No. 187 November 2026

FRIENDS OF BATTYE LIBRARY (Inc.)
NEWSLETTER

Our End of Year meeting 17 November 2026

Jane Lydon

Australian legacies of British slavery



'Specimen of the society at the Swan River' 1830 - '*Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cycno* (A rare bird on this earth, like nothing so much as a black swan).
[National Library of Australia 135264918]

Tuesday 17 November 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 (2025-2026)

President	Jennie Carter
Vice President	Pamela Statham Drew
Secretary	Lorraine Clarke
Treasurer	Nick Drew
Membership Secretary	Cherie Strickland
Events Coordinator	Helen Mather
Committee members	Heather Campbell, Steve Errington, Penny Hoffman, Raymond Marks, Odhran O'Brien, and Callum Wood.
Ex-Officio	Catherine Clark (CEO & State Librarian) Damien Hassan (Senior Archivist, State Records Office) Kate Gregory (Head of Research and Interpretation, formerly Battye Historian)
Newsletter editor	Heather Campbell
Layout & production	Jennie Carter

All correspondence (other than membership or *Newsletter* matters) to:

The Secretary
Friends of Battye Library (Inc)
PO Box 6143
Swanbourne WA 60105.

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.

End of Year meeting

Tuesday 17 November 2026

Great Southern Room, 4th floor State Library of Western Australia at 5pm for 5.30pm

Our speaker will be Professor Jane Lydon

Australian Legacies of British Slavery

Help us celebrate the end of another year

After the talk, members and guests are warmly invited to stay on and join us for a catered two course spit-roast dinner which will be served in the staff dining room adjacent to the Great Southern Room. Regrettably, the cost of living has also affected the Friends and we have had to slightly increase the cost of dinner. It is still great value:

The cost is only $45 per head
Including wine and soft drinks

We are grateful to Catherine Clark, CEO and State Librarian, for her generosity in making the 4th floor staff canteen again available to us**.**

Bookings for the dinner must be received by the morning of Friday 6 November as we must provide final numbers to the caterer. Please RSVP to Nick Drew by email at: *nickdrew@bigpond.com* or telephone 0409 290 895 by 2 November 2026. Payment can be made in advance to the Friends Bank Account: BSB 016 185 Account No 4220 58413 or by card. Or payment on the 17 November at the door by card or cash.

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 reception desk or the Battye Library desk on the 3rd floor.

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About our speaker Jane Lydon

Australian Legacies of British Slavery

Professor Jane Lydon is Wesfarmers Chair of Australian History at the University of Western Australia. Her research centres upon Australia's colonial past and its legacies in the present. Her most recent book is the co-edited (with Zoe Laidlaw) *Legacies of British Slavery in Australia and New Zealand* (Manchester University Press, 2026).

Jane's topic

In August 1833, British Parliament abolished slavery in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape. While this momentous event has continued to be celebrated, it is often forgotten that many of those who benefited from slavery had ties to other parts of the British Empire, including the settler colonies of Australia, Canada and South Africa. Between 2020-2024 our team worked to trace the movement of people, goods, capital, and practices from the Caribbean to the newly-established colony of Western Australia, working in collaboration with the National Centre of Biography, the Australian National Maritime Museum, and the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership at University College London. We researched Western Australian colonists and their networks, contributing to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the People Australia database, and an exhibition at the ANMM. Our project demonstrated the profound importance of British slavery and slave-ownership to the colonisation of Western Australia and has helped frame a set of methods and questions that can be applied to the legacies of slavery in other settler colonial contexts.



Meeting dates for 2027

(Please mark your calendars)

9 March Jeff Pearce, Chris Handley *Light Horsemen and Cameleers of South Australia*

11 May Emily Lanman *Rethinking Prisoner Classification in WA 1829-1868*

13 July David Price *True story of North West Australia's fatal experiment with medical apartheid*

14 September (AGM) State Library and State Records Office - *reports.*

23 November (End of year celebration) Michelle Hilbrands *Tracking frontier violence, expanding territories and control of country*

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President's piece

It is a privilege to have been elected president of our society for the next two years at September's AGM. Please see page 8 for the President's report which was tabled at the AGM.

My heartfelt thanks to the wonderful committee of the Friends whose support has been invaluable. My appreciation also to all our members for your involvement in our vital organisation which exists to assist and promote the work of the Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia, and the State Records Office.

Sadly, since our last meeting, our esteemed long-term member, Fr Ted Doncaster has died. We pay tribute to him here.

Jennie Carter

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Obituaries

Farewell to a Gem

The Venerable Edward William Doncaster, OAM (1931–2026

Fr Ted (as he was affectionately known by many) passed away peacefully in Perth on 13 August 2026, aged 95.



Born in Busselton in 1931, to Edward Thompson Doncaster and Doreen Disney Daly, Fr Ted was educated in Perth at Thomas St Junior School and Hale School.

He started as an office boy with a commercial artist on Howard St, Perth, volunteered at the Fremantle Missions to Seamen, then was employed at the WA Registrar General's Office (1948-54), where he indexed more than 1,000 names in the Anglican section of East Perth Cemetery.

After completing theological training at St John's Theological College, Morpeth (1954-56), Fr Ted returned to Perth, was made a Deacon, and ordained on 21 December 1957.

After serving as assistant curate (St Aidan's East Victoria Park, then Geraldton), Fr Ted became Rector of Bluff Point in 1959. In 1964, he went to Carnarvon, and four years later, he became the inaugural priest of the Gascoyne-Ashburton Parish for the Bush Church Aid Society. His love of the North West and its people stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Fr Ted ministered to Southern Cross, Mundaring, and Floreat Park parishes from 1970 to 1985. During a crippling drought, he went as Rector of Port Lincoln, South Australia, in 1985.

In 1990, Fr Ted was called to Willunga and, in 1995, to Renmark. He retired from the Anglican ministry in 1998.

Ordained into Antiochian Orthodoxy in 1998, Fr Ted ministered to Orthodox communities in Perth and Bunbury until declining health forced his final retirement in 2007.

Among many extramural appointments, Fr Ted was Archdeacon of the North West, Swan and the Eyre Peninsula. He was Rural Dean of Claremont, Willunga, and Renmark, Canon of St George's Cathedral, and Perth's inaugural Diocesan Archivist.

Noted for his keen interest in Western Australia's past, Fr Ted preserved irreplaceable church records. He biographed Anglican luminaries and researched many Western Australian parishes. The Battye Library holds many published and unpublished works, along with other significant records donated by him. For remarkable service, Fr Ted was honoured with the Order of Australia Medal, as a Gem of Time by The Friends of Battye Library, and as an Honorary Life Member by the Royal WA Historical Society.

A committed Christian, loving family man, and gifted historian known for his quick wit and gentle nature, Fr Ted married Susan Hewett in 1962; they were together until her passing in 2014. He married Yvonne Paterson in 2017; she died in 2023.

On his passing, St George's Cathedral bells pealed for a humble, faithful servant who is survived by three children and five grandchildren.

Michael Doncaster

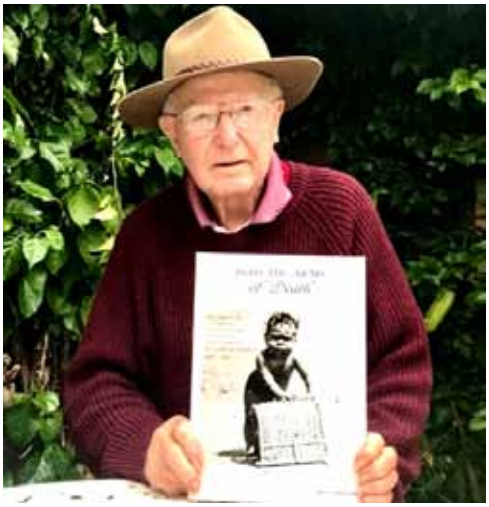
[*Editor's note: Fr Ted was a much respected member of the Friends of Battye Library for many years and a regular contributor to the Newsletter writing many delightful articles on Western Australian and Anglican church history.*}

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Vale Dr Neville Green (1933-2026)

WA historian Dr Neville Green died on 7 September 2026 at the age of 92. Neville achieved so much in his life, was highly respected for his written publications and had a long association with the State Records Office and State Library. Neville was the winner of the Margaret Medcalf Award in 2007 for his PhD thesis *Access, Equality and Opportunity? The Education of Aboriginal Children in Western Australia, 1840-1978* (Neville held two PhDs).

