FREMANTLE STUDIES

No 12

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The Society seeks to promote interest in, research on and publication of the history of the Fremantle area. Activities include guest speakers at monthly meetings, a quarterly newsletter, site tours and an annual Fremantle Studies Day for research presentations.

This is the twelfth volume of the Fremantle Studies journal, a biennial publication.

Information on the Society or the journal or copies of any edition can be obtained from www.fhs.org.au, by contacting the Secretary at PO Box 1305 Fremantle 6959 or secretary.fhs@gmail.com.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Volume 12 of Fremantle History Society's Fremantle Studies. The volume contains papers from Fremantle Studies Days in 2019 and 2020.

As expected this publication adds new and interesting information on Fremantle's past. The journal is comparatively small due to COVID and it represents six of seven papers presented in 2019 and 2020.

The 2019 papers followed the theme of work and included the paper by Fremantle Scholarship winner Cate Pattison. Cate based her research on the State Engineering Works in North Fremantle, interviewing retired employees as a key part of her research. The fascinating oral interviews are available online. You will find a link to them and the end of Cate's paper providing a rare insight into what work was like during the 20th Century, particulary in a large engineering works. Cate's work is not only a valuable addition to our knowledge of Fremantle's history but also to the broader area of labour history.

Continuing the labour history theme, Bobbie Oliver's paper provides an interesting account of the Patrick's dispute which occurred in ports around Australia in 1998. Bobbie's paper focusses on the events at Fremantle at this time and discusses the intimidating tactics used to prevent workers from entering the work site. The dispute was finally resolved with compromises and Bobbie argues that Australians need to support the right to union representation which has been watered down during the Howard and Morrison governments.

Also in 2019 Charlie Fox presented a paper entitled the History of Chinese Seamen in Fremantle. Unfortunately the paper was published in 2019 in *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* by Charlie Fox (Editor), Alexis Vassiley (Editor) which prevented its inclusion in this publication. *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* is available in libraries and bookshops.

During 2020 with the widespread threat of COVID in the community the history society committee decided early in the year to abandon planning for the 2020 Studies Day, however as time went on, and guidelines were clearer for meetings during COVID, it was decided to go ahead with the day. Three speakers were found at short notice and we thank them for their contribution under difficult circumstances.

Lorraine Clark, Lenore Layman and secretary of the Fremantle History Society, Judith Robison, gave a joint presentation on the photograph album of AT Maywood held by the Royal Western Australian Historical Society.

Several of the photographs from the album are published in this volume. The paper demonstrates the value of photographs as historical sources. Maywood was a keen amateur photographer and left a carefully curated photograph album featuring Fremantle in the 1890s-1900s including landscapes and streetscapes, residents, commercial and cultural activities and sports. Certainly an interesting snapshot of Fremantle during a period of rapid development and population growth due to the gold rushes of the 1890s in the eastern goldfields.

Steve Errington's paper looks at little known facets of the early history of the Round House, Western Australia's oldest public building which narrowly escaped demolition in the 1920s. In the 25 years after its opening in January 1831 it was home to runaway sailors and servants, drunks, thieves both Aboriginal and colonial, court-martialled soldiers and, in the absence of a hospital and lunatic asylum, the physically and mentally ill. The whalers' tunnel, which runs under the Round House, was completed early in 1838 and a study of Gaoler's Returns reveals the names of the prisoners who dug it as part of their hard labour. The Gaoler's Returns provide an enlivened view of the people who were incarcerated at this time.

Finally, FHS President, Allen Graham delivered a paper chronicling some of the not so savoury characters in early Fremantle and the impact their actions had on the society of the time, particularly women. Allen relates stories of domestic violence, infidelity and suicide and, of course, scandal and gossip in the various accounts sourced from historical newspapers. Life wasn't easy for many early settlers and this paper certainly highlights some of the social problems of the time. On a happier note Allen indicated at the start of the paper that 'No doubt there are a lot of good feeling love stories to be told about many of the early settlers to Western Australia, despite the hard time that those settlers had to endure.' The paper provides insight into the difficulties of living Fremantle in early years of the 19th Century.

We thank the contributors who have given of their time, knowledge and expertise to produce such interesting papers relating to the history of Fremantle. Thank you to Shelley Campbell who prepared the index and Ian Chambers for his skills and patience during the laying out of the volume 12. Anne Brake, Heather Campbell, Pam Harris, and Judith Robison undertook the editing.

We commend it to you.

Fremantle Through the Eyes of AT Maywood

Lorraine Clarke, Lenore Layman, Judith Robison

In many ways, historical photograph albums are the most complex and multilayered documents found in archives.[1]

Photographs have been central to modern culture since the development of photographic technology in the nineteenth century. By the end of that century the press and the public, professionals and amateurs, artists and advertisers, official institutions and families all found important uses for the new medium. Photographs permeated society. In a pre-digital age photographic prints were mostly stored in albums for both preservation and viewing purposes. Most albums were large in size and often decorative in cover design. Their ubiquity among professionals, families and individuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has resulted in a rich trove of albums in private archives today. The Royal Western Australian Historical Society is delighted to hold in its collection four such albums originally belonging to amateur photographer Alfred Thomas Maywood and donated by his elder daughter Mrs Dorothy G Tognini. The albums together contain more than 700 photographs, many of which have now been digitised and can be viewed individually on the Society's website.[2] The focus of this article is one of Maywood's albums recorded as Album 42 in the Society's catalogue, which contains 70 photographs and pictures Fremantle life in the 1890s. Modern culture is strongly visual and images shape the way we construct

our historical narratives. Photographs create immediacy, a sense of being there and seem transparently authentic, making them powerful viewing. Nevertheless, they are photographers' creations, shaped by their makers' decisions on each photograph's subject, timing, framing and focus. When photographs are gathered together in albums they are further edited to meet one or more purpose - as official record, professional advertisement, social or environmental documentation or personal history. Family photograph albums have been constructed as generational record and portrait gallery; they aid and enliven family memory.

Maywood was a keen amateur photographer and has left a carefully curated photograph album featuring Fremantle in the 1890s/1900s - landscapes and streetscapes, residents, commercial and cultural activities and sports. This is a photographer's album, not an album of snapshots; it is an artistic creation intended for display and browsing by visitors. Maywood was both documenting local life and creating artistic forms. He decorated the album in a manner surprising to the 21st century eye – with pressed seaweed – but it would not have struck his contemporaries as unusual. 'Flowers of the sea' were a relatively common Victorian domestic decoration in coastal districts and pressing them, like pressing native flora, was a popular leisure activity. Whether he undertook the task himself or with his wife and daughters is not known. The activity was most commonly a female one.[3]

Unfortunately, Album 42 has few captions. At the time viewers would have been familiar with the local landscapes and houses, known most of the families who lived in them and have met or at least recognised the people captured in image. Today most of the photographs are masked in anonymity and the challenge for historians is to re-connect the images with past places, people and events. Absence of captions is a common archival problem, leading to today's advice to photographers to maintain a list of captions with stored photographs.[4] However instructions on archiving photographs still emphasise technical matters at the expense of historians' advice to record fully the provenance, history and context of each photograph. The problem is compounded when archival repositories have accepted albums or individual photographs without obtaining accompanying documentation from donors. This past failure was sometimes an oversight among the collecting institutions but, in many cases, the desired information was already lost knowledge. Often donations are made when the owner is old and at the point of settling their affairs; memory has already dimmed.

Archived photographs therefore often call for historical detective work

and that is certainly true of Maywood's album. Who was he? And what stories do his photographs tell?

Who was AT Maywood?

Alfred Thomas Maywood (1867-1919), resident of Fremantle from 1889 to 1910, was born on 15 December 1867 in London's East End, one of twelve children. His father who worked as a lock gateman died when Alfred was only five.[5] The family valued education and, with her family's support, his mother ensured her children were educated. In 1889 Alfred decided to seek his future in Western Australia, arriving in Fremantle aboard the SS *Elderslie*.[6] Whether he had been sponsored to come out to Western Australia or not we do not know; however he was working for W Sandover & Co in August 1890.

Alfred immediately threw himself into Fremantle community life, within a year becoming librarian/secretary of the Fremantle Philharmonic Society and secretary/treasurer of the Western Liedertafel (male voice choir). He sang, recited and played the violin, and performed at numerous local concerts. He also joined the Fremantle Rowing Club and the Fremantle Artillery.[7]

Alfred certainly embraced the social life of his new community and there he met his future wife, Martha Jane Downes, or Popsie as she was affectionately known. Martha was a talented musician, taking leading roles in concerts performed by the Fremantle Orchestral Society.[8] Martha used the surname Josephson as she was the stepdaughter of Abraham Moise Josephson, an influential merchant in the colony, especially in Fremantle. She was born in Fremantle in 1870 to Betsy Downes who was unmarried, which made Martha illegitimate in the language and judgement of the times. Betsy became Josephson's housekeeper and Martha grew up in the Josephson home on Cantonment Rd (now Queen Victoria Street).[9] Betsy and Abraham entered a de facto relationship, marrying in 1896 after the death of Abraham's first wife.

The relationship of Alfred and Martha blossomed and on 11 November 1891 they married at St John's Church, Fremantle.[10] Their first child, a daughter, Dorothy Grace Clury, was born in 1892 and a second daughter, Felicia Leila, followed in 1895. In 1898 a son, Reginald Alfred Josephson, was added to the family and finally in 1900 a second son, Leslie Roberts. The children followed in their parents' musical footsteps, Dorothy and Felicia playing violin and cello at various Fremantle concerts.[11] Reginald

played the cornet and Leslie the clarinet and saxophone.[12] Alfred continued his community work, becoming vice president of the Apollo Club, which presented musical concerts for charities, and auditor of Fremantle Hospital.[13]

Alfred left W Sandover & Co in January 1896 to take up an appointment as Locomotive Accountant in the Western Australian Government Railways, after six months' service earning £300 per year.[14] He rose to become Chief Clerk before being retrenched in December 1908.[15] This must have been a worrying time with a redundancy payment of only £147-3-0, less than six months' salary, and with four growing children.[16] Martha had received nothing from her mother's estate;[17] and similarly, when Abraham Josephson died in 1907 leaving a large estate, Martha was gifted, in addition to £25, only a strip of land two feet wide along the northern boundary of the land in Cantonment Road where Alfred and Martha lived. Each of their four children was also left £25.[18] In the short term these setbacks do not appear to have affected the way the family lived. In 1908 they undertook a week's concert tour of the southwest and continued their involvement in fundraising concert programs.[19]

However, Alfred found it difficult to secure ongoing employment in Fremantle after 1908. As a result, from 1910 he lived and worked on the goldfields as an accountant and auditor, mostly in and around Kalgoorlie. In 1910 he was employed by Messrs Miles and Co, possibly the Marble Bar merchants, and was auditor of the Marble Bar Progress Association.[20] Martha and the children joined Alfred in Kalgoorlie in August 1911.[21] The family was missed in Fremantle's cultural world, the Fremantle Orchestral Society warmly thanking Martha for her 24 years of voluntary charitable service as principal lady violinist.[22]

Martha fitted easily into Kalgoorlie social life, giving musicals at their residence and many other musical events and benefits. The family became involved in the Kalgoorlie Croquet Club and Alfred became secretary of the Kalgoorlie Bowling Club; later he took on the role of honorary auditor of the Kalgoorlie Mechanics' Institute.[23] Their life in Kalgoorlie was as full as it had been in Fremantle; not a week went by that they were not volunteering their time to entertain visiting dignitaries or at fundraising events. Alfred took pride in the organisations with which he was involved; indeed, with Maywood as Captain, the Kalgoorlie Bowling Club by 1914 had the largest membership in the state.[24]

However Alfred's health began to deteriorate and, in February 1918,

the family moved to Perth.[25] He died on 18 September 1919, aged 53, a respected man among friends and colleagues.[26] He had devoted his life to giving every advantage and opportunity to his family and the communities in which he lived. He died intestate and his estate incorporated at just £80 in a savings account, passed to his widow.[27]

Maywood's Photographs

Had Alfred not been a keen and proud photographer who created albums of his work, and had his family not valued his photographs, he would have passed from history, remembered only by his descendants. His albums, however, are historical artefacts. They have survived and now provide us with entry into his world. Our challenge is to decipher them.

On the following pages are some of the photographs in the album that Maywood created of Fremantle life in the first years of the 1890s when he was a young, newly married man. Where possible extended captions explain the context of each photograph. Some images, however, have little or no information to accompany them. The four photographs of Aboriginal people are such. Their inclusion in the album and labeling identifies them as Maywood's work but we do not know his purpose in creating them. Most are of Aboriginal people dressed in traditional kangaroo skins and carefully posed in natural settings. Many similar images were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often turned into postcards and reproduced for sale. Such images were highly contrived and part of the dominant colonial discourse positioning Aboriginal people as objects to be viewed — exotic and primitive, savage and representative of a dying race — always as something foreign. Maywood's Aboriginal photographs fit this characterisation only partly. Every one of them portrays its subject sympathetically; they seem to be a celebration of Aboriginal life pre-colonisation. And they are accompanied by photographs of Aboriginal people dressed as other Fremantle people were when Maywood photographed them. The two final photographs show two unidentified Fremantle families, one Aboriginal and the other not, both posed in exactly the same way in front of a white canvas sheet; Maywood's fellow Fremantle residents — that is all we know.

The authors of this paper would like to thank the Whadjuk Cultural Advice Committee (CAC) who have given their support for the photos of the Aboriginal people included in this paper to be published by the Fremantle Historical Society (July 2022).

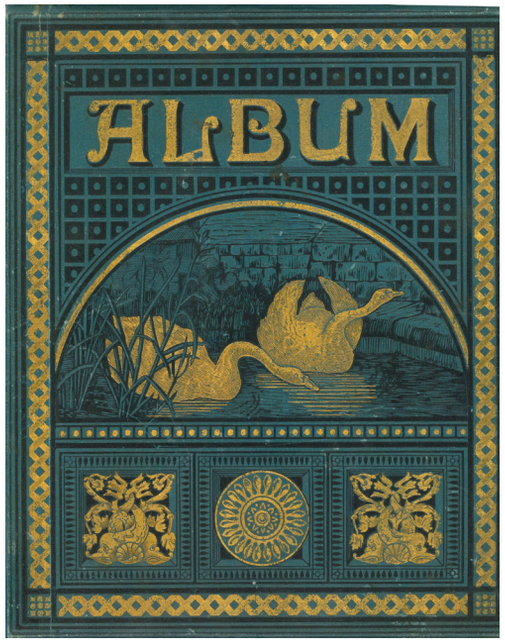


Photo 1: Front cover, A T Maywood, photograph album. Decorated blue cover with gilt embossing. Album 42, Tognini collection, RWAHS.

This was the first of Maywood's albums, begun approximately two years after his arrival in Western Australia, and also, the most personal. It presents - in image form - his memoir of Fremantle life.

Photo 2: Dried, pressed seaweed decorates the surrounds of this photograph of the convict-built North Fremantle Bridge, later renamed the High Level Bridge, taken looking north sometime in the first half of the 1890s.[28] Age has discoloured the album; nevertheless this page still suggests Maywood's intention that visitors to his home should enjoy the visual beauty of his album. The album was intended as parlour entertainment. P1999.3007a RWAHS.

Photo 3: 'This is part of the first home of Mr & Mrs AT Maywood taken Nov 11th 1891 at Fremantle WA.' Maywood's own caption pictures the sitting room of his and Martha's first home in Cantonment Rd. The date of the photograph was also their wedding day, an auspicious day for the photographer and groom.[29] It seems that the couple had already arranged their new sitting room to feature the artistic pursuits that were central in their lives. The pianoforte was a most appropriate wedding present for the bride because music was Martha's principal interest. She was an accomplished pianist, violinist, singer and performer. Also in the photograph is Alfred's tripod which held his camera when taking photographs indoors. Furnishings in the room are simple; this is a couple of modest means beginning married life. Yet the room is also highly decorated and appealing. Most prominent is the native foliage in the foreground. There is also, among the family photographs, a dried flower posy on the wall and embroidery of flowers and animals in the furnishings. A celebration of the natural world is combined with a strong sense of the aesthetically pleasing. This is the sitting room of a talented and artistic couple. The natural world was fascinating to 19th century society and many people filled their homes with decorative art based on plant and animal life. Nature - carefully selected with an eye to visual beauty - was domesticated in these displays. P1988.233b RWAHS.

Photo 4**:** High Street looking east towards the Fremantle Town Hall, c1890. This area was the retail and entertainment hub of the town at the time. Maywood's photograph shows, on the left, the premises of tailor T Smith who advertised himself as a 'fashionable tailor, habitmaker and gentlemen's outfitter', 'no novice as a cutter…of large London experience'.[30] 'F Wheeler, Jeweller, Watchmaker and Optician', had corner premises on Market Street while across the road was Holmes Brothers butchery. Further along the street were drapers and a shoe shop. In 1906 the Manning buildings opened, housing the Majestic Theatre. The popular Criterion Restaurant was prominently advertised while the Madrid Restaurant was located a little further down the street along with several hotels. In the 1960s, the section of *High Street* from Market Street to Adelaide Street was closed to traffic and converted into a pedestrian *mall*. P1999.3037 RWAHS.

Photo 5: Rowing crew proudly posed for photographer and member, Maywood, who joined the club shortly after his arrival from England. The Fremantle Rowing Club was founded in July 1887 at a public meeting chaired by Dr H C Barnett where a motto 'Pull Together' and a set of rules were officially adopted. A site for a clubhouse, between the two river bridges, was selected and the boatshed opened in April 1888, in conjunction with the first intra-club regatta. In its early years the rowing club was quite an institution in Fremantle, so much so that the first day of June was gala day for the town. On that day the Club held its annual regatta, the finishing line being opposite the East Fremantle ('Wood') Jetty upstream from the traffic bridge. All senior races were rowed over a two-mile course starting at Bicton and following the deep-water channel all the way to the finish.31 P1999.3040 RWAHS.

Photo 6: 'River View'. This fine residence, at 75 Tuckfield Street, was built as the home of Edward Mayhew who was a business partner of Maywood's first employer, William Sandover. Mayhew was a prominent Fremantle businessman and pharmacist and was appointed the second United States Consular Agent for Western Australia. The grand home was constructed between 1888-1890,[32] from plans by JT Hobbs.[33] Mayhew married Agnes Maria Jewell in 1883 and they had seven children. It is likely that three of the daughters are captured by Maywood's camera on the front verandah of their home in this photograph. The house was advertised for sale in 1895,[34] but was not sold at this point. In 1901 it was a boarding school run by a family of ladies, the Misses Bird, who leased the building. It was sold in 1902 to the Catholic order of Oblate Fathers. In 1942 it became a military hospital and, after the war, a Christian Brothers Junior High School. Sadly, the building was demolished in 1988. P1999.3021 RWAHS.

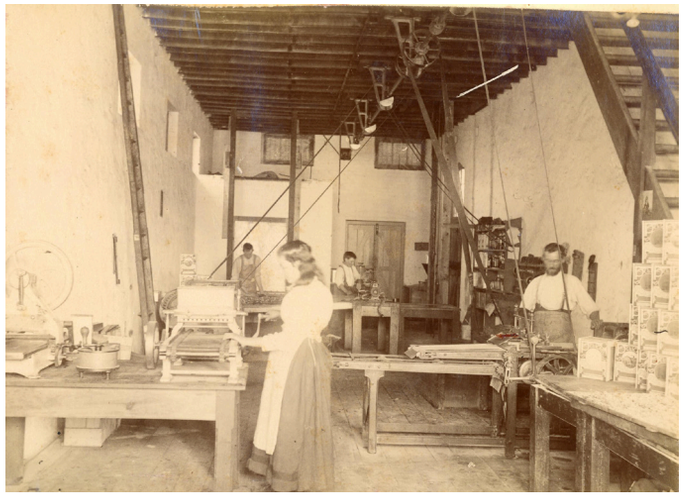


Photo 7: Pelican Confectionary works, Newman St, Fremantle. Edward Mayhew purchased the premises in 1889 and installed 'a first class confectionary works', guaranteeing that 'all the mixtures used are pure and free from adulteration'.[35] In 1895 he expanded into jam making, his lollies and jams finding ready sales on the goldfields until federation opened the local market to duty-free eastern states competition. Maywood has photographed

the labelling room in a carefully posed scene showing its four workers tending machines driven by steam power. Long leather belts powering the machines are connected by pulleys to the shaft in the ceiling, which was driven by an eight horsepower steam engine located outside the building. Many such small manufacturing works sprang up in Fremantle in the 1880s-1890s to cater to Western Australia's booming gold rush population. P1999.3035 RWAHS.

Photo 8: 'The Jolly Crowd'. A rare photograph of Maywood himself (first on left, middle row), as a member of 'The Jolly Crowd', a group of young men dressed up to perform. We do not know the occasion or who brought these men together but we do know that all were Fremantle residents and that most (or perhaps all) of them worked for Fremantle merchant houses. At least four of them, including Maywood himself, were employees of merchant William Sandover. Fremantle had a lively amateur theatrical and concert life in the 1890s and these young men were part of it. Some played musical instruments; others sang, recited, ran lantern shows and performed in group routines. Their dress and poses in this photograph suggest their entertainment was humorous and that they had a good deal of fun. P1999.3025 RWAHS.

Photo 9: Rous Head looking out to sea. The entrance to Fremantle Harbour in which the signal station can be seen on the southern shore. The photograph was taken before the dredging of the rocky barrier across the mouth of the Swan River allowed for the development of Fremantle's inner harbor. The new harbor opened in 1897 to accommodate the increasing shipping traffic caused by the discovery of gold and the subsequent colonial development; it transformed Fremantle into Western Australia's main port. P1999.3013 RWAHS.

