

No. 186



July 2026

FRIENDS OF BATTYE LIBRARY (Inc.) NEWSLETTER

Our July 2026 meeting

Dr Charlie Fox

*The State Hotels Project of the Scaddan Government
in the years 1911 to 1916*



Former State Hotel Gwalia (with dog) c1985. Photographed by Richard Woldendorp
(Battye Library, SLWA, 215959PD)

Tuesday 14 July 2026 at 5.00pm for 5.30pm. See details on page 3.

Objectives

The objectives of the Friends of Battye Library (Inc.) are to assist and promote the interests of the JS Battye Library of West Australian History and the State Records Office, and of those activities of the Library Board of Western Australia concerned with the acquisition, preservation and use of archival and documentary materials.

Patron Miss Margaret Medcalf OAM

Committee (2024-2026)

President	Jennie Carter
Vice President	Vacant
Secretary	Pamela Statham Drew
Treasurer	Nick Drew
Membership Coordinator	Cherie Strickland
Events Coordinator	Helen Mather

Committee members Lorraine Clarke, Steve Errington, Raymond Marks, Michael Nind.

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Views expressed in this *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Friends of Battye Library Committee, the State Library of Western Australia, or the State Records Office.

Our July meeting.

**Tuesday 14 July 2026
Great Southern Room, fourth floor
State Library of Western Australia
at 5pm for 5.30pm**

Our speaker will be Dr Charlie Fox

*The State Hotels Project of the Scaddan Government
in the years 1911 - 1916*

After the meeting, members and guests are very welcome to join us for a meal at a nearby Perth restaurant. Our Treasurer, Nick Drew, will take bookings on the night.

Problem with the stairs?

If any members have difficulty with taking the stairs to the fourth floor, please notify staff on either the ground floor Welcome desk or the Battye Library enquiries station on the third floor for assistance with access to the staff lift to the fourth floor.

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Remaining meeting dates for 2026

8 September (AGM and election of Committee) Kate Gregory –
Maud Sholl Bequest. Researchers-in-Residence: Dean
Chan and Catherine Belcher.

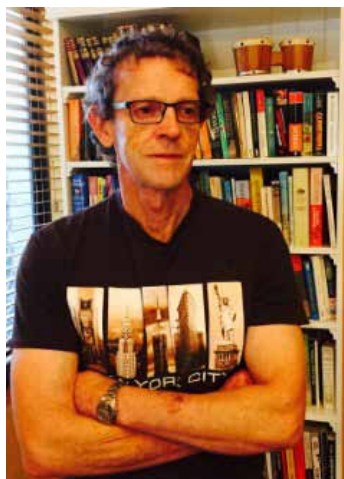
17 November End of year celebration – Jane Lydon – *Australian
Legacies of British Slavery*.



About our speaker and his topic

This project was part of a much wider programme; the State Enterprises Programme which built a range of other industries at the same time.

Charlie Fox was educated at Borden Primary School and Albany High School in the 1960s, then to UWA in the 1960s and 70s. In 1980 he moved to Melbourne, wrote a PhD and taught at Melbourne University before returning to WA in 1989 to teach at UWA; he taught a wide variety of Australian history units and historiography. After serving as Head of Department for a couple of years he retired in 2011. Thereafter Charlie maintained a connection with UWA, supervising several UWA and Notre Dame University theses, and also taught briefly at Notre Dame.



Charlie is a labour historian who has written and edited three books on the history of work and unemployment in Australia and edited a 1996 book on the history of intellectual disability in WA. In 2017 he

was the lead editor and author of the successful book, *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* and for two years ran well attended radical walking tours around Perth and Fremantle until Covid put an end to them. He has written many articles on issues as diverse as social welfare in the Mt Lyell copper mine in Tasmania and Aboriginal people and the Fourteen Powers Referendum of 1944. He has edited the Australian Association for the Study of Labour History, WA Branch journal, *The Western Worker* for several years.

President's Piece

In this issue we pay tribute to the marvellous Wendy Ryan who has left the Friends a generous bequest. Her thoughtfulness will enable special work to be done in furthering the aims of the Friends of Battye Library (Inc). Member and regular contributor to the Newsletter, Julie Martin, has written a tribute to Wendy (see page 6).

We also learned with sadness of the death of Michael Nind, one of our stalwart members, a committee member for several years, historian and author, and a dedicated supporter of the work of the Friends. Michael will be much missed by the Friends, as well as the other organisations to which he generously gave his time and shared his deep knowledge of this State's history (see page 7).

On a much happier note, it is with great pleasure that we received news that long term member, supporter, author of many articles in this *Newsletter*, and our Gem of Time for 2008, Fr Ted Doncaster, was awarded well-deserved recognition in last month's King's Birthday Honours (see page 8).

It is an election year for the Friends and in this issue you will find a nomination form for the Annual General Meeting and election to be held on 8 September this year. Please consider nominating yourself, or someone you would like to see on the committee. I assure you the commitment is not onerous – it is a two-year term and we meet four or five times per year. The work committee members do is vital in supporting the State Library of Western Australia and the State Records Office in the crucial roles they play in collecting, preserving, and making accessible the unique records of Western Australia.

The positions vacant are:

Executive:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Five Committee members:

Designated roles to be filled for three of the five committee members are:

- Membership co-ordinator
- Events Co-ordinator
- Newsletter Editor

plus two ordinary members.



Obituaries

Wendy Irene Ryan (Nee Lawrence) (1948 – 2025)



Wendy's roots go well back in WA – her great great grandfather William Lawrence jumped ship from the American whaler *Florida* in Albany in 1844. William went on to have a successful boat building yard in WA, settled and raised a family here, subsequently dying in 1898 aged 76. [For further information on William see *Maritime Heritage Journal* 2014 pp 14-18].

After attending Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), Wendy became a Library Assistant at the State Library of Western Australia in the late 1960s (Bibliographical Centre and Cataloguing Division, the latter processing Fiction and Junior books). She later studied Library Science at WAIT and returned to the State Library in the early 1980s as a Reference Librarian in the Social Sciences division, leaving the State Library in the early 90s to take up the role of Librarian, Supreme Court of WA. Wendy,

who was known for her bright, brisk manner, excellent research skills and stylish outfits always maintained that Lennie McCall was her role model because of Lennie's sense of style, personality, and abilities.

Wendy married David Ryan, however the couple were subsequently divorced and they had no children. Her great loves were social events, high fashion and good wine. She also loved horses and when living at a property in Millendon, she agisted and stabled them.

Wendy, who was not a member of the Friends, died, aged 77, on



12 Sept 2025 from pancreatic cancer, but must have looked back at her time at the State Library with great affection as she left a generous bequest of \$50,000 to the Friends of Battye Library (Inc).

Vale Wendy and thank you.

Julie Martin



Michael Nind (17th June 1962 – 11th June 2026)

Michael Nind, a stalwart supporter of the Friends, valued committee member, historian, author, and archivist died this month. Despite a long illness, he maintained his connection to and voluntary work for the Friends and several other key organisations. Our heartfelt condolences to his family – former wife, Leanne, son Patrick, and partner, Alma.

Michael was recently honoured with the History Council's Lifetime Achievement Award for 2026, the citation of which is kindly reproduced here.



Photo courtesy Nind family.

The History Council Lifetime Achievement Award to Michael Nind

This Award recognises a career of exceptional and sustained service: to historical societies, to records and archival access, to national representation, and to the cause of making history matter in public life.

Michael Nind has devoted his career to the preservation, promotion, and advancement of history in Western Australia. He began researching and writing Western Australian history in 1978 and has sustained that work ever since: in his own words, advocating for history “for longer than many people have been alive.”

His areas of historical interest encompass local history, transport history, frontier issues, and the development of archives and historical research. Michael's published research is on river transport in WA and Burswood. His working life was in archives and record keeping.