Many will be familiar with Neville's published works relating to Aboriginal history. Neville was also closely involved in the work to comprehensively index Colonial Secretary's Office correspondence to identify references to Aboriginal people in these records. These indexes list app. 10,000 Aboriginal people in the 1800s and remain an important resource to this day.



Dr Neville Green (Murdoch University)

The SRO would also like to acknowledge Neville's work in the 1980s that ensured many government school records were transferred to the State archives collection at that time. Neville was pivotal in this project. Later on, in the early 2000s, Neville wrote many letters to the Education Minister to lobby for the Education Department to more actively collect school records of archival value. As a result of this advocacy, the Education Department established a project in which, over successive years, thousands of government school records have been centrally gathered and registered. This work is still ongoing.

These school records have been used by many clients and have served many research needs. In more recent years, they have been critical for the National Redress Scheme. For the purposes of the Scheme, these school records have been used to meet evidential needs and have been able to assist many applicants of the Redress Scheme.

The legacy of Neville's work will have ongoing value and benefit to many West Australians. Neville was always a welcome and friendly face at the Alexander Library Building and he will be missed.

Damien Hassan, Senior Archivist

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Members' news

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*

Nick Drew

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Annual General Meeting 2026

The members of the management committee elected at the AGM held on 8 September 2026 and who will hold office for the next two years are:

President	Jennie Carter
Vice President	Pamela Statham Drew
Secretary	Lorraine Clarke
Treasurer	Nick Drew
Membership Secretary	Cherie Strickland
Events Coordinator	Helen Mather
Newsletter editor	Heather Campbell
Committee members	Steve Errington, Penny Hoffman, Raymond Marks, Callum Wood.

A nomination for Odhran O'Brien submitted prior to the AGM unfortunately went astray and was not presented for election. The Friends committee at its meeting held on 13 October resolved to co-opt Odhran to the committee as the fifth ordinary member.

The President's and Treasurer's reports were tabled and are here:

Friends Of The Battye Library (Inc)
President's Report to the AGM 2026

At the 2024 AGM a revised constitution was adopted, which now means officers are elected every two years rather than annually. This is why 2026 is an election year. When Richard Offen stood down as President last year, as Vice President I took over for the remaining time. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Richard who had been an outstanding President for five years. His is a hard act to follow indeed.

Sadly, the death of some of our valued members have occurred during the year and we farewelled with respect and fondness our wonderful Gems of Time, Gillian O'Mara and Father Ted Doncaster. As well, we mourned our stalwart members Jan Beresford-Pierce, Anne Gill, and of course, Michael Nind, who was an important member of the Committee. We also remember with gratitude, Wendy Ryan who, although not a member, left the Friends an exceedingly generous bequest in her will.

Committee meetings are held in February, April, August, and October with June being an optional meeting held if needed. Your Committee continues its work of running the Friends, overseeing the finances of the organisation, choosing projects to support, and ensuring general meetings are held for the benefit of our members. That we have been able to assist with State Library and State Records Office projects is due in no small measure to the wonderful generosity of the late Maud Sholl as well as that of our revered Patron, Miss Margaret Medcalf OAM.

This year we are delighted to have had the opportunity to contribute Sholl Bequest funds towards the Researcher in Residence (AVDP) project for the State Library. For the State Records Office we have been able to help with SRO's ongoing digitisation of the Colonial Secretary's Office Correspondence.

The State Library CEO Catherine Clark, Battye Historian Kate Gregory, and SRO Senior Archivist, Damian Hassan, are ex-officio members and attend our meetings, despite them being held at the end of their busy working days. Their support and encouragement fosters efficient communication with both organisations and we are guided by their expertise and understanding of the collections as we strive to work with the State Library and the State Records Office to preserve and enhance our State's heritage collections. We remain indebted to Catherine Clark and her team for making us so welcome and providing all the facilities we need, including the State Library's staff room for our popular end of year dinner.

We have had a very interesting program of talks which have enlivened our general meetings which are held five times a year:

September AGM: Dr Kate Gregory and Michael Nind on 40 years of the Alexander Library Building.

November end of year meeting: Caroline Ingram *Women on Trial: The criminal trials of women in colonial Western Australia.*

March 2026: Sue Graham Taylor - T*he growth of environmental activism: the role of the WA Naturalists' Club*

May was Christine Harris who spoke about *Ghost Towns in WA*

In July Dr Charlie Fox gave a talk on the little known *State Hotels Project of the Scaddan Government 1911-1916*.

My warmest thanks to our speakers who have given their time and knowledge to keep us informed, enthralled, enlightened, and entertained throughout the year.

I am most grateful to all our Committee members for making my life as president so easy. Special thanks to Pamela Statham Drew who has willingly taken on the exacting, and at times onerous, task of secretary over the year, to Nick Drew our treasurer who does so much more than make sure our finances are well-kept and growing nicely. Cherie Strickland astutely organises our membership to keep us all informed and in touch with each other. Helen Mather is our dedicated events co-ordinator who liaises with our speakers to provide such engaging talks at general meetings. Lorraine Clark donates her time and expertise to manage the Friends website. Heather Campbell, has cheerfully and patiently continued the daunting task of editing the much-appreciated *Newsletter*. Steve Errington has shared his knowledge of WA history and writes the 'Afterwords' column in the *Newsletter*, and Raymond Marks always provides an interesting perspective at committee meetings.

I cannot thank my colleagues enough for all the hard work they put in behind the scenes.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to every one of our members for their backing for the role and aims of the Friends of Battye Library. Our special organisation was formed in 1981 and since then has gone from strength to strength because of your ongoing encouragement and involvement. Without your generosity and enthusiasm the important work the Friends does to assist the State Library of Western Australia and the State Records Office would not have been possible to the extent it has been over the past 45 years.

Thank you all for your kindness and friendship, I have been profoundly privileged to be president of this marvellous organisation for the past year.

Jennie Carter
8 September 2026

Treasurer's Report to the AGM 2026

It was my pleasure to present the detailed Treasurer's report which showed an excellent financial situation for the Friends of Battye Library (Inc) for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026. Here is a brief summary of my report.

Income and Expenses Statement

Income (interest from bank deposits, Ryan bequest, donations, meetings, end of year dinner, and member subscriptions).
Total **$67,731.25**

Expenses (bank charges, end of year dinner, *Newsletter* printing, postage costs, and Sholl bequest payments distributed for SLWA and SRO projects). Total **$47,906.64**

Held by the Friends of Battye Library

Bank term deposits, shares (hybrids), and in trust by SLWA for Maud Sholl bequest distribution. Total **$335,985.93**

Outstanding payments: project funding as at 30 June 2026

To pay SRO for Stage 1 of the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) digitisation project and the conservation of Perth Police Criminal Registers. Total $**38,305.62**

Nick Drew
Treasurer

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Treasures from Trove

[*Editor's note: this extract is a historical record which reflects the perspectives and attitudes of its time about First Nations people which today might be viewed as offensive.*]

Dipping into the British Newspaper Archive for the birth of the Swan River Colony.



15 December 1828, p.3

Proposed settlement on the western coast of New Holland

Many of our readers no doubt are aware that, for some time past, extensive arrangements have been in progress for the formation of settlement at the Swan River, on the western coast of New Holland, and that directions have been given by the English Government for taking formal possession of that almost unknown country. Public curiosity is naturally excited on the subject, and but little has transpired which can satisfy the craving. We therefore feel peculiar satisfaction in having it in our power to communicate some important details, the general accuracy of which may be depended upon.

