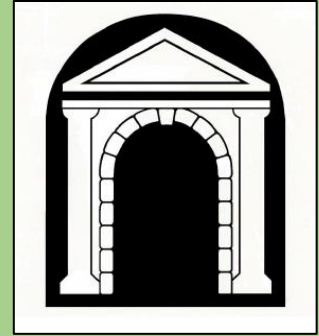


FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

SPRING EDITION, NOVEMBER 2024



NEXT MEETING – THE CHRISTMAS PARTY!!!!

The next meeting is the final FHS event for 2024, the Christmas Party on Sunday 24th November at the Miller Bakehouse Museum in Melville. We have the opportunity to mix and mingle with a fellow local history group, the Melville History Society, who are delighted to have us come visit their museum. We will invite them to join us for afternoon tea.

Henry Miller came to W.A. from Melbourne around 1900. He was a master baker, trained in bread, pastry and cake making. In 1908 he took a contract to bake for a widow in her late husband's bakery on Wray Avenue, Fremantle. He supplied 70 loaves for her shop at the front and also started to develop his own delivery service.



In 1914 Henry bought a house on Hubble Street, East Fremantle. It had a bakery at the rear called 'Sunlight'. Both buildings still stand today. By 1929 their family of 13 surviving children was complete and a new home built in Palmyra. Mr. Miller had the bakehouse built in 1935.

They have kindly waived the usual individual booking fees for our members; the society will give them a collective donation. Contributions to afternoon tea most welcome.

2024 Christmas Party – Miller Bakehouse Museum

Sunday 24th November 2.00 – 4.00 pm

Corner Hammad and Baal Streets, Palmyra 6157

MESSAGE TO ALL MEMBERS:

A gentle reminder that membership fees were due in July, but still happily accepted now.

Please note that our bank account has now changed to the Westpac Bank in Fremantle.

Bank account details as follows:

Account name: Fremantle History Society
BSB: 036-306 Account No: 604012

Payment by cheque can be sent to: PO Box 1305, Fremantle 6160

Cash payments can be made at the Christmas Party.

MEETING REPORTS

Pub Lunch at the National Hotel – Sunday 25th August



Karl and Janine Bullers bought the 'Nash' in 2012 when it was little more than a burnt out shell of a building, the result of a devastating fire. Being an old port pub it has a lot of stories to tell, and Karl entertained us with some anecdotes from its past. Perhaps the most famous of these concerned first publican, William Conroy, demanding entrance to a children's ball at the Town Hall in 1887. As he seemed rather drunk, Town Councillor, John Snook, refused him entry. Conroy went back to the hotel, returned with a gun and shot Snook. Conroy was found guilty of wilful murder and hanged.

In 1908 a Mr Smith was found dead in his bed. He was actually Perth veterinary surgeon, William Hill and had taken a large dose of cyanide. His wife later said he had been worrying over financial matters for some time.

In 1938 a chambermaid with an armload of washing fell down the stairs from the top floor and would have fallen through a glass window to the courtyard 15m below but her shoe became caught in one of the rods holding the staircase carpet in place. A helpful guest hauled her back through the window and she suffered only cuts and bruises.

And then there was the brawl between a number of US and NZ army personnel in 1944, when Fremantle was a submarine base during WW2. An alcohol and testosterone-fueled fight broke out for reasons unknown, spilled out into the street where the US sailors pulled out knives. Two NZ sailors died but due to a lack of evidence the deaths were ruled as accidental.

A year later, at the end of the war, a fight broke out in the toilet amongst five British soldiers, one beaten so badly he died a few days later. Once again, everyone was drunk, no-one knows what happened; death by misadventure. Very sad to have survived a world war only to be brutally killed in a pub toilet back home.

There have been a number of fires. In the 1950s there was a small fire in the basement. In 1975 a more serious fire took hold on the top floor. The building was badly damaged from the water putting it out.

2005 the hotel was closed for major renovations but before the work was finished two boys set a fire March 2007 which gutted the interior and roof. The walls were left and, ironically, the grand fire place in the restaurant. Karl and Janine took on the renovation job of a lifetime in the National Hotel, but they must enjoy it, as they have since added the Old Courthouse and the very recently opened Exchange Hotel in Pinjarra to their achievements.



Having finished our meals, which by all accounts were very good, Karl gave us a short tour of the rooms and the Rooftop Bar with its fabulous views. All in all a highly enjoyable pub lunch.

Author: Kim Scott, 25 years since Benang – Tuesday 27th August



Author Kim Scott (left) with Ethan Kelly-Akee, Aboriginal Engagement Officer, City of Fremantle

Benang: from the heart, Kim Scott's second novel, was published 25 years ago and won him the Miles Franklin Award, the first Indigenous author to do so. This evening Kim meandered through the journey he undertook writing the book.