Michael joined the Royal Western Australian Historical Society in 1980, serving on the Society's Council for the past two years. Joining the Friends of the Battye Library in 2020, Michael was on the committee of

that organisation at the time of his death, supporting one of the state's most important repositories of Western Australian documentary heritage.

Within the History Council of Western Australia, Michael has served across multiple executive roles, as Treasurer, and more recently as Vice President. His institutional memory across successive committees has been a stabilising and guiding force for HCWA.

Involved with several other historical groups and committees, Michael has also served as the Royal WA Historical Society delegate to the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, and as a member of the Australian Dictionary of Biography's Western Australian Working Party, contributing to the project of ensuring that Western Australian lives are properly represented in the national biographical record.

His most consequential ongoing contribution has been as the History Council's legally appointed representative on the State Records Advisory Committee. There he has championed the creation of a formal Register of State Archives, a mechanism that would capture and make legally accessible an estimated 60 to 70 kilometres of archival material currently dispersed across government agencies, off-site warehouses, and commercial storage facilities. If enacted this has the potential to transform access to the documentary record of Western Australia.

Michael's investment in the History Council's awards programme, in the development of its digital presence, and in the careful mentoring of newer members is recognised with deep gratitude and respect.

History Council of Western Australia (HCWA)



Members' News

Honouring Fr Edward William (Ted) Doncaster

On a happier note, it was with pleasure that we learned that the Venerable Edward William Doncaster, our dear Father Ted, was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division in the Kings Birthday Honours list for his service to the Anglican Church in Australia and to historical organisations.

Father Ted, who was ordained in 1957, was Archivist to the Anglican Church Australia, Diocese of Perth from 1980-1985. As an Anglican Priest, Archdeacon, and Canon, he spent many years ministering to congregations in various parts of the State.

Many valuable records and other materials were donated by Father Ted to the State Library and Battye Library. It is a tribute to his foresight many years ago that some irreplaceable country and regional church records which were under threat of destruction and decay are now preserved in the Battye Library

He was an Honorary Life Member of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society and officiated at the Annual Pioneers' Memorial Service, East Perth Cemetery, for many years. He was a long-term member of the Friends of Battye Library and an enthusiastic volunteer for our Society, including writing many articles for this *Newsletter* over the years. He was a recipient of the Friends' Gem of Time award in 2008.

Our warmest congratulations to Father Ted – we are delighted that his years of service have been recognised.



WA Newspapers.



A Note from our Treasurer

This is a friendly reminder to advise that the Friends of Battye Library (Inc.) is endorsed as a deductible gift recipient (DGR) organisation by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

This means that when a member makes a donation to the Friends, they maybe able to claim a tax deduction.

By making a donation this assists the State Library and/or the State Records Office in their mission to acquire, preserve and make available for research Western Australian material.

If you have any queries please contact me at nickdrew@bigpond.com



Treasures from Trove

Building Bridges

A gem from the British Newspaper Archives

Those of us who live south of the river are having to manage with only one traffic bridge over the river for a year, while the new bridge is finished. In the rush hour it can take an hour to get from Nedlands to South Fremantle! With bridges in mind instead of *Treasures from Trove* this issue, I found a gem in the British Newspaper Archive (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>) from the *Illustrated London News*.



Bridge at North Fremantle, Western Australia.

(image published with the following article from the *Illustrated London News* dated 29 February 1868, p.20.)

Public Works in Western Australia

The bridge across the river Swan, near the port of Fremantle, in Western Australia, and on the main line of road to Perth, the capital of the colony, has been erected entirely by convict labour, from the designs of Captain Grain, BE and Mr James Manning, clerk of works, under the administration of his Excellency Governor Hampton, to whom great credit is due for the energy with which he has pushed forward this important undertaking. The bridge is 42 ft. high, offering no obstruction to the navigation of the river: and, with the approaches, it is 2078 ft. long. It is built of the jarrah timber of the colony, the lower piles being driven 10 ft. into the bed of the river. It occupied two years and nine months in its construction and, without the advantage of convict labour, it would have been an almost impossible undertaking for this colony.

Transportation commenced to Western Australia 1850, under Colonel Henderson, RE, now Surveyor-General of Prisons; and since that time

9246 convicts have been sent to that colony. Under the influence of transportation its population and resources have rapidly increased. The revenue of the colony in 1850 was £12,440 ; and in 1866 it had reached £89,382. The exports in 1866 were £152,240, against £22,134 in 1850; and the imports had increased from £52,351 to £251,907. The population has also increased from 5886 to 21,065.

In accordance with the promise made by the home Government to the eastern colonies of Australia, transportation to Western Australia has now ceased, The last ship was dispatched towards the end of 1867; and transportation, as a means of disposing of criminals, is now at an end. It may be hoped that the impulse which Western Australia has received will, with its genial climate and great natural resources, render it a prosperous member of this Australian family of colonies.



Pictured above is a photograph of the new bridge across the river at Fremantle in process of being built. (<https://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au/projects-initiatives/all-projects/metropolitan/swan-river-crossings> accessed 21 April 2026).

Heather Campbell



Have you a story to tell?

[Now retired Senior Archivist, David Whiteford, who will be well-known to our members, has written another of his fascinating articles for the Newsletter, this time drawing the curtain back on Consignment 3580 and giving our readers a glimpse of the research treasures therein.]

Consignment 3580 – The hidden information

The State Records Office of WA's consignment 3580 is a very large mix of Supreme Court records. The largest component of this is within series 577, civil writs files. The Civil Court of Western Australia was established in 1832 and from 1889 the system of arrangement becomes alpha numerical with files taking the plaintiff's initial followed by a number (A1, A2, B1, B2 etc) within each year. In the SRO online catalogue this will appear, for example, as 1925/B001 to provide for collections of over 100 files for any one letter. Series 577 continues on from series 201 (1832-1880) and 576 (1881-1889), both of which had different file identification means. The cons 3580 files go up to the end of 1945.

The listing of cons3580 has been underway for many years and there is still much to do but since May 2026 there are nearly 290,000 online catalogue records, most of which are series 577. I have alluded to this collection in previous pieces and also in the catalogue additions updates in the SRO newsletters in 2024 and earlier, it is such an important historical record of WA social, industrial, and settlement issues.

The files vary considerably in their size and content. Many are single sheets and only record the plaintiff, defendant, and the nature of the case. Some can take up one or more whole boxes. Most are claims for money owed, whether a loan, mortgage, or unpaid purchases from a business. While these could be said to be the mundane cases, there is still much to be gained from them. For example, if I search cons3580 AND Nukarni, a small (now ghost) town between Merredin and Nungarin, I find a number of cases where agricultural supply companies such as Dalgety & Co, The Westralian Farmers Ltd, and Elder Smith & Co, have taken Nukarni farmers and residents to court. Such a search is also important for revealing the names of these residents such as Gilbert, Brown and Scarlett. This type of search can be done for any place name in WA although I can't guarantee success for all places! However, it works for many long-abandoned towns such as mining and mill towns, as well as the agricultural areas and Perth and suburbs. It can also work for station properties – a search cons3580 AND station gives the names of many pastoral stations such as Thangoo and Carlominda. For those aware of Family History WA's *People of Western Australia's ghost towns* project (theme of the talk at the May Friends meeting), such searches can help with the social and economic histories of these lost settlements.

And of course, it will work for name searches such as cons3580 AND

Smith (over 780 results May 2026) or cons3580 AND Gibbons (10). Because of the nature of the entries, you can try searches by place name and surname either within this series or consignment, or just the names. Cons3580 AND Brown AND Boulder gives four results while Brown AND Boulder is 51. As many of the archive records only have initials it can make searching for individual people difficult, so this can be a useful way of locating specific families within a town or district when a given name is not in the record.

If the above has numbed you, I hope now to interest you with examples of cases.

The files contain some incredible records of early motoring in WA. This can be through claims of injury – and even death. As at February 2026

there was a result of 36 files recording deaths including the death of Clarence Karri Richards due to negligent driving 6/9/1936, and the death of John Thomas Dickie due to negligent driving, 23/2/1925.