In the early part of last year Captain Stirling, of his Majesty's ship Success, was directed to examine the western coast of New Holland, from Cape Leeuwin northwards. As the geography of this region is not very familiar, we venture to state that Cape Leeuwin, or Lion's Land, is the south-west point of New Holland, and was so called from the Dutch ship which first discovered it in 1660. Here it was that the late Captain Flinders commenced his survey on the 7th December 1801, which was confined entirely to the south arid east coasts, while about the same time an examination of the west and south coasts look place by Captain Baudin, a French navigator. Until the visit of Captain Stirling, in February 1827, we were entirely indebted to Baudin for our knowledge the Swan River. Captain King, who in June 1822 anchored off Rottnest Island at the entrance of this river, was prevented by the weather from exploring it, at which circumstance that scientific officer expresses little regret, the Swan River having been "very minutely examined by MM. Heirisson and Baily — the former an enseigne de vaisseau, the latter mineralogist" and so fully described in De Freycinet's and Peron's accounts of that voyage.*

The object of Captain Stirling's expedition was to ascertain an eligible situation for the establishment of colony; and the report made by him, after the careful examination of 500 miles of coast, has led to the selection of the Swan River, situate in 32 deg. 4 min., and deriving its name from the numerous black swans by which it is frequented.

It was surveyed by the French to the distance of about 60 miles. Captain Stirling penetrated to its source and some way beyond, through an exceedingly picturesque and fertile country, until he arrived at an extensive range of mountains, the view from which presented only a vast and boundless plain.



Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)
1848 engraving from John Gould's *Birds of Australia*. (Public domain image)

Although Captain Stirling's first interview with the natives in his progress up the river assumed rather a hostile character, it terminated in perfect amity, which continued uninterrupted. The inhabitants were found in the most deplorable state of savage ignorance, clothed merely with mantle of kangaroo or opossum skins, and armed with spears pointed the bones of animals or flint. A stone adze and mother-of-pearl fishing hook appeared to be their only implements, with fishing-lines manufactured from the bark of trees. In summer (which, be it observed, is our winter) they frequent the coast in considerable numbers, and live chiefly upon fish taken by spearing, as they are unacquainted with the mode of making nets, as well the construction of canoe, or even-raft of the rudest kind. They, however, form in shallow places a kind of weir with considerable ingenuity. In the winter the natives retire to the hills, where their food is the opossum, the kangaroo, the land tortoise, and birds, of which the country affords a great variety and abundance, with roots and vegetables. Their appearance is forbidding, and their manner ferocious; but if managed with skill, the natives may be attached, although great care must taken not to give offence — for on the slightest provocation they are inclined to resort to hostile measures, and are capricious and revengeful. Their heads are large, and their limbs disproportionably slender; but, notwithstanding, they are peculiarly active, and possess an astonishing quickness of sight. The climate of the Swan River is described as extremely salubrious. Although the heat is very great during the middle of the day, yet the frequent showers and cool breezes from the mountains deprive it of any injurious effect. The mornings and the evenings allow ample time for labour, and the nights are clear and beautiful. The heat is probably greater upon the sea-shore than inland, owing to the power of the sun on a sandy soil; but it should be stated, that no case of sickness occurred to Capt. Stirling's crew, though they were necessarily much exposed.

The soil is described most inviting to the agriculturist. Springs are abundant, and so rich is the vegetation, that thistles and ferns were

observed which had attained the enormous growth of twelve feet. The trees, too, assumed the most luxurious green possible. Several specimens of minerals were collected by Captain Stirling, which have been deposited with the Geological Society. Of the birds, the most common are the emu or cassowary — the swan, and several species of the duck tribe, which are particularly numerous - cockatoos, both white and black — quails, pigeons, parroquets, kingfishers, falcons, and many singing birds. On the coast, seals, but of the least valuable kind, abound; and both whales and sharks are frequently seen. Fish, of variety of excellent kinds, is plentiful; and there appears little room to doubt but that a valuable fishery will result from the establishment of the projected colony.

Two ships of war have been appointed to take out the settlers, and Capt. Stirling has been nominated governor of the new settlement. Lieut. Roe of the navy, who was employed in the survey of New Holland under Capt. King, goes out as surveyor-general to the colony; and some other officers, selected for their scientific acquirements, have received subordinate appointments. — *Literary Gazette*.

Heather Campbell

* See 'De Freycinet,' p.175 et seq: and 'Peron', vol. I. pp.178 et seq.



Have you a story to tell?

[*Senior Archivist, David Whiteford, who will be well-known to our members has written several fascinating articles for the Newsletter most of them on the origins of places and their names.*]

I went to school in a ghost town

At the May Friends meeting, Christine Harris of Family History WA's 'People of Western Australia's Ghost Towns' project gave an interesting presentation on the foundation, intention and progress of the project to record all of Western Australia's ghost towns and their stories. Ghost towns can be found throughout Western Australia and even within the Perth Metropolitan Area. One town listed in the project's website is Wialki.

Wialki is in the north-eastern wheatbelt 341km from Perth. It is on the Burakin to Bonnie Rock railway and the siding was opened by the W.A.

Government Railways on 27 April 1931, along with the Kulja to Bonnie Rock section of the line. Forty-five people were recorded as living in the Wialki statistical area in the 2021 national census. There is also a North Wialki area in the census, with ten people recorded.



Wialki 2 May 1974. (Cons 7655) Along the main road from left to right are school, store, hall, and church. A train is shunting the siding which contains wagons for grain and superphosphate for local farms. Tennis courts are just visible bottom left. The school grew after this image was taken, becoming a two-teacher one and there was a house built for married teachers behind the store. The school closed in October 1993 and both it and the house were removed. The large CBH grain bin is no longer served by rail, services being suspended Beacon to Bonnie Rock sometime after 2012.

Wialki celebrated the centenary of settlement on Saturday 26 September 2026, although the townsite wasn't gazetted until 30 June 1933. The townsite and much of the greater locality of Wialki is within the Shire of Mount Marshall but to the east some of the locality is in the Shire of Mukinbudin.

Wialki is now a ghost town. There are no permanent residents within the townsite but in 1966 when the Whiteford family of two parents and three children arrived in Western Australia from Scotland the town was very much alive. My father was sponsored out on the £10 assisted immigration scheme by Jim Meney, a Scotsman who had long been settled on 'Lochwood' farm, Wialki – in fact, the farm's road address is Scotsman Road. We arrived at Fremantle aboard the Shaw Savill liner *Northern Star* on 24 February 1966. After a few days in Perth we set off for Wialki on my ninth birthday, 1 March 1966, a day in which the temperature in Perth reached the old 100 degrees Fahrenheit. And us just out from a Scottish winter. We survived and were soon settled in a

house within the Lochwood farm complex. My younger brother, Richard, and I being of school age were enrolled in the Wialki primary school along with (I think) 19 other pupils ranging from grade 1 to grade 7. A typical one-teacher country school. We caught the bus at the end of the long drive, being almost the last pick-up in the morning and, therefore, nearly the last drop-off after school as the route was reversed for the home run.

The Bonnie Rock railway had been closed in 1957 along with many other branch lines. But it had re-opened on a seasonal trial basis on 18 January 1960 to cater for grain and fertiliser traffic and was also available for other freight. Dad purchased a Holden station wagon in Perth that took us and some of our belongings to Wialki. But the bulk of our goods and chattels came later by train and I recall my mother lamenting the breakage of some of her crockery in transit.

In 1966, Wialki had a school, store, hall, church, railway siding and grain bin, a golf club and sports grounds. In earlier years the WAGR also had camps for permanent way staff. As an example, a ganger and four repairers were based there in 1935.

The WA *Post office directory* of 1949 – the last issue of that publication had 22 families listed including Meney, O'Neil, Miguel, Clarke and Arnold, names I knew from our time there. Wialki first appeared in the 1935-36 issue of the directory, indicating the more recent close settlement of the area.

Many readers will know of the emu wars of 1932 in which Defence Department machine guns were used to cull large numbers of emus gathering along the emu proof fence east of Mukinbudin. Later, in June 1958, *The Beverley Times* reported that 'fairly large concentrations of the birds have been reported from…Wialki*'.* A headline in the *Daily News* of 14 December 1955 'You have to be quick up in Wialki**'** revealed that

> One of the neatest pieces of "banditry" seen in Wialki occurred recently when a car driver saw the carcass of an emu wedged in the fork of a mallee tree growing adjacent to a North Wialki road. The excited driver brought the car to a sharp halt, got out, reached up and screwed off the emu's head, returned to the wheel of the car, and drove off happy with his luck – for he would now be able to claim a 4/6d bounty on the vermin's beak. A week later, at the local store, an irate young farmhand related the experiences of his most recent shooting escapade. Having fired a total of nine shotgun bullets he had killed a young emu. He placed his prize in the fork of a mallee tree. He then walked seven miles to his employer's farm

and returned on a bicycle with a sharp knife to cut off the emu's beak. On arriving at the scene of his kill, he found his bullet-riddled carcass intact – minus the beak.