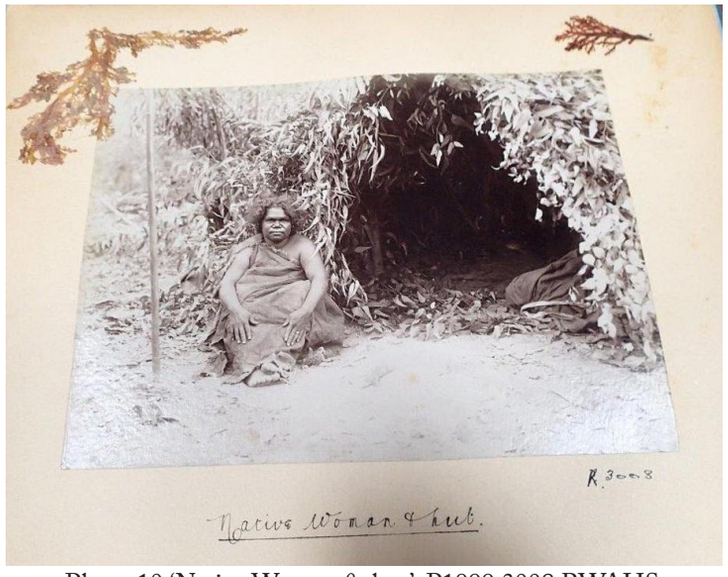


Photo 10:'Native Woman & hut'. P1999.3008 RWAHS.

Photo 11: 'An armed Aboriginal'. P1999.3020 RWAHS.

Photo 12: 'Native Woman'. P1999.3016 RWAHS.

Photo 13: Family portrait 1. P1999.3070 RWAHS.

Photo 14: Family portrait 2. P1999.3067 RWAHS.

1 Jeffrey Mifflin, ' "Metaphors for Life Itself": Historical Photograph Albums, Archives, and the Shape of Experience and Memory', *The American Archivist*, 75, 2012, p 226.

2 AT Maywood (photographer), Albums 14, 32, 39, 42, Tognini collection. Royal WA Historical Society. https://research.histwest.org.au/photographs/search

3 Andrea Di Noto & David Winter, *The pressed plant: the art of botanical specimens, nature prints, and sun pictures*; photography by John Berens. Stewart, Tabori &

Chang, New York, c1999. Molly Duggins, 'Pacific Ocean flowers. Colonial seaweed albums', in S Mentz, M E Rojas (eds), *The Sea and Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Literary Culture*, Oxford, 2017. 'A trip to Rottnest' (by an occasional contributor) West Australian, 20 July 1896, p 7.

4 *Preserving History. How to Digitally Archive and Share Historical Photographs, Documents, and Audio Recordings*, ch 4. https://archivehistory.jeksite.org/index.htm *Telling Our Stories: Family Photo Archiving Guide* https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/7/1414/files/2019/06/Photo-Archving-Guide.pdf

5 Baptisms, St Dunstan, Stepney, County of Middlesex, 1870. Census 1871, East Ward, Tower Hamlets, Mile End Old Town.

6 *West Australian*, 2 July 1889, p 3.

7 *West Australian*, 29 Aug 1889, p 3; 12 Sept 1889, p 3; 18 Sept 1889, p 2; 18 Mar 1890, p 3; 14 Apr 1890, p 2; 10 June 1890, p 3; 23 July 1890, p. 3. *Daily News* 17 June 1890, p 3, 8 July 1890, p. 3, 18 Dec 1900, p 3; 17 June 1890, p 3; 8 July 1890, p 3.

8 *WA Bulletin* (Fremantle), 5 July 1890, p 7.

9 https://fremantlestuff.info/streets/cantonmentroad.html

10 *Daily News*, 12 Nov 1891, p 2.

11 *WA Record*, 2 Jan 1904, p 12; *West Australian*, 22 Dec 1903 p 3; 5 July 1904, p 5.

12 *Evening Star* (Boulder), 6 July 1911, p 3.

13 *West Australian*, 26 Nov 1898, p. 5; 28 Jan 1899, p 2.

14 Record of Service register, Chief Mechanical Engineer's Branch. AU WA S4585 Cons1753 2 SROWA.

15 WA Blue Book 1905.

16 *Western Mail*, 5 Dec 1908, p 2.

17 *Western Mail*, 23 June 1900, p 39.

18 Cons 3458 item 1911/027. SROWA.

19 *West Australian*, 12 Dec 1908 p 12; *Daily News*, 30 Dec 1908, p.3.

20 *Pilbarra Goldfield News* (Marble Bar), 22 April 1910, p 2; 11 Nov 1910, p 2.

21 *West Australian*, 29 Aug 1911, p 2.

22 *West Australian*, 2 Sept 1911, p 11.

23 *Sunday Times*, 3 Dec 1911, p 27; *Sun* (Kalgoorlie), 6 Oct 1912 p 4; *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 27 Sep 1912, p 2; *Evening Star*, 7 Dec 1914, p 1; *Western Argus*, 21 Oct 1913, p 44; *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 30 Nov 1912, p 8.

24 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 30 Mar 1914, p 3.

25 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 19 Feb 1918, p 2; *Sun*, 31 Mar 1918, p 6.

26 *Daily News*, 23 Sept 1919, p 1.

27 AT Maywood, probate. Cons 3458 item 1919 368 009. SROWA.

28 https://fremantlestuff.info/bridges/index.html

29 *Daily News*, 12 Nov 1891, p 2.

30 *Daily News*, 22 November 1886, p. 3; 1 November 1887, p 3.

31 Ralph Jeffreys, *History of Fremantle Rowing Club 1887-1987*. https://www.rowinghistory-aus.info/club-histories/fremantle/index.html

32 Place No. 22245 Heritage Council. http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au

33 *West Australian*, 21 July 1888, p 3.

34 *West Australian*, 8 April 1895, p 2.

35 *Western Mail*, 12 October 1889, p 1.

The Round House: an Investigation of its Early Years

Steve Errington

Fremantle Gaol, better known as the Round House, is Western Australia's oldest surviving building. From January 1831 when it opened until 1856 when it was, for the first time, 'abolished' as a gaol, it was Western Australia's most important gaol. Its supremacy was challenged in 1848–1849 when the small and useless Perth Gaol in St Georges Terrace was expanded in a surprising manner. However, with the arrival of convicts in June 1850 Fremantle Gaol became busier than ever.

With one exception (see below) no Imperial Convicts were sent there but most early convicts were given a ticket-of-leave on arrival and they, the Enrolled Pensioners who accompanied them from England, and the wives of the Pensioners overfilled the Round House.

It is tempting to assume that closure was due to the opening in 1855 of the first stage of the building now known as Fremantle Prison. But closure was entirely due to the opening in 1856 of a large colonial gaol in Perth; the gaol currently forming part of the Western Australian Museum.

The building

The tempting explanation for closure is one of many unsafe assumptions about the iconic Fremantle building. In the absence of Henry Reveley's building plans, and ignoring the obvious loss of four cells and toilets from the western side of the building, it was reasonable to assume that the Round

Image 1: THEN. The Round House was a prominent feature of several early topographical paintings, like this one by Richard Morrell from August 1832 (Art Gallery of WA).

Image 2: NOW. A recent photograph showing the entry to the old bakehouse (centre, photo author).

House stands as built in 1830.

It was assumed that the well in the exercise yard and the bakehouse under the front steps had always been there (after all, wasn't bread and water the staple diet for prisoners?). Likewise, the original eight cells were clearly needed for prisoners, and the three upstairs rooms above the entrance were obviously needed for the gaoler and his family.

These obvious assumptions slowly unravelled. A report of an early trial[1] revealed that prisoners were collecting the gaol's daily water needs from George Leake's private well in the town. Bigger surprises were lurking in the 'Blue Books', the annual reports all colonies sent back to the Colonial Office in London.

The description of the gaol in Western Australia's Blue Book for 1834 confirmed[2] that the gaol had a kitchen and a ward room (ie office), but revealed that it contained only seven cells for the custody of prisoners with another 'for the Jailor's bedroom'. A report on prisons compiled by Judge William Mackie two years later[3] showed that nothing had changed: the gaoler and his wife (Henry and Louisa Vincent) were still sleeping in one of the cells.

Though widely believed to be Fremantle's first gaoler, Henry Vincent was not the first – he was preceded by the blunderbuss-wielding William Owers.[4] In the early months of 1831, neither Owers nor Vincent slept in the gaol – it was just guarded at night by soldiers of the 63rd Regiment.

Judge Mackie's 1836 report also reveals the origin of the well and bakehouse. In the period under review all prisoners apart from the overnight drunks performed hard labour (see below for the usual exception) as part of their sentence. In the beginning, this was performed in and around the gaol. Mackie's report lists among the outcomes of hard labour 'building a Laundry and Bakehouse attached to the Gaol.'

He also listed the digging of a well 46 feet (about 13.8 metres) deep in the exercise yard as another of the outcomes. This occurred in 1833-34. In November 1833 Executive Council had before it a request for a pump to be used 'in a well proposed to be constructed'. Council endorsed the immediate construction of the well but deferred the expense of a pump, ruling that a windlass be used, and calling tenders for such.[5] Later reports confirm that water was drawn up in a bucket on a long rope.

The 1839 Blue Book reveals that one of the eight cells was still being used as a gaoler's bedroom with no mention of any upstairs rooms. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but it is clear that the gaoler was not sleeping upstairs. But by March 1841 there had been a rearrangement: all eight cells are now available for prisoners but 'ward room' has been replaced by 'Gaolers Residence'[6].

By December 1843 the gaoler was Nicholas Smith, a married man with four children. In a letter written by Fremantle Government Resident

Images 3-5: The southern, central and northern rooms of the 1844 upstairs Gaoler's quarters (photos by author).

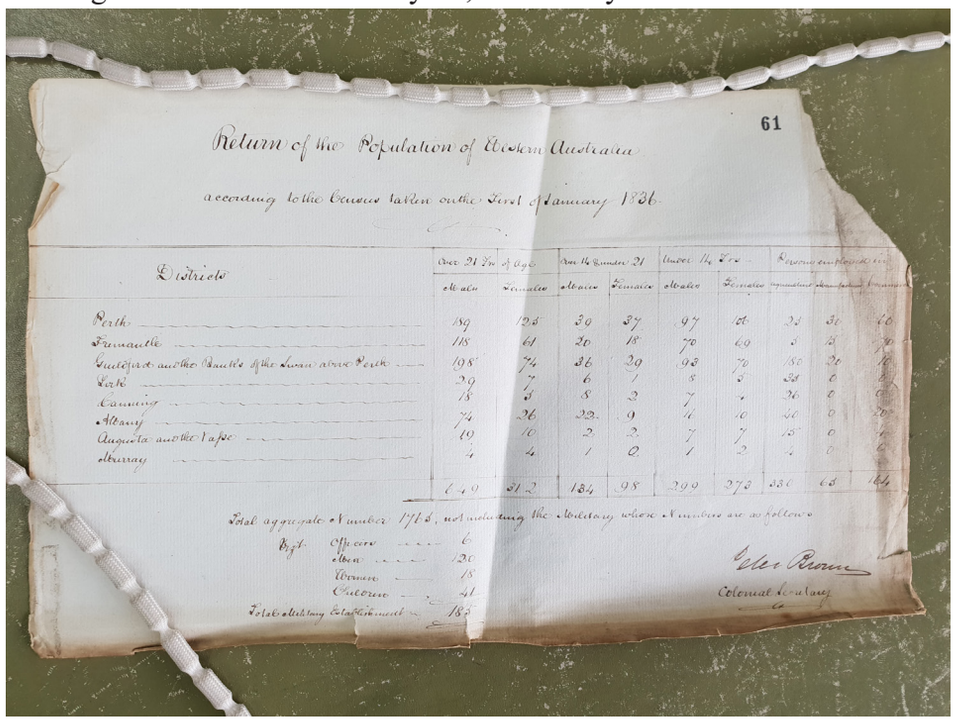
Richard McBryde Brown to his brother Peter Brown, the Colonial Secretary, Richard Brown wrote:

I hereby enclose an estimate of the expenses of certain additions, proposed to be made to the Jail for the accommodation of the Jailor.

The tender was submitted by stonemason Thomas Harwood who had enjoyed a brief term as Acting Gaoler in May-June 1840, and was possibly the un-named contractor who built the gaol in 1830. Harwood undertook:

To raise the walls of 3 rooms about one foot to lay the lower floor to put the roof on again make two partition doors and three windows also a staircase on the left going in the above to be done in a workmanlike manner for the sum of thirty five pounds (£35.0.0).[7]

In other words, he undertook to raise the walls of the kitchen, the entrance hall and the office/gaoler's residence to fit in three new rooms above them. The rooms, now empty, still feature three windows and two doorways. They were very small, but the Smith children were only young, and there was already a kitchen downstairs. Each of their rooms had a window looking down into the exercise yard, which they still do.


61

Return of the Population of Western Australia

according to the Census taken on the First of January 1836

Districts	Over 21 Yrs of Age		From 14 Years to 21		Under 14 Yrs		Persons employed in Agriculture		
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females			
Perth	89	25	30	37	97	60	25	30	60
Fremantle	118	61	20	18	70	60	3	3	30
Guildford and the Districts of the Swan above Perth	198	74	36	29	93	70	150	30	12
York	29	7	6	1	8	3	28	0	2
Canning	18	5	8	2	7	4	36	0	0
Albany	74	26	22	9	14	10	40	0	20
Augusta and the Vasse	19	10	2	2	7	7	15	0	4
Murray	4	4	1	0	1	2	4	0	2
	549	312	184	98	299	276	330	63	164

Total aggregate Number 1713, not including the Military, whose Numbers are as follows

Regt.	Officers	6
	Men	120
	Women	18
	Children	41
Total Military Establishment		185

Colonial Secretary's Office

Image: 6 The 1836 census taken five years after the gaol opened, showed that the population of Fremantle was still only 356. (Courtesy The National Archives, London.

The Need for a Gaol

Lieutenant Governor James Stirling wrote to the Justices of the Peace on 23 April 1830 to inform them he had decided to build gaols in Perth, Fremantle and other places.[8] But why did the village of Fremantle need a gaol in January 1836, 5 years after the gaol opened,[9] when the population of Fremantle was still only 356? What sort of people did Stirling think would need locking up?

The April letter reveals that Stirling was firmly committed to enforcing the Master and Servant Act, and the first person incarcerated in Western Australia was Edward Chapman who spent December 1829 in a temporary gaol for 'misconduct as an indentured servant'. He was committed by Stirling himself days before he appointed the first Justice of the Peace. In November 1829 Stirling had issued a public notice warning William Harrison that if he did not return to his job he would be apprehended and sent to Carnac Island.[10] Later that month Stirling issued a Proclamation on the mutual obligations of the Master and Servant Act.[11]

Image 7: A detail from Mary Ann Friend's 1830 painting of the South Bay showing the harbourmaster's office where early trials were held, and *Marquis of Anglesea* impaled on a rock. (Courtesy JS Battye Library).

Edward Chapman was locked up in the Swan River Colony's first gaol, Fremantle's own 'convict hulk', the *Marquis of Anglesea* which, in September 1829, had been blown ashore and impaled, still vertical, on a rock just offshore at the western end of the South Bay.

The second and third people to be incarcerated were two sailors off the *Gilmore* who spent the first week of 1830 in the *Anglesea* for refusing to work. They were committed by George Leake, one of the first JPs appointed. This first trio of prisoners set the early pattern: runaway servants and sailors were very significant minorities. Of the first 27 men

known to have been incarcerated on the *Marquis of Anglesea*, twelve were indentured servants.[12] On the list of eleven prisoners held in the Round House in October 1831, nine were runaway servants.[13]

But runaway sailors were probably the reason why the first gaol was built in the port rather than the capital. In later years they were locked up in batches, like the 17 off the *Robert Small* in August 1853 - in the week ending 28 August 1853, 25 of the 27 prisoners were seamen.[14] In the following week, all 21 were sailors. Runaway or misbehaving sailors were a constant presence in the Round House in its first quarter century. With over 600 known cases they constitute the biggest minority group.

The Inmates

No prisoner registers from this time have survived but a careful study of the gaoler's surviving quarterly returns,[15] supplemented by some early monthly returns and some late weekly ones, reveal over 2,400 individual inmates for the period 1831-56. Details of all inmates will appear in *Locked up in Fremantle 1829 – 1856*, forthcoming.

Some of them weren't prisoners; they were patients. There was no public hospital in Fremantle until 1897 so sick men and boys who couldn't look after themselves were brought to the gaol. There was often a cell set aside for sick prisoners who were visited as needed by a government doctor. George Wagstaff was referred to the gaol in December 1835 by the Colonial Surgeon but died a few days later. In September 1839 an un-named Aboriginal man was brought in for his own protection and for treatment of his spear wounds but he too died a few days later.

George Phillips (Convict No. 30) was sent up from the temporary Convict Establishment (where the Esplanade Hotel now stands) in January 1851 and remained for a month.[16] Phillips was the only actual convict to spend time in the Round House though his ticket-of-leave came through while he was a patient.[17] Altogether, 17 men (including nine Aboriginal men) were admitted simply because they were sick.

Men and women who were mentally ill formed a larger group with 33 admissions representing 24 individuals (22 men and 2 women). They were admitted because they were 'insane', 'a lunatic' or, in the case of the Aboriginal boy Gorman, a 'supposed lunatic'. Western Australia had no lunatic asylum until 1857 when one was set up in the abandoned buildings of the original Convict Establishment. Before then, 3 long-term mental patients died in the gaol.

The 2,400 individuals were responsible for a total of over 3,600

incarcerations. The majority of the 3,600 were male colonials being locked up for a whole range of offences from public drunkenness and petty theft to rape and murder. There was one hanging at the gaol, that of 16-year-old John Gavin for murder, in 1844.[18]

More than a quarter (nearly 1,100) of the total incarcerations were for being drunk or drunk and riotous. The inebriates were typically locked up overnight and released the following morning without any breakfast but with a five-shilling fine – unless they made the mistake of being arrested on a Saturday, in which case they had to wait till Monday to face the Magistrate.

An unexpected group who emerged from the gaolers' lists were soldiers from British Regiments stationed in the colony. Some committed civil offences but there were at least 65 who arrived under military escort to serve sentences with hard labour when convicted by courts martial. Offences included drunkenness, neglecting duty, sleeping on duty, insubordination, and desertion (which earned them solitary confinement). Private Thomas Ames of the 21st Regiment received 7 years transportation for 'striking his officer'. Private Aiden Allard of the 51st received 7 years transportation for being drunk and asleep at his post.

Given the era under discussion, it was no surprise to find young boys on the lists. The first was William Glover who was only eleven when he stole some gunpowder and cash under instructions from his father. For this he was gaoled in June 1832 for two weeks with a whipping in front of the gaol on receival and discharge; '2 doz each time'. William Cooper was only 8 when he was sentenced to 12 months with hard labour for stealing silver spoons – he was made cook for the prisoners. There were Aboriginal boys whose ages are not known and at least ten other European boys, the youngest of whom we will meet shortly.

Women and girls were definitely in the minority with around 160 incarcerations. But even this number is distorted by prisoners like Mrs Ann O'Brian, wife of Enrolled Pensioner Patrick O'Brian, with 21 incarcerations, sometimes with Patrick, and usually for drunkenness. The first known woman prisoner – probably a misbehaving servant – listed in the handwritten prisoner list from July 1831, was Louiza Hearn. The name Hearn appears in no other colonial records, but Henry Vincent the gaoler married a Louisa Hume in October that year.[19] It is possible that gaoler Vincent might have married his first woman prisoner and brought her back

Image 8: The Round House and whalers' tunnel were a potential tourist attraction when noted photographer Frank Hurley took this photograph in about 1960 (author collection).

to live in a cell!

After sailors, the next biggest – and the most significant - minority were Aboriginal males, nearly 500 in number, mostly from what is now recognised as Noongar country. Yagan was the first, with his friends Dommera and Ningana, in September 1832. All three had been named as outlaws (ie beyond the protection of the law) and could have been shot on sight but were captured and sent to the Round House, while authorities pondered their fate (they were sent across to Carnac Island, from where they escaped).

The same authorities were initially reluctant to prosecute Aboriginals, and none appeared in court until January 1837. Offences by Aboriginals were predominately for stealing food, most commonly sheep. Some were sentenced to transportation 'beyond the seas' for inter-tribal murders committed to meet cultural obligations. They were sent to the Rottnest prison.

Aboriginal prisoners only served short terms in the Round House, usually on their way to or from Rottnest, or awaiting trial. Their numbers peaked in 1848-49 when they outnumbered all other prisoners. Numbers then fell away dramatically. In 1848 the colonial government had built a 'Native Prison' in St Georges Terrace in the grounds of the old Perth Gaol. In

1849 they expanded it, closed the Rottnest Prison in September 1849, and brought all the Aboriginal prisoners to Perth to work on the local roads.[20]

Hard Labour

Everyone sentenced to a term of imprisonment was also sentenced to hard labour to be performed six days a week. This took the form of 'productive' labour (the English punishment of walking a treadmill for hours each day was being phased out before the Swan River Colony was settled).[21]

There is one exception 'that proves the rule'. Adam Armstrong, a farmer and the founder of Dalkeith, was arrested in July 1832 for receiving a stolen pig. He was bailed to appear at the October Quarter Sessions. Found guilty, he was sentenced to three months in the Round House *without hard labour*. On the recommendation of Judge Mackie and a bench of magistrates he was freed two months early.

