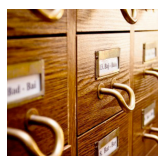


PHA **WA**



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 135 **JUNE 2018**



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The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the PHA (WA).

President's Note:

Having only two newsletters per year certainly means that both editions are full to the brim of news, information, announcements and reviews, and almost overflowing with details about both past and upcoming conferences, events, awards and grants that are keeping historians busy, engaged, stimulated and occupied.

There has been plenty of activity in this 150th anniversary year of the end of convict transportation to Western Australia, with all events held so far by all accounts being well organised and patronised. To mention just a few, the year started with the launch of the Transportation exhibition at the Fremantle Prison, and a series of very well-attended talks presented by the Royal WA Historical Society and WA Genealogical Society. The History Council WA joined forces with the UWA Centre for WA History and Fremantle Prison, facilitating the launch of the Digital Panopticon project by Professor Barry Godfrey and Dr Lucy Williams from the University of Liverpool as well as the very lively and entertaining 'Great Convict Debate' featuring local, interstate and international debaters. One of the debaters, Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, will be returning to WA for the Carceral Colony Symposium in July. Details about the day-long symposium, organised by the UWA Centre for WA History and Fremantle Prison, are included in this newsletter.

Another event of significance in which we have been immersed has been the centenary of the First World War. As we head towards the conclusion of this four year-long event, and the last of the various milestones and commemorations, there are still some activities and events to come. One of particular relevance and interest to our members is the 2018 PHA National Conference 'Marking Time' hosted by PHA NSW & ACT. The theme of the national conference will be to reflect upon and interrogate not so much the war itself, but the emotion and myth surrounding events such as this in



the aftermath and the changing ways in which we 'mark time' and interpret them. I hope that some of our WA members will be able to attend this conference. Another conference drawing its theme from the Great War, is the Australian Garden History Society national conference 'Gardens in Times of Peace and Conflict', to be held in the Southern Highlands of NSW. Details of both these conferences can be found in this newsletter.

Our book notes this time around focus on two quite different forms – biography and historical fiction. Ann Hunter shares her thoughts on Sue Taffe's biography of Mary Montgomerie Bennett *A White Hot Flame*, and Lenore Layman reflects on the virtues and vices of historical fiction, touching on *Dustfall* by Michelle Johnston.

Another highlight of this newsletter are the two articles on heritage places, both in regional areas. One features Butterly House in Toodyay and the other on the recently completed and greatly anticipated refurbishments of the old Katanning Flour Mill which is the latest addition to the Dome Café portfolio of adapted heritage buildings. However, not just a café, the old mill will also house Dome's first venture into boutique accommodation.

There are also plenty of updates and latest news from our peer organisations including the Batty Library, the RWAHS and History Council WA. As well, we have the latest news and information on the Margaret Medcalf award, the WA History Foundation Grants, an overview of the Heritage Council's Sacred Heritage Seminar held earlier this year and a profile of PHA WA's newest member.

There's still more to come until our next newsletter in December including the return of the PHA History Slam as part of the annual Heritage Perth Weekend and our end of year gathering. Planning for the next State Heritage and History Seminar will also be well underway by then, so the details of that will be featured. A reminder too that our AGM is once again looming fast. As always, the AGM will be paired with a professional development opportunity for our members. Although final details are still in development, as a heads up, the focus this year will be on ways to improve and strengthen our skills in presentations and public speaking.

With all that in store, I wish you all a great second half of 2018 (and start to a new financial year!) and will let you get on with diving into the June newsletter.

Helen Munt APHA
President

PHA (WA) AGM 2018 - Advance notice:

Advance notice is given for the 2018 AGM of PHA (WA), which has been scheduled for Sunday 23 September 2018 at the State Library of WA. More details to come in due course.

In the meantime, we would love to hear from any of you who are keen to join the Management Committee and support our Association!

Helen Munt APHA
President



PHA National Conference - 'Marking Time':

Professional Historians Association National Conference Sydney 30–31 August 2018 State Library of New South Wales

Professional historians record the history of places with direct connections to the public: in parks, on monuments, at exhibitions, in archives and publications. 2018 is the culmination of the four-year long commemoration of World War I and therefore a fitting time to reflect on the challenges we face as professional historians interpreting sites, places and events that become surrounded by myth and emotion.

The PHA National Conference will explore the changing ways we mark time and interpret events through traditional and new media in the 21st century.

Key note speaker: Bruce Scates

Bruce Scates is an Associate Professor in the School of History, University of New South Wales and a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. His publications include *Return to Gallipoli*, *A New Australia*, the *Cambridge History of the Shrine of Remembrance* and *Women and the Great War* (co authored with Raelene Frances). The last of these won the NSW Premier's History Award.

Updates about the conference will be available from [the PHA NSW & ACT website](#).

For any enquiries, please email markingtimeconference@gmail.com

New Member Profile - Dr Bruce Baskerville:



Photographer: Sorrel Wilby.

I have recently returned to WA after 25 years, working mainly in heritage in NSW and Norfolk Island. Since 2013 I have been writing and reviewing conservation management plans for Place Management NSW (formerly Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority). Before that, I was Site Manager of the Kingston & Arthur's Vale Historic Area (KAVHA) on Norfolk Island, and previously Senior Heritage Officer (Listings) in the NSW Heritage Office. I also worked in private practice, notably with Clive Lucas Stapleton & Partners. A real highlight was working on the world heritage nomination for the Australian Convict Sites, especially KAVHA and Old Government House & Domain in Parramatta.

While working I studied and graduated PhD (University of Sydney). My 2017 thesis, *The Chrysalid Crown: An un-national history of the Crown in Australia 1808-1986*, drew in unexpected ways on my 1992 UWA honours dissertation *Creating Arcadia?: A history of nature conservation in colonial Western Australia 1870-1914* – but that's a story for another time.



My research interests lie in the ways old institutions are transported, re-imagined and adapted in new realms, especially settler societies. Particular themes include place-name histories, common lands, reading landscapes, ruins, cultural cleansing at heritage sites, vice-regal history, heraldry, symbols of identity, forced migration and convict history, and LGBTI histories. I currently advise a group of Batavia Coast historical societies on their 150th anniversary project, 'Convict Tracks of the Victoria District'.

I have been involved in the Professional Historians Association NSW & ACT variously as secretary, treasurer, president and most recently chair.

Dr Bruce Baskerville MPHA

A 21st Century Mill: The revitalisation of The Premier Roller Mill, Katanning:



The Premier Roller Mill, Katanning, 1912. Photo courtesy: State Library of WA.

The Dome Café in Katanning was opened for business on 30 April this year. Housed inside the Premier Mill, the café opened 127 years to the day after the Mill first opened in 1891. Although its purpose has dramatically changed, the revitalisation followed a pattern of adaptive re-use that allowed the Mill to survive and retain its value in the community.

From as early as 1830, surveyors travelling north from Albany and south from the Avon Valley recognised Katanning's agricultural potential. However, due to its relative isolation, it was utilised only by shepherds, sandalwood cutters and a few European families.

This changed in 1889 with the arrival of the Great Southern Railway connecting Beverley to Albany. The railway opened vast amounts of the region's farmland, gave direct access to the port of Albany and provided the means to transport necessary, and heavy, farming materials.



Brothers Frederick and Charles Piesse, who had spent nearly a decade in business together as 'Merchants and General Agents', saw the opportunity that the railway offered. Frederick, ever the entrepreneur, travelled south with the railway construction crew, bringing a portable shop to each new campsite. He supplied the crew with essentials such as boots, beds and sugar, and became a wealthy man.

When the railway was completed, the Piesse brothers made the auspicious decision to put down roots at the line's central station - Katanning. They established many of the first businesses but it was the brothers' most successful endeavour that became synonymous with the town: 'The Premier Roller Flour Mill'. The Mill attracted industry and settlement and provided an economic framework that allowed Katanning to flourish, including the supply of electricity for the state's first electric street lights.