Of other bird life, black swans were seen in the district for the first time in living memory, reported on a North Wialki property in April 1955 following soaking rains.

As at 2 October 2026, Wialki has five entries in the National Archives of Australia *RecordSearch* catalogue. Three are for the post office, one for telephone trunk line and one is an air safety investigation file regarding VH-RKR in the 1960s which bent propellor blades on landing. There are 72 entries in the State Records Office catalogue. Files relate to the school, railway siding, water supply, cemetery, hall, roads and other matters. There is even one file relating to Lochwood farm; cons3516 EX-1641 *Farmers Field Trials JF Meney North Wialki*. It covers wheat, barley, oats and urea and superphosphate trials on the farm from 1963 until 1968.

There are fifteen entries in the State Library catalogue including a couple of books on the school and area, an oral history interview, maps and photographs. There's even a 2014 music compilation CD produced by The West Australian Music Industry Association called *Sounds of the wheatbelt* containing a song titled *Wialki.* Pete Byfield wrote and sang *Wialki*, which isn't actually mentioned in the lyrics but the song is about dusty dry seeding time on the edge of the wheatbelt – and it can be found on Youtube.

Jim Meney's adult son, Rob, and another man, also worked on the farm in 1966 and it was soon evident that there was insufficient work to keep my father on. So a move of job and home was made to Wongan Hills. I still have my report card from Wialki, and I took a few photographs with my Kodak brownie camera (total of eight photos on a roll of film!) shortly before we left. The farm is now worked by a grandson of Jim.

Although we did not stay long in Wialki, the experience helped shape our lives in our new country. We explored the area on weekends and began our learning, and loving, of 'the bush'. While I am sure the need to stay at least two years to avoid having to pay our full passage out from the UK should we return had something to do with it, my parents persevered and well-established our family in Western Australia. I have been back to my ghost town a number of times over the years – even on a special weekend passenger train in 1993 that included the Bonnie Rock line in

its itinerary. If you're visiting the wildflowers and rock formations in the region, try and include Wialki on your travels.

David Whiteford

[*Julie Martin, who wrote a lively series of articles on her experiences in the 1960s as an 'accidental librarian' as well as the moving story of Lenny Sexton which appeared in our March edition, has provided a fascinating and little known exploration of two remarkable women.*]

A Tale of Two Women

This is a gentle story, uncovered through a meagre trail of casually revealed clues. It tells of an unlikely friendship between two women from very different worlds in early twentieth-century Western Australia — a story that, despite its modest nature, speaks volumes about both their characters.

On a Friday in September 1878, twenty-seven-year-old Jane Cormack handed her three-year-old daughter, Mary, to the Catholic nuns at Aberdeen's Nazareth House and walked away, out of her life forever. Mary's Scottish birth record bore the word '*illegitimate'.*

After seventeen years, in the company of alcoholic women, wayward teenage girls and incapacitated elderly soldiers, Mary emerged from that institution, a literate, trained laundress and domestic.

Initially employed as a housekeeper for an Aberdeen widower, his three children and two female boarders, Mary disappeared from the records until November 1907, when, at thirty-two, she boarded the RMS *Omrah* in London bound for Western Australia.

Also aboard the *Omrah*, accompanied by her four children, a maid and a female companion, was Lady Gwen James, returning home to Western Australia after four years in England while her husband served as the State's Agent-General.

Lady James, born Gwen Hearder in Carmarthen, South Wales, where her father was Medical Superintendent of St David's Mental Hospital, had, by all accounts, an idyllic childhood and family life. She would later be described as:

possessing a sympathetic nature, appreciative of all that is best in those with whom she came in contact, seldom if ever critical of others, and ready at all times to give help to those in sorrow and need.

She had met the young, charismatic law student Walter Hartwell James during his time in London as an articled clerk, and in 1892 married him at Albany's historic St John's Anglican Church. In the fifteen eventful years that followed, Gwen gave birth to four children, fought alongside her husband for women's suffrage, and supported him through his terms as Premier of Western Australia and Agent-General. With his knighthood in June 1907, she became Lady James.



Lady Gwen James
(Battye Library, SLWA BA1272/21)

With her commitments and responsibilities as the Agent-General's wife, Gwen unsurprisingly hired staff to help manage her busy London life — and among them was Mary Cormack. Mary and the James children developed a rapport, and when it came time to return home, Gwen invited Mary to accompany the family back to Western Australia and join their household.

And so, on arrival in Fremantle in December 1907, Mary took up residence with the James family as nurse and needlewoman at their gracious Cottesloe home, *Minnawarra* — a position with a loving family in a beautiful setting, a short walk from the banks of the Swan River.

But not for long.

Within a year, the tall, good-looking Frank Webber appeared at *Minnawarra's* back door delivering produce from his mother's fruit and vegetable stall on the Perth to Cottesloe Road. Mary was smitten and, no doubt-yearning for a family of her own, married him.

Frank was not a bad man — rather, a man trying to navigate life without the compass that good parenting provides and overwhelmed by the responsibilities and constraints of marriage and fatherhood. Within five years, Mary had given birth to three girls, and as Gwen and Walter sold their Cottesloe home and purchased an elegant three-storey house in Mount Street, Perth, Mary and Frank moved from one tiny workers' cottage to another in the port of Fremantle.

In 1915, Mary found herself in the country town of Wagin as Frank's troopship sailed for Gallipoli. He never arrived. Redirected to France, Frank found himself on the Somme where he endured almost four years of unimaginable horror before returning with a Military Medal, a bullet lodged in his thigh and a gambling addiction.

Mary's marriage and the thirty-three years that followed are not the subject of this telling. But, in short, they were years of heartbreak and hardship.

In contrast, Gwen and Walter's marriage was, by all accounts, one of fulfilment — a union of kindred spirits. Walter, a lawyer by profession, warm and gregarious by nature and loyal and generous to his friends, was described as a man with a deep dislike of privilege and a genuine concern for the underdog.

As the twentieth century gathered pace and the four James children grew less dependent on their mother, Gwen was drawn — somewhat reluctantly — into public life, driven by her deep concern for women and those less fortunate than herself. Through the Karrakatta Club, the Women's Service Guild and the Girl Guides, she found her voice as an advocate for feminist causes. She served as president of the National Council of Women of Western Australia and was a tireless worker for the Red Cross Society, for which she was later awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

After Frank's return from the Western Front, Mary and the children left Wagin and settled into a series of rented weatherboard cottages in the Perth suburb of Subiaco.


Mary Webber

How and why the two women maintained their connection remains a mystery. Perhaps, in desperation, Mary appealed to her former employer for help when Frank's request for sustenance relief was refused. But remain a part of one another's lives, they did. Periodically, Mary, dressed in her 'best' outfit, would catch the tram in Rokeby Road, alight in the city, and walk to Mount Street to take tea with Gwen — sometimes on the wide veranda with its sweeping views across the river, sometimes in the cosy



Verandah at the James' residence at 69 Mount Street. (Battye Library, SLWA 095884PD)

sitting room. It is also understood that Gwen arranged for Mary to spend a week at Rottnest Island to rest and recover following a debilitating bout of influenza.

This would all be hearsay were it not for the small notices that appeared in the **In Memoriam** section of the local newspaper on the anniversary of Gwen's death and continued to appear every year until Mary began her long and distressing descent into dementia.

> JAMES – A token of love and remembrance of my dear Friend, the late Lady James, who died November 11, 1938. Inserted by Mary Webber.
>
> JAMES – Always beautiful memories of a dear, kind friend, the late Lady James, who died at Perth, November 11, 1938. Inserted by Mary Webber.

Some might question whether an educated, titled Anglican lady and an illegitimate Catholic nursemaid and laundress truly had common ground on which to build a friendship. Was Mary presumptuous? Were Gwen's acts of kindness misread as something deeper?