Benang is a work of fiction but drawn from real history and human emotion. Long hours spent poring over historic records in the State Archives, trying to piece together family histories – local histories, he would come across phrases of the time: 'the last full-blood Aborigine to be born in

such-and-such a place,' 'the first white man born in such-and-such a place.' Then in the archives of Aboriginal Affairs he would come across the same phrases but used in a slightly different context, about breeding out Aboriginality, filling people with shame.

Kim looked at these records and sought to shake up and deconstruct the rather linear, perhaps clinical, language so it could be read and understood in a different way, more nurturing. A quote from Chief Protector of Aborigines 1915-1936, A.O. Neville: 'We have to uplift and elevate a despised people.' Scott's way of dealing with this phrase is to take it quite literally, as his narrator Harley, floats above the ground, returning to Earth through a few words of family history or by filling his pockets with rubble from the renovations of his home.

Scott: 'It's a difficult book, not deliberately but it's also responding to many elements of that linear logic found in the archive and thinking – what are the traditional structures of traditional tales and how might they fit into a novel? How important is rhythm? What can I do with repetition? What can I do with landscape as a mnemonic or similar, rather than this sequential thing, that linear logic that gets you to those genocidal policies?'

Benang follows Harley, a young man who has gone through the process of "breeding out the colour", as he pieces together his family history through documentation, such as photographs and his grandfather's notes, as well as memories and experiences. Harley and his family have undergone a process of colonial scientific experimentation called "breeding of the colour" which separated individuals from their Indigenous families and origins.

Annie Barnett v Henry Barnett – Tuesday 24th September

The research professional historian, Lucy Hair, presented this evening, prepared with Emerita Professor, Ann Curthoys, contributes toward a much bigger, national project funded by the Australian Research Council: 'A history of domestic violence in Australia, 1850–2020'. Lucy used the Barnetts' case to illustrate the experience pre-1890s.

Earliest colonial divorce laws were modelled on those from England, with individual states drafting their own variations of this legislation. In WA the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Ordinance was passed in 1863, before this time women were almost invisible in public records. Thereafter, for the first time there were official records kept of women's lives and experiences.

However, there was great disparity in the grounds with which men and women could apply for divorce. Men could seek divorce on grounds of adultery alone. Women could only cite adultery

in combination with other offences (e.g. cruelty, bigamy, desertion). Women could petition for Judicial Separation on grounds of cruelty alone, which ended the marriage but was not a full divorce, and neither partner could re-marry. This was a fairly desperate measure and a last resort for women needing to escape their unhappy marriages and often violent husbands.

Lucy went on to describe Annie's turbulent life: First marrying Thomas Leetham, bearing seven children, four of whom died in infancy. Meeting and living with Henry Barnett in Ireland, Thomas, now bankrupt for the second time, divorces her. Marriage to Henry, they already have a daughter and another child on the way. They move to Western Australia and have two more children. Annie has an affair with Thomas Stockley King, Henry assaults King who then flees the colony. Annie petitions for Judicial Separation from Henry, giving a fairly gruelling account of years of abuse and beatings – which effectively counts for nothing when Henry then files for divorce on grounds of adultery, which is granted. Two years later Annie dies from dropsy, probably a very unpleasant and painful death, and Henry continues his medical duties and remarries. It reads like a soap opera.

From the historian's perspective there is a wealth of recorded material about Henry Barnett. Much can be learned about the man through his various medical reports, Colonial Secretary's records, and he was a prolific correspondent, but Annie's Judicial Separation is all the actual information there is about her. Lucy suggests that such a small snippet should be given due consideration when we are considering Henry's legacy in Fremantle.

Fremantle Studies Day 2024 – Sunday 20th October

The day was opened by President, Jude Robison with the Acknowledgement of Country. Jude spoke about the fact that this month marked the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Fremantle History Society in 1994. This was followed by the presentation of Life Membership Certificates to long-time members, Bob Reece and Pam Harris for their many year's dedication and commitment to the Fremantle History Society.

The talks commenced with Anne Smith and Simon Meath: The Boys Reformatory, Rottnest Island Prison: Forgotten genocide site of the Frontier Wars.

Anne talked about her love of the natural environment on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island and how only later in life she found out about the real history of the place. Anne had trouble locating information on the island's past as this part of the history had been minimised. The conditions that the Aboriginal prisoners were subjected to and their exposure to diseases such as measles, flu, typhoid and tuberculosis took their toll. This seemed particularly cruel as the Noongar people believed that Wadjemup was the home of the souls of the dead. The WA government has proposed to turn the former Boys' Reformatory, or Lodge, into a \$40 million resort.

The Boy's Reformatory was built in 1881 and its history is not so well known, especially its use as the prison hospital, it being the only building with fireplaces. There was a measles epidemic in 1883, 60 men died. Anne described the dreadful conditions, overcrowding and cruel treatment of the sick prisoners who 'howled like dingos' in their suffering. According to the



President, Jude Robison, presenting a Life Membership Certificate to Bob Reece.
Photo: Andrew Pittaway

Annual Prison Report boys and staff at the Reformatory were also affected by their contact with the prisoners and prison warders brought disease home to their families. In 1889 a small hospital was built on the island but conditions were far from ideal.