Frederick Piesse had been elected to the Legislative Assembly just a few months prior to the Mill's opening, a position he maintained until he retired as 'Father of the House' in 1909. He had a close friendship with John Forrest and served in his cabinet as Commissioner of Railways and Director of Public Works during the construction of Fremantle Harbour and the Goldfields Pipeline. The height of Piesse's political career came in 1901 when he served as leader of the opposition during Leake's first Premiership.

After Frederick died in 1912, his eldest son, also called Frederick, took charge of the Mill and added new machinery and various extensions to give the building its current form. His extravagant lifestyle was less positive for the Mill and, following his death in 1927, creditors swooped in to carve up his estate. A group of farmers and local businessmen formed a company to buy the Mill outright and stave off its closure. They raised the necessary funds by offering shares in the new company; an offer which was heartily taken up by the locals.

So began 90 years of relentless adaptation, where those in charge of the Mill were constantly on the lookout for new ways to raise revenues and keep it in operation.

An example of this was in 1930 when the verandah was replaced with shops that wrapped around the base of the building. These provided much needed income and further cemented the Mill as the centre of the town; shoppers could now visit 'Mill Corner' and buy anything from a grand piano to a haircut.

By 1969 flour sales had declined to the point the Mill again faced closure. A new generation of locals formed The Katanning Oat Milling Company and sold enough company shares to keep it open. They focused on oats, phasing out flour until production finally came to an end in 1976. The company continued to mill oats and stockfeed until 1981 when they sold the Mill following a lucrative offer from a supermarket chain that wished to redevelop the site. All the land behind the Mill was cleared and built on but, thanks to some vigorous campaigning by the 'Save the Mill' group, the local Council stepped in to stop its demolition.

The place sat unused for years until enough money was raised to make the ground floor safe to house the Katanning Tourist Association and to create displays covering the workings of the Mill. By 2012, maintaining the building was beyond the resources of the Shire of Katanning and the Mill was advertised for sale at the princely sum of \$1.

It was at this point that Dome began negotiations with the Council for the Mill and a further three years before they reached an agreement to purchase. I was employed as resident historian to write a history of the Mill building for Dome with the aim of helping guide the restoration and providing inspiration during the design process.

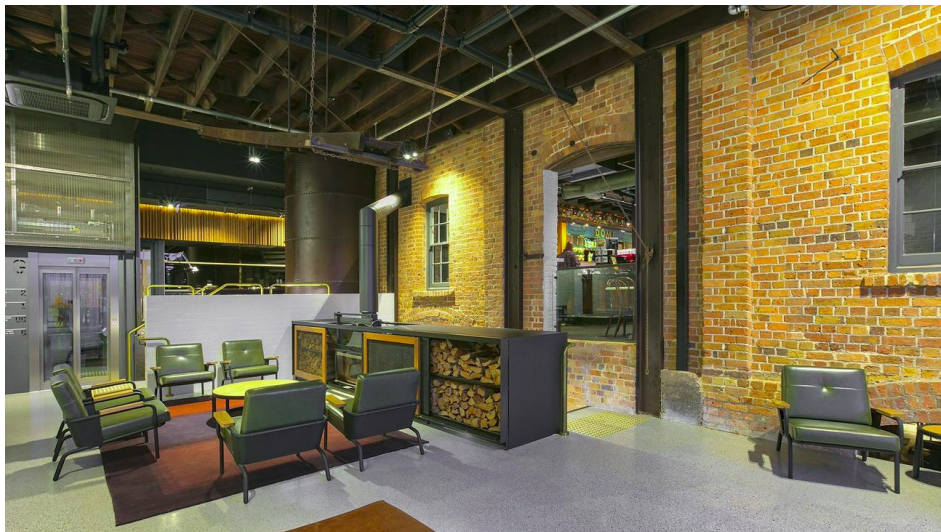


As the restoration progressed its size and ambition increased, and so too did the scope of my work. The initial restoration guide will be published as a book later this year, as will booklets explaining the milling process, electricity production and the function of the machinery that has been restored and returned to the Mill.

I personally favour oral histories in this type of work and the locals have been keen to talk face to face and share their experiences. Social media has also played an important role in my research. Regular updates on Dome's Facebook have been a key source of information during this renovation journey. As more of a 'traditional' historian I've found this source a challenge - although ultimately rewarding - as these interactions have provided comments along the lines of "My Dad was..." or "We used to..." and precipitated a nearly overwhelming number of leads. I've also really enjoyed seeing the photos that have been uploaded, taken straight from dusty family albums.

One highlight of the research period was putting together a stall at the Katanning Agricultural Show, where my display of photos and documents from the Mill's heyday proved to be more of an attraction than I had imagined. I spent the day listening to stories of life in and around the Mill; it was then the penny dropped and I realised how important the Mill is to the town and how the entire community is connected to it in one way or another.

Because of this positive engagement, I organised a Mill Memories Day with the assistance of the Katanning Historical Society. Locals were invited to come along and share their stories. It was especially interesting to hear the little things that wouldn't otherwise be recorded. One man spoke of hunting pigeons in the grain silo's roof; another lady remembered the mix of excitement and fear when watching belts and pulleys fly around in an organised tangle.



The hotel foyer looking through to the Dome Cafe, 2018. The delivery chute, which carried wheat from the bagging room to the waiting wagons below, was kept in situ and can be seen above the fireplace. Photographer: Barry Williams.

When restoration began, Dome had to consider local concerns about the work. With such strong emotional ties to their past the people of Katanning were initially reluctant for any changes to be made; they worried the redevelopment would not be respectful or honour their family memories.



Combining oral histories with modern social media engagement has in fact provided a more thorough appreciation for the social and emotional value the mill holds for generations of Katanning residents, and Dome took a proactive approach to the challenge of integrating these community values into the new function of the Mill.

Since the opening, I've been pleased to hear overwhelming praise for the result as well as excitement expressed that the restoration of 'The Premier Roller Mill' has brought life back to the heart of Katanning.

Dominic Walsh MPHA

The Toodyay Butterly Cottages Association Inc:



Butterly Cottages Association, Toodyay. Butterly House (c1870) is to the left. Photo courtesy: Robyn Taylor.

Heeding the call for members to share current projects they are working on, I can report that I have been commissioned to assist Toodyay's Butterly Cottages Association to produce a booklet for the official opening of their new group of homes for the aged. This will take place in mid-July if all goes to plan.

I was provided with over 40 years of Minute books and a large shopping bag of miscellaneous documents and newspaper clippings. A chronology was produced by a member of the local historical society based on publications and local newspaper articles, a great help given the short time-frame to accomplish the job.

Most of my previous work has been in the heritage field so this project is a refreshing change, and an opportunity to learn more about the people in my local town.

A salient demographic statistic is that Toodyay has the highest percentage in regional WA of people of post retirement age. It's not just that Toodyay's established inhabitants are aging but many people choose to retire here. They may want a tree-change, or to live in a peaceful rural environment, but still be close enough to the city's attractions and essential services, in particular medical ones. What was missing from the town were managed homes when independent living was no longer an option.



In 1976 a group of locals met to discuss the need for homes for the elderly and frail who didn't want to leave the district and lose those personal connections that had been built up over decades or a lifetime. At the group's inaugural meeting in September 1976, an executive and committee was formed. They decided to call themselves the Toodyay Homes for the Aged Incorporated with two aims: to raise funds and to liaise with the Shire to find a suitable site. Membership was set at a \$1, and at its October meeting the Treasurer reported they had a credit balance of \$29 in the bank. A Constitution was prepared, and investigations into other rural based homes for the aged was suggested.