But there's a certain familiarity in the qualities attributed to Gwen James — Quiet and retiring by nature, kind of heart, gentle and deeply religious. Throughout her life, she always interested herself in the welfare of those less fortunate than herself, and there are few who knew the full extent of her charitable deeds, most of them performed with the unobtrusiveness that characterised all her movements.

For my Gran was such a woman herself.

Julie Martin

[*Brendan Kelly, a Bunbury-based member of the Friends, has become a regular contributor to our Newsletter with many articles on the lively arts scene in colonial Western Australia.*]

The Wilgie Sketching Club

The West Australian Society of Arts is the oldest art society in WA, tracing its beginnings from 1889 to the Wilgie Sketching Club. The present Society was incorporated in 1896. *Wilgie* is the Aboriginal word for ochre in the Noongar language of the Indigenous people of the South-West. It is a natural earth pigment, clay mixed with iron oxides, typically giving it a deep red or brown shade of colour. Wilgie is used in art and body paint by Australian Indigenous peoples.

In a letter to the editor of the *West Australian* on 10 December 1889, headed The Wilgie Sketching Club, the Secretary of the Club and founding member, Bernard H Woodward, provides provenance of the club and a brief of its workings:

> Sir, I see I have been given the credit of initiating the "Wilgie Sketching Club," together with Messrs. Prinsep and Gibbs. Now Mr. Poole had an equal share in that work, and the remaining member of the committee, Mrs. John Forrest, did far more than anyone else in its establishment. As this is the first club of the kind in this colony, perhaps you will permit me to say a word about its working. Every member is expected each month to execute a sketch, illustrating one of the two subjects named by the Committee for that purpose, and a meeting is held once a month for a "time sketch" from a model or still-life group, when the criticisms of the Committee on the home sketches are read. These sketches are then sent out in a portfolio, each member sending them to the next on the list, after a day's interval, thus giving an opportunity of examining them, and voting for the best in each class-figure, landscape, and still life. I ought to add that the criticisms of the Committee are chiefly directed to the subject of composition, both as to form and colour. The club now numbers nearly thirty members, more than half of whom sent in sketches for November, and also attended and worked at the monthly meeting. Excursions will be made to picturesque spots, from time to time, for studies from nature. If the club be not successful in its aim of eventually founding a West Australian School of Painting, at any rate it will afford its members many a pleasant gathering for an interesting recreation.



H W Gibbs, Father of May Gibbs, (History West. RWAHS P1999.7177)

Clearly, Woodward wished to give credit to Herbert Gibbs, Henry Prinsep, George Temple Poole and Mrs John Forrest for the Wilgie Club, which became the West Australian Society of Arts and Crafts and in modern times, the West Australian Society of Arts. Herbert Gibbs was a key player, a

talented artist in multimedia. He painted in oils and watercolours, was a printmaker and wood-carver, as well as a skilled illustrator and lively cartoonist for the *WA Bulletin* newspaper.[1] Herbert and Cecilia Gibbs (and their talented daughter May) were also active in amateur entertainment circles, presenting Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Herbert Gibbs and Henry Prinsep were capable stage set-designers.

By virtue of Herbert's employment, the Wilgie Club found friends at the *WA Bulletin*. With a flourish, the paper printed a sonnet to the club titled *'Nullus Mensis Sine Tabella'*, which although politically incorrect now, is a jaunty ode.[2] Possibly penned by the *Bulletin*'s ubiquitous rhymer-in-chief, Jerry Hart, the Latin phrase translates emphatically to 'No month without a tablet'.[3] It exhorts the educated student to ensure that not a month should go by without writing. The phrase applies equally to artists practising their skill. The message conveys the need for diligence in practise about producing writing or art, every single month. Perhaps a forerunner to the modern saying 'Use it or lose it'.

At the end of 1896, it was reported that a new Society of Arts had emerged for an exhibition. Bernard Woodward, as President of the Society, reminded all that even before the colony had come into prominence and prosperity, there were those who had artistic tastes and strove to give them expression. The newspaper provided the Wilgie Club a timely valedictory:

> The Wilgie Club, under whose auspices the first exhibition of pictures by local artists was held some seven years ago, has, it is understood, become extinct. In its day, however, it did good work. It helped to keep alight among us the flickering torch of art, and its strongest and best elements have become merged in the new Society, whose vigorous life is evidenced by the exhibition now placed before the public.[4]

Brendan Kelly

Endnotes

1. 'Hart Beresford-Hartnoll – Stirring the Possum', Brendan Kelly, on 'Freotopia' (On-line), May 2024..
2. WA Bulletin, 14 December 1889, p.4
3. Author's translation from Cassell's New Latin Dictionary, Third Edition, 1964.
4. West Australian, 30 December 1896, p. 4.

News from the State Library

The stories that shaped us deserve to be heard – Oral Histories giving appeal

The State Library just launched a giving appeal to seek support for producing a curated selection of its Oral Histories collection to share publicly with its visitors through future exhibitions and programming. The Oral Histories collection contains more than 18,000 hours of interviews with over 7,000 Western Australians, capturing personal stories, memories and experiences that have helped shape our state. Yet many of these remarkable stories of war, migration and diverse lifestyles remain hidden within the collection. The library is now seeking donations to help unlock these stories and make them widely accessible.

Each recording must be researched, reviewed, carefully edited and prepared, so it can be shared in meaningful and engaging ways. This work requires specialist skills and significant time investment. Four hours of oral history curation cost the library $500, and a minimum of 200 hours of work is required to start the process of bringing more of these stories into exhibitions, programs and public experiences. Donations raised will help the library identify, curate and prepare oral histories for future visitor experiences and help ensure all Western Australians can access and discover the stories that shaped our state.

The Friends of Battye Library, in consultation with the State Library CEO and State Librarian, the Head of Interpretation and Research, and highly valued Friends' patron, Margaret Medcalf OAM, has allocated a part of Margaret's generous donation to the Friends as a matched gift for this appeal, so every donation received by the public will be matched dollar for dollar up to a maximum of $25,000. This means every donation will go twice as far and have double the impact, providing a strong incentive for support.

You are invited to learn more and/or consider supporting the appeal at *slwa.wa.gov.au/giving-appeal*.

Tom Stannage Memorial Lecture and Masterclass with Shona Coyne and Tiffany Shellam

The State Library partnered with UWA to present the Tom Stannage Memorial Lecture on Wednesday 4 November 2026 in the State Library Theatre. This lecture commemorates the exceptional contribution

made by Professor Tom Stannage (1944-2012), a passionate historian, teacher, and advocate for WA history and heritage.

Shona Coyne and **Tiffany Shellam**, historians and curators of the *Kalyagul: Connections to Menang Country* exhibition is presented in the Museum of the Great Southern as part of Albany's 2026 bicentenary that commemorates the colonisation of Noongar Country in Kinjarling/ Albany. This significant moment offers an opportunity to reflect on how we undertake this commemoration, and enriches the public engagement with our current exhibition *Kinjarling Djinnang Ngalak: Country Sees Us* on until 4 April 2027 in the Ground Floor of the State Library.

Kalyagul: Connections to Menang celebrates Menang people's profound connections to the land, sea and skies of the great southern and their crucial role in shaping how the region's natural world is understood. The exhibition is a culmination of *Entangled Knowledges: Kaartdijin, Science and History in the Robert Neill Collection*, a collaborative research project that returned colonially disconnected knowledge to the community it came from.

This lecture and the masterclass on Thursday 5 November explored how reparative work to return knowledge, objects or stories is often emotional, sometimes uncomfortable, and rarely concludes with the act of return itself. However, this cross-sector, collaborative and Indigenous-governed project produced the Kaartdijin model, a framework for research as a relational, reciprocal and community-led process. Shona and Tiffany's collaborative work has created space for Menang people to be heard as the authority on their stories and what it looks like to create opportunities for reparative and regenerative practices.

Shona Coyne has Menang Noongar and Scottish heritage, and is Manager of First Nations Outreach at the National Museum of Australia, a curator and researcher. Her work moves between community, Country and collections, grounded in First Nations-led approaches to museum practice, repatriation and cultural heritage.