Simon Meath continued the presentation elaborating on the appalling conditions. Simon spoke about George Webb, an eleven year old boy who was so badly treated that after weeks of illness he died from a brain infection. The children were often reluctant to talk about why they misbehaved and there was talk in the newspapers about them not being reformed at all but were in fact acquiring 'terrible vices' at the Reformatory. All of this as well as the emphasis in prison reports on keeping expenses down paints a picture of misery and hardship during the years of the Reformatory and Prison's operation.

The second speaker of the day was Caroline Ingram who is this year's recipient of the Ron and Dianne Davidson Scholarship. Fresh off the plane from the U.K. Caroline gave us a very interesting talk entitled Dead in the water: The life and trial of Margaret Cody. Margaret and her partner William Davis were charged with the murder of James Holditch, who was found floating naked in the river at Fremantle. Both Margaret and William Davis were hanged despite there being doubt about the reliability of the evidence particularly in relation to Margaret.

Caroline's story highlighted the way women were treated in the justice system in the late 19th century, particularly if they did not conform to the norms of the time of what was deemed to be proper behaviour for a woman in society. Women were expected to be pious, sober, passive and moral, while men were largely excused; if they beat their wives it was probably because they deserved it. Remembered in the newspapers as being a 'dissolute woman' Margaret sounded like a fiery woman and was not afraid of loudly interrupting the judge during the trial. She appears in the records accused of drunkenness, using foul language and stealing, possibly to provide food for her children.

Margaret's pensioner guard husband was twice imprisoned for beating her and the couple parted ways. Margaret then took up with the co-accused William Davis who did not have a good reputation and had previously been convicted of bestiality. Margaret was offered a free pardon if she told all but because of her distrust of the police refused. Much of the evidence used to convict her was hearsay. She was also represented in court by Stephen Henry Parker who was not on good terms with the Supreme Court judge at the time. Caroline's talk cast doubt on the evidence used to convict Margaret Cody for the crime with which she was charged. She and Davis were both hanged on 5th July 1871. Caroline concluded that although things have improved there is evidence that women who do not appear to be 'respectable' are still treated more harshly in the justice system even today.

Following a break for some afternoon tea and a chance to mingle, the talks continued with Nick Everett's presentation on Wobblies on the waterfront: The Industrial Workers of the World in Fremantle during WWI. Nick who was due to present at last year's Studies Day but had to cancel due to his involvement with the Friends of Palestine gave a most interesting talk.

Beginning with its origins in the United States in 1905 Nick talked about the arrival of the Industrial Workers of the World, (IWW), an international labour union, in Fremantle. Known locally as the 'Wobblies', they were particularly successful among the Fremantle lumpers, whose conditions of work were difficult and dangerous. The lumpers were also employed on a casual basis, were not well paid and lived in what were described as 'fetid dens'.

Charles Reeves arrived in Fremantle from Chicago to establish a Fremantle Branch of IWW in 1915. Keen to use tactics to change the local unions from within he sought work among the lumpers on the wharves of Fremantle.

As World War 1 was in progress at the time the IWW opposed not just conscription but war itself. They were also anti-capitalist and opposed to racism. Some of the posters in their office windows had slogans such as “Don’t scab on the unemployed. The faster worker dies young. Someone must be slowest - let it be you!”

Because of their anti-conscription stance the ‘Wobblies’ were portrayed as being dangerous, radical and unpatriotic during World War 1 despite support from Adela Pankhurst and John Curtin. This difference in ideology led to tensions between the existing unions and the ‘Wobblies’ which eventually led to Bloody Sunday and the death of Tom Edwards in 1919.

Ultimately the IWW in Fremantle failed and new unions arose to fill the void. Despite this Nick concluded his talk saying that the anti-political IWW changed the politics of Australia at the time because of its anti-war and anti-racism stance.

The final speaker of the day was Kiara Gormlie who gave her talk on: The founding women of Soroptimist International Fremantle: Early intentions and lasting legacies.

Kiara’s presentation spoke of a little known area of women’s history in WA, Soroptimists International (S.I.). The movement, which is dedicated to justice, equity and the empowerment of women, started in 1921 in the U.S. then spread initially to London and eventually Australia.

The Fremantle Chapter was founded in 1953 thanks to the dedication of three women; Dorothea Parker, Gladys Locke and Sadie Stone. Dr. Dorothea Parker, the first President, was the first W.A. born woman to practice as a doctor. She had her own practice from 1926 to 1967 and also worked at Fremantle Hospital and Hillcrest Maternity. Gladys Locke opened her home to host many wartime support services, but also held fundraising events for local organisations, apparently cooking much of the food herself. Sadie Stone was the second woman to be elected to Fremantle Council, but committed her time to countless charities and community services, for which she was awarded an OBE in 1980.