These were small, but momentous beginnings. The Minute books reveal the hours of work by dedicated people who already led busy lives and were involved in any number of clubs and volunteer organisations that make up a country town. This meant when it came to fund raising, a large part of the community, including service organisations and the district school, assisted. The Op Shop was, and continues to be, a consistent and substantial contributor. The committee organised its own fundraising initiatives – street stalls, morning teas, raffles and catering at the races. Every bit helped.

While the bank balance grew, the Minutes reveal the frustrations of finding a site which met with the Shire's approval, and that of the Department of Social Security, a source of future funding. Existing buildings and parcels of land were found unsuitable.

Establishing homes for the aged is no simple matter. Infirmities have to be considered regarding safe and easy access and appropriate interior design and furnishing. It wasn't long before the local doctor and a nurse were co-opted onto the committee.

When it was announced in 1979 that Miss Katherine Butterly had offered her old home for purchase by the Shire the relief was palpable. The land, just under an acre, was acquired in June 1980. It was relatively flat and within walking distance of the central shopping precinct.

The proviso was Miss Butterly would be given a cottage to live in at no charge. The Shire then leased the land and house to the Toodyay Homes for the Aged. In 1990, in honour of Miss Butterly, who had lived there for 76 years, they changed the name to Toodyay Butterly Cottages Association. The c1870 restored heritage-listed house remains but for the present its future is undecided.

In 1981 the first of three units were completed on the Harper Road site, followed in 1988 by another four units, then two more in 2005. Another three units had been constructed in 1996 on land donated by Mrs Mavis Crosby in the main street. On her request they were named 'Ashby-on-Avon'. The Avon River runs through the town. These were joint projects between Homeswest and the Association.

A decade on, in partnership with the Shire and funding from Royalties for Regions, the Association undertook to build nine new two-bedroom units on lots purchased in Rosedale Street, with the official opening planned for July 2018. When funds become available there will be room for another eight units on the Anzac Terrace frontage.

It is not surprising the Butterly Cottages Association believes it may well be the only volunteer organisation in WA to accomplish such an undertaking so successfully. This owes in no small measure to the involvement of the community and local organisations, such as the Lions, Masonic Lodge, and others, that not only assisted with fundraising but also provided some of the labour and skills needed to establish these furnished cottages in their garden settings.



This success gives pause for thought. Just recently, renowned sociologist Hugh Mackay was interviewed by the ABC about his latest book *Australia Reimagined: Towards a more compassionate, less anxious society*. He talked about the loss of faith in our major institutions, rampant individualism and social fragmentation. He believes we need to look at the health of our local neighbourhoods, how they work and if they work well, whether they can provide lessons for the future. The Butterly Cottages Association is one of the forces for good in our contemporary society.

Dr Robyn Taylor MPHA

State Heritage Office 2018 Regional Conference - 'Sacred Heritage':



Father Robert Cross (center) discussing the interior of St Francis Xavier Cathedral. Photo courtesy: Prue Griffin.

The annual conference organised by the State Heritage Office was this year held in Geraldton at the scenically located Geraldton Multipurpose Centre which has expansive views of the Geraldton Port. The conference venue was well suited to the attendance of approximately 80 delegates and the event was well organised and ran smoothly, at least from the view of this delegate there seemed to be no hiccups. Master of Ceremonies, Richard Offen, kept the program on track and provided commentary from his wealth of experience as the former Executive Director of Heritage Perth.

Before and after the conference, opportunities were available to attend a stone repair workshop at Greenough historic hamlet and, for the energetic, the Camino San Francisco Walk took place from 6 to 8 April.

Delegates had a diversity of backgrounds and experience, and the conference organisers encouraged informal catch ups and discussions between presentations.

The conference program explored a range of topics associated with 'Sacred Heritage'. Presentations ranged from the practical to the theoretical, and included exploration of Aboriginal and historic sacred places, artefacts and practices. Intangible heritage was an area which came to the forefront of discussion in a number of presentations and discussions.



The presentations were engaging and informative, and it would be difficult to highlight some and not others. From a personal view I found the presentation by architect Ian Hamilton, from Arcuate Architecture in Adelaide, on the regeneration of places of faith in a community challenging and relevant to my professional work.

References to Aboriginal heritage were common across many presentations. It was central to presentations, such as Aidan Ash from the Department of Planning, Land and Heritage who discussed the assessment process under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*. While Patrick Churnside from the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee, and Godfrey Simpson from the Budyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation, gave more personal accounts of the relationships between land, culture, spirituality and community. How these relationships and meanings are presented and understood within a wider community continues to be a challenge.

Other presentations demonstrated how Aboriginal sacred places and spirituality are one strand of complex stories. The history of New Norcia, presented by Father John Herbert, and Gary Martin's discussion of the contested history of Bootenal Spring, near Greenough (which unfortunately I did not attend) are good examples of how interpretation of sacred spaces can build better understanding in communities.

I thoroughly enjoyed the organised site visits with the benefit of knowledgeable and generous presenters. The opportunity to explore the Masonic Lodge in Geraldton was an unexpected pleasure.

Overall I found the conference to be valuable and informative and the staff from the City of Greater Geraldton and the State Heritage Office provided a warm welcome. Not sure which of these was responsible for the sunshine but it was a delight after the grey days in Perth.

Prue Griffin APHA

History Slam 2017:



Helen Munt presenting the awards to the winners - Stephen O'Brien (left) and Bernard Carney (right).
Photo courtesy: Helen Munt.



Three minutes is not a lot of time when you are trying to cram in a history lesson. Yet that was the challenge for the historians gathering at the secretive looking bar and performance spot 'Downstairs' at the Maj one sleepy Sunday afternoon last October. It was Perth's second annual History Slam, hosted by the PHA for the Heritage Days festival. The Slam was quite an exciting affair. The bar was full of people, buzzing with anticipation for 'a fast and furious storytelling forum for anyone who does history!' President Helen Munt hosted the event. She arrived in sparkly clothes and with great enthusiasm, immediately creating a fun and relaxed atmosphere.

There were ten contestants, all professional historians, and each had a mere three minutes to perform. The contestants gave it their best shot, with Helen's threat of interrupting them with cymbals hanging over their heads. "Doing it in three minutes, which is a bit of a challenge, gives people an opportunity to really think about their subject," said contestant Stephen O'Brien. Malcolm Traill laughed about his own performance, saying "it almost fitted into three minutes, it should have, but didn't quite..." He also said that "last year was longer, this is better. It's snappier. There were less participants and it moved quicker." The time constraints on the performances seemed to work out for the best, at the very least it led to great amusement for the audience.

Each historian had a different angle for their performance, and their own way of entertaining the crowd. "It's summer in Albany, so everyone's wearing jumpers," was a winning line for Malcolm before the clashing of cymbals interrupted him. There were some more serious performances, such as the resounding poetic reading given by Andrew Turk. Aileen Marwung Walsh also held the audience enraptured during her passionate poem 'Noongar names - what do they mean?'

The Slam included some great storytelling from those such as Christine Choo who talked about Filipinos fleeing civil war and escaping to Australia. Bernard Carney had the audience in awed silence during the only musical performance of the afternoon, a song about how 'a rusty piece of cable changed the course of World War II.' "I've never heard history put to music in such a fantastic way before", said audience member Pamela Statham Drew.

Helen was a spirited announcer; her introduction for Stephen O'Brien advised: "you're so old now you must check your own diaries to look up history". This elicited laughter from the crowd, which continued throughout Stephen's comedic poem called 'We are but a small local museum'. Helen also had a comment for Neville Green, telling the audience "when asked if he had any requirements Neville said 'a brick to stand on, and orchestrated applause.'"

The History Slam was a fast paced and innovative way to make history accessible and enjoyable for the public. As Malcolm said: "Everyone knows about history, but we lose people between school and the age of sixty" "[History Slams] are short and sharp; people don't want to read a whole book or a thesis." The 2017 History Slam was an obvious success and hopefully will become a much-loved annual event in Perth.