Tiffany Shellam lectures in History at Deakin University. For the last fifteen years she has collaborated with Noongar researchers and families to unearth the hidden histories of their Ancestors in archives and museum collections in Australia, the UK and Europe.

The 2026 Tom Stannage Memorial Lecture is part of the State Library's Dialogues 2029 program.

Day of the Imprisoned Writer: Writing and publishing across cultural fault lines

On 12 November the State Library is hosting, in partnership with PEN Perth, Louise Adler in conversation with author and activist Sisone Msimang, *Commemorating the Day of the Imprisoned Writer*, in the State Library Theatre.

In this conversation, Louise Adler draws on a lifetime of experience as a leading cultural figure in Australia to explore the pressures and possibilities facing writers, publishers and readers in a society marked by cultural and political fault lines.

At a time when public debate is becoming more polarised, cultural spaces are increasingly contested and the lines between political disagreement and personal identity are harder to navigate, what role can writing and publishing play to keep open the lines of communication across difficult debates? What responsibilities do publishers have in deciding which voices and ideas enter the public conversation? And how do writers retain their autonomy to challenge, unsettle and provoke when the space for disagreement is narrowing?

In a multicultural democracy such as Australia, the ability to disagree, listen and remain in conversation is essential to democratic life.

Louise Adler AM is one of Australia's most influential publishers and literary figures. She was CEO of Melbourne University Publishing for fifteen years and has held senior roles across Australian publishing and literary institutions, including as Director of Adelaide Writers' Week. A passionate advocate for books as a forum for public debate, Adler has consistently championed publishing that engages with ideas, politics and the questions of contemporary society.

Sisonke Msimang is a South African–Australian writer, activist and political commentator whose work explores race, gender, democracy and belonging. She is the author of *Always Another Country* and *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela*, and has written for publications including *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. Her experience across activism, storytelling and public debate gives her a distinctive perspective on how writers navigate divided societies.

Tickets can be purchased through the State Library website.

Fishing for Answers: Casting a net into WA's fishy past

From David Craddock, Manager of Creative Programs and Engagement

Among the priceless glass negatives, boxes of Polaroids and precious 35mm slides that make up the State Library's 70,000 strong photographic collection there is a universal truth: people love holding fish in front of cameras.

But what compels people to hold up their catch in these photos? And why – like the moment a toddler blows out their first birthday candles – are these scenes such a staple of our photo albums?

A primal display of lunch? A pre-Tinder boast? Or something deeper and more revealing about our State's economy and recreation habits?

The State Library's heaving bucket of fishy photos offers a compelling glimpse into Western Australia's relationship with all things piscatorial. It serves as a reminder of ancient fishing practices, a timeline of our commercial fishing industry and a repository of happy snaps from recreational anglers.

So throw a line in with us as we drift through the State Library's fishiest photos.

Richard Woldendorp's 1979 photograph of the ancient fish traps in Kinjarling / Albany offers an important reminder that fishing has taken place on this land thousands of years before colonisation. However, it is in the voices and memories of Aboriginal elders that this knowledge lives on.

In the Library's current exhibition *Kinjarling Djinnang Ngalak: Country Sees Us*, Menang elder Vernice Gillies reflects on the importance of fishing to the Menang community. In her oral history , mentioning fish some 48 times, Vernice explains of the fish traps:

> This was a place where people came together to eat, a bit like a party. To eat, to tell stories. The men would do the business of the tribe and celebrate. Have a massive feed; shellfish, fish, kangaroo, all sorts of other, foods around here… But the other scientific information that we know is that our people, 10,000 years ago, had this scientific knowledge to actually build these semicircles out of this, almost like an iron stone, and build them in such a way that at high tide, the water and the fish would wash over, and they're built in such a way that there are holes between the stones. And when the tide was ebbing, those little holes would allow the fingerlings to escape through. So, there was always fish here.



People fishing on Swan River, c1981 (216444PD: SLWA)

Despite the abundance of endemic fish and local knowledge, some of Western Australia's earliest settlers put significant energy into importing both European fish and techniques.

As outlined in Glen Power's 2024 book *Trout in Western Australia ,* a who's who of early colonial WA society were linked by, of all things, trout.

In January of 1874 Western Australian Governor Frederick Weld visited Ballarat where he was particularly taken by fish breeding ponds in the town's Botanic Gardens. Weld was a keen fly fisherman, a hobby he pursued while Governor of New Zealand. Inspired by these 'acclimatisation' ponds, Weld set about importing fifteen English Perch to Perth via steam ship. He then arranged for trout eggs to be sent from Tasmania to Perth via Mail Steamer. They hatched on arrival and were set free in a stream near Mt Melville, Albany, becoming the state's first recorded hatchment of brown trout.

The Forrest family were also captivated by trout. William Forrest, Sir John Forrest's father and the great great grandfather of Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest, built WA's first trout hatchery on family land in Picton, just outside of Bunbury, in 1894.

Like Weld, both Sir John and William Forrest supported the importation of trout ova by WA Commissioner of Fisheries and marine biologist



Sorting prawns at Exmouth, 1978 (SLWA 216081PD)

William Saville Kent. Kent would send tiny trout eggs on epic journeys from Tasmania: first via mail steamer from Tasmania to Melbourne, then via train from Melbourne to Albany, and eventually onward to hatching ponds in Picton.

While these prominent settlers were responsible for the introduction of trout to Western Australia, recreational fishing in both salt and freshwater has long been an accessible pastime loved by many.

By the 1890s WA's first size limits were introduced for recreational fishing and as Joseph Christensen recounts in the *Historical Encyclopaedia of Western Australia* , fishing 'parties' on the Swan River and trips to 'seaside resorts' of Rockingham, Mandurah, Bunbury and Albany became increasingly popular.

With the only barrier to entry being a bucket and a line, the archive is dotted with people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. It is perhaps the affordable, accessible nature of fishing that has made it such a popular subject of photographs in our archive.

Over the decades, and still to this day, jetties and rock walls have continued to hum with kids and adults alike in search of a free feed, peace and quiet, and an Instagram photo.

There is however, no such thing a free (fish) lunch, and alongside our love of recreational fishing, Western Australia has developed a formidable commercial fishing industry.

Salted and dried dhufish and snapper were exported to Asia from the Abrolhos Islands from as early as 1840 by merchant mariner Anthony Curtis. By the early 20th century, population growth spurred by the goldrush, commercial iceworks and new fishing fleets led by Italian and Eastern European migrants, would increase the viability of commercial fishing in WA (Sally R. May, *The Historical Encyclopaedia of Western Australia*).

According to the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, by 1900, Western Australia had 191 boats and 401 fishermen registered as commercial fishermen.

As May details, World War II would also spur on the development of commercial fishing. During this period of food scarcity, the Department of War invested in fish canning industries, including crayfish in Geraldton and salmon in Albany.

The influence of post-war migrant families from Italy and Greece continues to loom large on our fishing industry today, particularly in Fremantle, Geraldton and the State's north. The Library's archive includes images from legendary WA brands and exporters such as MG Kailis, who were instrumental in putting WA seafood on plates right around the world.

So before giggling next time you are sent a photo of a proud niece, uncle or sibling holding an underwhelming fish, consider the proud tradition that photo is a part of.

Our fishing photos aren't just a mindless boast. They're a record of our sustenance, livelihoods, and a hobby that we hold dear. Or perhaps a record of a fleeting moment of calm and solitude in an otherwise wavy world.

Snap. Go fish.

David Craddock

Recent Acquisitions

Bardwell private archives

The Bardwell archive is a collection of letters, diaries, photographs and ephemera, created or collected by Captain Beresford Everett Bardwell (1890-1961). Largely related to his service in the First World War, the collection covers the entire period of the conflict (1914-1918), including the Gallipoli landings, where Bardwell's battalion was one of the first ashore. The collection is highly significant for its scale and scope, comprising of 11 handwritten diaries, 101 wartime letters, four photo albums, loose photographs, and related ephemera.

William Henry Loaring Archive

After returning from WWI, where he was wounded, William Henry Loaring became an avid amateur naturalist, largely self-taught, living in Bickley, WA. His collection spans the period 1915 until 1968 and contains detailed

observations and photos of WA fauna and flora, including field notes on birds, insects, and mammals.