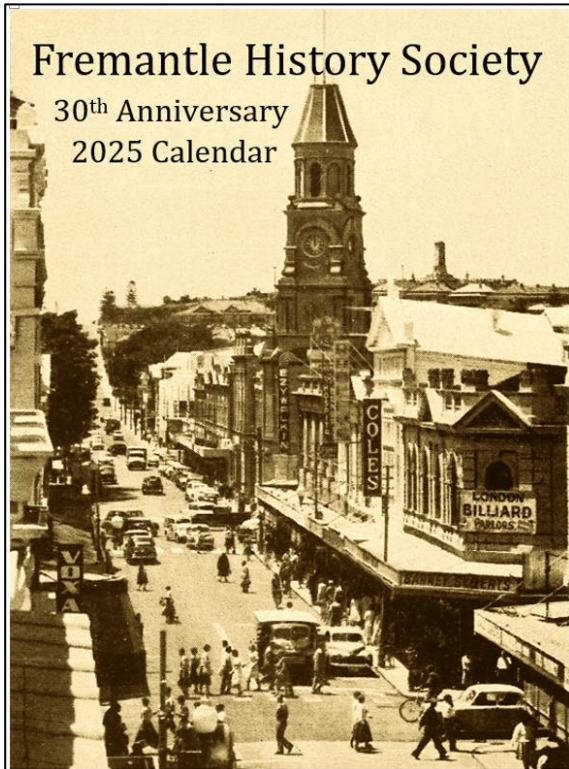
Soroptimists Fremantle has supported a host of charities and organisations to help the underprivileged, including a slow learning children’s group (now Activ Foundation), the Crippled Children’s Society (Rocky Bay), resettlement of refugees and aged care facilities.



Initially started as a women’s only movement, these days men can join S.I. and take part in the activities. There is an SI memorial garden in the memory of Sadie Stone on the corner of High and Parry Street in Fremantle. Although the members have gained some recognition for their work they tend to work in the shadows and don’t seek the limelight. Kiara, herself a member of the local S.I. group, is working to promote the group and gain recognition for the work of the early founding members in WA.

At left: Sadie Stone Walk Photo: Maeve Harvey

Fremantle History Society limited edition 30th Anniversary calendar



A difficult task indeed, to sift through the thousands of beautiful historic images held in the Fremantle History Centre, and narrow it down to just 12, - 13 including the front cover. But we needed something special to mark the occasion and everybody needs a calendar don't they?

Perfect Christmas presents and at \$22.00 a copy you can afford to give them to everybody!

Sepia toned historic Fremantle prints
A3 size
Satin finish
Wire bound along top edge

We have only ordered a limited number so order yours now before they sell out.

Available from the Fremantle Visitor Centre
\$22.00 (purchase by card)

RWAHS 2024 State History Conference of Affiliated Societies – Dongara 6-8 September ***Waves of Change* hosted by the Irwin Districts Historical Society**

FHS Delegate: Heather Campbell Photographs: Carolyn Jupp

The conference title gave a hint of what delegates might expect in these times of great change. The theme was followed through, with presenters speaking of adapting to change, finding new ways of operating, using collections and archives in more creative ways, and in so doing help organisations to thrive and become more inclusive.

The conference opened with a very moving Welcome to Country, performed in bright sunshine on the front lawn of the Old Priory Hotel, by members of the Wattandee Littlewell Aboriginal Corporation. Delegates then went inside and were welcomed by Richard Offen, President of the RWAHS and Bruce Baskerville IDHS Chair. Hon Sandra Carr MLC then formally opened the conference, which was followed by Roll Call, Apologies and Remembrances.

The keynote address, *Moving beyond Pioneers* was given by Gary Martin, a Greenough resident, who has been Curator of the award-winning Greenough Museum and Gardens for the past twenty years. Gary spoke of the focus of many local museums on early pioneers – those that were the first to explore and settle a new country – however there was little or no recognition of the original inhabitants or succeeding generations. He stressed that the whole community was part of history, all had a story to tell, and it was important to include everybody. Efforts should be made to include others by perhaps asking them for items for display. While museums should be fun and actively engage with visitors, there should also be quiet spaces, like gardens. Exhibits could include memory triggers; static displays should be changed

regularly to maintain interest and more recent items collected to ensure relevance. In closing Gary said that volunteers were a museum’s most valuable assets and stressed the need to work together – engaging, enhancing and evolving.

Thomas Cameron, the next speaker is a Wattandee Elder, from the same group who performed the Welcome to Country. He spoke of the Littlewell Aboriginal Reserve, which was established near Mingenew in 1938, closing in 1972. It is now the site of an award-winning heritage trail which celebrates the heritage and culture of the Wattandee people. The importance of education was stressed as was the preservation of language and place. Thomas told the story of securing and preserving the Littlewell Reserve and of its importance to the local people who return there for significant events; he reiterated that it was not a money-making exercise, but an important way of connecting with the past. Language contributed to the cohesion of the group who shared the ‘encyclopedia of knowledge when old people passed away’.



