to smash a boat to splinters, so that the approach had to be made warily and with skill. As soon as the whale was struck the harpooner took the steersman's place and it was with the headman that the responsibility of killing the capture rested.

Sometimes this took hours. If the carcass sunk in shallow water it was necessary to wait until the gases of putrefaction brought it to the surface again before it could be taken ashore and the blubber removed. The unpleasantness of such a task needs no enlargement.' [*West Australian*, 15 Aug 1936, p. 5 'The Bay Whalers']

The Fremantle Whaling Company are erecting a substantial jetty under the south side of Arthur's Head, and we believe the Governor has allowed the prisoners to be employed in the work. [*Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 29 April 1837, p. 892]

First Whale caught! The guns at Fremantle have been firing for two or three hours this morning, proclaiming the memorable event of the first whale caught, near Cockburn Sound. To what extensive enterprise this circumstance may lead, remains to be seen. The particulars we give as we have obtained them from a gentleman who has just arrived from Fremantle. An intimation to the Fremantle Company

from T. Peel, Esq, who was yesterday proceeding to Perth from the Murray by way of Fremantle, that he had seen two whales in Cockburn Sound, was the occasion of the boats

FREMANTLE WHALING COMPANY.

AT a Meeting held at Mrs. PACE'S Hotel, on Saturday the 25th of February,—Present, the following Persons,—

Messrs. Raudiet, Habgood, Vincent, Birch, Duffield, Edwards, Okely, Pratt, Back, Dempster, Thomson, Mrs. Pace.—

It was proposed, that the above Persons do form a Company, to be called the

"FREMANTLE WHALING COMPANY."

That the Company do consist of three Boats-Crews, or eighteen persons, and that, for the present year, this number is not to be augmented.

That the amount of Shares be £20. each, and so soon as the number is completed, an immediate deposit of £9 on each share will be required.

That in default of the same, the said defaulters' names be struck out, and others elected in their stead.

That the next Meeting be held on Monday, the 6th March, at Mrs. Pace's Hotel, at 6 o'clock P.M.

Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal, 4 March 1837, p. 859

being immediately manned; and, it would appear, the Carnac party had previously observed the whales at a distance and were in chase. Both parties assisted in its capture - but we believe it is allowed that the Carnac party threw the first harpoon, and were obliged to cut the line, from the rapidity with which the boat - the *Spitfire* was drawn under the water. The Fremantle boat had also struck the whale, subsequently held on, and was employed, when our informant left, in bringing it in to Fremantle jetty. Every boat in Fremantle, on the return of one of the whale-boats with the news, was soon put off to render assistance; and the last gun fired, it is supposed, is intended as a signal of its having been safely landed at the new jetty.

Some dispute is likely to arise as to the property in this fish, between the Carnac and Fremantle Company. We have only sufficient space, at present, to recommend the following decision to their notice :-In Macpherson's Annals of Commerce (vol. 3, 131 note) it is stated to be the custom in the South Sea fisheries, that when two ships strike the same whale, one with a loose harpoon, and the other pursues and kills it, it is divided between them. ...[*Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* 10 June 1837, p. 916]

The inhabitants of Fremantle had an opportunity, on Monday last, of witnessing one of the most animating, but, we lament to add, tragical sights, which will probably ever again present itself. The boats of both companies were each fastened to a whale — a bull and a cow — within a short distance from Arthur's Head, when one of the Fremantle Company's boats received a blow from the whale's flook or tail, and a man named John Stevens, who was in the act of throwing his lance, was struck dead. Mr. Randlett, seeing the unfortunate man's cap floating on the water, and supposing the boat to be in a sinking state, cut from the whale to which he was fastened, and it was lost. The Perth Company's boats succeeded in bringing in their prize; it is likely to turn out a very valuable one, and the oil is pronounced the best which has been tried out this season, although the men have been labouring under many disadvantages in their operations,—the whole of the work being carried on upon the open beach. Stevens was considered a good headsman, and his loss is consequently more severely felt, in the present dearth of hands. The sight is represented to us, by a gentleman who observed the occurrence from the hill, as most terrific; the whales were floundering about, with the boats around them, and the sea was one mass of foam and blood.