Accidents involving omnibuses, motor trucks, bicycles, cars,

motor cycles and even horses are recorded. 1932/V004 Adelaide Veronica Vail vs JT Stephens of Boyanup is a case over a motor vehicle and horse collision on 16/1/1932 – with photographs.

Early motoring is also recorded in cases where money is owed on the vehicle. In 1925 Skipper Bailey Motor Car Co took Francis Norman Hanson of Karridale to court over the hire of a Chevrolet truck and in 1927 Arthur Bales Ltd took John Richard Walton and Harold Gilmore to court over the hire of a Jewett car. Early agricultural vehicles such as tractors may also be traced – in 1927 HJ Wigmore & Co took Kitty May Pearce of Lake Brown to court over the hire of two-ton caterpillar tractor number 74536. It is interesting how many women appear in such cases.

In the above vehicle files, the make, engine number and even licence number plate of the vehicle may be given, though not always noted in the



Cons3580 item 1945/J009 Metropolitan Omnibus Co bus involved in a collision injury to Albert John Jeffery a passenger in a small van on 5/2/1945.

catalogue record notes. But vehicle historians can have fun searching for cons3580 AND Buick, Cletrac, Studebaker or Oakland and many other brand names.

Inevitably, I will mention railways. While listing the files, I had a chance discovery of the mention of tramways used on coal hulks at Albany and this led to substantial research which has been published (*Light railways* February 2023). Johann Heinrich Carl Ludwig Schumann was injured on 16/9/1898 when he was knocked off the tramway into the hold of a hulk. The file, 1899/S050, even included a drawing of the deck of the hulk showing the equipment. Another fascinating discovery was 1925/T019 – The Perth Firewood Supply Company vs Westralian Black Diamond Collieries. The colliery company inspected rails at the firewood company's Sawyers Valley operation and agreed to purchase a substantial amount of rail for underground mining and other operations. On the arrival of the rail in wagons at Allanson siding, the coal company claimed that the rails supplied were largely substandard to those inspected and agreed upon. What is of interest to railway historians is a detailed description of the firewood company's disused railway line and the rails used – dating back to 1870 – and even two photographs of the rails in wagons at Allanson. Other railway related themes include fires allegedly started by sparks from locomotives, injury through negligent driving of a train, and various issues regarding the Midland Railway Co Ltd.

Issues regarding land and property are well represented. An interesting example is 1897/B214 *In the matter of Transfer of Land Act 1895...* (Ernest Augustus Bonney v John George Thompson) as it can be linked to cons4223 item 041 which is a Transfer of Land Act file dealing with the North Western Portion of Swan Location 1313 together with a right of way over Edison Street. The file includes papers relating to Certificate of Title XXXIX/8 and Caveat 213/97 - case B214 of 1897. Here are some examples of content notes in other files: Rent of Nestle Brae, Swan Location 1127; Mortgage of Swan Location Z Lot 265; Wellington Location 1 Lot 2 Ommaney Road; Work done clearing Yilgarn Location 967; and Nelson Location 7724, Group 26, Pemberton. Town lots are also well covered - Guildford Town Lot 47, Lot 24; Perth Town Lot X36, Lot 16; North Fremantle Lot P42 Lot 25, 26; and Day Dawn Lot 27.

Real estate developments also feature with estate companies, the estate name, and prospective purchasers noted, the cases usually being a default on the purchase. 1945/E005 Estate Development Company vs Harold Edward Brown-Neaves is over the purchase of Lot 104 Bellavista

Estate, while 1931/L015 Land and Homes (WA) Ltd vs William Charles Bernard Mattras of Hamel is over the sale of Lot 236, 237 Hurlingham Estate, 243, 244 Bellavista Estate (Applecross / Mount Pleasant) and Lot 48 to 52 St James Park Estate.

Industries and livelihoods are yet more research gems in the collection. Many hotels can be found, often with the licensee owing money to breweries such as 1941/T004 The Kalgoorlie Brewery and Ice Co Ltd., vs Fortunato Poletti of both the Doyle's Well Hotel and the Great Eastern Hotel, Lawlers, both mining centres near the end of their existence. 1936/T034 covers a mortgage over Tammin Hotel, Tammin Lot 8, 18 from Thomas Frederick Foy. 1926/T001 James Tighe v Frank Jasper has considerable documentation about the Ardath Hotel construction contracts and includes Jasper & Co. bankbooks, receipts, invoices, letters. While in the Murchison gold mining centre of Abbots, Alice Lillis took George Noble Murdoch to court over her wages as housekeeper at a hotel in Abbots (1900/L026).

Case 1925/W005, the Whittaker Brothers (Edwin and Arthur) consists of two full boxes containing many financial records of the company and detailed statements from both brothers providing a fascinating insight into timber industry operations.

You can also search for dairyman, farmer, storekeeper, tailor, hawker, milk vendor, cordial manufacturer, pastoralist, sleeper cutter or contractor. Even butcher, baker AND candle! (but not candlestick).

I have recently done a little research into the turtle soup industry in Western Australia – yes, we had factories in Rockingham and Cossack in the 1920s and 1930s, with soup being exported to Britain. Chelonia is a Latin name for sea turtles and also the name of the company operating the Rockingham factory. In my recent work on Cons3580, I was surprised to come across two cases involving Chelonia including a breach of contract over turtle supply, and a claim of false dismissal by the chef at Rockingham.

Ethnic records include camel dealers and drivers, market gardeners, Asian residents of Cossack and Broome, people from India (including what is now Pakistan) and Italy. There are many cases involving pieceworkers on gold mines, many of whom are of European origin.

I mentioned social history value at the beginning and a few social themes that come out are breaches of promise of marriage (is that still

a possibility in the courts today?), arrears of maintenance payments for deserted wives and/or children, and seduction of daughters. And one wonders at the story behind 1924/C013 Margaret Carrick vs Boans Ltd., over assault and false imprisonment! Unfortunately, a *Trove* search only brought up the case listed in court lists and not an account of it.

Consignment 3580, series 577, is a wonderful collection of records of what seems to be the whole of life in Western Australia. Searches in the online catalogue can take many forms including the combining of terms as noted above. It is important to genealogists, local, social and general historians, and even railway historians. Have fun searching.

David Whiteford



[Brendan Kelly, a Bunbury based member of the Friends has become a regular contributor to our Newsletter. In this issue he looks at the social life of several of the genteel residents of WA and at Government House.]

The Robinsons and Harts

William Cleaver Robinson (1834-1897) served three terms as Governor of Western Australia. His final tenure began in 1890 and were 'glory' years. The newly declared state became crowded by clever people and golden riches. Sir William and Lady Olivia were a brilliant husband and wife partnership. Aged in their fifties, regal experience had perfected their routine, while William also possessed an extraordinary musical talent. The Robinsons promoted literature, education and the arts. Being Governor was William's job, music his passion. Lady Olivia possessed all the grace and character required of a Governor's wife, no skill left unexplored.



Sir William Robinson c1880.
(Government Photolithographer
SLSA B429.)

The Robinsons held in their intimate circle the much younger couple, Francis and Lilian Hart. Francis, the fast-talking journalist, actor, impresario and dubious businessman. Lilian, one of the prominent mid-west Mitchell clan, Perth's premier female newspaper columnist. She maintained connections and links across

the social order, while her husband did his best to lose them. Francis was a character of his own making – clever, talented, self-encompassing, but untrustworthy. Lilian, as the columnist ‘Cora’ in the *Western Mail*, reported every aspect of well-to-do society. The Robinson/Hart relationship was deep and its reach influential.