Caitlin Scott

Caitlin is a third year Professional Writing and Publishing student at Curtin University. She has recently started a freelance editing and writing business, and hopes to work in the publishing industry or in journalism once she graduates this year. In the meantime Caitlin volunteers her services at the Royal WA Historical Society and was delighted to attend her first History Slam.



News from the State Records Office - 2018 Margaret Medcalf Award for Excellence in Referencing and Research:



The Hon. David Templeman, Minister for Local Government, Heritage, Culture and the Arts (left) and Ms Cathrin Cassarchis, State Archivist (centre) with nominees and winners' representatives. Photo courtesy: Helen Munt.

I was fortunate to be able to attend the presentation of this year's Margaret Medcalf Award held recently at the State Library Theatre. Although the event itself was quite modest, there was good representation from associated and affiliated organisations, and individuals - including the nominees and past recipients of the award.

State Archivist Ms Cathrin Cassarchis spoke eloquently in her welcome address, reinforcing the importance of the award both in acknowledging the work of those nominated and affirming the work of the SRO: its compliance and management, and how it is responding to the needs of its users and society more broadly particularly in light of the growing demand for the digitisation of collections. Cathrin reminded us of the importance of keeping archives: because they are an authentic record of the past which still speak to contemporary society and contain decisions from yesterday that still affect us today. The award also pays a nod to the special people – such as Margaret Medcalf as well as Chris Coggin – who were instrumental in developing our West Australian archives with passion and commitment. With many impressed by Cathrin's address, I believe that it will be put onto the SRO website and I would encourage you all to seek it out.

The Hon. David Templeman, MLA, Minister for Local Government, Heritage, Culture and the Arts who presented the award also spoke of the importance of archives and the SRO; how intrinsic they are to the character and heritage of Western Australia and in helping to keep government and business accountable. Poignantly both Cathrin and Minister Templeman alluded to the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child *Sexual Abuse* and the significant part the SRO played in that.

The 10 works nominated for this year's award represented a broad and varied range of the application and use of archives, and in turn demonstrated the richness of the collection held by the SRO. As well as looking for excellence in referencing, the judges also assessed the submissions in relation to the level of originality, quality and appeal. Those nominated were:

Jessica Barratt

Dr Shane Burke

Lorraine Clarke and Cherie Strickland

Dr W. J. (Bill) Edgar



Caroline Ingram
Dr Michelle McKeough
Isa Menzies
Gavan O'Connor
Dr Joanna Sassoon
Dr Leigh Straw

The quality of the submissions was attested by the fact that there were 2 winners this year:

Dr Joanna Sassoon, *Agents of Empire. How E.L. Mitchell's photographs shaped Australia* [Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2017]

Dr Leigh Straw, *After the War: Returned Soldiers and the Mental and Physical Scars of World War 1* [UWAP, 2017]

Unfortunately it was not only Margaret Medcalf who was unable to attend the awards ceremony (the first time in its history she was not there) but neither winner could make it. However, it was pleasing to note PHA has been fortunate to have had engagement with both winners; with Leigh talking on her book at our 2017 end of year function and Joanna participating in last year's History Slam, and with both publications reviewed in past newsletters. It was also delightful to have had one of our own members, Dr Michelle McKeough, included in the nominations for her work on the bubonic plague in Fremantle from 1900-1904.

Congratulations to the winners, the nominees and to the State Records Office on a fine and worthy event.

Helen Munt APHA
President

News from the State Library:

Forthcoming events and exhibitions

World Track Laying Record – The Nook (May 8 to July 15) This display, presented in collaboration with the WA Museum, is a celebration of the contributions of Thursday Islander track workers to building the Pilbara railway network. Specifically, the display looks at how Thursday Islander workers helped set the world record for track laying in 1968 in building the Mt Newman railway. The record was achieved amidst the heat and isolation of the Pilbara. It explores camp life and the camaraderie that developed as a community worked to retain their identity while being separated from their land, islands, and families.

See My Hat – Story Place Gallery (10 April – 11 July) Featuring photographs and picture books from the Library's collections, this exhibition is designed especially for children and their families. Dress hats, uniform hats, military hats and fancy dress hats are some of the many millinery styles to explore. Children and their families have the opportunity to make a hat and share a picture book together.

Disrupted Festival of Ideas – Ground Floor Discovery Lounge (Saturday July 28) The annual Disrupted festival will take place on Saturday 28 July. In 2018, the theme is disruption and technology with discussions and workshops with creative thinkers exploring this theme. The full program is forthcoming.



Un/nature - Ground Floor Discovery Lounge (August 9 -23 September 2018) *Un/nature* is a photographic exhibition exploring Richard Woldendorp's photographs held by the State Library of Western Australia. The exhibition exposes the diversity of Woldendorp's photographic documentation of the WA landscape, both natural and cultural. Unnature is an obsolete word that means to change the nature of, or to invest with a different or contrary nature. Woldendorp's images reflect the way in which the Western Australian landscape has been made or remade over time.

Projects

From Another View – Minderoo Foundation partnership project In January 2018, State Library staff began work on *From Another View* in partnership with Minderoo Foundation. This project seeks to reinterpret the 1874 trek from Geraldton to Adelaide by explorer and later Western Australian Premier, Sir John Forrest. The project explores the historic trek from different creative and community perspectives through artworks, regional displays, public programs, educational resources and a major exhibition at the State Library in 2019. It runs from January 2018 to August 2019 and involves three major components: community engagement; artistic engagement; and research. The State Library is using its Storylines program and archive as a tool for community engagement to explore First Peoples' connections to the lands travelled by Forrest and his team in 1874. The four main Aboriginal communities in the Yamatji and Western Desert areas that are the focal points for community engagement are Geraldton, Wiluna, Laverton and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (from Warburton to Wingellina).

Over the past few weeks, State Library staff have been out in the field from Geraldton to Laverton conducting Storylines workshops and sharing information about the historic trek. Visit the *From Another View* State Library blog to keep track of the team's progress: [https:// fromanotherview.blog/](https://fromanotherview.blog/)

Sharing our Diverse Heritage – partnership project with Office of Multicultural Interests In 2017, OMI and SLWA OMI began a partnership project *Sharing our Diverse Heritage* to provide language teachers with 'authentic' locally produced community language heritage materials and make them digitally available to community language teachers.

The project's aims are to:

- Assist with the collection, preservation and promotion of non-English language materials produced in Western Australia that represent and tell the stories of local communities;
- Increase engagement with and public awareness of Western Australia's diverse multicultural history;
- Help celebrate language learning as a vehicle to promote social cohesion, increased intercultural understanding and improved language and literacy skills among citizens
- Celebrate the learning of all languages, whether it is in mainstream school programs, community language schools or tertiary institutions.
- Promote and develop the use of libraries and their resources by the community.

The twelve-month project includes the following activities to be undertaken by SLWA:

1. Identification, collection and processing (description, conservation and reformatting) of heritage materials that document the lives and stories of Asian and European migrants in Western Australia;
2. Liaison and consultation with community language schools and community organisations to identify and select suitable materials for digitisation;
3. Development of lesson plans and education material using the identified and digitised multi-lingual resources;
4. Promotion of the resources to the target community language and school sector language teachers during Languages week 2018.



Collecting the West Dr Denise Cook, a post-Doctoral Fellow on the Collecting the West ARC funded project, is undertaking collections research to update and expand on *Katijin*, the excellent guide to SLWA Indigenous Collections by Heather Campbell, produced with Friends of Battye Library support in 2003.

Denise will be working on focused case studies to help map key collections and the changing approach to how Aboriginal documentary heritage has been collected by the State Library over time.