Hard labour for a woman or girl was 'suited to her sex' such as 'cleaning about the jail'. 'washing for gaol', or 'mending for gaol', though none seem to have been made cook. Boys weren't sent out to work with the men but also worked in gaol. William Gee, a practised burglar was only ten or eleven when he was arrested and locked up on remand in October 1834 for housebreaking. He was unlucky. The October Quarter Sessions had been held four days earlier, so he had to wait three months in gaol for the 1 January 1835 Sessions. Found guilty, he was sentenced to two years with hard labour. He was made cook for the gaol and, incidentally, wasn't released until 31 December 1836. Time off for good behaviour hadn't been thought of.

When William returned for three days in February 1838 for robbing gardens in Perth, he was accompanied by his little brother George, aged only seven. The brothers probably had the pleasure of sharing a cell with their father Charles Gee who was then serving his sixth term. He had convictions for beating his wife, but on this occasion he had stolen a turkey and been sentenced to seven years 'transportation beyond the seas'. William was back soon afterwards to start a six-month term for committing a felony. Now fourteen, he was set to work building a jetty on Bathers Beach.

Prisoners Dig a Tunnel

Most of men's hard labour was quarrying stone, making and repairing roads, building jetties and lime burning. But the most significant project was digging the whalers' tunnel through Arthur Head in 1837-38. The Fremantle Whaling Company had set up a whaling station on Bathers

Beach and the government had guaranteed prison labour to dig a tunnel through Arthur Head so the company could bring its barrels of whale oil into the town. Work started in August 1837 and was completed in February 1838.

Thanks to gaoler Vincent recording details of hard labour performed, we have the names of some of those who dug the tunnel:
Aboriginal prisoners: Buoyeen, Cogatt. Darrip, Goordap and Nuambert
Colonial prisoners: Thomas Blakey, Richard Carey, Robert Field, Charles Fowler, Charles Gee, Richard Reilly, Daniel Tapper
Soldiers: Hugh Dysart and William Mills,
Sailors from the *Alice*: Joseph Brown, John Efford, William May, William Moor, William Nash, Edward Pain, and Thomas Wick[22]

In July 1838 Buoyeen, Cogatt and Goordap, who had all been sentenced to seven years transportation, were sent with three others (one of whom had only been sentenced to 12 months hard labour) 'beyond the seas' but only as far as Garden Island. They were joined in August by Charles Gee, a carpenter also facing seven years transportation. Then all seven were gathered up and transferred to Rottnest. This was the beginning of Rottnest as a prison island to which about 3,800 overwhelmingly Aboriginal males would ultimately be sent.[23] No one spent more than two years in the Round House after conviction. The next level of punishment was transportation. Years before Britain sent convicts to Western Australia, the colony was making convicts of its own and sending them to New South Wales or Van Diemen's Land[24]. Before Gee and the six Aboriginal men were sent to Rottnest, at least 26 men had already been sent from the Swan River Colony to the two convict colonies.

No Aboriginals were sent out of the colony but in July 1849 Governor Charles Fitzgerald came close to sending six to Van Diemen's Land on the colonial schooner *Champion*. At the last minute he heard that New South Wales had been stopped from sending convicts to Van Diemen's Land and decided he should check with London. His letter shows that he was hoping to be told he could send them to some other part of the world.[25]

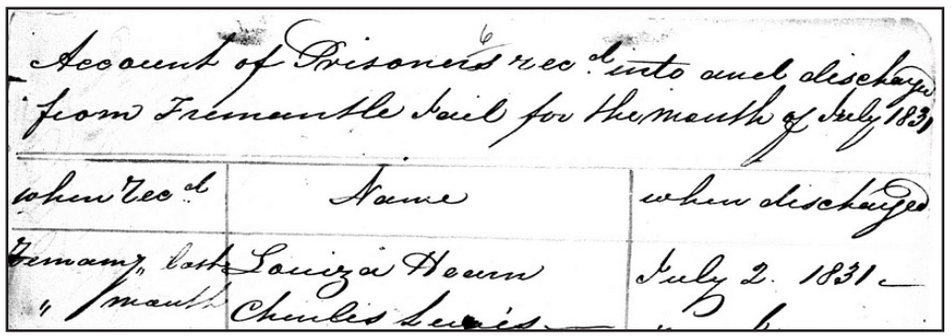
When transportation to Van Diemen's Land was forbidden, Swan River authorities found a solution: starting in 1851 anyone sentenced to transportation was given a convict registration number and sent to join the Imperial convicts in the Fremantle Convict Establishment.

Deaths in Custody

In the nine months after the gaol opened in January 1831 there were

no fewer than four ~~4~~ deaths from among the small gaol population, the cause in each case being ruled by a coroner's jury to be 'visitation by God.' The first was Daniel Gee, brother of Charles Gee.[26] Another, Thomas Dunn, was simply 'resident in gaol' having been discharged at the Quarter Sessions but being too ill to leave.[27]

In the next 25 years there were only 10 more deaths in the gaol, including 5 who were patients, rather than prisoners. In the 1840s 3 Aboriginal prisoners died in the gaol: Dening in 1840, Yeip in 1842 and Yalonga in 1847.[28] William Wilson died in 1842 in a tussle over the gaoler's loaded pistol.[29] Jerry Donovan, a sick vagrant, was on his fifteenth visit when he died in 1853. After 1831 the position of coroner had been left vacant so there were no Coroner's inquests.



Account of Prisoners rec.d into and discharged from Fremantle Jail for the month of July 1831

when Rec.d	Name	when discharged
Fremantle Gaol	Louiza Hearn	July 2. 1831
" "	Charles Lewis	

Image 9: The gaoler's monthly return for July 1831 reveals the name of the first known female prisoner see Acc, 36 vol 17/6, SROWA.

Full details of what happened to the old building after it was decommissioned as a gaol in 1856 can be found elsewhere,[30] it twice came close to demolition in the 1920s. It survived as a windbreak for the harbourmaster's 1835 house in 1922, so 2022 marked the centenary of the first decision to demolish it. The abandoned building continued to crumble away and in October 1928, demolition actually commenced but was halted by the intervention of Fremantle Mayor Frank Gibson, State Librarian Dr James Battye, Premier Phillip Collier, and Sir James Mitchell who was both Leader of the Opposition and president of the new Western Australian Historical Society (now RWAHS).

Now owned by the City of Fremantle, from 1998 the ancient building has been opened by volunteers and enjoyed by about 200 visitors each day.

Fremantle Studies Day, 2020

Endnotes

1 Cons 3472/item 17, State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA)
2 Originals of the WA Blue Books can be found in file CO/22 in the National Archives, London
3 WH Mackie, 'A Report on the State of Prisons in Western Australia', dated September 1836, Acc. 36 vol 48/123-28, SROWA
4 *Western Australian Chronicle and Perth Gazette*, 26 March 1831, p 2
5 Minutes of Executive Council for the meeting held 12 November 1833, SROWA
6 The Blue Book for 1841 dated 15 March 1841, CO22/17, National Archives, Kew
7 Letter from Government Resident R McB Brown to Colonial Secretary Peter Brown enclosing tender dated 23 December 1843 from Thomas Harwood, Acc 36 vol. 131/94-95, SROWA
8 Letter dated 23 April 1830 from Lt Governor Stirling to the Justices of the Peace, Acc 49 letter 727, SROWA; reply dated 20 May 1830, Acc 36 6/152, SROWA
9 The Fremantle Gaol opened without ceremony, on 18 January 1831
10 Government Notice dated 3 November 1829, Acc, 49 1/261, SROWA
11 Proclamation dated 13 November 1829, Acc 49 vol 1/349, SROWA.
12 Acc. 36 vol. 7/114 SROWA
13 Acc. 36 vol. 18/129, SROWA
14 Acc. 36. Vol. 272/70, SROWA
15 Cons 3472/21; 'Quarterly Returns of Prisoners', Cons 3676, SROWA
16 *Scindian* arrival George Phillips was presumably taken ill before the hospital in the Convict Establishment was set up
17 There were nearly 400 incarcerations of ticket-of-leave and conditional pardon convicts, see Steve Errington, *The Round House 1831 to 1856: the early years of Western Australia's oldest building – and how it survived*, Hesperian Press, 2022, p. 29
18 *Perth Gazette,* 6 April 1844
19 Ian Berryman in his 1982 book *The Census of 1832* says (p. 146) that Louiza Hearn was probably Louisa Hume
20 Steve Errington, 'The Aboriginal Prison in the Terrace', *Friends of the Battye Library Newsletter*. Afterwords, July 2020
21 See Chapter 8 in Christopher Harding, Bill Hines, Richard Ireland and Philip Rawlings, *Imprisonment in England and Wales*, Croom Helm, 1985.
22 Steve Errington, *The Round House 1831 to 1856*, Hesperian Press, 2022, p. 24.
23 Neville Green & Susan Moon, *Far From Home: Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest Island 1838-1931*, UWA Press, 1997
24 Renamed Tasmania in 1853
25 Letter from Charles Fitzgerald to Earl Grey dated 16 July 1849, CO18/51/191 (AJCP reel 433)
26 Coroner's report, Acc 36 vol 16/25-28, SROWA
27 Coroner's report, Acc 36 vol 17/4, SROWA
28 Steve Errington, *The Round House 1831 to 1856*, p. 49
29 *Inquirer,* 25 May 1842, p. 2
30 See Chapter 12 in Steve Errington, *The Round House 1831 to 1856*

Cads of the Colony

Allen Graham

When I started writing this essay I was not too sure what I would call it. There were a number of possibilities such as *Sex Scandals of the Colonists*, *Women and Power Within the Colony*, or *Cads of the Colony*, for none of the tales that follow reflect very well on the colonial male. The abstract for the paper contained the line, 'No doubt there are a lot of good feeling love stories to be told about many of the early settlers to Western Australia, despite the hard time that those settlers had to endure.' However, it was never the objective of this paper to discuss romance and so it concentrates on some of the broken people of early Western Australia.

The essay starts from the very earliest days of the colony, and in some cases the story had started even before the colonists arrived at the Swan River for while a three month trip to the colony was enough time for a shipboard romance to blossom, it was also enough time to put some strains on relationships, so this paper is peppered with examples of both.

The first tale of love gone wrong, which may be better described as passion gone wrong, is that of the liaison between Elizabeth Gamble, and the bosun of the *Parmelia*. Elizabeth had come to the colony as the servant of the Drummond family, as James Drummond had been employed as the colony's botanist. This liaison was described by Charles (Tom) Stannage,

the respected historian, when he wrote 'One evening in late May 1829, as *Parmelia* heaved to off Fremantle...a maidservant and the ship's bosun made love in some quiet corner between decks.'[1]

Those furtive minutes resulted in Elizabeth falling pregnant to the bosun and so she settled in the colony in the family way, continuing on in the service of the Drummond family. Stannage reports that Elizabeth had no enthusiasm for becoming a mother and there is a record of a conversation between Elizabeth and Mrs Drummond where Elizabeth said, 'I would no longer be bothered with the child, but would take it down to Fremantle and throw it on the deck of the ship of the father of it.'[2]

The sad sequel to this tale is that a week after giving birth, the hut in which the child was being kept was burnt down and the child died in the flames. This raised the question of whether this was a case of infanticide, but the coroner recorded the death by misadventure. Consequently, no further action was taken and Elizabeth continued on in the service of the Drummond family.

That was not a good start for Elizabeth, but a number of other couples were more confident about their futures and so between February 1830 and May 1831 there were three reports of couples eloping in the colony, and two out the three of these could be considered scandalous. The first of these elopements was reported on by the *Fremantle Journal and General Advertiser* of February 1830 when it wrote:

> Elopement to Perth…One of the Passengers of the *Protector* just arrived, has had the misfortune this morning, (not to break his leg) but to lose his rib. In fact, his better half has gone off with two Dukes or Earls!! it is believed to Perth. We heartily trust these Brothers in iniquity will be discovered—it's a hard case when a man is yoked to his wife, she should give him the slip & leave the horns behind.[3]

That tale perhaps encouraging another smitten couple, for in March 1830 there was another elopement when Mary Ann Friend wrote in her dairy:

> Whilst we were here a runaway match in the town made a great sensation. After the young lady had run away, the Clergyman disappointed them and did not come from Perth as promised. To my great surprise at night the Gentleman brought the fair one to my tent and begged me to take charge of her. I had no room but she stayed with Miss W and in the morning was married from Mr Gillibrand's tent. Went to give her joy, had cake and wine. Afterwards the happy pair proceeded to a neighbouring tent (the most miserable place I ever saw) for the Honeymoon.[4]

Mary Ann Friend did not name the happy couple, but a corresponding marriage record identifies them as George Eyre and Catherine Bamber who had both sailed to the colony on the *Nancy* which arrived on 9 January 1830. George and Catherine may have enjoyed a shipboard romance, but their impatience to get married was most likely due to the fact that Catherine's father was planning on leaving the colony, which the family did do in June of 1830. However, bad luck was to later befall the couple as George died in an accidental fall in 1835 and Mrs Eyre left the colony 12 months later. The third elopement was recorded by the *Hobart Courier* in May 1831 when it told how, 'A young settler has eloped with an old settler's wife; both have been ordered off by the Governor.'[5] That is a story that warrants further research.

The need to elope suggests that a marriage may not necessarily be approved of by the couples's parents and in the fledging days of the colony, any prospective suitor would have come under the intense scrutiny of the girl's father. As for marriages themselves, Mary Durack, the respected writer, has suggested that with men outnumbering women two to one, marriageable women were the 'scarcest commodity' in the colony.'[6] Similarly, Eliza Shaw, in a letter home to England wrote:

> As soon as I get about again I mean to set about a Ladies' Memorial to King William asking him to award a handsome premium as well as a pension to all of us who, for the good of the colony, have presented it with young females. They are so scarce here that Mrs Tanner and myself have promised to get the gents a cargo of young ladies sent out![7]

Adding that 'for upon the prudent and well selected choice of a husband depends entirely the happiness or misery of a girl's life' and it would have been feelings of that kind that gave cause to the following incident in Fremantle in 1833.

At this time William Lewington was having 'in law' troubles and the *Perth Gazette* tells how:

> William Lewington was brought up under the charge of having fired a loaded pistol at Robert Maydwell with an intent to do him some bodily harm. It appeared that the Prisoner had lately married the Prosecutors daughter, and that in consequence, there were continual quarrels between them. On Saturday evening last about ten o'clock the Prisoner came into Mr. Cooper's public house where the Prosecutor was; who seeing the Prisoner immediately retired to avoid any occasion of quarrelling with him, and went to Mr Herds: the Prisoner followed him there.

The paper then gave details of the event leading up to the shooting,

including telling how Lewington procured the gun and then told how:

> He returned immediately to Mr Coopers and seeing the Prosecutor he exclaimed; you dammed scoundrel, you have broke my peace of mind, if you are a man come out; to which the Prosecutor replied, You foolish fellow go away about your business, the Prisoner then raised the pistol and took a deliberate aim at the Prosecutor, and said. If you don't come out like a man, here goes, he immediately fired the pistol, the contents of which lodged in the wall a few inches from the Prosecutors head...In his defence he said that the Prosecutor had for a long time treated him in the most cruel and unkind manner, and that he only did it to frighten him; as he could easily have shot him dead, if he had had any such intention.[8]

When the matter went to Court the jury found Lewington not guilty and so he escaped without any conviction being recorded against him. But that was not the end of Lewington's troubles and in October 1833 he was again brought before the bench, this time charged with assaulting and ill treating his wife. Found guilty he was bound over to keep the peace for twelve months.[9]

Violence was never too far away from people associated with the hotel trade and Stannage writes of the brutish soldier, James Rahill, who assaulted the wives of two Perth publicans.[10] One of these was Mary Dent, the wife of Thomas Dent (the publican of the most inaptly named hotel, the Happy Emigrant) and for this assault Rahill was sent to gaol. However, it seems that he was let off lightly for the second assault on Mrs Gregory of the Pineapple Inn for he was only fined five shillings, including expenses.[11]

Violence against women was quite common at this time and Mrs Dent was regularly assaulted by her husband. The *Perth Gazette* gives considerable coverage to one occasion when Thomas was charged with assaulting his wife. The paper wrote:

> Thomas Dent was brought up charged with committing a violent assault upon his wife. The Chairman of the Court told the Jury that similar assaults have been very prevalent in the Colony…A witness told - 'I live next door and have had frequent opportunities of witnessing the assaults, it was every day, a regular succession of assaults. Never saw any provocation on the part of Mrs Dent, she never raised her hand, she was obliged on two occasions to my knowledge to take refuge with a neighbour. I saw the prisoner on one occasion strike her violently.'[12]

Thomas, in his defence, telling the Court, 'I will acknowledge…we have not lived a happy life together. My wife has been in the habit of practising many petty vexations.' The paper then explained that a letter was handed to the Bench at which time Dent complained that it commenced and

ended 'without any of those endearing epithets, which might be expected, from an affectionate wife, addressing a beloved husband.' After which the paper wrote 'The circumstance of the letter being written to him during his confinement in the prison, in consequence of the repeated attacks made upon her, seemed to explain this apparent want of courtesy.' Dent finishing his testimony by telling the court how he 'had been subjected to a lengthened series of vexations, but I now solemnly swear I will never molest her again.'[13]

Stannage tells how Dent had previously spent time in gaol and at that trial Mrs Dent had told the Court 'The moment my husband entered the house on his return from gaol he knocked me down…He treats me more like a slave…I swear that I am in fear of being murdered by my husband.'[14] The outcome of the trial was that Dent was sentenced to another 3 months in gaol, leaving one to wonder how she was treated the next time he came home.

Another tale about hotel life is that which occurred at Mrs Pace's hotel in Fremantle in 1837. While women were not employed as barmaids at this time, they were employed in domestic duties which often required them to work long hours. It was against this backdrop that Mrs Pace was threatened late at night by the intoxicated Edward Sommerland, the husband of one of her domestic workers. It was his belief that Mrs Pace was keeping his wife at work for unreasonably long hours, sometimes up until 11 pm. His agitation compounded by the fact that while she was working, their son was playing cards with the patrons in the bar.[15]

However, the *Perth Gazette's* report on this assault adds far more colour to this story for it highlights the extreme chauvinism of some of the town's menfolk. When reporting on Mrs Pace's testimony, the newspaper described how the husband:

> ...held up his clenched fist at us…he turned around to his wife and gave her several blows; I tried to get out of the room, and I at last succeeded and sent for a constable. In the meantime he had laid hold to his wife by one leg and dragged her out of the room into the street. He got her up against the wall and dealt her one of the most cruel blows I ever heard.[16]

Sommerland, when speaking in his defence, gave a different version of what had happened, including his denial that he had struck, or had attempted to strike Mrs Pace, as well as pleading that he had meant no harm as he only wanted his wife and thought of her as his own property. So with conflicting testimony, the Magistrate was left to decide Sommerland's fate

and he too shared Sommerland's chauvinism and found him not guilty.[17]

While those stories highlight the physical violence that colonial women faced in the confines of marriage there were a number of sex scandals that also captured the colonists' attention and there was a period in the late 1830s when William Nairne Clark, the owner editor of the *Swan River Guardian* was openly critical of the morality displayed by some of the elite of Perth.

It was his belief that the standard of morality in the colony was low[18]and he considered that the sexual impropriety of the elite was a blight on the colony, writing, 'It is much to be regretted that so many instances of profligacy have occurred in this colony, and shed their baneful influence over a young community, and a rising generation.'[19] The extent of his feelings being expressed in the following article which read:

> A young girl who lately left this Colony, and bore two children to one of our Magistrates, is in the most desperate situation in Launceston, and laments the hour when she met this 'Gallant gay Lothario', who after satisfying his pleasure abandoned her. Perhaps the moral Gentleman may take the cap that fits him, and to future amend his life, which has disgusted all persons, except the Government Party who seem to think that an imitation of a London Roue, is a passport to good Society; and alas to the Governor's table.[20]

The 'roue' of that story was Richard McBride Broun who was the brother of the Colonial Secretary, Peter Broun. Richard had arrived in the colony in January 1831 as a single man and, as his brother was the Colonial Secretary, he was able to secure Government employment. By 1835 he was holding the position of the Government Resident of Fremantle.[21]

The young girl was Hannah Dyer who had been employed by Broun as his housekeeper and while employed by Broun she fell pregnant to him. In April 1834 she had a baby girl who she named Amelia. Hannah, continued to live with Broun and so fell pregnant to him again, but this time, Rica Erickson tells how, 'A second was born in Tasmania, where Hannah had been sent.' So with Hannah banished to Tasmania, Broun in March 1837 married Anne Leake, the daughter of the prominent merchant George Leake and she later adopted Hannah's daughter Amelia.[22]

The *Swan River Guardian* also made a reference to another woman, or women, who had been subject to some colonial gossip, writing 'even female chastity has not escaped the lying lips of the aristocracy of Swan River, in consequence of which one highly respectable family has left the Colony.'[23] That too would be a story worthy of more research.

There are many stories about the power relationships that existed between the employer and their servants and Peter Broun was not the only gentry employer to take advantage of his housemaid. In 1840 the colony was scandalised over the fact that Captain Francis Whitfield a long standing, and, up to that time a well-respected settler, had fathered a child with his servant Jane Green. However, this too was another case of infanticide as the baby had no sooner been born than Jane cut its throat.