The Fremantle Company have commenced cutting a tunnel from their wharf, in Bather's Bay, under Arthur's Head, communicating with High-street. The lines were laid out on Wednesday last, by W H Reveley, Esq, Civil Engineer. This improvement will be of great convenience to the public, as the time of discharging a vessel will be saved by at least one half: and small craft will be able to lie alongside the jetty. The company will have the lease of the tunnel for seven years, and will, no doubt, derive considerable emolument from the tolls which will be levied; we believe the government have reserved the right of establishing the rates. Every person, who has inspected the works of this company, speaks of them as most spirited undertakings..... [*Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 12 Aug 1837, p. 952]

.... The Fremantle Whaling Company commenced the tunnel from their wharf, in Bathers Bay, communicating with the high street. This was a bold and spirited undertaking and was completed last month. [*The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 24 Feb 1838, p. 31]

.... THE tenure under which the property of the Fremantle Whaling Company is held, has been strangely misunderstood. The following is the result of some inquiries we have made on this head : — The company have a certain portion of land in Bather's Bay on a seven years' lease, under certain stipulations — such as, that if it is abandoned as a whaling station, or becomes a nuisance to the public, the land, with all the improvements, will revert to the crown. Many

persons, we believe, were ignorant of the existence of this lease, which has no doubt occasioned the misunderstanding as to the position in which the company was placed. Recently, we believe, an application has been made to the colonial government to obtain the land in perpetuity, in consideration of the great outlay of capital by the company in the improvement of the spot ; but this it has not been deemed prudent to grant. However, in order to afford every encouragement to the enterprising projectors of these improvements, the government, we are told, have made a proposal to remunerate the company, at the expiration of the lease, by purchasing their buildings, &c, if they should not exceed a given sum, say £800. The company are under a misapprehension if they conceive the tunnel to be exclusively their property, as the work has been chiefly performed by the prisoners. The crown will retain this in its own right, and as soon as funds are available for the purpose, Bonded Stores and other public buildings will be erected at the opening into the high street, in completion of a plan submitted to the Council by the Civil Engineer, H. Revely, Esq. Under these circumstances, we would recommend the company to restrict the outlay of their capital to works of immediate utility, and not to speculate upon prospective advantages. [*Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 28 April 1838, p 66]

Whaling was not a financial success and in December 1850 the Fremantle Whaling Company was advertising some of its equipment for sale by cash as the company was being dissolved.

The Company's Whaling Licence was eventually officially cancelled in October 1916 as 'all operations had ceased and the company had failed to pay the stipulated rent to the Government.'

[*West Australian* 20 October 1916, p. 8]

Fremantle Whaling Company.
To be Sold by Auction, at Fremantle, on
Saturday, the 7th December—
(3) Three Try Pots
(2) Two large Copper Coolers, and a quantity
of Timber and Fittings.
The Company being about to be dissolved, the
above articles will be sold for Cash.
R. McB. BROUN, Treasurer.

Inquirer, 4 December 1850, p 2, Advertising

YOUR COMMITTEE

Executive:

Judith Robison (President)
 Allen Graham (Vice Pres.)
 Beth Powell (Treasurer)
 Stewart Alger (Secretary)

Committee Members:

Alan Kelsall
 Fay Campbell
 Tania Heyne
 Maeve Harvey
 Andrew Pittaway

Fremantle History Society contact details:

Email: secretary.fhs@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fremantlehistorysociety>

Web: <https://fhs.org.au/>

We welcome your feedback, thoughts, ideas for stories.

Send me an email: kristimcnulty55@gmail.com I'd love to hear from you.