WA Women Do visit the State Library's online celebration of 183 WA women at <https://slwa.wa.gov.au/wawomen/>

Selected recent acquisitions

Sam Lovell collection - Private Archives. This collection provides an important visual record of recent history in the Kimberley as well as Sam's own extraordinary life. Sam (b1933) was removed from his family and sent to Moola Bulla station for "half-caste" kids near Halls Creek when he was just four years old. He became a boundary rider and stockman and worked on cattle stations all along the Gibb River Road. During this time Sam started taking photographs with an old box camera, documenting the cattle industry, mustering camps, the landscape, and the people he met. He became known as "Mr Kimberley" and his deep knowledge of the country served him well when he started running bush tours with his wife in the 1980s. Sam is also an acclaimed musician who plays at Tamworth Music Festival each year. In 2003 Sam was awarded an OBE for his services in developing indigenous tourism. Sam Lovell is a high profile Western Australian who has made an enormous contribution to the state and to indigenous affairs more nationally, and his personal archive of photographs will be a highly significant addition to the pictorial collection as well as to *Storylines*.

Paul Cole album - Pictorial collection. The Palace Hotel photograph album, leather embossed with 'The Palace Hotel 1895' on the front, containing 18 large colour photographs (mostly by Whitfield-King, also Bevan Williams) taken to promote the hotel's function rooms, 1970s. The photographs provide an important visual record of the hotel's architectural features, décor and furnishings, table settings, staff uniforms, and wedding fashions of the time. The album is accompanied by loose photos; ephemeral items such as hotel postcards and letterheads, invitations, coasters, and a matchbook; and newspaper clippings relating to the closure of the hotel and the campaign to save the building from being totally demolished and replaced by a modern office building.

Samantha and Mathew Kelley - Film archive. Secret Fleets camera, archive and research tapes.

Toodyay Historical Society - Oral History. Interviews and associated documents related to the Toodyay Bushfire Project.

Anglican Diocesan records - Private Archives. Registers of the Anglican Diocese.

Daw family archives - donated by Ronda Jamieson. Various miscellaneous papers and correspondence of historical interest.

John Bennett letter - Private Archives (Purchase). Written in Fremantle Prison to Robert Rowles, Wongamine near Northam, 10 May 1899, Bennett thanks Mr Rowles (Bob) for his kindness in writing previously and asks if Mr Rowles could raise seven or eight pounds to assist him to engage a lawyer who can attest to his 'antecedents and character' to a jury. His arrest had taken place at Malcolm on 10 April 1899. He says that Dan Horan at Murrin Murrin knows the details if Mr Rowles would care to write to him. The letter is an interesting artifact and although it raises more questions than it answers, it will be of interest to those researching the families or districts involved, or crime and imprisonment in Western Australia at the turn of the twentieth century.



Mark Wilson artworks (Purchase). Seven original illustrations for the book *Stranded*, by illustrator Mark Wilson, plus preliminary drawings, reference photographs and notes. *Stranded*, written by Jan Ramage and illustrated by Mark Wilson, is based on two real-world rescues of stranded whales near Busselton, Western Australia.

Western Australian postcards, 1910-1916 (Purchase). Two Western Australian postcards sold as a single lot. The first is political advertising for John Forrest and Commonwealth Liberal Party Senate candidates for the 1910 Federal elections. The second commemorates the opening of the Soldiers' Institute, which opened on St George's Terrace in October 1916.

Gary Peters photographs - Pictorial collection. Digital images of the aftermath of a massive fire at Inglewood Bunnings store on the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Beaufort Street, 26 February 2018.

Eastern Goldfields Historical Society Inc - Private Archives. Letter – WA Jewish Ex-Servicemen & Women's Association; Photographs of Perth buildings.

This piece was previously published in the Friends of Battye Library (Inc.) Newsletter, No. 162, July 2018. It is reprinted here with permission from Friends of Battye Library Newsletter Editor Jennie Carter.

News from the History Council President Jenny Gregory:

This autumn our key focus has been advocating on issues of concern to members. These have included the possible sale of Landgate, the Eastern Guruma and the protection of Ngajanha Marnta (or Spear Hill), Western Australian Births, Deaths and Marriages Records, and fees at the new WA Museum

Possible Sale of Landgate

It has been reported in the media that the Government is considering the possible sale of Landgate. On behalf of the History Council and with the assistance of Neil Foley and Jim Cameron, I have written to the Treasurer expressing our concern about the impact of any such sale on the huge collection of important historical records of which Landgate is the custodian. A number of issues are raised by this matter.

Historical importance of land records

The land records held by Landgate are of major importance in terms of the history of this state. It holds irreplaceable State archives of historic titles, maps, charts, field books, survey plans and a wide range of other historic records dating back to European colonisation. These records are widely used by academic and professional historians and are also indispensable for genealogists, as well as those in the business of land and real estate development.

Records detailing changes in land tenure, for example, are essential to understand the development of the city, suburbs, country towns and properties throughout the state, as well as agriculture and mining. These historic records held by Landgate document the shaping of the Western Australian landscape from the beginnings of its European occupation through the activities of explorers and surveyors and changes in government policies regarding land tenure, as well as the control of the land surface through police and local government districts and constantly changing electoral boundaries. All mining activity until the creation of the Mines Department in the 1890s was documented and regulated by the Lands Department along with forestry and fishing.



The History Council is concerned that, if these records are sold into private hands, they will not be adequately protected and preserved.

Landgate records and state archives

The 'Historical Records' section of Landgate's webpage shows that a large number of State Archives are held by Landgate. These records should be held by the State Records Office (SRO).

This has implications for search costs. Whilst some of the records held by Landgate have been transferred to SRO and are freely available for the public to use for research purposes, a significant proportion, despite their classification as State Archives, are not available for research in the SRO. Rather, to access these records, a researcher has to pay a fee to Landgate.

This is contrary to the intent of the *State Records Act 2000* and records keeping practice around the world that public archives should be made available for viewing for free by members of the public.

Eastern Guruma and the protection of Ngajanha Marnta (or Spear Hill)

Thanks to the hard work of a working party led by Cindy Solonec and comprised of Robin Barrington, Andrea Gaynor, Peter Gifford and myself, the History Council has made an important submission in support of the Eastern Guruma people under section 10 of the Commonwealth *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* for the protection of Ngajanha Marnta (or Spear Hill), south of Tom Price.

We are concerned that 23,000 year-old sites will be desecrated and destroyed with the permission of the Western Australian government. As members of Australia's first peoples the Eastern Guruma's belief systems date back thousands of years. The archaeological records of these beliefs and practices are part of Western Australia's history and must be protected. We have expressed concern that, according to the Eastern Guruma, the Fortescue Mining Group (FMG) have not consulted properly with the people and their report outlining the need to protect Ngajanha Marnta has been ignored.

The Eastern Guruma people are seeking protection from desecration of an area known as Ngajanha Marnta, in the east Pilbara. At least fifty sites below the hill that are culturally significant and sensitive are in danger of being destroyed. On the hill itself, which is a registered site, is unique spear wood that is harvested for ceremonial purposes—a wood that is not found anywhere else. The only access to the spear wood is from the western side of the hill, where FMG propose to build a railway line.

The State Government under s.18 of the *Western Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* has given approval to FMG to build a railway line through an area that hosts the sites. These sites, that are religiously connected to Ngajanha Marnta, are in the valley below in close proximity to the hill.

FMG intends to build a rail corridor from their new mine 'Frederick' at Eliwana Mine development to their existing railway line that runs between their Solomon mine and Port Hedland. The railway will be approximately 120 km and will have supporting infrastructure that includes haul roads and associated geotechnical investigations. The proposed rail line is along the actual pathway that Eastern Guruma people have followed for thousands of years, and it would be destroyed.



The History Council supports the Eastern Guruma in seeking protection of the area by asking that the Federal Minister overturn the state's decision. Through Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation (WGAC) the Eastern Guruma have asked that FMG realign their proposed railway to protect the Ngajanha Maarnta sites and detour around the valley. A realignment plan would affect about 3 kilometres of the railway. They believe that there need be no losers in this mining venture, which they support.