Her actions were discovered by Mrs Whitfield after which it was revealed that Captain Whitfield was the father of the child. However, it was just not the death of the child that appalled the colonists, but also the behaviour of Whitfield for he was a 66-year-old Magistrate of the colony while Jane was an orphan girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age. The outcome of Jane's trial was that she was found not guilty of murder, but guilty of endeavouring to conceal a birth and was sentenced to two years imprisonment. As for Whitfield, Durack tells how 'he was forced to tender his resignation' and 'he was thereafter not only ostracised by society but deserted by his family, his sons George and Francis going into partnership on a nearby property.'[24]

A few years after her release from gaol Jane married James Bell who has his own place in Western Australia's history as the man who raised the alarm of the Fenians escaping from the beach at Rockingham.[25] More will be told about the Fenians later.

Another scandal of this time is the case of Mrs Georgiana Collins who, in 1838, horsewhipped the Fremantle lawyer William Temple Graham in St George's Terrace. It was Mrs Collins belief that Graham had maligned her character when he had said publicly that she was in the habit of meeting gentlemen in the bushes for improper purposes. Mrs Collins' attack on Graham had seen her charged with assault, and when Graham spoke in Court he denied 'that he had ever said that Captain Tompkins had any improper intercourse with Mrs Collins, or that he was a favourite of hers... He stated he did not know anything improper of Mrs Collins.'[26]

Consequently, Mrs Collins was found guilty of the assault and ordered to pay a fine of 50 shillings, with constable's expenses of 5 shillings, voluntarily paid by the 'Gentlemen of Perth.'[27] The true behaviour of Mrs Collins will never be known, for as much as Graham had denied making the statement, when she later pursued a claim for slander, the case was settled before it went to court. While Mrs Collins may have preserved her reputation in the court, the case did nothing to enhance the reputation of

Graham, for he was a person of questionable standing in the community, with his own history of poor behaviour.

Graham and his wife had arrived in the colony in March 1830, but not everything seemed right between Graham and his wife, attracting the curiosity of their fellow colonists. This unwelcome interest prompted Graham to write to the Colonial Secretary stating that 'your Humble Servant and his wife occasionally form the subject of conversation in the Colony, and that imputations, deeply affecting the Honour and peace of the parties, were freely discussed at certain scandal parties at Perth and elsewhere.'[28]

Still, there must have been some justification for this interest, for Graham later kicked his wife out of their house and she had to take refuge in another Fremantle household. The news of the ejection spread beyond Fremantle and George Fletcher Moore recorded the plight of Mrs Graham in his diary when he wrote, 'Captain Graham's villainy towards her who thought herself his wife…He has now turned her on the wide world and told her plainly he had duped her, that she was not his wife. I know not what she will do, poor creature, she is quite destitute.'[29]

While that would have been a most precarious situation for Mrs Graham, some good did come from it, for she later accepted a bona fide marriage proposal from John Weavell, who at that time was running the ferry service from Preston Point.[30]

Graham was to later live with a woman by the name of Keziah Lockyer and she too was to be treated in a similar way to that duped woman, but firstly some background history needs to be provided before the circumstances of her expulsion are revealed. Keziah Lockyer had arrived in the colony in February 1830 with her husband Paul and their eight children as part of the workforce that had been brought to the colony by Thomas Peel. They originally landed at Clarence, but just as that settlement was failing, so too was her marriage and it was not long before Paul Lockyer deserted his family, 'to amuse himself with *'Sailor Jim'* at Fremantle.'[31] Later the family moved to Fremantle, where Keziah and her eldest daughter Eliza obtained work as domestic servants in a number of Fremantle households, including the households of Graham and William Nairne Clark and in 1833 Eliza married Clark.[32]

Clark was well known in the colony for he had not only made a name for himself as the controversial newspaper editor, but he had also fatally shot George French Johnson in the colony's only fatal duel in August 1832.

That duel had been fought at the rear of Graham's house which was known as Richmond House. Graham had acted as Clark's second at that duel so while Graham and Clark started off as friends, that friendship was to later turn ugly.

After the marriage of her daughter to Clark, Keziah continued to work as a servant in other Fremantle households and during this time she must have been providing sexual favours to the men of the colony for Rica Erickson tells how she was 'notorious as a high class whore to the army officers.'[33] It is not known what year Keziah started living with Graham, but at some time in 1838, in an act of licentiousness that truly typifies the cads of this time, Graham commenced an affair with Eliza Clark, Keziah's daughter, and by August 1838 she had become Graham's de facto partner. Needless to say, this not only invoked the enmity of Clark, but it also raised the wrath of Keziah who served out on Graham by saying 'You old villain, you have had enough of me, and now you want to make a wife of my daughter.'[34]

From this time onwards Clark sought to avenge himself by commencing a number of legal actions against Graham and he was so successful in one case that he not only won the case, but the verdict of guilty so inflamed Graham that he was found in contempt of court and gaoled for one week.[35]

Unfortunately, given Keziah's intimate relationships with both Graham and Clark she was regularly called as a witness for one party, or the other, and finally in April 1839, perhaps through the strain caused by the events of the preceding 12 months, she was charged with, and later found guilty of, perjury and sentenced to 7 years transportation.[36] Still, luck had not deserted her completely and when a plea for mercy was heard by the Governor it was agreed that she would be allowed to 'leave the colony in the first vessel, never again to be allowed to visit these shores.'[37] So Keziah was sent off into exile, beaten and betrayed by all around her.

Still, that was not the end of the colony's sex scandals. In August 1840 Henrietta Bull, the wife of Lieutenant Henry Bull, ex Royal Navy, another long-standing and respected settler also suffered the indignity of exile, albeit one that was forced upon her by her husband. She too had been caught out providing sexual favours to the army officers and Bull sent her home to England with an allowance of £50 per annum.[38] His wife's behaviour would have been very hurtful to Bull and in the tradition of the time, he wanted his honour satisfied with a duel, but as Thomas Yule wrote in a letter to an ex-settler, that was 'prevented between Bull and Lawson in time to prevent bloodshed.'[39]

Yule was a long-standing member of the gentry and knew all the prominent people in the colony, including George Leake, the Fremantle merchant, and in the same letter Yule gave some news on Leake. He writes that 'George Leake is about to be married to Miss Kingford [sic], a young lady…Clearly, a matter of money - I hope she will serve him as Bull got served.'

While the story of the Fenians escape is well known, it is not so well known that John Joseph Breslin, aka, James Collins, who was the hero, or anti hero, of that escape, depending upon how you look at it, had a sexual relationship with a housemaid from the hotel where he stayed. The consequences of that relationship were described by Detective Sergeant Rowe, one of the Police Officers who conducted the local enquiry into the escape and he reported that:

> Mary Tonduit (Tondut), a Roman Catholic of the Colony, late servant of the Emerald Isle Hotel, where Collins was lodged, was seduced by Collins and is now enceinte. She left the colony on the Northern Light. Her expenses were paid by Collins through Moloney. She is to be accouched at Sydney where further arrangements are promised to be made to take her to Collins.[40]

And maybe it was not just Miss Tondut who fell for Breslin's charms, for a local correspondent, when writing to his family in America tells them that the attitude of the locals to Breslin was divided, with 'some being for hanging, and others – amongst them the ladies – for letting him escape.'[41]

The next tale is one from 1898 and centres around Frederick Mason, a prominent Fremantle jeweller and landowner. Mason owned property in both Fremantle and North Fremantle where he lived. One of his North Fremantle properties was the Railway Hotel which was being run by Bertha Sophie Hilmer. Mason was an ex-convict who had arrived in the colony in 1864 and whose true name was Frederick May. He, like many ex-convicts, changed his names to hide a convict past. Thus, he used the name Mason in his daily life and signed off as May on official documents.

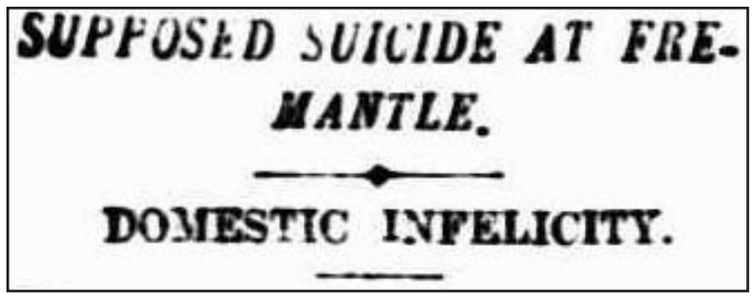
After being issued with his Ticket of Leave, May married in 1866 and had five children, but three of them died in infancy and his wife died in 1876 at the age of 27. Thereafter, he lived in a de facto relationship with his housekeeper, Alice Marshall, with whom he had another three children who all survived infancy. However, in June 1898 Frederick caused chaos when he married Bertha Hilmer, his hotel manager, and so revealed that he had never been married to Alice Marshall. This meant that the three children he had fathered with her were illegitimate and that stigma was too

much for one of his sons and the *WA Record* told how:

> A lad of 16, named Henry Mason, committed suicide at Fremantle on Wednesday under exceptionally melancholy circumstances. The lad, whose father had recently parted with his mother, to whom he was not married, and married another woman, had been horrified at hearing the manner of his birth. The father, who was on the eve of a wedding trip with his wife, went to visit his family before his departure. Deceased and one of his brothers accompanied him afterwards some distance through the streets, but, on his holding out his hand to say good-bye, the lad drew a revolver and shot himself through the head. A note found in his pocket said, 'Everybody knows why I committed suicide'.[42]

Sadly, the young boy's death was in vain for the newly married wife of Fred did leave for the Eastern States as had been planned for their honeymoon, but Frederick stayed on in the colony and never did live with Bertha. They divorced in 1904 and in 1910 Frederick married William's mother, Alice Marshall.

The last story in this essay is about a newspaper report that appeared in the *West Australian* in October 1900 under the heading:


SUPPOSED SUICIDE AT FREMANTLE.

DOMESTIC INFELICITY.

Domestic Infelicity being old fashioned language for domestic violence. The paper wrote:

> What appears to be a case of suicide by drowning was brought under the notice of the water police at Fremantle last night. At about quarter-past 7 pm, Coxswain Hopkins received information at the Cliff Street station that the body of a woman was floating in the water near the Sea Jetty. The body was fully dressed, and when recovered was identified as that of Mrs Knudson, the wife of a lumper living at Fremantle.[43]

The paper continuing:

> What happened…is possibly the sequel to a case which came before the Fremantle Police Court yesterday morning, in which the husband of the deceased was charged with persistent cruelty to his wife. The woman withdrew the charge on the accused promising to atone for his past misconduct. But it would seem that she afterwards came to the conclusion that life was not worth living, and thereupon drowned herself.

A couple of weeks after that story was printed, the *West Australian* published an anonymous letter under the heading Cruelty to Women and the letter read:

> Sir,-With your kind permission I would like to draw attention to some remarkable decisions in our police courts. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals employs, I understand, an inspector to look after its interests, and we find that on 3 October, for ill treating a horse at Guildford, the driver was fined £1, with 2 shillings costs, and for the same offence on the same date another driver was fined in the Perth Local Court 10s., with £1 7s. 6d. costs. On the same date it is reported that a man, by name Knudson, was brought up at the Fremantle Police Court for ill-using his wife and was let off on his promising to keep the peace. On October 8, in the City Police Court, another wife beater was fined 10s., with 8s. 6d. costs. No doubt if the drivers who were prosecuted for the ill usage of their horses had had the option of promising to keep the peace and mend their ways they too would have been found availing themselves of the opportunity. From the above cases…it will at once appear that a horse is held in greater estimation with us than a woman, and in the eyes of the law it is certainly a lighter offence to beat a woman than to beat a horse.[44]

While the author of that letter is unknown it could have been written by Edith Cowan who was prominent at that time for advocating for women's rights and who was no stranger to men acting violently towards women, for her own father Kenneth Brown had been executed for fatally shooting Edith's stepmother.

At the start of this essay I wrote that this paper 'could well have had a number of alternative titles such as Sex Scandals of the Colonists, Women and Power within the Colony, or Cads of the Colony' and so after having told the stories of Elizabeth Gamble, Hannah Dyer and those other women of the colony, I believe the best title for this essay is Cads of the Colony.

Fremantle Studies Day, 2020

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It Wasn't Just About Webb Dock: the 1998 War on the Wharves in Fremantle

Bobbie Oliver

Three days before Easter, on the night of 7 April 1998, the firm of Patrick Stevedores began an assault on their employees in every major Australian port, including Fremantle. This involved security guards wearing balaclavas to hide their identity and using guard dogs, helicopters and search lights as intimidating tactics. The ports became war zones as workers formed picket lines and resisted. Much of what has been written about this dispute (both historic and dramatic) concentrates on Melbourne's Swanston and Webb Docks.[1] This paper tells Fremantle's story, but it is best understood in the context of what was happening nationwide.

The Beginning

In 1996, the Liberal-National Coalition led by John Howard, was elected to Federal Government after 13 years of Labor administrations. From the second half of 1997, the Howard Government turned its attention to the waterfront and in particular the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). The MUA was a 'super union' that had formed in 1993 from the amalgamation of the Seamen's Union of Australia and the Waterside Workers' Federation.[2]

The government overtly supported waterside employers such as Patrick Stevedores, whose agenda was to de-unionise the workforce.[3]

After a failed attempt to de-unionise the Cairns waterfront in September 1997, all was quiet for the next few months. But the MUA wasn't fooled into thinking that the attempt in Cairns was a one-off. It waited for the next

attack. Rumours circulated of non-union workers being trained offshore to replace the unionised waterfront workforce.[4]

The Patrick Group conducted stevedoring business at 17 wharves around Australia. It employed 1,400 permanent workers and 600 casuals – all MUA members – via four Patricks-owned labour hire companies.[5]

Patrick Stevedores' CEO, Chris Corrigan, claimed that the workforce was overpaid and unproductive, yet statistics showed that productivity on the waterfront had increased 75% in the past five years. Although the Minister for Industrial Relations, Peter Reith, asserted that crane drivers on the wharf were earning $90,000 per annum, wharfies' permanent pay rates at the time of the dispute ranged from $30,000 to $45,000 per annum, which scarcely put them in the high wage bracket. [6]

In January 1998, the National Farmers Federation (NFF) set up a stevedoring company, P & C Stevedoring, and Patrick transferred to them the right to use No 5 Webb Dock in Melbourne, with cranes and equipment. The MUA believed that Patrick and the NFF were colluding to introduce a non-unionised workforce with which to replace union members.[7]

On the night of 7 April 1998, Corrigan sacked his entire workforce, including 100 workers in Fremantle. It was just before the Easter holidays. Many employees had no warning of what was coming until they heard the morning news on 8 April, informing them that they no longer had a job.

In every major port where Patrick's operated, security guards with their faces hidden by balaclavas, accompanied by guard dogs, arrived at the wharf by boat and ordered the employees to leave. Many resisted. In Fremantle the MUA branch secretary, Terry Buck, and 60 unionists refused to comply until the police arrived. That evening, each of the four Patricks employment companies appointed administrators, who advised the court on the following day that they intended to dismiss the employees because the companies were insolvent.[8]

The Picket Lines are Drawn

The lockout's impact was immediate. Greg Combet, then Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Assistant Secretary, who coordinated the unions' national response, reflected in his autobiography:

> All of these workers had families, people who depended on them. At a human level, the assault by Patrick and the Howard Government was devastating. Arrayed against them [were] not only their employer but a replacement non-union workforce, including former military men; the federal government from the Prime Minister down; the National Farmers' Federation with a multi-million-dollar, anti-union 'fighting fund'; platoons of security guards; squadrons of shock jocks and, ultimately, perhaps, the legal power of the state represented by the courts and police. These workers and their families felt the viciousness and hatred of their employer and the government and wondered what rights they actually had.[9]

Image 1: Probably the most famous image of the dispute in Fremantle: the balaclava-wearing security guard (Courtesy of the MUA).

Given its formidable opposition, the MUA's first objective was to survive, then to get members reinstated in their jobs, and lastly to negotiate waterfront reforms. To achieve these objectives, the union sought a legal solution for the first time in its history. Although opposed by some militant unions, the MUA had majority support from its own rank and file, the ACTU and other unions, to pursue this strategy despite the risks involved.[10]

On the morning after the lockout, a legal team comprising ACTU and MUA lawyers was in the Federal Court in Melbourne seeking an injunction on the sackings. There followed parallel battles, one in the courts and the other on the wharves.

Picket lines were soon set up in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle in defiance of government legislation. The dispute sparked an immediate response from port workers' unions around the world. These included the San Francisco members of the International Longshoremen's Union, Japanese waterfront unions, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Brussels, and the FNV in the Netherlands.[11]

Image 2: The wharfies received extensive community support as evidenced here with young an old, unionists and supporters attending a gathering. Note the presence of the flags of the CFMEU and the Australian Services Union as well as the MUA. (Courtesy of the MUA)

The protest at Fremantle Wharf received considerable community support, which extended far beyond Fremantle. In a candlelight service on Easter Sunday morning, local clergy blessed the picket line, and they continued to hold Sunday services throughout the dispute. Unionists and supporters established a community hub nearby, setting up a children's créche, meeting rooms, entertainments and artists, public facilities, power, lights and even a giant television screen. State and Federal parliamentarians visited. Former Premier Carmen Lawrence organised a benefit concert that raised $3,500 for the families of the sacked workers. The Trades and Labor Council (TLC) rallied its affiliated unions to provide a 24 hour presence at the picket line and established a telephone tree to contact people quickly when extra support was needed.[12]

At night, helicopters flew in 'scab' workers, and the police played searchlights on the crowd, trying unsuccessfully to intimidate them. On 16 April 700 police, including tactical response group units wearing riot gear, took up positions behind the picket line to force trucks through. Violent incidents occurred at other ports around Australia, but MUA National Deputy Secretary Paddy Crumblin claimed that Fremantle was the only place where the police used the Tactical Response Group against civilians.

A participant described the scene:

> When the call came that trucks were on their way, everyone lined up 50 metres from Patrick gate, six rows of around 120 people…. They lay prone, linked arms, legs, ankles – whatever grip they could get. The police moved in. People were put in the back of the paddy wagon, driven 200 metres down the road, let out and made their way back. As soon as they saw no trucks were getting through, they linked arms and stood firm.[13]

Two nights later, in a move instigated by the NFF, a group of farmers attempted to cross the Fremantle picket lines. Again, helicopters and searchlights were used to frighten and confuse the picketers. Again, the tactics were unsuccessful.

Although the MUA asked members not to resort to violence, incidents occurred. After some of the picketers abused and spat at non-union labour, Patrick's gained an injunction against the union and the offending picketers, preventing them entering the vicinity of the terminal. Meanwhile, scab labour was unloading ships, although unionists had succeeded in preventing some trucks carrying cargo from leaving the site. Fremantle Port Authority issued a writ demanding that the wharfies dismantle the site outside Patrick's front gate, which had been called the Workers' Embassy.[14]

Image 3: Stopping the trucks. Unionists formed human chains to prevent trucks from entering the wharf and discharging their cargoes. The name 'Coates Hire' on this truck suggests it was driven by a member of the National Farmers' Federation. (Courtesy of the MUA)

The protest in Fremantle peaked on the night of Monday 20 April 1998. No containers had left Patrick's terminal that day, indicating the picket line's success in preventing trucks moving cargo. The NFF threatened to drive trucks through the picket lines in Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle by the end of the week. TLC Secretary, Tony Cooke, urged protesters to remain peaceful and professional; to 'stay on the ground and stay with

your friends' and not to 'get involved in altercations with police officers. We're expecting them to protect you from any wayward vehicles and from any violent confrontation'.[15]

The picket lines were strengthened by 200 Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) members. By 11pm, 1,000 protesters were preparing for the arrival of hundreds of police. There had been an increased police presence during the day and a police helicopter circled overhead in the early evening, apparently trying to assess numbers. There followed what the ABC described as, 'a long night of tension between over a thousand members of the community and hundreds of police' during which, 'police could be seen doing riot exercises' and 'a fixed wing aircraft and [a] helicopter kept a constant surveillance on the peaceful assembly'.[16]

Despite the bravado, it was a scary experience for individuals involved, including University of Western Australia (UWA) historian Charlie Fox. He recalled rumours that the farmers were coming; 'now at Midland, now at Claremont'. One of the organisers told picketers that the police 'would try to break another picket line and that our job would be to form a flying V formation and charge through them, like the cavalry and come to the rescue of our comrades'. Fortunately, the police held off and such action was unnecessary. Fox also remembered his UWA colleague, Tom Stannage, telling him that on another picket line, 'labour lawyers were there to instruct people on their rights and doctors and nurses, too, to assist the injured'. Police discouraged people from walking on Port Beach by telling them to move on. 'It was like an armed camp down there.'[17]

The Legal Judgement

On 21 April in the Federal Court, Justice North handed down his decision that all of Patrick's workers should be reinstated. He ordered the reinstatement of the labour supply agreements between Patrick and the four labour supply companies, despite their insolvency. Furthermore, the labour supply companies must use their former workforce – the sacked MUA members – to perform the work on the wharves. Justice North found that the evidence indicated the workers were sacked because they were members of the MUA and, arguably, this was in breach of both the *Workplace Relations Act* and the workers' contracts. North found that it was 'an arguable case that Patrick owners and Patrick employers have engaged in an unlawful conspiracy'.[18]

In Fremantle, unionists celebrated by naming their picket line The Tom Edwards Stand, in memory of another success in preventing union busting

that had occurred 79 years previously. Fortunately, in 1998, no one was killed in the effort.[19]

The Full Federal Court dismissed an appeal by Patrick against Justice North's order, and his reasoning was substantially approved by a majority of the High Court on 4 May, with one dissentient.[20]

The dispute was not yet over. In May, the MUA succeeded in getting workers back on the wharves, but they were still employees of labour hire firms – the same situation as existed prior to the lock out. The wharfies returned to work with no job security and received only a portion of their wages until mid-June. Work rosters, penalties and wages all had to be renegotiated.