Jeff Murray and Dr Nan Broad shared the session following. Jeff is a cartographer who specialises in topographic interpretation and Nan has worked extensively in the pastoral industry. Jeff spoke of the many types of maps, describing them as ‘windows into the past’. He gave examples of features appearing in the wrong location on a map due to ‘gross errors’ made by the surveyor or explorer, or instrument problems – early compasses had quite a few faults. There were also ‘random errors’ caused by unavoidable fluctuations in equipment, eyesight problems, misreading the terrain, or poor weather conditions. He also spoke of the overlap of traditional cartography with modern technology and digital mapping platforms.

In keeping with the theme of inclusivity, the next presenter was Tarun Preet Singh, a Sikh, who moved to Australia from India in 2002. He examined the Sikh history of emigration and settlement in WA, particularly to the Irwin Districts and looked at the contribution they have made. Sikhs were involved in hawking from laden wagons drawn by horses, selling spices, toys, kitchen and sewing implements, ornaments, etc – some subsequently opening shops. They were also involved in transport through use of camels in the mining sector and in farming. Sport is integral to Sikh identity, which has included some renowned wrestlers. In 1914 the Sikhs of Western Australia tried to raise a Sikh regiment to go to WW1. Mr Singh’s description of the Sikh contribution to the development of Australia, was very well illustrated with some excellent images and extracts from Trove.

The final presentation before lunch was *An Appetite for Change: The nineteenth century food and health reform* by Heather Hunwick. The nineteenth century ‘unleashed a wave of dietary/food reformers committed to creating a better future’ by returning to the ‘wholesome

healing diet that God had intended for humans'. Heather highlighted the contributions of particular reformers including Sylvester Graham and also the work of Mary Farrelly of Greenough, who was convinced that a diet based on whole wheat products was necessary. Such was her enthusiasm that in 1923 she ran a course on food education at UWA producing a wholemeal bread, for which she ground the corn herself. Though this did not look very appetising the CWA began to promote wholemeal flour for bread and biscuits. Appropriately this session was followed by lunch (which did not include wholemeal flour)

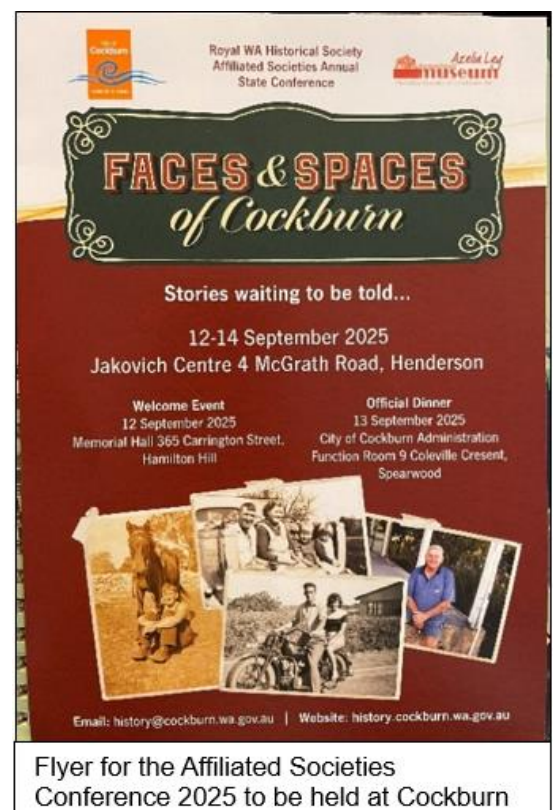
Options for the afternoon sessions included a Sikhs of Dongara bus tour and a Walk Along the Old Port Road. This walk went along the edge of the river (after a visit to Russ Cottage built between 1868-70) and after passing an old quarry which provided limestone for buildings in Dongara, ended at Denison House, now the base of Dongara Denison Art Group. There walkers were given the opportunity to purchase artworks and were also given tea and scones before returning to the Priory to ready themselves for the conference dinner.

The conference dinner, catered for by the Dongara Hotel, was located in the Old Priory Hotel dining room. Local artist Gail Spanier had designed and painted bespoke placemats and coasters featuring colourful sea life (which diners were allowed to keep and take home at the conclusion of the meal.) Local identity John Fitzhardinge was the speaker for the evening and told entertaining stories of the Abrolhos Islands from the early 1960s and of starting Dongara Marine, a well-known boat building company in 1975.