Births, Deaths and Marriages Records

We were very pleased to learn from the 2018-19 WA State Government budget papers that

'The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages is preparing amendments to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998. These amendments will improve change of name processes and strengthen identification and enrolment processes, maximising Western Australia's contribution to the national identity management and security agenda.'

(<https://www.ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au/2018-19/budget-papers/bp2/2018-19-wa-state-budget-bp2-vol2.pdf> p.347)

We note that the Department of Justice's Annual Report for 2016-17 states that the key performance indicator for the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages is to ensure that Western Australian birth, death and marriage certificates are accurate and accessible (p.111). But the key effectiveness indicators (percentage of certificates of birth, death or marriage issued within two days; extent to which births, deaths and marriages source information is recorded error free) do not address many of the issues which concern historians and other researchers; particularly limitations on public access to historical information and the redaction of information on certificates.

Limitations on public access on the historical registers of births, deaths and marriages.

The History Council has long advocated, mainly thanks to the work of Neil Foley, that these records are state archives and should be treated as such. Copies should be open to the general public for viewing and research free of cost in the State Records Office once they reach an appropriate age. The History Council's advocacy position is that the Government should

- amend the Births, Deaths and Marriages Act 1998 so that access to the births, deaths and marriage Registers of this State are brought in line with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 1992 and the State Records Act 2000;
- provide access to family history information in accordance with the State Records Act 2000, if not already in place.

We are very pleased that the Registrar now offers free online historic index searching of births (1841-1932), deaths (1841-1971) and marriages (1841 to 1936). But this only provides basic information such as name, registration district, number and date.

If you place an order for a certificate, a fee (\$35 or \$49 if less 75 years old) is required, an identification or certification is required and access conditions apply if a birth occurred less than 100 years ago, death less than 30 years ago, and marriage less than 75 years ago. An uncertified copy for family history purposes costs \$20.

Redaction of words and information

For a time, images of historic certificates were provided on line by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. However, these no longer appear to be available.

In a recent incident, an online search provided an image of a handwritten death certificate of a person who died in 1915. It included the information that they were Aboriginal. When the descendant received the certified copy of the certificate they had ordered and paid for, the word 'Aboriginal' had been redacted. It had been whited out.



This incident has recently received considerable publicity: on ABC News (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-17/aboriginal-term-deemed-offensive-births-deaths-marriages/9753430>, 17 May 2018), and is soon to be aired by the BBC World Service. The matter has also attracted a great deal of interest, surprise, anger and dismay on several Facebook sites, including the History Council of Western Australia's Facebook site.

The Registrar's action was made possible by the provisions of Section 57(2) of the *Western Australian Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998*:

S57(2) If, in the Registrar's opinion, a word or expression appearing on an entry in the Register is, or may be regarded as, offensive, the Registrar may issue a certificate under subsection (1)(a) without including the word or expression.

Although all Australian state and territory Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Acts provide the Registrar with power to correct the register, none, except the Western Australian and the Northern Territory Acts, provide the Registrar with the power to redact a word or expression on an entry if deemed 'offensive'.

It is a matter of grave concern that the WA Act permits the Registrar to make changes to a certificate if, in their opinion, a word is 'offensive'. Such a decision is simply a 'matter of opinion'.

The main concern of our members and historians across Australia is the redaction of information relating to Aboriginality as in the recent incident cited above. There is nothing offensive about the word 'Aboriginal'. Indeed, though once hidden, it is a source of pride for most people of Aboriginal descent today.

The Registrar has also been redacting words like 'Abo', 'black fella', 'half-caste', 'native'. They are 'offensive' to many Aboriginal people, as they reflect past attitudes that belittled and demeaned Aboriginal people. But these were words regularly used to describe Aboriginal people in the past and are still used by some people today.

By redacting words and expressions, the Registrar is tampering with history—making 'fake histories'. One could go so far as to suggest that he is white-washing black history. This is out of step with current attitudes. It is also unnecessary because information about Aboriginal ancestry is available from other sources, e.g. Church of England marriage certificates and letters by Aboriginal people to and from Native Welfare requesting permission to marry. Though this information is more complex to research, it is publicly available.

The Registrar's attitude to Aboriginal ancestry seems similar to past attitudes about convict ancestry. Between 1948 and 1958, under the Australian Joint Copying Project (<https://www.nla.gov.au/microform-australian-joint-copying-project>), the British Government microfilmed their Australian colonial records and these were given to State Governments. However, despite the availability of these and convict records already held by the WA State Records Office permission to access these records was refused because they were considered too sensitive. At that time to have a convict in your ancestry was considered shameful and, in Rica Erickson's words, 'best forgotten'.

It was not until the mid-1970s, particularly with the approach of the Sesquicentenary of Western Australia's foundation, when there was a burgeoning interest in genealogy, that the convict records were gradually made available. The Bond volume of the *Dictionary of Western Australians* was published in 1979 and is now online thanks to the work of the Friends of Battye Library. Now to have a convict in one's ancestry is a matter of great pride to many Australians because it links them to the early years of the British colonization and settlement of Australia.



This sense of connection to the land applies much more strongly to people of Aboriginal descent. Their connection to the land goes back many generations, with archaeological evidence showing that they have occupied Western Australia for at least 60,000 years.

On behalf of the History Council, I have written to the Attorney-General, with copies to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, on these matters noting that the redrafting of the Act provides an ideal opportunity for changes to be made. I know that many of our members share our concerns and urge them to take advantage of the great opportunity to generate change that the redrafting of the Act presents and make representations to the Attorney-General.

WA Museum and Entry Fees

We greatly regret the decision by the State Government to charge entry fees to the new Museum. While we note that children will have free entry and that concession holders will have a fee reduction from \$20 to \$15, we are concerned that the fee will put many people off going to the museum. Visitor numbers to the Maritime Museum in Fremantle have fallen since fees were introduced and it is likely that the same will occur at the new museum once initial interest has subsided after its opening in 2020. Imagine if the British Museum charged fees.

This piece was previously published in the History Council of WA Newsletter, Vol. 14, Issue 2, Autumn 2018. It is reprinted here with permission from History Council President Jenny Gregory.

Reflecting on historical fiction:



Dustfall by Michelle Johnston. UWAP, February 2018. RRP \$26.99.

Reading and reviewing works of historical fiction is a tricky business for this historian, and perhaps for most of us. 'Taking a spade to the proverbial soufflé' is how one historian has described it. Faced with historical novels, historians have often been judged too critical – condescending towards their authors, overly protective of our patch, and nit-picking in hunting out historical inaccuracies; even resentful of the popularity of the fictional genre. Scott's fictional historian and pedant Dryasdust is well-recognised, enough to have entered the US OED.

Think of the controversy that raged when Hilary Mantel published the acclaimed *Wolf Hall* (2009) and won her first Man Booker, upending the dominant historical interpretation of Thomas Cromwell and turning him into an attractive figure – a thinking, feeling, fascinating man, something of a modern hero. In the process Thomas More was transformed into a villain.



For some Tudor historians this was simply wrong, misrepresenting the surviving evidence. In Australia Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) drew strong criticism from historians Inga Glendinnen and Mark McKenna for blurring the distinction between history and fiction. They warned of the dangers inherent for readers in mistaking a fictional past for a historical past, indeed in privileging the former over the latter. Grenville responded that her work was not history but fiction 'based on history'. 'I drew on these historical sources loosely as a starting point for the work of the imagination'. Her many readers were overwhelmingly positive in their responses.

So we historians have generated a bad press: judged as narrow-minded and trapped in various outdated beliefs — that facts speak for themselves, that objectivity is essential, that a single truth can be found if research is sufficiently painstaking. Such beliefs do not fit our postmodern age — truth has become truths and the author's (and reader's) identity and point of view are celebrated and placed front-and-centre in representations of present and past. We are said to be all storytellers now. Thus the line between history and fiction has blurred and fictive texts are widely seen as providing sound and insightful access to the past.