MUA National Secretary, John Coombs, and ACTU Assistant Secretary, Greg Combet, scored a major victory in negotiating an end to the notorious double shifts of 15 hours that wharfies had been forced to work. But there were compromises. A settlement between the union and Patrick on 5 August resulted in 738 redundancies nationwide. While this amounted to about one third of those planned by Patrick, it was a bitter pill for the union to swallow. Patrick agreed to drop all charges against the MUA and to pay over $1.8 million in legal costs, and all outstanding wages.[21]

Image 4: MUA official Christy Cain links arms with union members in a show of defiance against police and Patricks. Union militancy was on show every day of the lock out, but it was a legal solution that won the victory, albeit with considerable compromise. (Courtesy of the MUA)

A 'Defeat for Union-busting' or a 'Miserable Deal'?

There has been considerable debate about whether the MUA took the right course of action in depending upon legal redress. One critic, Tom Bramble, argued that although the outcome was 'a defeat for union-busting', in which the Howard Government was 'significantly embarrassed', the solution brokered by the MUA and the ACTU leadership resulted in a 'miserable deal' for the wharfies. Bramble argued that there was enough public support around Australia for the ACTU to organise a general strike and to hold out for a deal that offered better job security. Instead, the union agreed to a deal that 'signed away nearly 50 per cent of the entire permanent Patrick workforce', with maintenance, security and cleaning jobs being allocated to outside contractors. Two thirds of MUA members would be casuals working 'two-hour minimum shifts, on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year'.[22]

Bramble's argument places considerable and possibly misplaced confidence in union power and solidarity. Once the MUA and the ACTU had decided upon a legal solution, they were obliged to convince the court that the members were 'ready, willing and able to perform the contract of service'. Legal precedent was important here for, according to Rachel Mulheron:

> The employment cases to date indicate, when a plaintiff employee fails to give an undertaking to the employer that there will be no further industrial disruption, the parties are *not* in a position to perform the contract of employment.[23]

Union militancy aside, therefore, in order to have any chance of winning the battle by legal means, the MUA had to abandon industrial action. Bramble's analysis also tends to underestimate the Federal Government's commitment to ridding the wharves of union labour. Militant activity might merely have played into the government's hands and achieved its aim of destroying the MUA.

Although the ALP did not win the Federal election on 3 October 1998, it was clear that many Australians were unhappy with the Howard Government. In Western Australia, the sitting Federal MPs Stephen Smith, Carmen Lawrence and Kim Beazley were joined by four new Labor colleagues: Jan McFarlane, Kim Wilkie, Jane Gerick and Graham Edwards.[24]

Nation-wide, although the Howard administration held on to government it was a close result, with Labor gaining 18 seats and the Coalition losing 14. More than 50% of the two-party preferred vote went to Labor. Among those who lost their seats was the former Minister for Transport and Regional

Development, John Sharp, who, with Reith, had masterminded the plan to 'reform' the waterfront. Given that the government was revealed to be supporting the employer in illegal actions against some of its own citizens, however, it is surprising that the Australian public's verdict was not harsher.

Today, the MUA remains a strong presence on the waterfront, but moves by the Morrison Government (2019-2022) showed that unions remain in danger and workers' rights to join a union remained under threat. The Morrison Government's attempted 'Ensuring Integrity' legislation and reinforcement of the powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission were further attacks upon trade unions. Had the 'Ensuring Integrity' bill, succeeded it would have, among other things, granted the Federal Court the power to deregister a union or sack a union official for one instance of unprotected industrial action or one failure to comply with a court order.[25] Just like its predecessor the Howard Government, the Morrison administration appeared to believe that Australian workers have no right to union representation, and that is something we should all stand up against, irrespective of how we vote.

[A slightly updated version of a talk given on Fremantle Studies Day, 2019]

1 See, for example, Rachel Mulheron, 'Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) v Patrick Stevedores Pty Ltd: Marrying Injunctive Relief and Labour Supply Contracts', *JCU Law Review,* 1999/8, case note 153, pp 152-64, www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/1999/8.pdf *accessed 15 June 2022;* Greg Combet, *The Fights of My Life,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2014, pp 73-109; *Bastard Boys* (Sydney, dir. Ray Quint, ABC TV/Flying Cabbage Productions, 2007, DVD).

2 Diane Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships. Australia's seafarers and their union,* UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008, pp 403-6.

3 Stephen O'Neill, 'The Waterfront Dispute: from High Court to Settlement – Summary and Comment', current issues brief 1, 1998-99 (14 September 1998), Parliament of Australia, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/CIB/cib9899/99cib01 (accessed 15 June 2022).

4 Tom Bramble, *War on the Waterfront,* Brisbane Defend Our Unions Committee, October 1998, (pamphlet). https://libcom.org/book/export/html/33545 (accessed 15 June 2022).

5 Mulheron, 'Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) v Patrick Stevedores Pty Ltd', p 153.
6 Bill Anderson, 'On the Waterfront', *Papers in Labour History: the centenary of the ALP and the TLC in Western Australia, 1899-1999*, no 22, December 1999, p 69.
7 Combet, *The Fights of my life,* pp 72ff; Mulheron, 'Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) v Patrick Stevedores Pty Ltd', p 153.
8 'War on the Wharfies' News Summary – Wednesday 8 April 1998 http://www.takver.com/wharfie/apr98.htm#apr98027 (accessed 16 June 2022); Bobbie Oliver, *Unity is Strength. A history of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council of Western Australia,* API Network, Bentley, 2003), p 359.
9 Combet, *The fights of my life,* p 77.
10 Bramble, *War on the Waterfront,* Section 1, 'Reliance on the courts'; also 'War on the Wharfies', News Summary – Friday 10 April 1998.
11 'War on the Wharfies', News Summary – Friday 10 April 1998.
12 MUA, 'Mobilisation, pickets, priests and public protest' (1998), cited in Oliver, *Unity is Strength,* p 359.
13 MUA, 'Mobilisation, pickets, priests and public protest'. 'War on the Wharfies',
14 'War on the Wharfies', News Summary, 13 April 1998.
15 ABC News, 20 April 1998.
16 ABC News, 22 April 1998.
17 Charlie Fox, email to the author, 24 May 2016.
18 ABC News, 22 April 1998.
19 Bobbie Oliver, 'Fremantle's Bloody Sunday: "the finest exhibition of solidarity in Western Australian History"', in Fox et al, eds, *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle,* First Edition, Black Swan Press, Bentley, 2017, pp 35-51.
20 Mulheron, 'Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) v Patrick Stevedores Pty Ltd', p 156.
21 O'Neill, 'The Waterfront Dispute', section, 'Conditions of Settlement'.
22 Bramble, *War on the Waterfront,* section 6, "'MUA, Here to Stay", but at what cost?'
23 Mulheron, 'Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) v Patrick Stevedores Pty Ltd', p 157.
24 Oliver, *Unity is Strength,* p 375.
25 Parliament of Australia, Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment (Ensuring Integrity) Bill 2019 https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r6348 (accessed 20 June 2022).

A Job at the Imps: the State Implement and Engineering Works at North Fremantle (1913-1986)

Cate Pattison

Introduction

Standing in peaceful parkland, with breathtaking views of the Swan River and Minim Cove to the south, it's difficult to imagine this 8 hectares in North Fremantle buzzing with the sounds of industry and 600 workers. In 2018 the opportunity to research the history of the State Implement and Engineering Works in North Fremantle was generously made possible by the Fremantle History Society, and in 2019 I began the task of trying to piece together an account of this combined workshop that survived against the odds through a succession of sixteen governments for 73 years, training thousands of apprentices in multiple trades. The Midland Railway Workshops, operating through a similar time period (and admittedly employed a much larger workforce), has received considerable research attention since its closure in 1994, and benefits from surviving physical remains that have been preserved and protected.[1] But the State Implement and Engineering Works (SEW), despite its broader remit, has enjoyed no such love; in fact, few now remember where it was, or even that it existed. Yet for those who lived around, worked at and traded with the SEW, the memories of its operation and identity remain powerful. Christina Lee has written about how our relationships with a physical past that has been

obliterated can produce incredibly strong lasting connections, really *due to* a dependence on memory, rather than physical remains.[2] The presence of absence can be a powerful thing.

Wired with an oral historian's remit to give air to 'heritage from below', I set about finding as many people as I could still around to share their stories of the SEW.[3] The deluge of enquiries to my research advertisement delivered a final set of 20 interviewees for the project who enthusiastically donated their time, patience and astonishingly good memories to help produce this brief history of the SEW. My participants, a dwindling breed of (mainly) men with a cast-iron work ethic and the ability to repair anything, shared anecdotes, laughs and tears. A selection of quotes is included in this paper. A compilation recording of highlights from the interviews has also been donated to the Fremantle Library, organised into chapters that explore management structure, daily life at work, the apprentice experience and the eventual closure. In his 2019 address to the History Council of Western Australia Bill Bunbury eloquently noted the power of oral history to expose the truth of economic hardship, make the mundane interesting and provide a cathartic opportunity for all involved, which for this project was certainly the case.[4]

Important credit is given here to the work of the late Richard Hartley and David Hutchison, Fremantle-based historians whose earlier work on Rocky Bay and the Fremantle Railway Workshops respectively proved valuable sources. The 1975 thesis on the early costings system at the Implement Works written by then employee Nick Dragicevich, and who participated in this project as an interviewee, was also wonderfully useful. And an unexpected joy was found in accessing oral histories held at the Fremantle Library recorded in the mid-1980s, with now-deceased men whose names were often referred to in interviews within this project. These tradesmen spoke of their memories preceding by four decades these 2019 interviewees, including during WWII. Oral history gold.

Before the Works

First Nation inhabitants waiting for low tide to cross the river and fish in the area are known to have visited *Garungup* (the First Nations name for Rocky Bay and in particular a large cave in the cliff, that was later used as a lime kiln) for 10,000 years.[5] Denise Cook's research on the Noongar camps of Fremantle and the Western Suburbs notes how as a place with one of the best food supplies in the region, North Fremantle was an area of many

births and thus in keeping with tradition, frequently revisited.[6] Although reportedly still teeming with wildlife in the 19th century, the real value of the land and river at Rocky Bay to early settlers was as a mine for limestone, which probably cast the namesake of the bay. The riverside location was also ideal for easily transporting materials by barge to the port or city. Quarrying here was to be responsible for a major landform transformation: from one of soaring limestone cliffs to coastal plateau, as well as providing the bedrock of the Fremantle Groyne and significant public buildings such as Government House. When the Fremantle to Guildford railway opened in 1895, spur lines out into Rocky Bay were a welcome resource for this backbreaking trade and other fledgling industries. The locale gradually became home to a growing number of early colonist settlers residing in a group of shanties: 'the humpies', 'canvas town' and 'Brucetown'.[7] When North Fremantle became a municipality in 1895, the new council set about creating roads to support housing and gradually turned the area into a thriving mixed residential zone and industrial centre, which by the 1930s was providing fuel, soap, flour, fertiliser, vehicles, agricultural implements, rope, breakfast cereal and shoes to consumers all over the state.

Infrastructure outside the city of Perth also increased steadily, and railways in the Swan River Colony grew from 203km of tracks in 1885 to 884km by 1890, connecting the regions to the flourishing port and opening up potential agricultural opportunities.[8] In ten short years between 1891 and 1901 the population of Western Australia increased almost fourfold from 53,177 to 193,601;[9] and in the following decade wheat became the state's biggest export, with a crop base of 74,308 acres in 1900, to 521,862 in 1910. Cheap land, an investment in railways, generous credits to new settlers and a continual influx of migrant labour all added to this astonishing growth.[10]

An initial workshop and foundry to service the railways had been built in 1886 in Elder Place in Fremantle to begin producing rolling stock for this rapidly expanding rail network. When CY O'Connor became Engineer in Chief of Western Australia in 1891, as well as completing the construction of the inner harbour at Fremantle by 1897, he also directed significant attention to other supporting infrastructure, particularly rural rail. The need to create a new, bigger railway workshop facility became a priority to address. But where? In 1893 a Royal Commission was held and a subsequent decision passed to locate the workshops in far-away Midland; an unpopular decision met with much political wrangling. Three proposed alternative sites that would keep the operation in striking distance of its

current Fremantle workforce were proposed: at Claremont, Richmond (East Fremantle) and Rocky Bay (North Fremantle). Protests failed to swing the decision and the workshop relocation to Midland went ahead, eventually opening in 1905.[11] The old workshops were cleared to make way for the new (current) Fremantle Train Station and marshalling yards. The daily 'Rattler' rail service was introduced to transport railway workers from Fremantle to Midland (and everywhere in between), but nevertheless, the local community had pulled a short straw.

As the new century dawned, diversified industry ventures were gradually replacing quarrying in North Fremantle. The privately-operated Westralia Ironworks Ltd was already operating in Rocky Bay to help supply the growing demand for rail rolling stock and other equipment, but once the Midland workshops opened in 1905 objections to a competing private service were raised, and by 1917 any public work granted to external providers while workers at Midland were struggling to keep their jobs became a matter of contention.[12] Westralia Ironworks folded a few years later. Meanwhile next door, the adjacent Mt Lyall Superphosphate Works had been established in 1910 as part of the Daglish Ministry's (1904/05) land expansion programme, processing 'superphosphate' fertiliser to enable farming expansion on land of sandy soils unsuited to agricultural production.[13]

When the gold rush was over many who came to WA (and probably couldn't afford to leave) were encouraged to seek their fortunes as self-employed farmers, with generous land purchase schemes made available as part of a somewhat haphazard approach to economic development.[14] With little capital, many novice farmers found that they lacked the resources to import equipment capable of cultivating the harsh environment and generate the income needed to complete their land purchases. Although multiple-furrow and 'stump jump' ploughs began to be used by 1910, their uptake was hindered by the tariffs the Commonwealth had put on imported equipment such as that being mass produced in America by this time, and the high freight and service costs associated with supplying machinery to sprawling remote WA.[15] Although the Moore Ministry (1906-10) had continued to expand rail links to support farmers, it had not found a way to adequately equip them for the gruelling work of clearing the bush to establish grazing and crops.[16]

When the Labor Party was voted in by WA's burgeoning migrant population with a landslide victory in 1911, it was led by 35 year old 'happy'

Jack Scadden and a predominantly young cabinet. This government soon set about delivering its vision for growth and equality, undertaking widespread borrowing to invest in state enterprises, with farming expansion its highest priority.[17] It rapidly clocked up an impressive list of achievements establishing the Workers' Home Board, State Brickworks and State Shipping Service as well as government-operated quarries, dairy farms, abattoirs, meat and fish shops and hotels; a time cast by historians as WA's era of 'state paternalism', or even socialism.[18] In line with their commitment to the state's agricultural future, the State Implement Works was commissioned to produce a range of basic tools and machinery for local distribution at affordable prices.

Commissioning the Works

Once the decision had been made in July 1913 to set up a state trading concern for the production of farm implements, the project was initially passed to the Agricultural Department, who appointed engineer John Davies as Manager of the new works and authorised him to acquire the necessary land and equipment.[19] The manufacturing of agricultural machinery was at this time stringently controlled by the patent system, so Davis travelled to South Australia where he purchased the plant and patents of a bankrupt plough company and collected a few other patents in NSW and Victoria, all mainly based on earlier American designs and already outdated.[20] Wasting no time, the existing Fremantle Workshops were handed over by the Public Works Department to the Agricultural Department so they could make an immediate start with producing the first ploughs and cultivators, until a suitable site and building could be arranged.[21] By October 1913 a small line of products such as grain harvesters and scrub rakes were displayed at the Royal Agricultural Show for farmers to view.[22] An early brochure published in 1914 to promote the wares was 'respectfully dedicated to the Man on the Land'.[23]

Possibly going back to the shortlist of sites from the earlier Railway Workshop move, the Government chose an 8-hectare area in Rocky Bay to build the State Implement Works. Locating it in the Fremantle area would have also appeased the disgruntled Labor supporters in the electorate, with 570 locals on the payroll by 1915.[24] A rail spur-line that could bring materials in and product out was already in place and added to the location's appeal. Built in one year, the Works were opened on 27 March 1914 by the Acting Premier of the day Mr TH Bath (on behalf of Scadden) who

ceremoniously started the 200hp gas engine.[25] A workforce was installed and production began in earnest, not to mention the forming of the its very own brass band, whose members it was reported were employed for their musical abilities over other applicants in the recruitment drive.[26] It wasn't long however before the enormous and complex task of running such an operation became apparent, and by July 1914 the Works were transferred over to the control of the Public Works Department who the government believed would be better suited to the job.[27] By the sowing season of 1915 the Works were producing nearly 100 items and employing 700 men, a remarkable achievement in a short few years.[28]

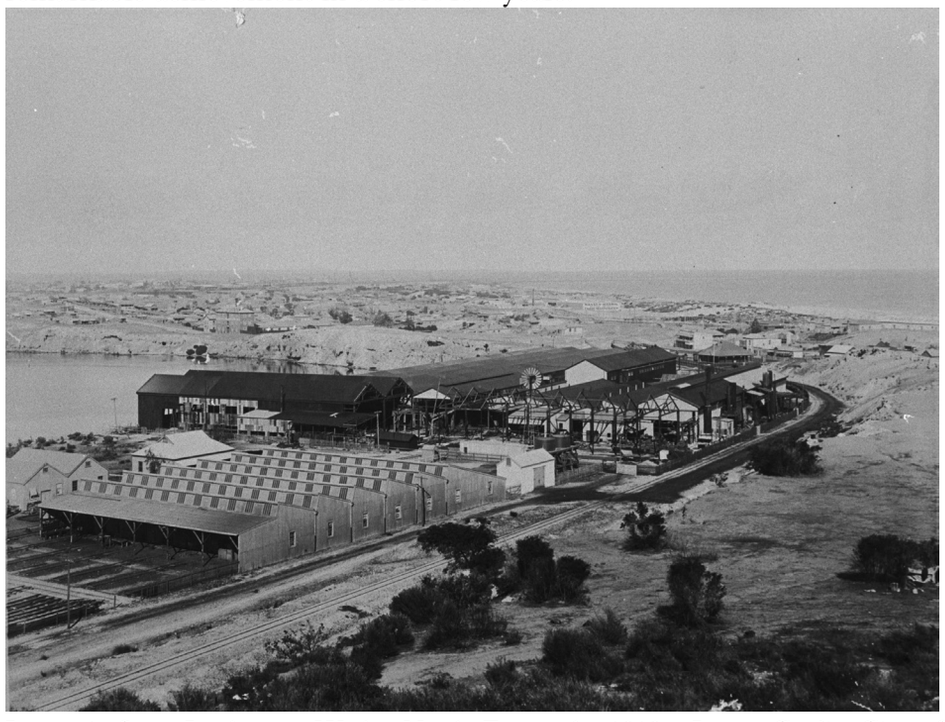

Image 1: State Implement Works, North Fremantle, 1919. Image Credit: City of Fremantle History Centre [LH004221]

However, the Works proved to be difficult to operate 'profitably' and Davies struggled with the task from day one. This was not helped by being lumped with trying to reduce earlier losses incurred by Public Works on a previous South Mole site for pipe contracts.[29] At the time of the transfer from Agriculture to Public Works the accumulated expenditure already exceeded receipts by some £70,000, one of the problems being that stock was sold on a hire purchase system. Davies was unable to answer

parliamentary questions on his costings and subsequently resigned prior to the commencement of a 1915 Royal Commission. Frank Shaw, a senior tradesman from the Midland Railway Workshops, was appointed to the role of Manager and systematically set out to ascertain the detailed cost of production of each item which saw prices increase, although existing orders had to be filled at old prices for some years. An early catalogue displays an impressive range of goods available, including windmills, ploughs, cultivators, harrows, drills, corn crushers, engines, chaffcutters, wagons, road rollers, tree pullers, bag loaders, poisoning devices and rope-making machines.[30] Shaw claimed that a bad layout and poor management system were to blame for the lack of profit, although this was not confirmed by the earlier Royal Commission. Being established to support and subsidise the sector in the first place, it pointed out how the operation was in fact achieving its objectives.[31]

Frank Shaw had grown up in Fremantle and did his fitting apprenticeship at the Fremantle Railway Workshops in the 1890s, moving to a position at the new Midland Workshops in 1905. He had shown solid progress and was offered the role of General Manager at the State Implement Works in 1915.[32] He also rose through the social ranks in Perth and residing at the smart address of 9 Bindaring Parade, Peppermint Grove,[33] became a stalwart of the Perth rowing fraternity, prominent with the Rocky Bay Rifle Club, and a Mason. Frank Shaw was at the helm for around 35 years and remembered by many for his uncompromising management style,[34] with grandson David following his path as an apprentice fitter at the Works in the 1950s.