When ‘Bill’ Robinson was reappointed as Governor, the Harts and Perth celebrated. Statehood and parliamentary government in Western Australia stimulated cultural life across the old Swan River colony. The affluence brought by gold added a sparkling madness to the mix that would encircle the Robinsons and the Harts. It brought a different *frisson* to Perth’s societal fusion, where style in the Governor’s mansion connected with the new shared order. Key to the social calendar were functions at Government House. The invitation list brought offers to attend balls, musical evenings, dinner parties and diverse entertainment.

The Harts found a prominent place in the pecking order at Government House, the state’s most important social address. The official residence of the Governor of Western Australia since 1863, it provided a unique venue. As well as being the Governor’s home, it was the location for the performance of vice-regal duties and formal receptions. The Harts were centrally positioned during the Proclamation celebrations. Francis organised members of the Western Liedertafel to play in the Government House grounds, an event that brought the special festivities to an elegant close. Lilian duly reported the highlights.

In their third term, Sir William and Lady Robinson effortlessly established a rolling schedule of receptions, garden parties and soirées. They hosted performances and events on a weekly basis. Being closest to the action, Lilian Hart as the ubiquitous Cora, walked a delicate line. She did not shirk her opinion about the need for upkeep and modernisation of the Governor’s mansion. The Robinson’s tenure brought a high level of accessibility to the governor’s office, reported generously in the newspapers. Cora’s description of the fashionable ladies



Lilian Hart (Cora), RWAHS
photograph collection,
P1999.4712.

and gentlemen, their ball dresses and uniforms, conveyed a real sense of majesty.

Cora was empowered to tell the story first hand. She told of one major event where tightly wedged guests distributed themselves about the corridors, porticos, in drawing-rooms and card-rooms. She brought intimacy to the public, noting that *'unlimited jostling is not exactly one's idea of what such an entertainment should be'*. However, with wry humour she expressed the opinion that *'We have not yet arrived at such a high stage of civilisation that we can submit to our dances degenerating into London "crushes"'*. Lilian Hart had the journalist's skill to bring her readers into the room, irrespective of their standing.

For guests at Government House, Lilian ensured that their attendance and dress found the way into the public eye. The LADIES' PAGE was the most eagerly read social news in the city. The Robinsons led culture in Western Australia and close to them were the Harts. Francis also inveigled himself with Premier John Forrest, rewarded with contracts for government work. Lilian reported every movement, formality and ritual. The fashion of Lady Olivia Robinson and Lady Margaret Forrest were first to be described. They were followed by the stylish spouses of high-ranking officials and the glamorous wives of prominent businessmen.

CORA also continued to press for ungraded facilities at Government House. She applied pressure on the public purse that funded Governor and Lady Robinson's residence:

It is fully time that the aid of Electra was called in at Government House, and the sooner the Hon. Mr. Venn and his staff see to this long neglected want the better for the Governor, Lady Robinson, and their guests; although possibly the worse for poor over-worked "Cora".

Soon after this very public call, the fabulous Coolgardie gold field was found and Western Australia was abuzz. With riches all but guaranteed, CORA upheld her campaign to ensure that the high end of society, and its social well-being, benefitted from the burgeoning economy:

The present system of lighting the drawing-room of Government House by means of wax tapers is not only behind the time, but ruinous to the ladies' dresses. The grease fell in absolute showers from the chandelier and grievously spotted many dresses and dress coats.

It was a reminder to the men of the new Parliament and State Treasury that the niceties of society were demonstrative of progress and the message was simple. Hospitality, which had been freely extended to

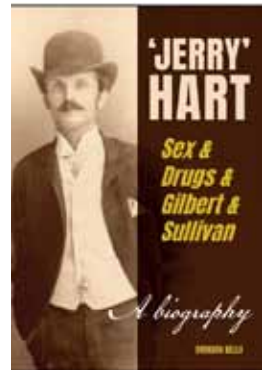
the community by the Governor and Lady Olivia, must endure. In June 1893 the spectacular gold discoveries at Kalgoorlie stamped wealth all over Western Australia. The affinity between the Robinsons and Harts was based on friendship, class and appearances. Ultimately, Francis Hart's dodgy business dealings would place immeasurable strain on the relationship, affecting husbands and wives. For the time being, they were grand times.

Brendan Kelly

References used:

- F. K. Crowley, 'Robinson, Sir William Cleaver Francis (1834–1897)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ANU, accessed online 5 October 2025.
- B. Kelly, 'Francis Jerome Ernest Hart', *Early Days* 102, 2018.
- B. Kelly, 'Cora – A presswoman of repute', *Early Days* 107 2023.
- *Western Mail*, 25 October 1890, p.6, 11 April 1891, p.1, 3 September 1892, p.7

[Editor's note: Brendan Kelly has just published a book, *Jerry' Hart: Sex & Drugs & Gilbert & Sullivan: A biography*, which details many facets of the lives of Jerry and Lilian Hart and provides an intriguing window into the times in which they lived. Available from stockist Collins Bookshop, Bunbury, or Brendan Kelly at btkelly55@gmail.com or telephone 0407 219 515, \$30.]



[Raymond Marks is a committee member of the Friends. He has an interest in emerging technologies and the unknown future of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In this speculative piece Raymond personally muses on AI and access to records.]

Archive Priorities

How are developments in modern information technology influencing the work of the archivist? Is it OK to carry on in a business-as-usual way?

A few years ago I was reading a book in which the author was making a case for a thesis that required photographic evidence. He faced the problem of convincing the reader that the pictures were genuine as he was writing in a time that was post-Photoshop. In recent decades after

image editing software came into popular use, all photos are regarded with scepticism. The way he sought to convince his audience of the verity of the photos was to utilise images taken from old newspapers published in the 1800's or early in the last century. Careful reference was made to the newspaper concerned and the place where the archives were stored so that they could be examined.

When we contemplate it, it appears that there has been a seismic shift regarding image reliability since about 1990. In earlier times a photo of a miscreant doing something illegal was enough to send them to jail or worse.

The buzz now is about artificial intelligence (AI) and how easy it is to generate text for whatever purpose, using software platforms like Grammarly and others. These systems use what is referred to as large language models (LLM's). When asked to do a task AI will 'look' at an enormously large amount of data that is in cyberspace and pick out that which it deems relevant to the assigned objective. The data perused includes everything from frivolous social media posts to learned papers to erudite chats to motorbike-porn. Everything, text and images.

Does this mean that eventually, with the explosion of AI generated text and images, records may become questionable, just as photos are now? We could be facing an era when truth itself is becoming an endangered commodity and we are living in an epistemological fog.

Significant investment has been made around the world to have archive material scanned. The feeling has been that access to the original information, letter, register, map, photo, and so on, was safer for the really long-term in an electronic form. Moreover these scanned artefacts have then been made available to the whole world through the use of web-pages.

AI working on the LLM approach is happily harvesting the scanned archival material and using it to construct narratives that may or may not be well researched and truthful. This output is then published to influence the public understanding of a subject. Subsequently 'contaminated' data may also be used to supplant the original scanned data. Who knows what AI is capable of?

When printing folding money the Government designs into the notes various elements that authenticate the item as genuine. The same approach is used for passports. Perhaps a similar approach could be

taken for an archival record before it can be accessed by on-line users. It would seem however that the original artifact has become more important than ever. It is the only thing that can be used to verify AI generated information. In the future, perhaps more importance needs to be given to preservation and conservation of original sources and not just on scanning them.

Raymond Marks



[Dr Michael O'Connor is a retired Digital Archivist, SROWA. In this, his third article, he examines the importance of our early archival records and the lost of the General Muster Book.]

The General Muster Book, commenced 1829, now lost

Researching the early Swan River colony is possible because most of the records of the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) survive. One item that has been lost for more than a century is the General Muster Book, a means of managing colonists that would have been second nature to James Stirling as a Royal Navy captain.¹ The General Muster Book was an ambitious but necessary initiative, tracking incoming and outgoing persons, documenting some rights to land under English regulations, and preventing the indebted and indentured from fleeing their obligations.