Historians have not been immune from this shift. Many are now trying their own hand at historical fiction and even more are welcoming historical novels, plays and movies as valuable contributions to understandings of the past. Simon Schama is one such.

The mindset of historians and historical novelists is not all that divergent. Both strive for what Oxford philosopher R G Collingwood exhorted as the imaginative "re-enactment"; the getting inside an event. Without a grip on evidence, the historical novel is empty fable; without imaginative empathy, history is all bones and no flesh and blood. For some historians, who see their work essentially as the political science of the past, this may sound like a dangerous flirtation with romance. But then there are some who don't mind admitting we were drawn to the subject in the first place precisely because of that romance. (*Financial Times*, 14 February 2015)

British historian Tracey Loughran makes a parallel point in praising Pat Barker's highly regarded *Regeneration* war trilogy (1991, 1993, 1995).

Historical novelists operate in the no man's land between history and fiction, where historians fear to tread. To walk with the dead unfettered by footnotes seems a terrible kind of freedom; this may be why historians persistently return to *Regeneration*, as though it is an itch which can't be scratched.

Loughran was contributing to an interesting special issue of *Reviews in History* (2011) on historical fiction. The review historians who compared works of history and historical fiction are neither condescending to nor dismissive of the fiction. Several conclude that the best historical fiction captures readers' imagination by bringing subjects from the past to life, imbuing them with feelings and imagination. Fiction can reach a wider audience than history and serve a valuable role in introducing the past to the reading public. Perhaps there is a symbiosis, Loughlen suggests.

Novelists like Barker feed academic history, and history in turn feeds back into historical fiction. They are not in competition with each other, but locked in a relationship which is often satisfying but which sometimes chafes.

My reflections on this potentially fruitful but sometimes chafing relationship between history and historical fiction have been triggered by a suggestion that, as an historian who has researched and written on mining history and specifically on Wittenoom's blue asbestos industry, I might like to look at a new work of historical fiction — Michelle Johnston's *Dustfall* (UWAP, 2018).



Dustfall is set primarily in Wittenoom and tells two separate stories in alternating chapters. Both concern young medical practitioners – Raymond and Lou – each of them escaping what they believe to be lethal medical errors they have made. They are anguished souls. Raymond flees England to Wittenoom to become the town's GP in the last weeks of asbestos mining and milling in 1966 while Lou abandons her failing career to hide in the abandoned and degazetted town in 1997. As Miss Rosa, a key character in Raymond's story explains it, 'there's something a little bit wrong with all of us. All who've ended up here, in this place' [p.70].

The Wittenoom created in *Dustfall* is a place of last resort. The love story of Raymond and Miss Rosa as they campaign together against the evil company is high romance couched in richly evocative language and culminating in a consummation where they become one with nature. Lou's story of helping the attractive Dave and trying to ease the last days of his father Giorgio who is dying of mesothelioma ends more sadly in palliative care but father and son are reconciled. In fighting for Wittenoom's victims the two doctors save themselves. The book presents modern hospital medicine as dangerously overstretched, relying too much on science and objectivity and too little on intuition and human caring. In this environment young doctors are damaged if not destroyed. Wittenoom becomes the setting where their end dramas play out and they are redeemed by their human compassion. This I think is the author's central theme and, as such, appeals to readers who share a common human compassion for the suffering of innocent others.

The book's setting, the mining town of Wittenoom, is a real place where blue asbestos (crocidolite) was mined from 1943 to 1966 by Australian Blue Asbestos Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR). The name Wittenoom is now synonymous with suffering and death, an infamous occupational and environmental health disaster for which CSR has been successfully pursued through the courts. The company has been found negligent in its duty of care to its workers and liable for exemplary damages because of its failure to ensure a safe workplace. Its failure was unconscionable and indefensible. This basic story is well known. The author writes that the book is 'inspired by the true history' but that 'much has been modified in the crafting of this novel'. Given that disclaimer, should an historian quibble at the location of the mine gelignite store (which explodes) off the mining lease in the town's residential area or the arrival of a fleet of ambulances in 1960s Pilbara or the curious absence of the Royal Flying Doctor Service from most of the story? I could go on but a novelist has licence to change anything she pleases, so it is misguided of me to labour a litany of wrong facts.

Instead I need to ask — what overall picture of Wittenoom is created by the novelist's story? We have here a story of an evil, bullying, vicious company operating unrestrained to tyrannise its workers, all of whom are complete victims, unable to leave, unable to speak out, coerced, frightened and trapped. It is a story of victims and villains with a flawed hero arriving too late to save the day. Conflict between good and evil with a cast of victims, villains and heroes is a theme common to a great deal of literature and indeed to some histories. In the case of Wittenoom it contains a powerful truth but an almost equally powerful distortion.

Wittenoom was a company town to all intents and purposes but the company's power was not total. Although most workers arrived on either six month or two-year contracts, their average length of stay was only four months. The great majority voted with their feet and left to find a better life elsewhere. They exercised agency, limited as it was. This is not to imply that finding another job was easy for all these workers, many without recognised skills and/or with limited English language. Some were held at Wittenoom by the houses (which were in short supply in postwar years) or by the relatively good money to be earned through very hard underground work paid by piece rates. While power was unequally distributed in the town the workers were not simply victims. The company was always desperately recruiting and never had an adequate workforce. It had to hold at bay the Mines Dept and an increasingly critical Public Health Dept.



Wittenoom's history is more complex than a simple tale of villains and victims. None of this seeks to excuse the company that was incompetent and intransigent. That most of Wittenoom's mine management, working and living in the gorge immersed in dust, died of asbestos related diseases is an irony in a tragic story.

Further, it is not correct to imply that even in the ancient world Pliny knew all about asbestos related diseases and therefore the whole thing was some sort of giant conspiracy. Knowledge of asbestos related diseases (notably asbestosis and mesothelioma) grew across the lifetime of the mine. While mesothelioma was not diagnosed and named until 1960, the mining industry had been living with the pneumoconioses, of which asbestosis was just one, for a long time. The industry believed that some level of dust and consequent fibrosis was an inevitable part of mining. Mining's history and geography are crucial contexts here.

These historian's concerns about the novel would be of no consequence if its readers were clear that that they are entering a fictional Wittenoom world; however even a quick scan of the internet shows that this is not many readers' understanding. They comment that the book is not 'mere fiction', it is 'a chapter from Australia's mining history' and so on. A vividly created fictional world presents itself to readers as a complete entity, a past brought to life. Its narrative draws readers in and reads as a convincing portrayal of the historical past. Its emotional completeness militates against alternative readings, undercutting the reader's ability to question and understand the past as complex and open to various interpretations. Of course, a well-crafted historical text will capture its readers in the same way, but available evidence restricts the world created by the historian whereas there are no bounds on the novelist. Perhaps what we need is more aware and questioning readers as historical fiction becomes an ever more prolific and popular genre?

Dr Lenore Layman MPHA

Book Note - *A White Hot Flame* - Mary Montgomerie Bennett - Author, Educator, Activist for Indigenous Justice:



***A White Hot Flame: Mary Montgomerie Bennett - Author, Educator, Activist for Indigenous Justice* by Sue Taffe. Monash University Publishing, March 2018. RRP \$34.95.**

Sue Taffe provides a fascinating account of the life and development of Mary Bennett, whose working life spanned four decades from the late 1920s until 1961 when she died aged 80 years, in Kalgoorlie. Drawing on previously unexplored sources, including Mary's childhood, the author provides a nuanced understanding of an idealist and pragmatist, examining



the motivations for her strong advocacy for justice for Aboriginal Australians. The biography is a picture of a single minded determined woman who deserves to be better known, especially in Western Australia, where she spent most of her practical activist life from 1930.