Selling to a market grappling with the challenges of falling wheat production due to the impact of war and droughts, in 1916 Shaw slashed the workforce from 602 to 324, and reduced the product range.[35] It was also a tumultuous time politically, when Premier Scadden's government was defeated in the lower house amidst growing scepticism about government trading enterprises, a sentiment capped off by the passing of the *State Trading Concerns Act 1916* soon after (and still in place), in an attempt by the new Liberal Wilson Government to prevent a repeat of similar deemed 'disastrous' commercial activities pursued by Scadden.[36] Against the odds, the Implement Works survived, and by 1919-20 Shaw had stabilised the books and begun to diversify a business that was soon in the black.[37]

A city sales office opened at 327-331 Murray Street in 1918 (moving from initial rooms at Marquis Street West Perth), from where 60 agents

Image 2: State Implement Works Staff 1928. Longstanding General Manager Frank Shaw believed seated centre front row. Note that only office workers were considered 'staff', those on the shop floor were 'workers'. Image acquired by author via anonymous donation.

worked to sell throughout the state.[38] With the group settlement scheme initiated in the South West in 1921, demand was high and business ticked along well for a while, however before long a number of competitors, both locally and from overseas, began to enter the market and a sales war ensued. Rumours circulated that the Implement Works would not continue to produce parts and orders dried up.[39] George Downs worked at the Works in the 1920s and described in the 1980s his role in keeping the sales force on the road:

> The implement part was very important. Windmills, ploughs, harvesters, seed drills all sorts of cultivators. They had a good trade. And it was through the salesmen going out and selling these things in cars supplied by the SIW, the old Model T's and Model A's that I was doing the repairs to, when they came in. I was sent mainly to the Esperance district, Salmon Gums was the headquarters. I would look after the engine parts of the small engines in various farms, they would look after the agricultural part of it, we used to go away for up to three months at a time.[40]

Image 3: The State Implement Works exhibit at the Perth Royal Show, 1923. Image Credit: SLWA_b2205879_1, Izzy Orloff.

By 1925 it was decided by the Labor Collier Ministry to dispense with making farming implements which were being sold at a loss, simply to uphold political promise. The government explored a partnership with Wesfarmers Cooperative at the time to hand over the distribution side of the business, however this was declared illegal under the *State Trading Concerns Act 1916*.[41] Wesfarmers instead entered into agreements with competitors such as Case Tractors, HV McKay and others, so by 1928 the beginning of the end for the Works' agricultural equipment business had commenced.[42] As one last attempt to prove its worth, in 1926 the research department developed an improved version of the Stump-Jump plough (a popular piece of technology of the day designed to work around tree roots), however this patent too was sold off, to a private manufacturer.[43] Twenty years later the Hawke Labor Government keen to pursue industrialisation underwrote the Chamberlain family to set up a tractor manufacturing business in a former munitions factory in Welshpool, and with significant financial support it went on to enjoy considerable success.[44]

Shaw had responded to the market and began to develop a more diversified service alongside that of farming implement production, as an engineering and manufacturing resource for all government operations. For example, after a fatal shark attack at Cottesloe Beach in 1925, the Works produced two high metal surveillance towers that were installed on the sand to allay swimmers' fears.[45] By 1930 the Works had renamed itself, and was now

to be known as The State Engineering Works (or sometimes the State Engineering and Implement Works but herein SEW). Although drifting away from agricultural fabrication and into structural and mechanical engineering George Howe, who was a blacksmith there from 1946 to 1965, remembers making tools for settlement farmers until well after WWII, including crude but effective 'ball and chain' devices for clearing bushland.[46] The requirement for engineering services from other arms of government such as the State Shipping Service and power-generating authorities brought in steady orders, and kept a lucky few men in work during the dark days of the Great Depression.[47]

The Works in the War

As the Second World War progressed, more and more domestic facilities were called upon to support the effort. The first order the SEW received from the Ministry of Munitions in 1941 was for 50 steam winches for the Royal Australian Navy; followed by 100 Bren gun carriers destined for North Africa and Syria, along with 50,000 links for the carriers' caterpillar tracks. These were made of cast iron which had to be made malleable in twelve custom-built annealing furnaces. The Ford Motor Company on Stirling Highway nearby supplied V8 engines for the carriers. The local spur railway line that serviced the sites in Rocky Bay was no doubt integral for this collaboration, with the finished bodies transported a few hundred metres to Ford for engine-installation once complete.[48]

The beginning of 1942 saw the commencement of one of Fremantle's most well-documented historical chapters when it hosted 168 Allied submarines, their support vessels and land-based facilities.[49] The first to arrive were a squadron of Dutch submarines from Java, some of which needed major repairs such as the addition of a completely new diving elevator. The American Navy based two squadrons of submarines (more than 125) with their mother ships and a floating dock in Fremantle. The dock was always full and a gang from the SEW permanently stationed there replacing underwater parts and removing propellers. The Royal Australian Navy also based a squadron of submarines and its mother ship the *Maidstone* in Fremantle, and later another the *Adamant*. A machine for working on the special requirements of British submarines was designed by Assistant Manager Bryan Rourke at the SEW, for which he received an award from the Admiralty, with another citation awarded to the SEW by the US Navy.[50]

Archive oral history interviews conducted in the 1980s and others from the present day are able to add further perspective on the role of the SEW in the war. Workers recall the 12-hour around-the-clock shifts that were required in order to fulfil demands, and the simple wooden-block landing facility set up at the river shore in front of the works that enabled Dutch subs to be pulled up by ropes for repair work. But one of the greatest legacies left from this period came in the form of the equipment that the US Navy transported from America and installed in the workshop, namely two extremely large machines (a lathe and steel roller) designed specifically for this marine work. Too big to remove, these stayed in the workshop for many decades but were rarely used; hence given the unofficial names 'the white elephant' and 'the mad mile'.

Cost Plus Seven: Building the State's Backbone

As the people of Perth picked themselves up after the impact of World War II, focus turned to building the infrastructure for a state that could attract investment and labour for long-term growth. The influx of migrants from war-torn Europe into Fremantle delivered a steady stream of labour. Interviewees recalled workers from the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, Germany, Portugal and Madeira, many working there as trade-assistants during the cray fishing off season. The 'ten pound pom' scheme also attracted skilled British tradesmen to WA seeking a life of new opportunity, particularly coming to work at Kwinana and many initially living at the nearby Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre. English and Scottish shipbuilders were particularly valued for their specialist knowledge of riveting and could be spotted as those wearing a tie and waistcoat at the lathe. However stories are also told of some migrant Brits who 'dressed the part' and tried their luck getting a job at the Imps, being gainfully employed with forged qualifications.

As large-scale infrastructure projects initiated all over WA got off the ground after the war, the SEW, with its suite of workshops under one roof, soon became a valued resource for many government departments and other entities such as hospitals, utility providers, mills and meatworks. The work floor and foundry contained over ten different trade shops, supporting machining and fitting, carpentry (which made most of the state's school furniture), sheet metal work, blacksmiths, a moulding floor, boiler-making, pattern-making, the meter shop and the materials store. The office housed the metallurgy lab, drawing office and accountancy and

clerical sections. Under the direction of the Public Works Department and overseen by a mechanical engineer, over 500 workers (including 50 apprentices), who were members of a range of unions as diverse as their trades, clocked on every day and received a cash pay-packet once a week. Industrial relations were generally good with allowances paid for dangerous work and overtime granted. There were instances of strike action however, such as during the time of the metal trades dispute in 1952. Metal workers across the state walked off the job in demand of better pay, with subsequent halted rail services the cause of much public grumbling. Apprentice labour kept operations ticking over, as they were not union members. When the industry-wide dispute was eventually resolved and workers reported back for duty at the SEW, some were told their jobs had evaporated due to the work lost during the time of the strike, and so another battle ensued.[51] Even though the SEW was turning a profit when unemployment was high in the late 1950s, workers protested when 20 men were laid off.[52] They protested again when contracts from the State Shipping Service were allocated to private firms, which they regarded as a significant threat to their jobs.[53] Prominent activist Paddy Troy was known to have sometimes come to speak to workers on site.

Image 4: The Machine Shop in the State Engineering Works, 1950s. Image Credit: City of Fremantle History Centre [LH004000]

With so much skill and equipment in one place, capability that was also made available to private clients would have been in hot demand, although it's unclear how the prioritising between public and private work was cast. Surpluses were kept modest, with quotes produced on a 'cost plus 7% basis' - terms of great appeal to clients such as large mining and maritime companies. It was even suggested by some interviewees and news reports of the day that there was quite a trade in other engineering firms getting the heavy work done cheaply at the SEW to then supply their own clients, pocketing a profit. SEW income was absorbed into Treasury's Consolidated Revenue Fund, and little provision was made for asset replacement which saw much of the equipment and facilities become dated and fall into disrepair.

In 1959 the new Liberal Government of David Brand took power and with a federal export ban on iron ore trade partially lifted, the mining boom of the 1960s kicked off.[54] As an earlier Minister for Works, Premier Brand was perfectly poised to press the button on infrastructure investment and also implement a policy of transferring state trading concerns to private enterprise, removing what he regarded as the 'dead hand of socialism' once and for all.[55] Brand appointed ex-head of Public Works, Russell Dumas, and prominent businessman HL Brisbane to oversee an Industrial Development Authority to implement the strategy. Both Brand and Dumas were later knighted for their contribution to the development of the state.

Brand's government pursued a policy of withdrawing from any business enterprise activities and after drastically reducing the SEW workforce by a third and threatening to close the Works altogether, chose instead to curtail private work and focus on supporting the many state infrastructure projects that were to ensue. But the SEW continued to prove its worth with ease. Heavy engineering projects were confidently handled in facilities that still didn't exist elsewhere and service was in hot demand. Infrastructure to boost mining development taking place in Western Australia was naturally going to be a key priority for this 'compass government' – one always facing north.[56] New facilities to support the resources sector were built by the Public Works Department at Port Hedland, Derby and Wyndham and adaptations completed to Fremantle Harbour with heavy dependence on labour and expertise from the SEW, both on site and in North Fremantle.[57] As a graduate engineer, Trevor Leaver got a cadetship with the Public Works Department and was involved in many work orders to the SEW.

> All that work up North, particularly at Derby Broome and Wyndham … we started Wyndham first in the early sixties, then Broome then Derby. So

> much of the steel work associated with those projects came through the SEW. A lot of jetties had a lot of steel work, particularly bolts that were 1-inch diameter, they made all our bolts as well.[58]

Employees also travelled throughout the state to work on projects such as the Ord River Irrigation Scheme, Kununurra Rice Mill and a Naval Communication Station in Exmouth. With no 'FIFO' on offer, they were often away for months at a time. Developing and repairing the state's electricity, gas and water infrastructure also kept a steady flow of work coming in. Moulder Rube Gabrielson remembers making large complex pipework components for the new power stations that were established in Collie, Muja and South Fremantle.[59]

Throughout the SEW's operation, it also fulfilled the role of providing service and repair work for the State Shipping Service and other maritime clients. New vessels acquired by the Service had to be adapted for the specific north-western Australian conditions, with some of the lowest tides in the world often depositing them into the mud and reef. This kept the SEW busy with modifications and ongoing welding repairs at sea and in port in the Pilbara and in Fremantle, to boats that were regularly damaged. Cheyne's Beach Whaling Station also sent their whalers to Fremantle every year for refitting.[60]

Outrage ensued in 1964 when the Brand government forced the 'sale' of SEW forge equipment including a very large steam hammer to the English company Doncaster Hadfields, who then held a monopoly over any work that required this unique machinery. Although met with industrial action and clear objection by local government, the removal of the equipment eventually took place and was sold 'for a song'. The decision also frustrated other local operators who depended on the SEW for its forging capabilities.[61] The hammer was apparently soon then scrapped by the purchaser and replaced with more modern electric machinery, confirming the suspected politically strategic intent of the deal. Nevertheless, the SEW survived and continued to produce a steady level of output and moderate profit, acknowledged by the investment in a new office and laboratory on site in 1969. Despite the supposed shift away from private work, this stream of income continued to grow, with clients such as Hammersley Iron, Alcoa, Mt Newman Mining, Goldsworthy Mining and many others. During John Tonkin's Labor Government, which began in 1971, a period of stabilisation was enjoyed with some improvements and new equipment purchases made. Toward the end of the 1970s however the Liberal Government of

Charles Court introduced a system of open tendering for any government work, and with competition rising from interstate and even more so from overseas, the SEW was struggling to win contracts.

Curiously and against a trend of wavering support, the decision was made to invest in a new foundry which was opened in 1980 by Liberal Minister for Works Andrew Mensaros, alongside the existing buildings. The new foundry shot the SEW to fame when it was the site for the pouring of the keel of Perth businessman Alan Bond's America's Cup winning contender *Australia II* in March 1982 and was coincidently the only facility in the state suitable for the job. On reflection, the question of why this significant investment was approved for a facility that was then demolished a few years later could be enlightening to research further.

Image 5: The pattern for the keel for Australia II was made in the Eastern States and the keel was cast in the new foundry at the State Engineering Works, 1983. Image Credit: City of Fremantle History Centre [LH004002]

More than Fabrication: Workplace Culture and Training Apprenticeships

The structure and culture of the British industrial trades system was dutifully reproduced in twentieth century Western Australia with a hierarchy that was cast in stone. No one was in any doubt about their position at the SEW, which some participants such as Graham Carter and Alf Allison spoke about positively.

> No one bucked the system. No one tried to get above anyone. Alec Douglass was in charge in Carpentry, Freddy Moss in the Pattern Shop. No one tried to white-ant anyone, there was no animosity, no revolts, nothing I can

> recall like that at all. And the same as me working in the office, we got on really well, had great parties, all worked hard together and were all a team.[62]
>
> A lot of it came from the structure, and it came from Bob Simpson the foreman who you didn't see all that much, with his immaculate suit and tie in the boilermaker shop and his grey coat on. There was protocol, there was some class to it, if you like. It taught you manners. And I think that was in trades in those days, and maybe it goes back to the master's apprentice thing, where it was quite a thing to have a trade. You get a trade and you are set for life, and you could be introduced to someone and you say "oh he's a tradesman". It's different to how it is now.[63]

A working class that had lived through the Great Depression and wars placed great value on the security offered by a trade, which ensured employment in tough times when the unskilled were laid off.[64] Across its lifetime an estimated 2,000 young men completed their trade apprentices at the SEW, the majority then taking their training and skills out into the private engineering market and other sectors. This important resource for industrial growth has been equally as necessary as the services for fabrication and repairs that were provided over these years, as Rube Gabrielson explained:

> If it wasn't for us government shops they wouldn't have a feed of apprentices coming out to supply them with tradesman. Even though they say we were as slow as the Chainman's horse, the companies that took the boys on from both the railways and the SEW, they would get them into their way of working and thinking, and that was one of the things that the private side still say, there's no (apprentice) supply now, and they don't have time to train them.[65]

Participants in the oral history project were predominantly ex-apprentices who largely went on to have successful careers and all reflected with pride and gratitude on the opportunity they received through the SEW. Each 'shop' took 2-3 apprentices every year, so there was always a range of young men at different stages of their five or four-year term. Applicants were interviewed at the headquarters of the Public Works Department in the Perth Barracks until its demolition in 1966, and attended weekly technical classes in the city. As well as excellent skills, there were many other traditions and values that an apprentice could absorb. Rube Gabrielson started his moulding apprenticeship in 1948 and recalls workplace protocols with clarity:

> One of the first jobs again was going over and filling the billies up at 10 to midday. They had a very small water tank of boiling water over near the

> fitting shop. Each moulder would say "give it three" swings, you had to get the method so it didn't come down on you. Or some only wanted one swing. After they had finished if they had black tea, they would spit it on the mould, to harden up the skin on a green sand mould.[66]

However not all who qualified left for the private sector and of those who stayed, many were to spend their entire working life at the SEW. Robert 'Chilly' Chilcott started as a labourer in 1923 before commencing his fitting apprenticeship:

> I passed my 8th Standard certificate when I was 14, and then I left school. I started work as a telegraph boy at the East Fremantle Post Office, I worked there for 12 months, I didn't like the work because it was a dead-end job, and I got a job as a junior labourer at the state engineering jobs, and I worked there until I retired, I worked 49 years at the SEW.[67]

Eventually a foreman, Bob was highly regarded for his knowledge and teaching abilities during his lifetime career at the SEW, as noted by numerous participants in this project.

Although a range of unions were represented at the SEW, it was many years until health and safety provision became an industrial issue. It wasn't until 1957 that the WA Public Health Department eventually set up a specialist occupational health section, but this was poorly resourced and had no power of prosecution. Participants spoke of health threats sustained in their work at SEW, some resulting in serious injuries such as the loss of an eye, and many reflecting on the environmental hazards faced by those working in the foundry and when repairing ships:

> Getting towards the end of my apprenticeship I had an accident at work and it caused me to lose the sight of my left eye. That sort of put me back a bit. I was working on big hefty crank shaft out of a diesel engine, I had a hammer and chisel and I was trying to knock out a plug, I missed the chisel and I felt a pain in my eye, and it wasn't till I went home dad said "you've cut your eye badly". Eventually it turned out a bit of steel went through my eye, a flake, it went right through and protruded out the back of my eye. The union handled it I got paid compensation, 960 pounds, that's how I first got my first motor car.[68]
>
> I think a lot of them that died young… I remember Jack Shields, Snowy Newby, Jimmy Bell, they died relatively young, and I think the reason why was the working conditions with all the mesothelioma side of things in their lungs, and the blacksmiths. It was alright when Ray worked in the fitting shop but when he had to go down to the wharf and work on the state ships and work underneath, that was really terrible.[69]

As well as the management structure being traditionally hierarchical, so

too was the division of roles between gender. Unsurprisingly for the era, no women were ever employed to work on the workshop floor. However plenty worked in the office, and in particular operating the comptometer machines that calculated wages. Lyn Richards got her first job at the SEW in 1958 aged 15 and worked there until she was 34, although didn't have quite the career there she might have if she'd been a man, missing out on the accounts clerk job due to her gender:

> Ian Metcher said no way are we having a woman doing a man's job and that was it. But the problem was that I used to work with the bloke that got it, Bill Finlay... He then became above me, but he was a really nice man and we were really good friends which made it worse. He couldn't do anything about it because that was what the manager wanted. … I ended up becoming head machinist after that, I used to work out the pays too. I had to pay my own way to learn the comptometer at Burrows in Perth.[70]

> Well it was a girls' job, comptometer, it was like an adding machine, that was what girls did in those day in tech, even when I was working later it was still a girls' job to do the data entry, guys didn't get a chance.[71]

Death by a Thousand Cuts: the End of The Works

Charlie Court had been trying to shut the place down for a long time, but it took a Labor premier to do it.[72]

By the early 1980s there was dwindling support remaining for a state owned enterprise with ageing infrastructure positioned on prime public land. In 1983 the SEW issued an annual report for the first time, reporting a profit of $300k. A wade through the archived files in the State Records Office show proposed plans for a relocated pattern shop and the provision of a new heavy machining area at the time. However, a letter, also on file from the Valuer General's office from January 1983, valued the land at $940k (or $2,250k if rezoned residential).[73] These mixed observations suggest a complex and hard-fought battle was quietly taking place. A change of government in February 1983 to Labor rule gave many hope that the fate of the works would now be in safe hands but this was not to prove the case. Brian Lethbridge who worked in the accounts department relayed how the Brian Burke Government commissioned a Task Force to investigate the viability of retaining the SEW, chaired by senior bureaucrat Kevin Edwards and a representative from engineering contractor (and earlier recipient of the large steam hammer) Doncaster Hadfields. After more than two years of discussion the decision was announced in 1986 by the Minister for Public Works, Des Dans, that the SEW would be closed.[74] A

proposal was floated to rebuild a smaller version of the SEW at Woodman Point, but to no avail. Intrinsically caught up in the infamous and murky era of 'WA Inc.', a future unthreading of the motives and handshakes that led to the decision to close the SEW would make for interesting reading.

Records show that in 1985 the Works employed just over 200 employees. Seventy-five of them had worked for the SEW for more than ten years. Fifteen had been there for more than 30 years and three for more than 40.[75] Staff protested against the closure, and although some were willing to take the remuneration packages offered, others with a deep connection to the SEW and the security of public service employment were unwilling to be so easily severed and had to accept redeployment elsewhere in the government, wherever that might be:

> And then we had all the solicitors and everything turned around and they said "OK Les Kennedy, come here, we would like to give you 48 weeks leave" but I said "I'm not leaving the government". Then the big problems started, no one wanted to leave. I ended up going to Charlie Gairdner's and being an orderly, pushing wheelchairs.[76]

Acquisition of adjacent Buckland Hill by the West Australia Development Corporation had gone ahead in 1987, despite warnings of risk from contaminated soil and organised protests calling instead for its listing as an 'A' class reserve.[77] At a time when Perth and Fremantle were undergoing a major face-lift for the forthcoming international focus of the America's Cup, SEW's closure could have been seen as just one of the many de-industrialisation directives that characterised the area at this time. The Mt Lyall Cuming Smith British Petroleum and Farmers Limited (CSBP) fertilizer works had ceased operations in 1969 freeing up large parcel of land that then attracted decades of public remediation investment to facilitate change of use. General Motors Holden had closed their nearby Mosman Park assembly plant in the 1970s, followed by the Rope and Twine Factory (Kinnear's) in the 80s, and then eventually the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) in the 1990s. As the century drew to a close the entire stretch of river around Rocky Bay had been cleared of almost all commercial activity and rezoned for private housing.

Any possibility that the buildings on the site would be repurposed was unlikely. Debates around the heritage recognition of industrial sites often refer to the fact that many are in valuable locations: the argument to demolish always wins if they are viewed purely as a financial asset. A similar fate was met by the CBH Silos on North Quay, removed in 2000

for not fitting the current common perception of a heritage place.[78] The SEW didn't stand a chance.