While waiting for conference sessions to start the RWAHS had tables set up with books for sale, both new and second hand, which proved a great attraction. The second day started with RWAHS business, with President Richard Offen in the chair. After routine items such as ratification of minutes from Bridgetown, and reports, the Merit Award was presented to Busselton Historical Society. This was well deserved for, among other things, their work on improvements to their museum features was noted, access for prams and wheelchairs, regular cleaning and maintenance, their involvement in community affairs and for the management and digitisation of their collections.

It was announced that next year's conference would be hosted by the Cockburn Historical Society and the City of Cockburn from 12-14 September 2025 with the title *Faces and Spaces of Cockburn*. Denise Cook, the Local History Officer for the City of Cockburn briefed delegates on what was planned. This was followed by the Affiliated Societies Committee election and an open forum Q and A, which brought us up to morning tea.

The first speaker of the day, Dr Howard Gray, then presented *Batavia – the Wreck that keeps on giving*. After describing the circumstances of the disaster in 1629, Howard traced the story of the discovery of the wreck 1963. He highlighted its newsworthiness through the years from when it became a 'media sensation in the 1600s', fascinated people and provoked speculation in the 1800s and early 1900s, and established a place in the post-WWII 'shipwreck fever'. He spoke of its excavation and conservation by the Maritime Museum and subsequent display in the 1980s. The adjacent



coastline became known as the 'Batavia Heritage Coast' and the term 'Batavia Coast' became commonly used on maps and by businesses, right through to the building of a replica and the staging of an opera in Sydney in 2001. In closing Dr Gray posed the question: 'as we approach the 400th anniversary, what's next?'

Su Dhu, the secretary of the Fishers lost at Sea Memorial Association then gave an evocative presentation on the FlatSea Project, describing how her own personal loss, and as a response to community grief, prompted her to work towards ensuring that those lost at sea were not forgotten, by recording their stories, and providing a medium for carrying memories. In so doing FlatSea is filling a space where there was no grave to visit and no statistics or stories to provide comfort to the bereaved and is providing a new initiative in historical research. Their aim is to 'Build a memorial to honour those who have been lost at sea and provide a place of remembrance for the families and friends who are connected with each tragedy'.

The next session *Commoners and Co-operators – Local History is so much more than rugged individuals*, was presented by Dr Bruce Baskerville, the Chair of the Irwin and Districts Historical Society, who started his session with some useful definitions of Commons and Co-operators. He used the Irwin Commons as an example, illustrating changes to it via maps – usually shrinking in size – over the years. For cooperatives he again chose a local examples – the Victoria District Cooperative Flour Milling Coy Ltd, 1894, 1923 and 1934, through to an images of the ruined building c. 1965 and 1973. Bruce showed by understanding the importance of shared work in local history, the whole community could be included – tying in beautifully with the conference theme of inclusivity. He finished his session with a telling quote from a lithograph in the British Museum, 'The law locks up the man or woman who steals the goose from all the common and the geese will still a common lack, Till they go and steal it back'.

In focussing on *The Midland Railway Company of WA and its local and regional heritage*, Matt Pavlinovich, another local historian, highlighted the history and significance of the Midland Railway Company of WA and its impact on the communities it served. He traced its conception and construction, from commencement in 1886 to the completion of the line from Helena Vale to Walkaway in 1894, opening up many towns along the way. He also traced the changes to it over the years, including the impact on Dongara when the line was rerouted away from the town. Matt provided some excellent images of the line, including locomotives, many of the small stations and sidings, some no longer in existence, and maps of the line. He explained that there were in fact two Midland Workshops initially, the Midland Railway Company Workshops and the Western Australian Government Workshops, which many of us had not realised.

Paul Barron, Film Producer and writer presented the last full session of the conference titled *Reflections on 'Such was Life'*. 'Such was Life' is a documentary series of five minute documentary films made by Paul for the WA Museum. They delve into stories, often overlooked, of characters which define our State's character. He said the project was his passion and this was clear from his enthusiasm in the delivery of his talk. He proved to be a most entertaining speaker, and it was no surprise to learn that his aim 'was to entertain as well as inform'. In September 2022 one of the films was released which had been based at the Greenough Museum and Gardens and focussed on the district's Wheat Queen, Mary Farrally, who had been mentioned in Heather Hunwick's session on the growing health craze for eating wheat products. Paul screened a snippet from this film, and his audience will long remember the expression on the face of the actor required to eat a slice of the wheat flour bread mentioned in Heather's session. Healthy it may have been, but the taste obviously left a lot to be desired! Paul's films in the series may be viewed on SBS or on Wanderland at:

[Such was life video series | WAnDerland | Western Australian Museum \(visitwonderland.com.au\)](https://www.visitwonderland.com.au)

Dr Bruce Baskerville, Chair IDHS, closed the Conference and in doing so thanked all the volunteers who had worked towards its success, commenting that volunteers 'are the core and heart of what we do'. RWAHS President Richard Offen then presented a plaque to Bruce commemorating the occasion. Delegates still had the afternoon tours to look forward to and after a generous lunch in the grounds of the Old Priory Hotel, left to participate in one of the following:

Middle Irwin and Wildflower Wall bus tour
Blue Marlin (Packout Room/Museum of Fishing and the Sea, a guided tour
Priory Hotel Tour, a walking tour.