Muster records were decreed before the first colonist ships reached the Swan River. On 13 May 1829, Stirling sent regulations to newly appointed Harbour Master Captain Currie, requiring that 'Masters of Ships or Vessels are to furnish the Harbour Master or his Deputy with the ship's Register... Muster Roll of Ship's Company ...[and]... List of Passengers.'² Further, ships' masters arriving in the colony were obliged to tell

[T]heir passengers or others intending to settle that they must appear at the Colonial Secretary's Office and obtain a "Permission to settle" and "certificate of Entry in the General Muster Book"; ... independent of any Return required of the Master of the ship or Vessel... And Ships departing are not to carry away any Person or Persons without a Certificate from the Secretary's Office of their discharge from the General Muster Book on Penalty of being responsible for their Debts.³

A corresponding instruction was made to the Colonial Secretary, Peter Brown/Broun, in the initial Regulations for the CSO on 16 May 1829:

The Secretary is to keep a Muster Book of all persons belonging to the Civil Establishment or in Government employment. He is to keep a General Muster Book of every person in the settlement...He is to keep the following forms in the office. No. 1. Application to settle and Certificate of Entry in Muster Book. 2. Application and Discharge from Muster Book.⁴

There being no printing press, initially these forms would have been manuscript in nature. There was also a stipulation to keep copies of all applications and answers relating to permission to settle in the colony.

Once landed at Garden Island Secretary Brown issued two Government notices. From 18 June 1829 settlers could apply to him for a 'Certificate of permission to reside', and ten days later asked artificers, workmen, and servants without a certificate 'to make immediate application'.⁵ Stirling's Proclamation of the colony specified a further muster, a muster roll of local militia,⁶ but no trace of it has been found.

All is not lost

Partial abstracts and extracts survive. Berryman (1979) described three known copies: an 'abstract' dated end of 1829 among the Colonial Office papers,⁷ its 1831 printing,⁸ and a 1923 reprint in *Historical Records of Australia*.⁹ He noted differences between the three, including name errors, and erroneous additions of 'Ditto' in the 1923 copy. In the original Abstract numbers run from 1¹⁰ (James Stirling) to 487 (Thomas Worrall, though numbered 1096 in cons36); 209 and 286–289 are blank.¹¹ Columns record date of arrival, name, age, place of birth, marital status, to what Country subject, profession or calling, and remarks. The Abstract has a 'Supplementary list of persons actually in the Colony, but whose Names had not been entered in the General Muster Book at the End of the Year'.

Additional fragments

Other records that preserve fragments of the GMB's information (see examples in Figure 1) include:

Authority to Select Land (S2036 cons5000 39/3) – paper scraps the CSO used to inform (or query) the Survey Office of an applicant's right to select land. A few have a GMB number or comment eg. Cleophas Chappell ('Mr Morrell's Carpenter') applied 4 June 1831 for a town lot but:

He is not [entitled to a town allotment], not being on the Muster Book. No person indentured is entitled to a Town lot unless legally discharged from his employ.

another is annotated:

The names of the Bearer John Tuckey and his Family have been regularly enrolled on the Muster Book of the Colony.

Schedules for Valuation in the *Inward Correspondence of the Colonial Secretary*¹² – covering letters list applicants, their families, and servants, with columns for GMB number, name, age, and quality/calling. Missing numbers may have been assigned. Letters up to September 1830, transcribed by Graham Bown, appear on the Friends website, recently extracted by WikiTree.¹³

Returns of property on which land has been claimed from 1st September 1829 to 30th June 1830 (available on Ancestry) gives GMB numbers for over 150 occupiers.¹⁴

Requests for permission to depart the colony would, on granting, most likely be added to the GMB. Sources include CSO newspaper notices (in Trove) and Inward Correspondence (SROWA cons36).

Certificates granting permission to reside and depart have not survived, except perhaps one kept by the Cowcher family as late as 1935.¹⁵

Combining these various sources about 800 surviving numbers and their names survive for example CB Churchman's valuation application is sans number, but #799 in *Returns of Property*.¹⁶ The highest surviving numbers are 1682–1685 assigned to James Lloyd, wife Hannah and two children who arrived on the *Egyptian* and had their valuation approved in July 1832.¹⁷ There are a few problems though. Number 16 is shared by two individuals – assigned to William Stirling in the original Abstract, and to Sir James Hume in the 1830 *Returns of Property*. A list of Absentees and Agents¹⁸ clarifies the situation – W. Stirling was the agent for Hume. In other cases the numbers and names aren't identical across the surviving material, so more work is needed to produce a combined list.

Daily uses

The Muster Book was maintained by the Colonial Secretary's Office, initially for ten weeks on Garden Island and subsequently in Perth. Berryman (1979) summarised its use succinctly – record permission to reside and depart, and on applications for import valuations in aid of land grants.¹⁹ The latter involved the CSO adding GMB numbers to valuation applications, sending them to the Board for Counsel and Audit, to be returned to the CSO where they survive today in its Inward Correspondence. The Muster Book was again consulted when issuing

an Authority to Select Land note to the Survey Office. Another use may have been in Civil Court matters relating to absconding debtors and servants.

The Book's use is glimpsed in CSO inward correspondence. Richard Ottway, a seaman on the schooner *Mary*, sought permission to reside in mid-1831, which the CSO remarked 'To be entd on Muster Book when full description forwarded on'.²⁰ Six deserters from the ship *Nimrod*, having found employment, were permitted to join the colony in mid-1831; the CSO noted 'These men to be entered in the Muster Book'.²¹ Thomas Thurkle, Duffield's servant, arrived on the *Orelia* in late 1830 but didn't apply to reside until 29 June 1832, claiming he became only aware of the Regulations a few days ago and now sought to be granted permission to reside and to be added to the Book.²²

There are a few mentions of departures being recorded. When the brig *Resolution* departed for Mauritius on 24 June 1831 the Harbour Master sent its passenger list to the CSO. The Colonial Secretary noted on it 'Mr Wells [CSO Clerk] to discharge the names from the Muster Book' and on the enclosed passenger list Richard Wells noted 'Walkden & Jones not on Muster Book'.²³ It is not clear which departure details were entered in the Book. Further, was the method for recording returning colonists to add remarks to the original entry, or assign a new number?

In 1832 the Government brought in a local Act to regulate pilotage and shipping, in which ship masters and commanders could be fined £50 if they carried away a person 'whose name have been enrolled in the muster book of the Colonial Secretary' who 'shall not have obtained a certificate in the form (numbered 3) in the said Schedule'²⁴ (form reproduced in Figure 2):

The Act also sets out a form that needed to be authorised by the Colonial Secretary and the Civil Court registrar. Russell (1980) summarises the system as 'Fourteen days' notice had to be given in a newspaper and no permit was granted until the Colonial Secretary had received a certificate from the Registrar Clerk of the Civil Court stating that there was no pending action against the applicant',²⁵ a system that continued for some years. Secretary Brown found it necessary in February 1833 to notify the public of departure requirements, including giving fourteen days notice in the Government Gazette.²⁶ The rules changed again in September 1834, when the Certificate to Leave would only be issued to applicants who 'have inserted in two successive Gazettes, previously to

his application, a Public Notice of such his intended Departure'.²⁷

Fate of the General Muster Book

The Board for Counsel and Audit²⁸ wrote on 23 March 1831 to the CSO seeking the Muster Book and all Schedules of Property.²⁹ Given the daily call on the Book it seems unlikely they were away from the CSO for very long. Mentions of the book are few after 1832, even though it must have been in use. As late as 23 March 1833, in *Hall v. Leake* in the Civil Court, parts of the Port Regulations were cited, including:

19. And all ships departing are not to carry away any person or persons without a certificate from the Secretary's Office of their discharge from the general Muster Book.³⁰

In early 1834 a restatement of Land Regulations stipulated:

13. An Allotment of Land will not be assigned to any individual whose name has not been previously inserted in the General Muster Book of the Colony, kept at the Colonial Secretary's Office.³¹

The last written mention I can find is 'The bearer John Colin Cooper has been duly enrolled in the Muster Book of the Colony'.³² in a note dated 24 July 1834 from CSO clerk William Knight to the Surveyor General.