The SEW buildings were demolished in 1988 and the land sold for $12.1m to Michael Hodgson's Jimwa Pty Ltd for staged residential development, with Landcorp clearing the site of contaminants as part of the deal.[79] Prior to redevelopment, groundwater tests indicated excessive levels of nitrate and salinity, with arsenic and cyanide at the upper limits of safe standards. The site's waste materials including foundry clinker, coal, pyrites and heavy metals were many times greater than recommended concentrations set by authorities. The wastes found leaching into the sand beneath also resulted in elevated levels of heavy metals in ground water, probably not helped given the stories of 'mistakes' being flung into the river by nervous apprentices. Site clean-up commenced in 1989 and involved relocating 47,500 sq metre tonnes of rubble to a landfill site in Henderson and another 15,000 covered over. The entire site was then covered with clean sand to a minimum of 1.5m deep with EPA clearance granted in 1991. Bankrupt Jimwa went into receivership in 1991, and the first of 100 fully serviced sites ranging from 249 to 880 sq metres were auctioned in May 1992. As a sweetener to the Fremantle City Council a proposal to redevelop the relatively new administration block into a community centre was proposed but later shelved, with an area set aside for public open space on the foreshore awarded instead. A later resident survey found that few people who bought land admitted to concerns around the environmental impact of the site's industrial past. It was, they possibly thought, a small price to pay for million-dollar views.[80]

Concluding Remarks

> *The state's worse for it. Public Works now is run by accountants and lawyers, whereas we used to have people that did things… you might see I'm a bit biased.*[81]

It is now over 30 years since the SEW closed and likely that only those who had a direct relationship with it or regularly travelled past the site would recall its existence, although many West Australians will know of services and infrastructure it made possible. The SEW however deserves to be remembered, not just for the blood and sweat that was shed on its floors during a now lost age of manufacturing, but also for the transfer of technical and personal knowledge that defined the generations who worked there. Instead, the legacy of the Works in collective memory is more likely to be as the 'home of the keel', where a state-owned asset assisted with the

production of now-legendary sailboat design that could prove to the world that WA was capable of great things through a yacht race victory. This was later celebrated with a 'hallmark event' that transformed the identity of Fremantle when Western Australia hosted the America's Cup in 1987.[82]

The life of the SEW spanned sixteen state governments, eight decades, two World Wars and a couple of mining booms. Against the backdrop of economic forces such as globalisation, deindustrialisation, neoliberalism, gentrification and transformative technology, the story of the SEW can be viewed as prism to read the impact of these drivers on Western Australian history. The process of this work has also given air to the value of oral history methodology in the historian's toolbox, to expose the human experiences that create the highly personal, rather than just broadly political, interpretations of its existence. Interestingly, the personal narratives shared in this instance reflect a sense of comfort and security experienced in the structures inherent in industrial trades, which can sometimes be discounted in accounts of the lack of individual power in traditional workplace hierarchies. This research too can offer a rich seam of material when exploring the social mobility that was available to migrants arriving in WA, where hard work and a belief in the state's economic potential meant that Jack really could succeed to be 'as good as his master'.

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The compilation recording of this oral history project can be accessed at the Fremantle Library, or directly online via the following link: https://soundcloud.com/user-648641069/working-history-the-state-engineering-works-at-north-fremantle

Fremantle Studies Day, 2019

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30 *Catalogue D - General Catalogue*. State Implement and Engineering Works, Murray Street Perth, nd. Held by author, by anonymous donation.

31 N Dragicevich, 1978, p 17.

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33 This (now demolished) house was known as *Katoomba*, probably named after an early steamer that connected Perth with the Eastern States.

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41 The Works' proximity to Mt Lyell Superphosphate Works next door would have been a convenient benefit for the Wesfarmers distribution network.

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Harbouring Discontent: Activism by the Fremantle Community in the 1930s

Paul Reilly

> Everyone was poor—some of the kids never got a feed all day. The Salvation Army used to bring soup for the kids who had nothing. The kids that did bring a cut lunch had a corner cut off by Miss Stewart, who would give it to the kids with nothing.[1]

This sharp and emotive memory, recalled by a former pupil at Fremantle Primary School, highlights the painful experience of many local children during the inter-war years, particularly from 1930 to 1933. Evidence of such personal experiences in Fremantle during this era is harrowing. As unemployment levels rose steeply, there was general concern about the plight of the unemployed and how to tackle the issue. A large public meeting on the Perth Esplanade in February 1930 attracted many concerned business-people.[2] A deputation made up of unemployed men and representatives of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Metropolitan Council was given an uninspiring response by the acting premier, Labor's John Willcock, who claimed a lack of funds prevented the government from creating effective solutions.[3]

On the same day, the stress of being unemployed was highlighted in a case at the Fremantle Children's Court. There, a 17-year-old male was charged with having attempted suicide by poisoning; he was worried' about being unemployed. The young man was bound over on a good behaviour bond' of

10 pounds.[4] In separate other incidents that year, two unemployed family men from Perth, depressed at their situation, took poison in attempts to end their lives; both were rushed to Perth Hospital for treatment.[5] Pride, self-esteem, masculinity and status, in and out of the home, were being battered by the economic storm.

This paper will address the challenges faced by the unemployed to survive the 1930s, particularly in the first half of the decade when the Depression was in full bite and unemployment levels peaked. Whether in or out of work, however, families suffered hardship, degradation and loss of opportunity as industries slumped. Yet the Fremantle community, organised, resisted and fought back against the worst of the effects of the Depression, and many workers became politicised as a result. The local trade union branches, rank and file Labor members, unemployed people, and communists challenged government policy and employers. They mobilised the community to fight pay cuts, worsening work conditions and inadequate unemployment relief. In doing so, they faced organised repression by the state, part of a government strategy to clamp down on any radical activity. Fremantle's local councils also attempted to alleviate the worst effects of the slump, despite inadequate resources and minimal state government support. Civic politics tried to address basic needs like food, fuel and shelter with limited funds. For families, this was a dire period. For single men and women, the situation was often worse.

Survival and Civilian Politics in Fremantle

The main problem for unemployed single men was that they were not provided for by government sustenance, which only applied to married men. The Fremantle Wesley Church opened a soup kitchen in 1929, and in its first fortnight was feeding 166 men regularly. A locally organised charitable fund, led by the council, local dignitaries and church leaders, issued meal tickets daily between 10.15 am and 11.00 am at the Town Hall. Tickets were issued by the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), JB Sleeman, and Reverend Nye from the local Methodist Church.[6] Concern about this growing number of single unemployed men and their plight, resulted in local councils putting together support schemes to distribute food and provide funding for hostel beds if families or friends could not provide support. In April 1930, Fremantle Mayor Frank Gibson, who was also a local businessman, chaired a well-attended meeting at the Town Hall to address the council's response which was energetic and

genuine in seeking solutions.[7] The outcome of this was the formation of a committee with two divisions: one to provide support for single men and women, and another for married men.[8]

A Citizens' Unemployed Relief Committee operated out of a disused tram office building in High Street. This committee, chaired by Sleeman, provided charitable relief to single men and women, including dormitory accommodation in the High Street building for seventy men, rent assistance, clothing, firewood and milk.[9] Later, accommodation for 100 single men was provided at the Immigrants' Home on South Terrace.[10] The committee's income came from private and business donations and from the state government but it was a constant struggle to meet demand. A similar committee was formed in East Fremantle in May 1932.[11] Calls were made for clothing and food donations to support this local scheme. Single women who were unable to be supported in the family home were placed in domestic service in Perth or country towns; arrangements provided to men were not viewed as appropriate for young women.[12] These basic and minimal provisions staved off starvation and homelessness but were an inadequate and undignified measure for men and women who wanted work and proper pay.

Anger had been building in the metropolitan area for some months. A rally of two hundred unemployed protesters in February at the Perth Esplanade condemned conditions and demanded 'toil not sustenance' criticising the level of sustenance pay and the quality of subsidised food. Critical of the Labor government's weak response to the crisis, one speaker said that he wondered 'if Collier could live on a shilling a day'.[13] Later, in May, protests over the quality of food at one of the relief depots led to fighting with police outside the Premier's Department in Barrack Street and the arrests of eight men.[14]

Responsive to the growing social and personal problems created by rising unemployment, Mayor Gibson established a 'Special Committee' which included one member from each of the council's relief committees. Its purpose was to assist the unemployed by providing cash for work, such as planting trees and laying footpaths.[15] This activity placed great strain on council finances as funds were overdrawn and diverted to work creation schemes.

In May 1930, James Mitchell's newly installed National-Country Party coalition state government announced that a thousand men would be allocated to the Main Roads Board on road-building projects, 140 men

allocated to the Railways Department to lay track, and 40 to 50 men allocated to wharf-building work in Fremantle. Mitchell hoped, in vain, that these work-for-relief projects would 'go a long way to breaking the back of the unemployment difficulty'.[16] Unemployed registrations at the labour bureaus continued to climb, however. At Fremantle's bureau, the number of registrations increased by 422 in the month of May alone.[17]

In July 1930, the fortnightly meetings of the Fremantle District Council of the ALP condemned the Mitchell government and employers for using the unemployment issue to under-cut award rates, so eroding hard-fought gains.[18] Gibson proposed that the state divert sustenance money to councils to allow them to provide local work-for-sustenance schemes, mainly necessary road-building projects. The federal government had allocated £192,000 to Western Australia in a grant at the end of 1929 to be spent on road building to alleviate unemployment.[19] Fremantle used its £5,000 share on this work; the two issues of road building and unemployed relief work were inseparable to Gibson.[20]

Local unemployed men were also put to work cutting and distributing firewood to the needy.[21] Much of this work was arduous and the men, through inexperience, lack of strength or under-nourishment, often unsuited to it. By 1933, the council's Parks and Ovals Committee had taken over the coordination of all the local sustenance workers who were put to work in beautification projects at local parks and gardens.[22]

Despite the nature of the Council's work and its poor pay rates, there was no shortage of men willing to sign up. In 1930, in what may have been the first example of collective action by Fremantle's unemployed, a Fremantle petition, signed by 130 men referred to the pitiful conditions they were living in and demanded work to allow them to provide for their families.[23] Numerous letters from desperate men to the Town Clerk appear in the Council's correspondence archives, requesting help in obtaining work. J Shepherd, the Town Clerk, had the unenviable job of attempting to satisfy these requests as far as possible within the meagre council resources available. He used all his contacts to create individual solutions, often directing men to attend local pick-up depots.[24]

Locals also requested assistance from the Premier's office, with charitable relief available for some from the McNess Fund, a charity established by philanthropist Sir Charles McNess. In one letter to a local Fremantle woman the Premier's Department requested her attendance to collect a parcel of clothing for her family of five children. The woman's

husband, working half-time as a sewerage worker, earned two pounds and two shillings (£2.2s), less than the amount the family would have earned on sustenance (£2.9s).[25]

Although men were in desperate circumstances, some were willing to show defiance in the face of unfair working conditions or heavy-handed supervision by site foremen. One example from files within the State Records Office is a note from a works supervisor to the Town Clerk dated July 1933. This described the suspension of 15 men for refusing to handle heavy stone unless they were paid an additional shilling a day. A follow-up letter signed by all the men on the job to the Town Clerk reported unfair treatment towards them by the supervisor and requested his intervention.[26] In another example, 80 unemployed men from North Fremantle met at the Town Hall to consider their own grievances in relation to work and its management. They called for a petition to have a public meeting with the council to discuss these grievances further, following complaints by two of the men about the 'vindictiveness' of a council foreman.[27]

The unemployed had much earlier formed their own committee to negotiate with the council in organising and representing men on work schemes. This led to tension with both the council and the local ALP District Council, both of which were fearful of, and hostile to, communist influences among the unemployed. EA Gray, the local member of the State Legislative Council, had in the early months of the Depression exclaimed: 'There were no communists amongst the unemployed in Fremantle!'[28] His was wishful thinking, because the unemployed men had appointed an active member of the Militant Minority Movement (MMM) to represent them, which irked both the District Council of the ALP and Mayor Gibson.[29]

Gibson engineered alternative representation by organising a meeting at the Town Hall that excluded about twenty of the supporters of the MMM and the unemployed men's representative. Less radical representatives of the unemployed were therefore elected, reported by the press to be 'loyal workers'.[30] However, this change of representation did not stop the MMM and Communist Party of Australia (CPA) members from protesting at future meetings. A meeting of the unemployed on the Fremantle Esplanade in September 1931 heard from MMM speakers was reported in the press as making 'fantastic demands' of the government.[31] In October, another gathering of the unemployed, this time at the Fremantle Trades Hall, heard CPA members condemn the government's relief schemes and call for a boycott of pick-up points.[32]

The Fremantle ALP set up its own Fremantle Advisory Unemployed Committee in 1931. The committee comprised of local party organisers and trade union officials and so was one of several local advocacy committees run by either the ALP, Fremantle Council or by the unemployed themselves. In 1932 it requested improved conditions for sustenance workers from the Fremantle Roads Board District stating that the men were 'ill-fed' for such heavy work.[33] The Roads Board District men's grievances about conditions had rumbled about for some time. In 1932 it approached Minister John Scaddan to ask for men receiving less than 35 shillings (£1.15s) to be given paid government work, as they were compelled to take work for bare sustenance or have their money stopped. Mr Cole of the Committee said this amounted to 'forced labour'. Scaddan, however, was unmoved by the appeals.[34] This strategy of sending deputations to government was a regular action taken by the unemployed throughout the Depression.

Later that year, Labor's committee moved to take control of the independent unemployed men's committee, and in November there was a protracted meeting between the two bodies. Attempts by the ALP to bar participation of 'four well known communists' was rejected, but the men's committee agreed to be taken over by the ALP committee provided they delete any clause excluding communists. The independent unemployed men's committee then ceased to exist.[35] Acrimony between the ALP and CPA was clearly evident - they were, after all, rivals for the loyalty of the unemployed and the ALP had been hostile to the Communist Party since the party was formed in 1931. An earlier meeting of the ALP Unemployed Advisory Committee condemned the CPA as 'callous', and praised the local unemployed for rejecting the 'false gospel of the self-elected champions of workers'.[36]

For men in regular work, a reduction in working hours was also commonplace particularly on the waterfront where workers, even in a good week, would take home little more than the basic wage.[37] Lumpers' work was always irregular and casual, dependent on demand for loading and unloading on any particular day. Work, when available, often involved long hours to get the job done quickly. With the decline in trade due to reduced demand, work became even more irregular and scarce. As early May 1930, 400 waterside workers turned up at Fremantle Town Hall to discuss ways of improving work distribution.[38] However, despite the shortage of work, many were reluctant to sign up for sustenance pay even when their reduced earnings entitled them to do so.[39]

This situation would have been significantly worse had the Mitchell government succeeded in introducing the bulk handling of goods at the waterfront, however, it failed to pass legislation in October 1932 to establish a monopoly trust to operate a bulk handling system. At the height of the Depression, when waterfront jobs were already insecure, it was estimated that a bulk handling scheme would have resulted in the displacement of over five hundred lumpers with an annual loss of £80,000 in wages to the local economy.[40] Mitchell's inability to grasp the political and economic consequences of this plan showed he was either out of his depth in managing the economic crisis, or extremely confident in taking on the lumpers and Fremantle community.[41] However, the issue would not disappear. In 1935, a Royal Commission recommended the introduction of bulk handling to create efficiency and reduce costs.[42]

For women, many were not covered by awards and often did not earn the basic wage. Collier, when returned to government in 1933, tried to address this issue only to be met by fierce opposition from employers.[43] The Shop Assistants' Union was unable to defeat applications to the Arbitration Council to reduce wages, which affected many women.[44]

Evictions were also on the rise, as families struggled to pay rent and still meet basic needs. In July 1931, the Fremantle, Metropolitan and Midland Junction Districts of the ALP met to discuss sustenance and eviction. That month, the *Westralian Worker* reported that the average rent owed by tenants was £16 and that 634 applications for financial relief had been made to the Housing Commissioner under the *Tenants, Purchasers and Mortgages Relief Act 1930* with 312 support orders made in response. The *Worker* acknowledged that the majority of tenants were trying to meet their obligations and that many landlords were also struggling.[45] The ALP meeting produced no radical demands or proposals despite the precarious state of many households.[46]

Locally, in Fremantle, the meeting of the Unemployed Advisory Committee of the ALP discussed the issue and what action was needed to protect those threatened with eviction.[47] The meeting discussed the formation of local protection committees, but there is no evidence of any being formed or acting against bailiffs and protecting tenants' property. The *Westralian Worker* does report correspondence from an East Fremantle man to the ALP District acknowledging the support his family received in preventing their eviction.[48] It seems more likely, therefore, that the local ALP, through its secretary JW Burgess, performed an advocacy role in eviction proceedings

rather than coordinating direct action to stop them. In North Fremantle, the Town Clerk corresponded with the local ALP indicating that a number of ratepayers wanted to pay off their arrears by doing work for the council.[49]

Sleeman attempted to push a Tenants' Protection Bill through parliament that proposed no tenant would be evicted if they were earning less than the basic wage without a State Commissioner of Housing order.[50] This bill was defeated by the National-Country Party coalition in the Legislative Council. At an MMM meeting on the Fremantle Esplanade however, more radical demands were called for. Eight demands were made from the platform:

1. No rent, no evictions, and accommodation paid by government.
2. No cutting off of the electric light.
3. Free train passes, once a day, from the suburbs to Perth and Fremantle.
4. Free passes for picture shows.
5. New clothing provided by government.
6. Full rations.
7. Unemployed single men and women paid allowances if living at home.
8. Double allowances for expectant mothers.[51]

The *Sunday Times* scoffed at these fantastic demands, foisted upon a gallery of unemployed'.[52] However, the issues of rent, electric power, clothing, and food supplies within meagre household incomes created real anxiety for unemployed families. The demands also showed that the unemployed had a very clear idea that the state was responsible for their welfare while they were unemployed, indeed that they had the right to relief and other forms of assistance. The demands also revealed how removed many families were from normal daily expectations because of this poverty like being able to catch a train to the city or go, once in a while, to see a film at the local cinema. They provide a picture of grinding poverty and deprivation for unemployed families with little respite or cheer.

Fremantle Council added to the pressure on local unemployed families by eventually appointing a rates arrears collector and paying him £1 per week plus 20% commission on collections. At first, there was an attempt to add 5% interest on the arrears, but this was defeated at council by one vote. By 1933, though, the penalty was finally introduced by a council chamber desperate to ensure its own financial viability.[53] This also increased the pressure on small business, some landlords and homeowners already being squeezed by rent arrears, reduced community spending and demand for their goods and services.

The general picture of unemployment in Fremantle then was of severe hardship. Governments - commonwealth, state and local - attempted to soak up the unemployed in poorly paid schemes that barely lifted families out of starvation. In the process, union work and award gains through the arbitration courts were undermined by work-for-relief schemes that would spark reaction from workers demanding dignity and fair pay for their work. Class tensions created political opportunity and activism, but also repression and betrayal.

The gatherings of unemployed in Fremantle with and without trade union and political presence provided opportunities to share grievances and experiences, discuss and challenge the failure and weakness of government response and provide informal and formal structures that mobilised activism. The local neighbourhood connections also provided cohesion and a shared experience that would assist in formulating demands for change.

Yet, more in Perth than Fremantle, these community connections and collective experiences created mass protests which were met by swift, repressive and sometimes violent responses by police. What became known as the 'Treasury Riot' was the first major clash in this era and would have consequences for the state's response to future disputes, as will be examined when looking at the Fremantle Wool Stores strike, a remarkable episode just a few months later.

The Treasury Riot

Much has been written on the so-called 'Treasury Riot', an organised protest march by unemployed men and their supporters that led to clashes with police on St Georges Terrace on the 6 March 1931. Street protest in the form of demonstrations and marches had become part of the customary repertoire of workers to raise awareness, promote support from the public and press their demands.[54] The events of this day were the culmination of attempts by unemployed workers to lobby the state government for paid work or improved support. Leaflets had been issued on the march that articulated demands that had already been presented in full by a deputation of the unemployed to Minister Scaddan.[55] He indicated that he would await Mitchell's return from a visit to the east coast and pronounce on the requests. When, following Mitchell's return, no response came, the unemployed men agreed to march on the Treasury Building, the main government office in central Perth, to press their case.[56]

At least two thousand unemployed workers assembled in Barrack Street

on the Esplanade to march up to St Georges Terrace. Among them were men from Fremantle, some who later held a meeting on Fremantle's Esplanade to condemn the behaviour of police at the march and the sentences imposed on arrested protesters.[57] When the marchers reached the intersection with St Georges Terrace trouble began. One speaker said the marchers didn't want trouble, but if the police were violent the men would fight back. Who started the fighting is unclear, but fighting there was after the march was blocked by foot and mounted police. The ensuing crush and tension on St Georges Terrace created hand-to-hand fighting between marchers and police that lasted nearly an hour. Marchers used makeshift weapons such as broken fence posts to defend themselves against police batons. An estimated seven thousand looked on from nearby streets and pavements, no doubt in shock at the action and reaction.[58] This took place, after all, on Perth's premier avenue.