Those of us who visited the Packout Room/Museum listened to John Fitzhardinge's stories of the Abrolhos Islands and of the building of jetties and sheds; we also learned of his boatbuilding company and were able to view a small exhibition of his private photographs. It was exciting to visit the Packout Room, where crays were packed and to learn of plans to make it a unique museum of Fish and Crayfishing and to look at the exhibits already collected.

All in all, an excellent conference which dealt with many topical issues relevant to organisations involved in local history and particularly those with museums, and which certainly lived up to its theme *Waves of Change*.

Rocky Vane, Snake Performer, 1929

From Fremantle Prison

During conservation works in the Main Cell Block of Fremantle Prison, archaeologists retrieved artefacts hidden underneath the floor, which included fragments of tattoo art dated to c.1934 and attributed to 'Rocky Vane', aka Lyn or Lindsay Herbert Vagne. Rocky, originally from Nowra, NSW, developed a keen interest in snakes and tattooing very early on. He was bitten on numerous occasions; in one three-day period he was bitten 16 times by adders, tiger and black snakes. His was a fairly checkered history to say the least.

Rocky enlisted in WWI but deserted the day before his battalion was to leave Queensland so he could run off with his pregnant then-girlfriend, Annie Whitby. In 1921, Rocky served 12 months hard labour at Goulburn Gaol, for breaking and entering, and stealing, from a motor garage. He was in court again in 1924 under charges of animal cruelty, regarding the small animals he produced during performances to prove the snakes' venom was deadly. During the hearing, Rocky protested his innocence on the basis that his show was scientific. He brought in an 8-year-old girl that he said was his daughter. The court saw that the young girl was covered in scars from numerous snake bites. He'd been using his daughter to tout his antidote efficacy. Rocky was promptly kicked out of NSW within 24 hours of the case wrapping up.

Rocky and his wife Annie arrived in Perth mid-1920 and began travelling around to carnivals such as Uglieland showing snakes that he had captured. In 1928 Annie, who went by the stage name 'Cleopatra', was bitten during a performance and died a short time later. Just days later, Rocky was back on stage performing. The newspapers chastised him for capitalising on his wife's death. In the same



Rocky and tiger snake, c.1929,
State Library of WA call no.047961PD

year, he employed a new assistant, Harry Melrose, who also got bitten and died. The use of venomous snakes in shows was then outlawed and Rocky was forced to get rid of his snakes. It has been theorised that Rocky dumped his snakes onto Carnac Island, explaining the booming population of approximately 400 Tiger Snakes that currently inhabit the island.

It is likely Rocky was tattooing while in Perth given the first evidence of his career as a tattoo artist dates to c.1915 in NSW. He had a tattoo parlour at 84 James Street in Northbridge from around 1933. In 1934 Rocky was caught unlawfully on a property in Scarborough, convicted of intent to commit a crime and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment in Fremantle Gaol.



The fragmented designs found under the floor would have originally been one larger piece drawn and painted by Rocky, referred in the tattoo industry as 'flash', which he could use to advertise his tattoo works to other prisoners.

Rocky left WA for Victoria after his release from Fremantle Prison, died in Tasmania in 1946 and was buried in Melbourne. His passion for snakes and tattooing continued all the way until his death. The fragments of Rocky's designs are now being carefully conserved and adopted into the Prison Museum collection.

Andrew Pittaway, our most recent addition to the committee, has a keen interest in Australian military history, Fremantle's in particular. His work in this field was recognised with an OAM in the King's Birthday Honours List last year. He has kindly agreed to let me share some of his stories of our WW1 Fremantle soldiers in the newsletter.

No.2016 Private George Ackland – 14th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment (ex Dragoon Guards)

George (born 16.06.1886) was the son of Thomas and Mary Ackland of Newdigate Surrey England, the youngest of five children. After completing his education George became a horse driver, though he soon joined the permanent army, serving with the 2nd Dragoon Guards. In 1911 his sister Mary, with her husband and children moved to Western Australia. This seems to have had an influence on George as in 1912 he requested to be discharged from the Dragoon Guards, short of his twelve years service. It appears his sister and brother-in-law secured him work in WA as normally future employment in the 'colonies' had to be proven before a soldier was released from service. Though in the event of any future conflict; George could be recalled to service, thus he became what is known as an Imperial Reservist.



On the 18th May 1912 George left England aboard the *SS Armadale* and soon arrived in Fremantle Western Australia. George lived for a time with his sister and brother-in-law in Fremantle and began work with the WA Police Force. He was appointed a probationary constable in the WA Police force on the 19th September 1912. He served in the Fremantle & Perth districts and on the 21st November

1913 he was appointed Constable. George remained in the Perth district until July 1914 when he was transferred to the West Perth Police Station. In 1914 George married Mary Jane Morley in Fremantle and they took up residence in Glyde Street East Fremantle.