On Governor Stirling's return in August 1834 the revised General Regulations of the Civil Establishment were published in the *Perth Gazette*, but there is no mention of keeping the General Muster Book.³³ I have not located official correspondence to specify the Book's fate. Geographic separation of administrators from August 1829 onwards – the Harbour Master in Fremantle and the CSO in Perth – and colonists increasingly located elsewhere, may have made in-person applications onerous. As the number of ships arriving and departing increased, record keeping may have been a challenge.

Why this volume has not survived is curious, given its early importance to the colony, and the survival of much of the early CSO material. I could find no mention of the Book in Madden's 'Index Book of the Archives of the Colonial Secretary's Office, 1828–1849'.³⁴ Was the Muster Book among Peter Brown's papers lost in that ship fire in 1848 when his widow was returning to England? For now, all we can do is satisfy ourselves with a partial reconstruction, and keep an eye out for more fragments and clues in CSO and other records.

Dr Michael O'Connor

Description of Offspring		
In the Ancestor's Blood	Names	Ages
910	Thomas and Mary Walters	27
	Caroline Walters	27

18 in Austin Book	Names	Families				
		1846	1848	1850	1852	1854
572	L.D. Britten com	-	4	1	2	
809	Let. Kishett	1	1	-	1	
205	Wm. Shaw	1	6	-	2	
744	C.B. Churchman	-	-	-	-	-
800	L.R. Phillips	-	-	-	1	

MB
504

Arthur Clapp is entitled to
a Town Lot

2^d July 1831.

D. W. Moxes

28

Endnotes

- 1 Royal Navy (RN) musters date from the 17th century onwards — lists with crew member's details, contract length, pay, and sign on and off (a practice also used by commercial shipping). In time the RN made musters for their dockyards, garisons, and other shore establishments.
- 2 SROWA S1243 cons52 B11. A number of early ship musters and passenger lists are preserved in SROWA S2941 cons36.
- 3 SROWA S1243 cons52 B11. See also BL Acc 311A *Notebook of Captain McDermott*, for an 1829 transcript of Port Regulations.
- 4 Regulations for the Colonial Secretary's Office (BL Acc.4308A, 16 May 1829; SROWA estray of S1243 cons52 as item 012 or B12.
- 5 SROWA S1243 cons52 B32 and SROWA S1243 cons52 B45, respectively.
- 6 SROWA S2941 cons36 1/52–55.
- 7 CO18/7 f.9–23, available via Trove.
- 8 *Returns relative to the settlement on the Swan River...*, British Parliamentary Paper, 1831. HMSO. Digitised at Battye Library Q 994.1 RET ; http://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b1225657_1.
- 9 Watson, F. (ed.) (1923). *Historical Records of Australia*, Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, Sydney. III (6), pp.622–636.
- 10 Peter Shadwell and household, no. 1–5 in SROWA S2941 cons36 5/161, perhaps their order on the form not their Book numbers.
- 11 The names for these numbers survive in other sources.
- 12 SROWA S2941 cons36, particularly vols. 1–26.
- 13 Transcripts of cons36, vols. 1–8, at <https://www.friendsofbattylibrary.org.au/colonialsecretarysoffice> ; see extracted by WikiTree at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1IRfqmmIRMvVgVxoKX79Tgz7g4dxBjnYG>
- 14 SROWA S2155 cons5000 0683/02.
- 15 Certificate, Stirling to Dr G. S. F. Couchier, Muster Book no. 1339 to permit him and his family to “abide in the colony of Western Australia” is mentioned in *The West Australian*, 30 August 1935, p. 6, at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32910493>
- 16 Inward letter A539, SROWA S2941 cons36 5/154 ; SROWA S2155 cons5000 0683/02.
- 17 SROWA S2941 cons36 23/67.
- 18 SROWA S2172 cons5000 0678.
- 19 Berryman, I. *A Census Detailed, 1832*, Creative Research, Perth. pp.14–15.
- 20 Letter inward A1937 SROWA S2941 cons36 15/188, 4 June 1831.
- 21 Inward letter A2162. SROWA S2941 cons36 17/059.
- 22 Inward letter A2868. SROWA S2941 cons36 22/183.
- 23 Letter inward A1985 SROWA S2941 cons36 16/84–5 ; The other passengers — Capt. Rae, Mrs H. Rae and their 2 children — must have been enrolled ‘on’ the Book (as phrased at the time), but there numbers have not survived.
- 24 2 Wm. IV., No. 9. 1832 (WA). https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/RedirectURL?OpenAgent&query=mrdoc_15969.pdf
- 25 Russell, E. (1980). *A history of the law in Western Australia and its development*

from 1829 to 1979. UWA Press, Crawley, p.27.

- 26 GOVERNMENT NOTICE. (1833, February 16). *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, p. 25. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article642226>
- 27 GOVERNMENT NOTICE. (1834, September 6). *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, p. 349. Retrieved from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article641321>
- 28 Board correspondence was transferred to the CSO, and later date-sorted by Battye into the CSO Inward Correspondence.
- 29 Letter inward A1857. SROWA S2941 cons36 13/165.
- 30 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 23 March 1833, p. 47 at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article642156>.
- 31 *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 11 Jan. 1834, p. 213 at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article641698>.
- 32 SROWA S2155 cons5000 0683/02.
- 33 *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal*, 30 August 1834, p.345–8, at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article641341>.
- 34 SROWA S1681 cons391 05.



News from the State Library

Exhibitions and Public Programs

Kinjarling Djinnang Ngalak | Country Sees Us is an immersive exhibition centred around newly recorded video oral histories of Menang Elders and a large-scale visual meditation on the Kinjarling/Albany landscape.

This exhibition marks 200 years since colonisation of Menang Country and asks visitors to encounter Kinjarling not as a backdrop to history, but as a living landscape with its own voice and memory.

The stories within this exhibition have been recorded to add important new layers of meaning to the largely colonial maps, photographs and illustrations in the State Library's collection.

Visitors step into a quiet six-metre-wide dome inspired by a kornt (a traditional shelter) to hear the Elders' stories. These include reflections by Carol Pettersen, Lester Coyne, Mark Colbung, Vernice Gillies, Doreen Hancox, Sharralyn Maddren and a young Menang ranger, Cleve Humphries.



Carol Pettersen



Lester Coyne



Vernice Gillies. (SLWA)

This immersive experience also features a specially commissioned animation that reinterprets the State Library's collections through a Menang lens, weaving Menang artist and academic Shandell Cumming's artworks with centuries-old maps, photographs and illustrations to reveal new ways of seeing and understanding these materials. The exhibition gives new voices and stories to evocative landscape photographs taken by government and commercial photographers over many decades.

This exhibition is curated by Denien Toomath, a Menang Noongar woman and Senior Partnerships Officer at the State Library.

Produced by the State Library of Western Australia in partnership with the Community Arts Network.

Kinjarling Djinnang Ngalak | Country Sees Us is the first State Library exhibition to be launched as part of the Dialogues 2029 project. Dialogues 2029 is a four-year program stimulating public dialogue and contemporary perspectives on the commemoration of 200 years since the colonisation of Western Australia.

ARC Linkage partnership with UWA Truth Telling in the Goldfields for 2029 -2030

The State Library is partnering with UWA and the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre Aboriginal Corporation for a new research partnership funded by the Australian Research Council. As Western Australia rapidly approaches the bicentenary of British colonisation there is a pressing need to develop more inclusive forms of Australian history. Aboriginal voices and perspectives will be central to this historical reflection. This partnership explores how colonisation was experienced by Aboriginal

people in the largest region of WA. It will develop research into State Library collections with Aboriginal people, develop a new history of the Goldfields and create public outcomes for partner organisations. This research project is funded for four years through to 2030.