The author was driven to write the biography after investigating Aboriginal rights activists such as Sheila Andrews who were influenced and inspired by Mary Bennett's energy, determination and the "quality of her thinking" about the position of Aboriginal people in Australia who were denied their civil rights and her attempts to remedy the injustice. Mary Bennett's early thinking was first articulated more fully in her book entitled *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* (published in London in 1930). This was inspired by research following her first book, a pioneer history, and biography celebrating the life of her father and pastoralist, Robert Christison and the pastoral station Lammermoor located in North Queensland where she spent some of her childhood. (*Christison of Lammermoor*, published in 1927). Taffe explores the emotional conflict that Mary experienced, being a member of the pastoral squattocracy which had benefitted from the continuing dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands, and the threatened destruction of their way of life.

Taffe argues how, despite her privileged and conservative background, Mary experienced a radical shift and was the first from 1930 to argue a case for Aboriginal people's full humanity to a general audience. The author explores the reasons for the shift while also emphasising how Mary had a unique ability to recognise complexities and interactions involving "the legal, social, political and economic position of Aboriginal Australians and her commitment to work for justice on their behalf" (p.367-8). Mary Bennett called for an "enlightened national conscience" and moral responsibility through action to ensure protection and justice for Aboriginal Australians. She called on Australia to abolish laws that were contrary to justice, the payment of Aboriginal workers and sanctuaries of land where Aboriginal people could have time through education and employment opportunities to adjust to mainstream society, without compromising their cultural and social lives.

Taffe points out how Mary Bennett was ahead of her time in highlighting the position of Aboriginal people in Australia, especially in efforts to shame Australian governments through publication of their breach of the Covenant of the League of Nations; and later the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While she met with fierce resistance the efforts made by her and organisations in the 1930s and 1940s have hitherto been little studied.

Another particular strength of the book is Taffe's research and critical evaluation of the sources in order to explain Mary's motivation for her political advocacy which, as the author points out, was inspired by personal relationships with Aboriginal people, formed in her childhood winters spent on Lammermoor station in North Queensland and later on the eastern goldfields of WA. The strength of her activism and its "sense of urgency" was inspired by her personal relationships such as with her childhood nanny and friend, Wyma, from whom she learned about the Dalleburra people and stories and with whom she maintained contact until Wyma's death in 1926. (Mary wrote a paper on her shortly afterwards). Mary then embarked on her own inquiries, forming relationships with women activists and organisations whom she influenced and from whom she derived inspiration.

The author unpacks how Mary struggled with a sense of guilt from the dissonance and "conspiracy of silence" encountered within her own family and learning of the reality of the ongoing devastating impact of colonialism on Aboriginal lives which she feared would be irreversible unless immediate action was taken. While a product of her times, Christian and gentry background to a significant extent, she understood the interactions between racial prejudice and barriers to the achievement of equal civil rights for Aboriginal people.



Wanting to make an impact, she left London for Western Australia in 1930 driven by a sense of urgency at the destruction of Aboriginal people at the hands of native police and pastoralists with whose agenda they were aligned. Her time at Kunmunya mission in North West Kimberley taught her that Aboriginal people lived for land and family and that keeping children and parents together was important to their well-being and prosperity. This led her to condemn the government's assimilation practices and policies that removed children from their families.

The decade spent as a teacher at Mount Margaret Mission (1932-42) teaching Aboriginal children using modern teaching methods that she researched, gave her the most pleasure. This is where she taught and influenced individuals such as Sadie Canning who was inspired by Mary's teaching and went on to develop a successful career of her own. Mary kept in touch and continued to assist many of their families while remaining estranged from her own family. The individual experiences of Aboriginal families seeking basic rights that other Australians took for granted provided Mary with the evidence that she forwarded to her network of organisations and individuals to campaign for change in government policy.

The book is invaluable not only for those interested in Mary Bennett and her work but in understanding the early 20th century where the increasing call for a national moral conscience paved the way for the later reform, including equal legal rights and status in the 1960s and 1970s.

Dr Ann Hunter MPHA

Items of Interest:

Western Australian History Foundation Grants 2018

The Foundation's grants round this year is scheduled as follows:

Closing date for applications – Friday 3 August

Announcement of grant recipients – Wednesday 7 September

A small number of grants will be made, normally to a maximum of \$10,000 in any one grant.

A project must fall within the Foundation's Objects to be eligible to apply for a grant.

For guidelines and more information, see the Foundation's website: <http://www.wahistoryfoundation.org.au>

The Secretary is available to answer further questions by email.

Lenore Layman [Dr], Secretary, WA History Foundation Inc., layman@westnet.com.au

History Council of WA Annual General Meeting and 15th History Council of WA Annual Lecture

Date: Thursday 23 August 2018

Time: 5.30pm

Venue: Kurrajong Lecture Theatre, old Claremont Teacher's College, UWA Claremont Campus (note - plenty of free parking!)



We are delighted to have as our guest speaker for our annual lecture Alec Coles, Chief Executive Officer, Western Australian Museum. Alec will speak on how the New Museum will build on the past strengths of the WA Museum and what new directions it might take, no doubt including reference to the recent State Government announcement about entry fees to the New Museum. Alec is bound to provide a very erudite and informative presentation, generate a robust discussion and hopefully provide a sneak peek at some images of the New Museum.

The Royal Western Australian Historical Society Inc Annual State History Conference of Affiliated Societies

7th to 9th September 2018

CERVANTES - BUSH TO BEACH

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PO Box 222 Cervantes 6511

39th Australian Garden History Society National Conference - Gardens in Times of Peace and Conflict

AGHS's Southern Highlands branch is hosting the 39th annual national conference of the Australian Garden History Society. Its theme is 'Gardens in Times of Peace and Conflict'.

The conference will be held on Friday 26 to Sunday 28 October 2018 in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, with an optional day of activities on Monday 29 October 2018 and a pre-conference symposium on Thursday 25 October.

Further information about the conference can be found on [the AGHS website](#).

Next Newsletter:

We encourage members to submit articles about their current projects or reviews of recent histories for inclusion in the PHA (WA) Newsletter. Copy for the next newsletter is due in **November 2018** and can be sent to [Lenore Layman](#) or [Kris Bizzaca](#). Calls for submissions will be emailed closer to the date of publication.



PHA (WA) Management Committee 2017 - 2018:

President	Helen Munt
Vice-President	Robyn Taylor
Secretary	Sinead Burt
Treasurer	Prue Griffin
Membership Secretary	Sue Graham-Taylor Dominic Walsh

PHA Representative Sue Graham-Taylor (Delegate), Dominic Walsh (Alternate)

Sub-Committees 2017-2018:

Rules & Incorporation	Helen Munt, Sue Graham-Taylor
Professional Development & Promotions	Helen Munt, Robyn Taylor, Dominic Walsh
Credentials	Sue Graham-Taylor, Robin Chinnery (co-opted)
Commissioned History	Prue Griffin, Robyn Taylor, Sinead Burt
Newsletter & Website	Lenore Layman, Kris Bizzaca

Annual Membership Fees as from 1 July 2014:

Professional Historian	\$85
Professional Historian (Retired)	\$50
Professional Historian (Associate)	\$65
Graduate Historian	\$40
Historical Researcher	\$40
Joining fee	\$30

Further information:

Membership applications, the Rules of the Association, the Register of Consultants, and advice regarding consultancy fees are available on request via info@professionalhistorianswa.org.au.

Members of PHA (WA) adhere to the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards endorsed by the Professional Historians Australia in August 2001.

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OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

To promote the concept of professional history and the status of Members of the Association in the community.
To set and maintain standards of professional practice.
To act in the interest of Members.
To maintain a register of all Members.
To advise Members and prospective clients on desirable terms of employment.
To collect and disseminate information of professional and general interest to Members.
To encourage further professional development by such means as seminars, workshops and publications.
To maintain links with similar organisations.

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