The police and press were quick to attribute blame to communist agitators and many of those arrested were known communists or sympathisers targeted by police. The conservative press highlighted the presence of 'non-Australian accents' on the speaker's platform and visible banners with 'Russian Soviet emblems'.[59] This narrative of the outsider as troublemaker was a persistent theme in press and police reports. Police Commissioner Robert Connell minimised the men's grievances and claimed the protest was all a communist plot.[60] One of those arrested included Syd Foxley who stood accused of inciting the riot by striking Inspector Johnston, a man who openly hated communism. Later, including at the meeting on Fremantle's Esplanade, there were widespread calls for Johnston's dismissal due to his brutality on the day. A leaflet, headlined *Black Friday*, produced and circulated at the time (author unknown but likely a CPA linked publication) and archived in police files, called for Johnston to be dismissed for being a 'menace'.[61] One witness gave sworn testimony that he saw Johnston 'rushing at the crowd…I don't know why he did it'.[62] Another sworn testimony stated that he heard a policeman say 'Hop into the bastards!'.[63] A letter from the Police Commissioner to the Minister for Police stated that he considered the protest was 'directed from the central communistic [sic] body and…of the eleven men charged as a result of rioting…ten of them candidly admit they were communists'.[64] The MMM also seems to get a mention by Connell in his 5 page letter: 'Any old pretext is good enough for these so-called Militant Minority to work up the passions'.[65]

The police and government's fear of and paranoia about communism

and militancy was evident. Communist banners were visible on the march and it is clear from the arrests that communists were both conspicuous to and targeted by police. This fear would shape tactics and responses to future disputes and activity to prevent the growth of militant ideas and organisation and this applied to both unemployed and employed workers. An opportunity came within a few months of the Treasury Riot for the state to demonstrate its readiness to try to break industrial militancy when Fremantle Wool Store workers called a strike over repeated cuts in pay. The government could not afford to allow the wool industry to come to a standstill as revenue from wool exports was vital. On this occasion, however, the employers and government were unsuccessful in quashing organised industrial action amongst the working class in Fremantle.

The Fremantle Wool Stores Strike

On the 8 December 1931, the Western Australia Employers' Federation Inc, sent a letter to the Commissioner of Police informing him that the workers at the Fremantle Wool Stores had begun strike action as a protest against reduced pay and conditions. The letter outlined the Federation's intention to bring in volunteer labour from country areas. Their plan was to set up temporary accommodation for the incoming workers at Ascot racecourse east of Perth. Anticipating a reaction from Fremantle workers to the plan, the letter requested support in 'providing the fullest possible police protection'.[66]

The dispute began when the Wool Store workers, members of the Shop and Warehouse Assistants' Union, voted to go on strike due to a further wage cut imposed by wool stores employers including Elder, Smith and Co, Goldsborough, Mort and Co, Dalgety and Co, and Westralian Farmers Ltd. The cut of 8 shillings and 2 pence a week, introduced as part of the Financial Emergency Legislation linked to the Premiers Plan was on top of the cut in the basic wage of thirteen shillings and sixpence that had already been imposed by the Arbitration Court.[67]

The workers had placed their dispute with the local ALP Fremantle District Council Disputes Committee, the Party's negotiating body under the secretaryship of JW Burgess. He was sent to negotiate with the Employers' Federation. With no agreement on the cuts, the workers went on strike on the 20 November. Local support from other union branches in Fremantle was swift. The Lumpers' Union branch was called to help at picket lines,[68] whilst resolutions of support were passed at the Fremantle Branch of the Clerks' Union and the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union.[69]

The strike was a significant one for the Western Australian economy. It delayed sales of wool with an estimated value of £300,000 in November, and the same amount again in December, as wool remained unloaded in the stores.[70] The response by the Police Commissioner to the letter received by the Employers' Federation was immediate. On the same day it was received he sent telegrams to regional police inspectors at Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Northam, Pinjarra and Narrogin. The tone of the telegram was urgent and revealed how the police regarded this dispute and their preparedness to support strikebreaking and quell militancy:

> Cancel all leave, call in all men on leave and arrange for following men to come to Perth immediately and bring full equipment, including revolver and ammunition with them (STOP). Where constable mounted horse must also be brought (STOP). Arrange with District Superintendent railways regarding conveyancing horses (STOP). Dongarra: one mounted; Geraldton: one mounted, three foot; Mingenew: one mounted; Mullewa: one mounted; Northampton: one mounted; Three Springs: one mounted; Yalgoo: one mounted.[71]

The request from the Employers' Federation came as the strike looked like it may escalate; more local unions joined to support workers' demands for a restoration of pay rates. The employers wanted to ensure the January wool sales were not prevented from happening. The Employers' Federation hoped that country woolgrowers would come voluntarily to Perth, but the request was met with hostility from farmers. In Pingelly, for example, the Employers' Federation letter, written by its secretary LL Carter, was firmly rejected. The woolgrowers thought the matter was for arbitration and that it was not their business to intervene.[72] However, the employers and police had increased the pressure on the strikers in other ways when 197 men were charged and processed through the local court for going on strike. The men included Burgess and R Bourke, the secretary of the union. All pleaded not guilty, but were convicted under section 129 of the *Arbitration Act*, which forbade strike action during arbitration.[73]

The Wool Stores strike ended when the President of the Arbitration Court recommended that the strikers return to work and be paid at the old rates instituted before the implementation of the Financial Emergency Legislation cuts with the agreement that they would uphold the Arbitration Court's decision on their appeal against the imposition of the cuts. At a 'long and heated debate' among the strikers held at the Fremantle Trades Hall in Collie Street, they voted in favour of the proposal, but only by a slim majority of 139 to 120. No doubt those who rejected the proposal were

wary of the decision of the Arbitration Court, but they would have been under severe financial pressure to return to work having been on strike for three weeks. The men returned on 10 December with their income restored awaiting the decision of the appeal at arbitration. The Employers' Federation wrote again to the Police Commissioner to thank him for the provision of police support, no longer needed, and he in turn alerted the country stations by wire a day after his first urgent telegram to stand down the men and horses on their way to Perth.[74]

In the new year of 1932, the *Westralian Worker* triumphantly announced a victory for the wool workers when the Arbitration Court supported the union's appeal against the cut in wages.[75] Further, the police court magistrate sentenced the strikers to only minimal fines of five shillings each, or twelve hours in the lock-up; Burgess was fined one pound. This was a significant win for workers in the Depression when most industrial disputes in Australia failed. The significance of wool to the economy and the failure of the Employers' Federation to generate an army of country workers to break the strike were likely factors in the willingness of the Arbitration Court to settle the case favourably for the workers. These factors also provided political opportunity to the union to press their legitimate claim.

The local solidarity of Fremantle's other unionists and the cohesion of the local community also added strength to the strike. The existing organisational and community structures helped assert demands and create action to back them. The willingness, however, of the police to use armed force reveals its fear of working class militancy in the wake of the Treasury Riot that had occurred just a few months earlier.

The Dispersal of Unemployed

Fremantle's unemployed men had been assigned to sustenance relief work, mostly around Fremantle, building roads and other earthwork projects, but also to Blackboy Hill.. Unemployed men from Fremantle were also sent to the rural southwest. A contingent of 90 men went to Harvey from Fremantle in 1932 to work on irrigation and drainage projects.[76] At Frankland River, forty miles west of Mount Barker, the government also established an archipelago of camps where men were put to work clearing trees. It is likely that Fremantle men were sent there too, as they were to other camps.

These camps were wretched places and the Frankland River project was one of the largest and worst. By mid-August 1932, the *West Australian*

reported that the camp was up and running; the first contingent of men arrived on the 13 August and soon about 800 men were working there.[77] The conditions were inadequate: tents leaked; drinking water and sanitation were poor; the food was of marginal quality, and; the men were provided with inadequate clothing. Soon resentment and anger grew. The congregation of men in the camps after work, with little to do other than sleep, mend clothes, write letters or play cards, fomented the conditions for demands for better conditions and fair pay.

Apart from the living conditions, many of the men sent there were totally unsuited to the work. One young worker's recollections of conditions sums-up the daunting challenge to survive. He wrote: 'We went out to work. I was given an old man of sixty-seven for a mate. He was not used to bush work; didn't know how to use an axe'.[78] To add to the misery of this work, the pay had been set to piecework rates, rather than a daily rate. It was impossible to make a living at the rates offered, because the work was so slow and heavy. As the young man continued: 'I realised it would take us 10 days to earn the 25 shillings we were supposed to earn in two days. That meant we couldn't even make our store account'. [79]

The initial rate offered to the men was 2 pounds per acre, cleared. This rate was quickly increased to 5 pounds an acre as the impossibility of the job became clear to all. Older residents of the area considered thirteen to fifteen an acre more appropriate.[80] The situation reached breaking point as the wet, winter weather worsened conditions. A mass meeting at the main camp on the 19 August 1932 called for work to cease and demanded the men be returned to Perth by free transport. A call for a secret ballot was rejected and the site was declared 'black', to be boycotted. A report, filed by Sergeant George King from Albany, named George Schneider, 'a communist who speaks with a foreign accent,' as being the event's main speaker. Again, like the Wool Stores strike and Treasury Building unemployed march, police were on heightened alert towards militant leaders, especially outsiders with communist leanings.[81] The press also highlighted 'communistic (sic) influences'.[82]

The response by Mitchell was both swift and dismissive. His avuncular image was increasingly giving way to displays of impatience and intolerance as he struggled to cope with the scale of the Depression and its problems. He sent a telegram to the men, ordering them back to the camp. After the message was read out, the men carried the following motion 'with acclamation': 'We will ignore the Premier's message just as our wires

to the responsible Minister have been ignored'.[83] The same report also notes that another telegram from Perth communists, offering to arrange a demonstration at the Central Station, was also ignored. Many of the men were determined to promote an image of working-class respectability, not radical militancy.

Nearly 300 men left for Perth on a train from Mount Barker with locals showing solidarity with the strikers.[84] When the train reached East Perth station next morning the train was stopped and the men ordered off by police. The engine was de-coupled from the carriages, the leaders arrested and led away and the men left stranded in the rain. Despite this indignity and provocation, the men were reported as remaining orderly.[85] Six men were arrested at East Perth, identified as leaders of the strike by the police. They were charged, though, with the petty offence of travelling without tickets.[86] They included Alfred Schneider, who was reported in the press as being an atheist from South America. Of the remaining 5, 2 were from New South Wales, one was from Nova Scotia, one from England and one from Ireland. Again, the press focussed on the presence of outsiders and foreigners in the midst of the dispute.

A rally at the Perth Trades Hall rejected the government's demand for the men to return to the camp and called for solidarity with the 6 arrested men. Minister Scaddan's comments on the strike were read out to the meeting: 'the government will not permit a band of communists to take charge of the affairs of the state', he proclaimed. He also claimed that the CPA had 'white-anted' the camp.[87] The mood of the meeting was defiant, determined to continue to press for a fair daily pay rate and improved conditions. It therefore became a protracted dispute as the men refused to return to the intolerable conditions.

The relief workers were banned by the Police Commissioner from further marching, stating that this was all a 'communistic [sic] method of provoking civil commotion',[88] whilst the six arrested men were fined the default train fare of £1.1s, plus costs of 16s.5d each and were freed with a caution.[89] The government increased the pressure by refusing any further material support for the men whilst they remained in Perth.[90] Newspapers began to report the solidarity of trade unionists with the strikers, with the Fremantle Lumpers branch mentioned as giving the strike its full support.[91] The Fremantle District Council of the ALP also gave full support as did the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) which condemned the 'slave labour conditions offered…by the government at Frankland River'.[92] The

Perth AEU Branch Secretary, Tom Fowler, in a letter written to the *Daily News*, however, was scathing of the Labor leadership's ' impotence' in supporting the men.[93]

The strikers, with support from the labour movement and CPA planned a demonstration in the city on the 12 September, one day after a large meeting on the Perth Esplanade. On this occasion, the plan was to gather outside the Treasury Building but scatter speakers to the balcony corners of Hay Street and Barrack Street to confuse, out-fox and divert police. Although the speakers were pulled down from their strategic posts by police, the demonstration was able to retain the dispute in the public's eye. The police made 18 arrests, including Alfred Schneider who was charged with addressing the crowd in Barrack Street without permission.[94] Four of the men were later acquitted at the Supreme Court of charges of unlawful assembly. Again, the press was quick to highlight *foreign* communist involvement with the *West Australian* at the forefront, publishing a letter that blamed them for 'edging on [sic] their comrades'.[95]

The state labour movement's response to the strikers was to call on them to place their faith in their ALP Disputes Committee and abide by the outcome of the negotiations. At a meeting of the Unemployed Council, a broad community body dominated by Labor and Trade Union officials, the meeting said it was 'impossible for the labour movement to protect them'.[96] Although the government had agreed to some of the demands, such as establishing a medical camp at the site, they would not negotiate on the demand for day rates rather than piece rates until the men returned to the camp and repaid their train fares.

Solidarity by the Fremantle labour movement towards the strike remained strong. At a large meeting on the Fremantle Esplanade on the 18 September, solid support was expressed for the men. This solidarity, the failure of Labor to persuade the striking men to return to Frankland and allow the Disputes Committee to negotiate on their behalf and the presence of CPA activists in the camp began to concern the state government and police. Commissioner Connell is quoted as having 'been convinced for some time that communistic (sic) propaganda was behind industrial disturbances'.[97]

This increasing alarm led the police to raid the properties of ten CPA activists, including the home of writer and activist Katherine Susannah Prichard and three addresses in Fremantle. Whilst no arrests were made, papers and correspondence were seized and prosecutions considered by Commonwealth authorities using recent amendments to the *Crimes Act*.[98]

The following week, four plain clothes and mounted police accompanied a government officer to a visit to the Immigrants' Home in Fremantle where unemployed single men were staying. There, he called for twenty men to go to work at Frankland River to replace strikers. Knowing the camp was blacklisted, all one hundred men at the home refused to attend, despite the intimidating presence of police. The men were reported as peaceful but indifferent to the pressure to respond to the request.[99] The attempt to use police to help recruit labour in Fremantle for the camp had failed. A chalk sign, written near the home read: 'Frankland River Black'.[100]

The protracted dispute continued and whilst there were concessions on the conditions at the camp for the men remaining there, the men considered the piece-work pay rates were still too low to make a living.[101] Minister for Lands, CG Latham, indicated there was no more money but conceded that many of the men who had been sent there were unsuited to the work.[102] Eventually, the strikers were either replaced by other unemployed men willing to work at the camp or returned through desperation. The government agreed to set up a board to set future piece rates provided the men agreed to its decisions.[103] Ongoing complaints about the piece rates continued, however, until the change of state government led to the closure of Frankland River and the introduction of different sustenance arrangements for the unemployed.[104] It is astounding that that these men remained on strike for over six months at the peak of the Depression.

Later, in 1934, at the Harvey work camp where Fremantle men were sent, another dispute arose; this concerned the decision by the government to force men to join the Australian Workers Union (AWU). Instead, the men wanted to join their own union, the Relief and Sustenance Workers' Union (RSWU), also named the Metropolitan Labourers' Industrial Union. Although the men supported unionism, they refused to be forced into the AWU and to have to pay AWU dues. Indeed, after lengthy periods of unemployment most were already in arrears with their own trade unions.[105] Three hundred men went on a one-day strike in protest and their refusal led to four of them being dismissed. This led to a protracted dispute and much bitterness between the men at the camp and the AWU. The three men, married with twelve children between them, were barred from claiming sustenance and directed to report to Perth's Marquis Street depot for other work. However, when they turned-up they were told that Labor Minister JJ Keneally had issued instructions that they were 'on no account to be dealt with at the depot'.[106]

A state conference of part-time and sustenance workers in Perth condemned the AWU's 'conscription', whilst a conference of unions affiliated to the ALP also met to discuss the situation, concerned about the approach of the AWU towards the men.[107] Rank and file union and party activists were sympathetic towards the RSWU, and, importantly, in Fremantle, the fledgling union was welcomed into the Trades Hall building and given space to work. Given the presence of Fremantle men in the southern work camps and their struggle for survival, this solidarity is understandable. In April 1934, TJ Hughes, secretary of the Relief and Sustenance Workers' Union, served a writ on the AWU and Premier Collier on behalf of the three men. This came to nothing, as the fledgling union was dissolved in 1934 after its application for registration to the Arbitration Court was rejected.

The AWU's hold over trade union membership in the work camps and the support given it by the government ensured that a more radical union of unemployed relief workers could not survive, so keeping militancy in check. It prevented radical voices in the camps from influencing branch voting and maintained the right wing hold in the union. The long running Frankland River dispute had occurred in spite of, not because of, the AWU leadership who offered little to break the long-running deadlock or use their strength to fight for the men.

The Council Against Unemployment was a later organisation that enjoyed support when it was established in 1938 and it was successful in achieving concessions. It campaigned for better conditions for the unemployed and supported strike action by relief workers, particularly strikes at Leonora, Wiluna and Pemberton road-building camps over working hours and lack of union conditions.[108] One victory was the establishment of rest rooms in the city in William Street which also served as the headquarters of the organisation.[109] A Fremantle branch was established in May 1938 and Eillen Perry, one of the founding members, spoke of the hostility by the official element' of unions and Labor, which did not want to see another militant body in their midst.[110] At a meeting in the Fremantle Kings Hall in May 1938, relief workers, their wives and friends demanded the right to use the Trades Hall for CAU meetings and called for the Labour movement to be rebuilt.[111] Despite the end of the Third Period Line* and the beginning of calls for a united front with Labor against fascism and reactionary forces, local tension, distrust and rancour remained.

Communist activists in Fremantle continued to demand improved conditions for the unemployed. Paddy Troy, who moved to Fremantle in

1938 and was working on the traffic bridge that crossed the Swan River, spoke at a meeting of 150 men at the Trades Hall in 1939 and called for increased ration rates of ten shillings a week, from seven shillings to cover rises in the cost of living. He argued that if the governments could find millions for war, they should provide for the unemployed.[112] A month later, Fred Wayma stood for the North Fremantle Council, the first time a communist candidate stood for local council office in the state.[113] Within months of this, after the CPA was banned by the Commonwealth Government, Troy and many of his comrades would be in jail.[114]

Later Unrest in Fremantle: Bus drivers, the Waterfront and Women

A number of disputes took place amongst trade unionists in Fremantle in the later years of the 1930s, though the worst of the Depression was over. One involved drivers and conductors in the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union working for the South Suburban Omnibus Company Ltd, the Metropolitan Bus Company, and its offshoot, the Perth-Fremantle Omnibus Company Ltd. The strike arose when the drivers' eight-hour shift was spread over twelve hours, to cover peak periods. Police alleged striking workers were sabotaging buses by letting down tyres, breaking windows and removing drivers. Again, the police were involved in breaking the strike by escorting non-striking bus drivers on motorcycles along their routes.[115] This allowed a skeleton service to run. This strike lasted throughout October 1936, during which time the union was threatened with deregistration by the Arbitration Court unless drivers returned to work. In the end, the dispute was referred to a Board of Reference to adjudicate which recommended amendments to rosters be introduced.[116]

Several waterfront disputes arose in the mid-1930s over conditions and job security. In January 1935, the Lumpers' Union called a strike over the handling of cement and the dangers of being exposed to dust from the sacks. The ship, *Arkaba,* stood idle whilst the men argued for an extra shilling an hour plus two additional 'smokos'.[117] The dispute underlined the dangers the men were exposed to without adequate clothing or protective gear. In another dispute, the Lumpers' Union raised objections over the bulk handling of wheat to the ships from the loading machine.[118] Bulk handling had been a contentious issue for a number of years, as workers rightly feared job losses. This brief dispute was part of the ongoing tension between a government that had been determined to introduce bulk handling

to reduce costs and weaken waterside unions, and workers aggrieved at its implications for their livelihoods.

Women, too, were becoming more active in industrial struggles, particularly as the Depression eased and workers began fighting for improved pay and conditions after years of stagnation. Many played an active role in the formation and influence of the CAU discussed above.[119] In Fremantle, on the 31 July1939, at the Mills and Ware biscuit and cake factory in South Fremantle, workers, men and women, went on strike over working conditions. The Coastal Food Manufacturers Union had called for a reduced working week from 48 to 44 hours and a 10% wage increase on the basic wage, but failed to win concessions in negotiation with the employer, resulting in the walkout of 260 workers.[120] The workers in the factory were mostly young and knew of the company policy of sacking workers when they reached adult pay rates. Local solidarity from other unions was strong with the Lumpers' Union donating £25 per week towards support. The strike also received active support from the Labor Women's Central Executive.[121] The strike lasted over 6 weeks, until 16 September, with remarkable courage from its mostly young male and female workers and shop stewards with no previous experience of industrial action. Unable to come to an agreement, the strike was ended with the company retiring the current award and an agreement to negotiate a new award without recriminations through the Arbitration Court.[122]

Summary and Conclusions

The dispute capped a decade in which Fremantle's workers — employed and unemployed — had been forced to survive economic and material privation, enduring undignified living and working conditions. In this they were - as far as possible - supported by the local councils. The councils operated with limited resources but showed great determination to try and ease the suffering created by mass unemployment and economic depression. Workers had also shown themselves willing and capable of fighting against austerity, poor conditions and exploitation, despite the economic climate that could have subdued militancy. In spite of Labor's inadequate, and at times undermining leadership, Fremantle's unemployed and working men and women organised themselves through their workplace union branches, Trades Hall, CPA fraternal bodies and community organisations. They attempted to defend their livelihoods and communities, most successfully in the Woolstores dispute; one of the few industrial victories by workers

in this dark period. This victory was achieved despite organised repression by the state, especially in the use of police and the courts to try to break the strike. Working class activists, notably from the Lumpers Union, also showed generous solidarity with these strikers and with other workers involved in disputes, including those unemployed men in rural work camps. Fremantle can therefore be viewed as a class-conscious community with a highly active minority who showed tremendous determination and energy to organise and fight back in extremely difficult times.

*Editor's Note: For explanation of The Third Period Line See: World Socialist Website, https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/foundations-aus/07.html. Accessed 21 May 2023

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