Last chance to donate before EOFY

Every story we share, preserve and bring to life is made possible by our community. By making a tax-deductible donation to the State Library before 30 June, you can help ensure exhibitions like Kinjarling Djinnang Ngalak, initiatives that champion WA writers like the Premier's Book Awards and our vast collections behind them continue to inspire Western Australians from all ages and backgrounds.

With end of financial year fast approaching, your support can help us expand access to literacy, knowledge and inspiration across the state. Every donation from \$2 is tax-deductible.

If you'd like to explore how your support can make a difference, please head to slwa.wa.gov.au/give or contact our Head of Philanthropy, Sarah Tompkin at philanthropy@slwa.wa.gov.au or (08) 9427 3176.

New Acquisitions

Erica Smyth collection

Dr Erica Smyth AC was a highly significant figure in Western Australia's minerals and petroleum industry, recognised for her pioneering contributions to resource development, industry governance, and gender equity. Beginning her career as an exploration geologist in the Pilbara in the 1970s, she rose to senior leadership roles and contributed to the growth of Western Australia's iron ore and gas industries at a formative period in their expansion. As a professional company director, she exercised national influence with regulatory, research, and safety organisations central to Australia's resource sector. Widely acknowledged as a trailblazer, Dr Smyth helped transform professional pathways for women in mining and energy, leaving an enduring legacy reflected in her industry honours and appointment as a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2018. This collection represents the collective efforts of Erica and relatives to explore the narrative of working women in early Western Australian history through to contemporary retellings, primarily through firsthand accounts and primary research documents.

'March for Australia' counter protest images

On August 31 2025 nationwide "March for Australia" rallies were held to protest what are claimed by attendees to be excessive levels of immigration to Australia. And while many of the marchers insisted that the rallies were about patriotism, not racism, the documented links between rally organisers and known far right/Nazi groups are indicative of the rising public profile that these formerly fringe movements are developing, not just in Perth or even across Australia but globally. These images, taken by Noongar photographer Cole Baxter, document the smaller counter protest and are accompanied by a written essay of his own perspective on witnessing the 'descendants of immigrants marching to gatekeep stolen land from future immigrants'.

Ukrainian Holodomor Survivors oral histories

In 2004-2005, Dr Melnychuk interviewed 42 Ukrainian migrants to Western Australia about their experiences of the Holodomor, a widespread man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians. The interviews cover biographical information and memories of the Holodomor, date of arrival in Western Australia, and the impact the Holodomor had on their migration experience and life in Western Australia. The interviewees of these six interviews wished to remain anonymous.

Wallace Vernon Fyfe papers

Wallace Vernon Fyfe, born in Victoria in 1894, began his survey career in Western Australia in 1909 and in 1910 was apprenticed to Marmaduke Terry, to whom he was appointed Assistant Surveyor in 1912. In 1921 he was appointed a Junior Valuer in the Taxation Department, from 1926-1938 he was Chief Valuer of the combined Commonwealth and State Taxation Departments in Western Australia and he was Surveyor-General of Western Australia from 1938-1945. During the period 1945-1947 he was Director of the War Service Land Settlement scheme and in January 1948 was appointed a Member of the Land Settlement Board. He resumed the office of Surveyor General in 1948, a position which he held until his retirement in 1959.

This collection of personal journals and notebooks and accompanying reports and correspondence fill a gap in current State Library *Papers of Wallace Vernon Fyfe*, providing insight into Fyfe's personal life as well as unpublished private reflections on development schemes that directly impacted many communities through Western Australia.

The Snake Film

Harry Butler AO CBE (1930-2015) is widely acclaimed as a naturalist and conservationist, being made Australian of the Year in 1979 and Citizen of the Year for Western Australia in 1980. This film, produced in the early 1950s predates all existing State Library audiovisual holdings regarding conservationists Harry Butler and Dominic and Vincent Serventy. It captures a very early stage in their careers and provides unique insight into the early activities and interests of some of West Australian Naturalist Club's founding members.

Kate Gregory
Battye Historian



State Records Office – News from the Archives

Digitisation of Colonial Secretary's Office records

Digitisation of the Colonial Secretary's Office records (consignment 36) has been continuing in 2026. At time of writing, the first 255 volumes of correspondence have been digitised, covering the period 1829-1853. This project is being funded through the Friends of Battye Library's Sholl Bequest.



New Friends of Battye Library Project

In parallel with the CSO digitisation project, the SRO has commenced a new project. Funding has been provided through the Sholl Bequest to unbind a series of Perth Police Criminal Registers (consignment 3904), in readiness for their digitisation and rehousing. These volumes record people charged during the period 1921-1948, providing a detailed description of the individual, a list of their convictions and a photographic mugshot. These records are very popular items but have been showing signs of wear and tear through regular handling. This project addresses

future handling concerns, as well as ensuring quality digital copies of the conviction sheets can be made after they have been unbound (not something that is possible while the volumes are still bound). While physical handling of these records can still be made after they have been rehoused, with each conviction sheet protected by polypropylene enclosures, preference will be given to digitised copies.

The SRO gives sincere thanks to the Friends for supporting this project which we would not currently be able to undertake without funding through the Sholl Bequest.

Public Transport Authority Photographs

The SRO has been working in partnership with the Public Transport Authority to conduct an appraisal exercise of unregistered WA Government Railways photographs in the PTA's custody. The SRO is assessing these photo collections to identify those of archival value, namely in depicting railways processes, infrastructure, services and new initiatives. Most of the photos date from the 1980s/90s. While this is an ongoing project, the SRO has already taken custody of selected photos.



Kitchen Galley on the Indian-Pacific train.

Earliest Aboriginal Handwriting?

The SRO recently assisted Shona Coyne (Curator, National Museum of Australia) and Tiffany Shellam (History Professor, Deakin University) as they conducted research for a new exhibition – *Kalyagul: Connections to Menang Country* - opening in July 2026 at the WA Museum, Museum of the Great Southern.

Tiffany had found a reference to a document written in 1854 by a ten year old Menang girl Rhoda Tanatan and had wondered

Document written by Rhoda Tanatan, 1854,
cons. 36/298.





Dr Tiffany Shellam and Shona Coyne viewing CSO records.

if the document still existed. We located this document, as well as an accompanying document written by eight year old Rachel Wardekan, in the Colonial Secretary's Office correspondence. Both girls had been placed at the Albany Native School (later Annesfield) and Revered Wollaston had sent the documents to Governor Fitzgerald as evidence of the school's work.

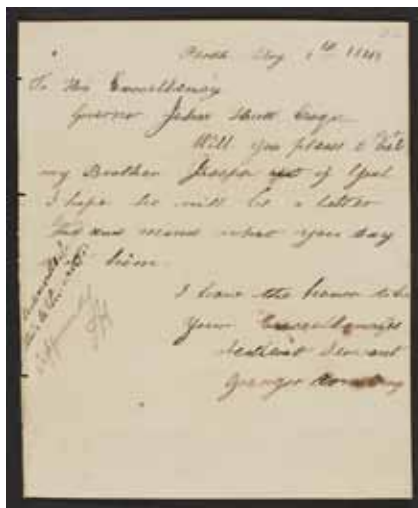
Initially, we wondered if these were the earliest surviving examples of Aboriginal handwriting in WA

although we were alerted by local historian Dr Emly Lanman to another letter written in 1843 by Noongar boy Goanger Armstrong. In this letter, written we believe in his own hand, Goanger writes to Governor Hutt requesting his brother Joseph Frazer be released from the Fremantle Roundhouse (where he had been placed after leaving employment without permission). Goanger's request appears to have been successful as Joseph was released four days after his letter was written.

We think Goanger's letter is the earliest example of Aboriginal handwriting in WA. If that is the case, what an extraordinary document, not to mention such an early example of Aboriginal advocacy.