Collection of material related to mobile sheep shearing business 1978-1995

Andrew Wytkin developed a mobile sheep shearing trailer in response to the difficulties of sheep shearing during periods of drought. The collection includes photographs, drawings (including initial concept drawings), documents and films.

Sister Kate's and Derby District Hospital photographs

Collection of photographs of children at Sister Kate's in Perth 1971 and Derby District Hospital in 1973.

Victor Raeburn film collection

Based in New Jersey, Victor worked for French Line, American Express and Air France. New Jersey's cold climate, local drug crimes, the Vietnam War and the assassination of President Kennedy prompted Raeburn to consider retiring overseas. His son's geology schoolbook prompted him to consider Western Australia. Raeburn created these films whilst on an annual leave investigative holiday. The films captured in 1966 and intended to showcase the climate, landscape and social opportunities available in Western Australia to his family and were the deciding factor behind the decision to migrate from New Jersey to Perth.

Kate Gregory
Head of Interpretation and Research

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State Records Office (SRO)

News from the Archives

Margaret Medcalf Award 2026

The Hon Simone McGurk MLA, Minister for Creative Industries, presented the 2026 Margaret Medcalf Award to joint winners at a special ceremony at the State Library's Theatre on Friday 23 October 2026.

The annual Award for Excellence in Research using the Western

Australian State Archives honours Ms Margaret Medcalf OAM, WA's second State Archivist for her landmark contribution to the development of the State archives collection from 1971 to 1989. Ms Medcalf turned 100 years old on 26 March 2026.

The winners announced by Minister McGurk are:

Arthur Haynes and the Smoking Gun — a Theatre 180 production, with playwright Jenny Davis OAM and visual design and production by Josephine Jay; and

Our Horrible Asylum — a master's dissertation and board game by Fiona Giles from Notre Dame University.

A record number of fifteen researchers and historians were shortlisted for this year's Award:

- *Examining the 1841 Wonnerup/Minninup Massacre through Western Australian Colonial Records and Wardandi Oral Histories* (MPhil thesis) by Mary Blight, Curtin University, 2025.
- *'Our own familiar English': A historical sociolinguistic study of the shaping of Australian English through the lens of Western Australia* (PhD Thesis) by Madeliene Clews, University of Western Australia, 2025.
- *Our Horrible Asylum* (Masters Dissertation and Board Game) by Fiona Giles, Notre Dame University, 2025.
- *'Secrets of the prison house' an inmate's view of Fremantle Prison 1903-1905* by Bert Leighton (book) by Andrew Gill (Editor).
- 'Tracking Frontier Violence: Expanding Territories and Control of Country' (Unpublished Paper) by Michelle Hilbrands, 2025.
- *Japanese Doctors in White Australia: Treating Prejudice* (Book) by John Lamb. Routledge Advances in Asia Pacific Studies, 2025.
- 'A Convict in Her Own Right': Rethinking Prisoner Classification in Western Australia, 1829–1868 (article) by Emily Lanman in *Law & History: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Law and History Society* 11 (1) 2025.
- 'Brendan's Odyssey - Barracks Arch, the Pemberton to Northcliffe Railway, the Big Bell Hotel, the Brisbane and Wunderlich display parks and the Jokers Tunnel' (YouTube Channel and Website – 2025 contributions) by Brendan Meharry, 2025.
- *Collecting the West: Revealing Western Australia through its Collection* (book) by Alistair Paterson, Andrea Witcomb, Gaye Sculthorpe, Baige Zylstra, Tiffany Shellam, UWA Publishing, 2025.

- *The Shameful Isles: the true story of North-West Australia's fatal experiment with medical Apartheid* (book) by David Price. Fremantle Press, 2025.
- 'The Aboriginal Land Inquiry: Recovering the Voices of the WA Aboriginal Land Rights Movement 1983-1984' (BA Hons Thesis) by Ashleigh Severinsen. Notre Dame University, 2025.
- 'The Unfortunate Woman v Her Well-Respected Killer' (Exhibition Film) Old Court House Law Museum, by Megan Shaw (Curator) and Andrew Clarke (Director, Edify Media). Law Society of Western Australia, 2025.
- *Riots: Returned soldiers and public disorder in Australia at the end of World War 1* (Book) by Fiona Skyring. UWA Publishing, 2025.
- *Arthur Haynes and the Smoking Gun* (Theatre Production) by Theatre 180 (Jenny Davis, Playwright and Josephine Jay, Visual Design and Production). Theatre 180, 2025.
- *The Australian Wars: the truth about the bloody battles fought to establish the nation* (book - chapters relating to Western Australia) by Rachel Perkins, Stephen Gapps, Mina Murray and Henry Reynolds (Editors) - (WA Chapters written by Chris Owen, June Oscar, Henry Reynolds, Kim Scott) [Allen & Unwin, 2025].

The SRO congratulates Fiona Giles and the Theatre 180 team, and also all who were shortlisted for this year's Award which were very high calibre entries.



Fiona Giles (SROWA)



Theatre 180 (SROWA)

The ceremony was very well attended. It was good to note that several members of the Friends of Battye Library were spotted in the audience.

State Cabinet Papers Release

To mark the International Day for Universal Access to Information, an online guide to 1995 State Cabinet records was released by the SRO on 24 September. This guide is available through SRO's website.

A Royal Commission into Use of Executive Power, Western Australian Government Response to the Native Title Act, funding for mental health and AIDS treatment, and the future of Stateships were just some of the issues discussed in a landmark year.

Swan River Papers

The SRO has recently digitised the Swan River Papers and placed copies on our online catalogue.

These papers comprise copies of approximately 1,050 documents leading up to the establishment - as well as early years - of the Swan River Colony, spanning the period 1826-1834. They are a key resource documenting how the Colony was to operate. The Papers also give insights into initial interactions between Colonists and Traditional Owners.

The documents were copied from original Colonial Office records in London by noted transcriber Alice Mayes between 1904-05. Alice Mayes was engaged for this work by the WA Premier's Office. The Swan River Papers were deposited with, it seems, the Registrar General's Department and transferred to Dr James Sykes Battye in 1908. The papers were accessioned into the State archives collection when the first State Archivist Mollie Lukis was appointed in 1945.

Northbridge History Project

In July 2026, the SRO received a large digital transfer from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet of the Northbridge History Project records. The Northbridge History Project ran between 2005-2010. The initial aim of the project was to 'understand and embrace' the history of Northbridge to improve diversity and interest in the area. The Project collected and created considerable quantities of material relating to the history of Northbridge. Photographs were sourced and digitised from private and public collections. The Project team conducted many contemporary interviews with people having a long association with Northbridge. Mapping exercises were conducted to capture Northbridge histories in geographic form. The Project also managed Northbridge Festivals, Displays, Studies Days and Workshops.



Masters student Elijah Petersen at work at the SRO.

The Project also established its own website which was subsequently decommissioned in 2013. While the website can be considered a publication and subject to legal deposit, what the SRO has received into archival custody are the Project's raw digital files from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's electronic recordkeeping system. These comprise a complex array of digital files of the Project's content (for example, photographs, audio interviews, etc), as well as operational records about the project (e.g. meeting and planning documents, and permission forms).



Image from the Northbridge History Project archives showing William St near the corner of James St, 1966.

The transfer of this set of digital State Archives to the SRO has been a great learning experience for the SRO and has also helped clarify how we approach digital transfers in the future.

Key sets of the Northbridge History Project records are already available through the SRO's online catalogue, comprising over 3,000 digital files. So wonderful to hear Geoffrey Bolton's voice again in the recorded interview with him!

SRO would like to thank Elijah Petersen for his assistance with this transfer. Elijah is a Curtin University Master of Information Science student who has recently completed an internship at the SRO. Elijah helped us make the Northbridge History Project records available online.

Tourism Department Photographic Slides

Work is continuing on digitising and rehousing a large set of Tourism Commission photographic slides, mainly dating from the 1980s (and over 10,000 slides). These are proving very popular on SRO's social media.