August 1914 the Great War broke out in Europe; the Imperial Reservists were called up for service all over Australia, ordered to report to the military authorities in their respective states. The military were being kept busy with the recruitment of men for the Australian Imperial Force but when the Imperial Reservists reported for duty from all over the state they were collected together at Fremantle Park. This Park had been the site of the camp of the 86th Regiment of the Citizens Military Forces but this was transformed to add the Reservists.

From August to October 1914 George and the other Reservists trained at Fremantle Park. This park was only a short walk from the Ackland's residence in East Fremantle so George was close to home during the first months of training. During this time the Reservists also instructed the 86th Infantry in various military drills and tasks as many of the young members of the 86th though too young to enlist in the AIF, were used to guard German internees on Rottnest Island.

It was initially assumed that the WA Imperial Reservists would embark from Fremantle with the WA soldiers of the AIF, but they instead received orders to proceed south to Albany and it was here on the 1st November 1914 that they boarded the HMAT *Miltiades* and set sail for England. The *Miltiades* sailed via Egypt and reached Plymouth England on December 22nd 1914.

After their arrival the Reservists all went their separate ways to their Regimental bases. Most of the original units had already been in France since August 1914 so the Reservists were either sent across to join their Regiments or added to new Regiments being formed in England. George reported for duty at the Dragoon headquarters and was assigned to a Regiment, reportedly the 2nd Dragoons. News would have soon reached George of his wife having given birth to a son on the 10th April 1915, the boy was named George Henry Ackland, after his father.

It was evident early in the war that the cavalry could not compete against heavy artillery and machine guns and their use became limited. Many men of the cavalry therefore transferred across to the infantry. George originally joined the Royal Sussex Regiment but was then transferred to the 14th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. This Regiment had been formed in Birmingham in September 1914 and was also known as the 1st Birmingham Pals. On the 26th June 1915 it came under command of the 95th Brigade, 32nd Division and landed at Boulogne France on the 21st November 1915. They soon transferred to the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division BEF and served in 1916 at the Somme fighting at High Wood, Guillemont, Flers, Morval and Le Transloy. In 1917 they served at Vimy Arras and the Third Battle of Ypres in September 1917 at Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and Poelcapelle.

In November 1917 the Division was moved to Italy and served on that front till April 1918 when they were returned to France. George saw action at the Nieppe Forest near Hazebrouck, which was also where the 1st Division AIF was located and George may have served near his fellow Western Australians in the 11th Battalion AIF. On the 12th April 1918 George and his Regiment received orders to capture the village of Merville. Their advance took them through Tannay-Le Foret, but new orders were soon received to dig a line short of their objective. While waiting for the advance to resume the Germans launched a heavy artillery barrage on the 14th Warwickshire's, which included gas shells. George was evacuated to hospital as a result of gas poisoning.

After spending time in hospital in France; George was soon sent back to England to recuperate. He was released from hospital and returned to the family farm at Newdigate. He was still

planning for his future in Western Australia and after being sent to his Regimental base he applied for a free passage back to Australia as the Imperial Reservists were entitled to this as were the members of the AIF. While he waited for indication of a passage on a ship he remained at his family home in Newdigate Surrey. He stayed with his sister at Brookleg Farm but soon fell ill and on the 8th February 1919 he died quite suddenly, the official cause being acute capillary bronchitis though no doubt the seriousness of the condition was exacerbated by the damage done through his gassing. He was so close to returning to WA after serving through the war and being reunited with Mary and little George; the son he had never seen. George Ackland was buried in Newdigate Churchyard Surrey. Mary and little George were devastated by the loss of their husband and father.

In 1920 Mary and young George travelled to England to meet the Ackland family, returning to Australia in 1923. In 1927 Mary remarried a Hugh Forcus in Fremantle. Hugh was a Military Medal winner with the 44th Battalion (Reg. No.485), however this marriage did not last and in 1935 she married for the third and last time to a Percival G. Potter in Perth. Young George completed his education and in World War Two he served in the Australian Army. He had married and had two daughters, but unfortunately he died in 1948 aged 33. Mary outlived her son and husband, dying in 1968.

Congratulations to Allen Graham on winning runner up in the Williams/Lee Steere History Prize!

Each year the Royal WA Historical Society offers a prize for a non-fiction publication on Western Australian history. As many of you will know, Allen, our Vice President, recently published his book on Fremantle titled the Inns and Outs of Fremantle: A Social History of Fremantle and its Hotels 1829-1929. The book is the first volume of three, and we expect the next to be published next year.

Copies are still available: hard cover - \$60, soft cover \$50.
Call Allen: 0412 933 360



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