Enduring Walls, Evolving Stories

In April 2026, the Law Court Museum opened a new exhibition to celebrate Perth's oldest building, the Old Court House, which reached 190 years this year. The SRO contributed copies of



Letter written by Goanger Armstrong, 1843, cons. 36/117.

State archives towards this exhibition, including Reveley's original building specification. This specification was used by the Law Court Museum to create a 3D video render of what the building was intended to look like (a little bit different to what eventuated).



Opening night of Enduring Walls, Evolving Stories exhibition.

Visits to SRO

The SRO has hosted a series of visits from executive staff in State government during 2026. This has been a great opportunity to better explain SRO operations and challenges, as well as to showcase items from the State Archives Collection.

We were also delighted to host a visit from Janet Holmes a Court in April 2026. A very big thanks to Lorraine Clarke from the Friends who provided a colour copy of Janet's student achievement card from Perth Modern School (SRO only holds a b/w microfilm copy), as well as a copy of the school's Sphinx magazine from 1960. Janet was very pleased to receive copies of these.

Damien Hassan
Senior Archivist, SROWA

Friends of Battye Library (Inc) Membership Form

Subscription period 1 July to 30 June

Life Membership \$500

Annual Membership

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Or

Submit the form available on the website
<https://www.friendsofbattyselibrary.org.au/membership>

Once the form is received an invoice will be sent containing payment options.

Thank you for your interest in the Friends of Battye Library, it is
much appreciated.

Afterwords: The useful but tragic life of Thomas Hunt

There must have been a lot of nervous excitement in the town of Hampstead near London in August 1829 when Thomas Hunt signed indentures for himself and wife Ann to travel to Swan River as a general servant to George Earl.

Not many individual indentures have survived, but his is held by the London Metropolitan Archives.¹ As indentures go, Thomas's (as witnessed by Wallace Bickley) was fairly generous. It was for five years, passages to be paid for both Thomas and Ann, with £30 per year as pay, lodging and 'every necessary' provided, 'clothing always excepted.' The bond was a modest £100. Earl also paid a £20 advance plus £5 for their little daughter Ann to travel.

The Hunt family arrived in the *Protector* in February 1830 to find a change of plan, probably explained in the letter that was waiting for Thomas at the post office on the *Marquis of Anglesea*. Earl had arrived earlier and gone immediately to Augusta. But he had met the Chapman brothers on board and we next hear of Thomas in March 1831 when he was working as a sawyer on a Chapman grant in South Perth (and later at a saw-pit on the Canning).

In the first of many heartbreaks, his daughter Ann, nearly three, had just drowned in a shallow well near his dwelling in conditions where modern CPR could probably have saved her. In the same year, their daughter Ester, born 1830, also died, but at the end of that dreadful year they had a son William to look after. In 1834 he was joined by sister Louisa. Another daughter, Harriet, was born in 1836 but didn't survive.

By May 1832 Thomas and Ann were living in Perth. In the July census Thomas was listed as a boatman but his May application for a town block near the river was unsuccessful. By 1833 Thomas had been made constable for Perth – according to diarist George F Moore he had been a constable in London.

He led a busy life as constable, conducting searches of suspects' houses and appearing regularly as a prosecution witness in the Magistrates' Court. As Sheriff's Officer he conducted auctions of seized goods. He led separate searches for the outlaws Midgegooroo and his son Yagan. In May 1833 he gave evidence against Midgegoroo based on their previous encounters and helped bring him out of the Perth Gaol to face a firing squad.

In August-September 1834 he was 2IC of an expedition sent to Shark Bay on the schooner *Monkey* in search of a reported shipwreck. His party explored the west coast of Dirk Hartog Island, where he found some

broken worm-riddled teak from an unexplained earlier wreck. Something of a maritime entrepreneur, in 1838 Thomas organized a Safety Bay whaling company (which failed) and later promoted the guano industry.

In August 1838 he was promoted to Bailiff of the Civil Court. Another promotion in August 1839 gained him a salaried position (£75 p.a. and rations) when he was made Fremantle Gaoler to succeed Henry Vincent. Thomas, Ann and their children William and Louisa moved to Fremantle.

Detail from Thomas Hunt's final Gaoler's Return, April 1840

His career started badly. He was instructed to take Weeban, a convicted killer who had already escaped from Perth Gaol, with him and his family in a whaleboat. At a stop at Point Walter, Weeban escaped with his restraining ironware and remained at large for eight months. Thomas's new career was effective, but short, resigning on a matter of principle in May 1840.

Thomas and Ann suffered another savage blow in April 1845 when their fourteen-year-old son William died while working on a South Perth farm. He was bitten on the hand by a snake and died in hospital a few hours later, the first of the settler population to die of snakebite.

There was a happier time in April 1851 when Louisa, their last surviving child, married American Thomas Gilman in St John's Fremantle. But their hopes for a happier family life were shattered when Louisa's newborn daughter Elizabeth died in March 1852. A few days later, still aged only eighteen, Louisa followed her daughter into the Skinner Street cemetery when she died of consumption (tuberculosis).

Ann Hunt, aged 59, died in Fremantle in 1859. Thomas, mariner aged 68, died of dysentery in Fremantle 27 April 1868. He was presumably also buried in the Skinner Street cemetery, of which no trace now remains.

Steve Errington

1. See B/MMN/5/208-216, London Metropolitan Archives.

Membership Subscription (Annually from 1 July to 30 June - GST inclusive). Please see subscription form on page 39 for more details.

Contact details

To join Friends of Battye Library please submit the form available on the website:

Friends of Battye Library website:
<http://www.friendsofbattyselibrary.org.au>

For membership information, subscription, change of address etc email Cherie Strickland at membership@friendsofbattyselibrary.org.au

Meetings

General meetings are held each year in March, May, July, September (the Annual General Meeting), and November (also the end of year function). They are held at the State Library of Western Australia and usually begin at 5.00pm for 5.30pm and conclude before 7.00pm, except for the November function which finishes around 8.00pm.

Newsletter

Three issues will be published each year in March, July, and November (flyers will be sent out in May and September). Articles from members and supporters are very welcome and the deadline for copy for the newsletter is 5 February, 5 June, and 10 October. The editor reserves the right to accept or reject articles and notices for publication.

For comments, requests for information, a copy of the Friends of Battye Library (Inc) Constitution, or to send articles and notices for the *Newsletter*, please contact:

Heather at hgmessina@bigpond.com or write to:

The Secretary,
Friends of Battye Library (Inc)
PO Box 6143
Swanbourne WA 6010.

J S Battye Library of West Australian History

Opening hours Mon/Thurs 9.00am - 8.00pm
 Friday 9.00am - 5.30pm
 Sat/Sun 10.00am - 5.30pm
 Public holidays - closed

Retrievals Every half hour during opening hours.

Telephone enquiries (08) 9427 3291 Website www.slwa.wa.gov.au
Email: info@slwa.wa.gov.au

Specialist staff: Dr Kate Gregory (Battye Historian)
 Mr John Hughes (Team Leader Senior Subject Specialist)

Volunteers Ring (08) 9427 3266 or email:
 volunteers@slwa.wa.gov.au

State Records Office

The SRO Search Room is co-located with the Battye Library, third floor of the State Library, Alexander Library Building. To access these materials in the Leah Cohen Reading Room a Researcher's Ticket will still be required.

Retrievals

As per usual times for SRO retrievals.

Telephone (08)9427 3600, website www.sro.wa.gov.au
email: sro@sro.wa.gov.au.

The Genealogy Centre

Opening hours - The hours that the Genealogy Centre will be accessible will remain the same as Battye Library opening hours on the third floor.

Volunteers from Family History Western Australia, formerly the WA Genealogical Society (WAGS), are available to assist researchers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 9.30am to 1.00pm.

Specialist staff for Family History: for Family History information call Tuesday to Thursday on 08 9427 3247 or email info@slwa.wa.gov.au.