CSO Digitisation Project Update

After a brief mid-year pause, the SRO recommenced digitisation of the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) inwards correspondence (consignment 36). This is a Friends of Battye Library funded project. At time of writing, the first 265 volumes have been digitised with content being prepared for online access through SRO's archives catalogue.

Police Criminal Registers Project Update

In April this year, the Friends approved funding through the Sholl Bequest for a new SRO project to unbind a set of Perth Police Criminal Registers covering the 1920s-1940s period (consignment 3904). At time of writing, the first eleven volumes have been unbound. This is allowing the SRO to digitise each page and re-house the charge sheets in archival quality enclosures.

As part of this work, the SRO is listing each charge sheet (app. 10,000 sheets) to include the name of the person charged to ensure this information is searchable via our catalogue. Digital copies of the first 5 volumes of these records are available through the SRO catalogue.

Recently listed

The SRO has completed itemising over 6,000 Perth Court of Petty

Sessions depositions for the period 1862-1917. These cover both civil matters (e.g. failure to pay a bill) as well as criminal cases (e.g. assault, stealing). These depositions are now name searchable on our catalogue (i.e. who was taken to Court) and also list each charge.

SRO Catalogue Update

The SRO is in the process of upgrading our online catalogue. To ensure that this system upgrade is successful, we will be unable to accept archive requests via our online catalogue between 23 October and 2 November 2026. During this period, clients can email sro@sro.wa.gov.au to make requests to view State archives or have items digitised.

Our updated catalogue is scheduled to go live the week of 2 November.

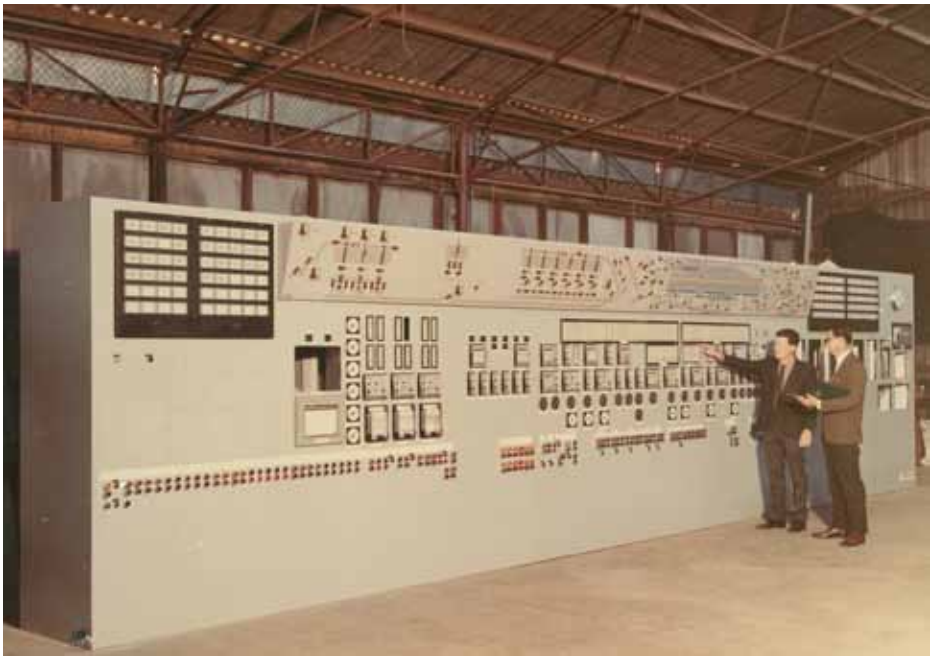


Image of Electronic Control Panel for Mining Operations, 1967, from the State archives collection (**not** SRO's online catalogue system!)

Damien Hassan
Senior Archivist, SROWA

Friends of Battye Library (Inc) Membership Form

Subscription period 1 July to 30 June

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https://www.friendsofbattyelibrary.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 - Steve Errington

Making our own convicts

As a volunteer guide at the Fremantle Round House I was often asked ‘is this where we kept the convicts’ or ‘was this built by the convicts’. I would reply that we didn’t receive any convicts until 1850 when 75 arrived on the first convict ship, so ‘no’ to both questions. But I would sometimes throw in that ‘in the early years we made our own convicts and sent them to the convict colonies in the east.’

We all know what a convict was. As my Macquarie dictionary says, a convict was ‘a person transported to the British colonies to serve out a prison sentence.’

The Round House was once our most important gaol, but it had only eight cells, and the longest any prisoner could be kept there was two years. For any offence warranting a longer sentence (short of hanging for murder), the sentence was ‘transportation beyond the seas.’ Once a spacious Convict Establishment opened on Fremantle’s south bay this wasn’t necessary, but before then at least 93 prisoners spent time in the Round House before being shipped out.[1]



The Round House, Fremantle where dozens of prisoners spent their last night ashore before being shipped to Sydney or Van Diemen’s Land – or just Garden Island or Rottnest. (Photo author.)

The first three transportation sentences were handed out at the Quarter Sessions held 2 July 1832. Repeat offender William Green, lascar (Indian sailor) Ingan, and Robert Nixon were each sentenced to seven years transportation for larceny. Green stole a shirt, Ingan stole two rings, and Nixon stole carpentry tools. It is not known what became of the three men.

The prisoners were sent away on cargo ships. The first convict whose actual transportation we have details of is Benjamin Hinks who was caught in the Harbour Master's office taking books from a bookcase for 'a bit of reading'. He was given seven years at the April 1833 Sessions. The government paid £20 to have him taken to Sydney on the *Jolly Rambler*. This added the *Jolly Rambler* to the long list of convict ships.

At least nine other WA prisoners were shipped to Sydney to join the Imperial convicts, but most were sent to Tasmania – or Van Diemen's Land, as it was then known. Because it was closer than Sydney it was cheaper (in 1842 it was decreed that our convicts would only be sent to Tasmania). Forty-four of our home-made convicts were sent there in the years 1834–47.

Only two women were sentenced to transportation and both spent time in the Round House. The first, Keziah Lockyer, was sentenced to seven years transportation for perjury in April 1839. But she successfully petitioned Governor John Hutt to have her sentence remitted – on condition she left by the first available ship and never returned. Frederick Turner, given the same sentence on the same day for an unrelated perjury, was given the same deal and they both departed that month for Launceston.

So Mary Trubee is our only true female convict. She was sentenced in April 1852 to fifteen years transportation for arson. By then, it had been five years since any convict had been sent out of the colony, but Garden Island and Rottnest Island had long been recognized as meeting the 'beyond the seas' criterion. On conviction, Mary was sent to the Round House on 16 April and was transferred to Garden Island on 1 May.

The men sent away were recognised as convicts in official correspondence and in shipping notices in newspapers. But, starting with burglar James Rudge in July 1851, men sentenced to transportation were given the next available convict number (980 for Rudge) and sent instead to the Convict Establishment in Fremantle.

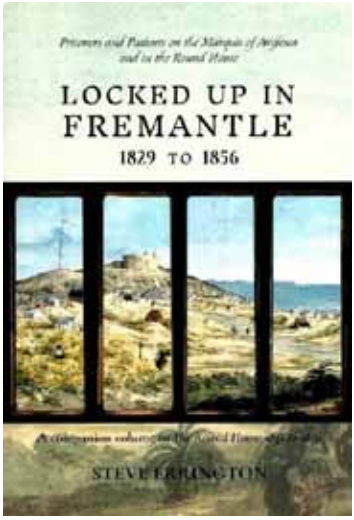
Forty-one Noongar men and boys also qualify as home-made convicts. None were sent out of the colony, although in July 1849, Governor Charles Fitzgerald wanted to do this. The first Aborigine to receive a sentence of transportation was Goordap who was given seven years at the April 1837 Sessions for killing and eating (presumably just a part of) a ram. In October 1837 Cogat received seven years transportation for stealing ten pounds of butter, as did Daricap for stealing dough – the flour and water kind.

All three spent time digging the whalers tunnel as part of their hard labour before, in August 1838, being sent (briefly) to Garden Island along with Charles Gee who had a similar sentence for stealing a turkey. In September all four were transferred to the new Aboriginal prison on Rottnest where carpenter Gee was needed for building construction.

In 1856 a new Perth goal was opened in Beaufort Street and Fremantle Prison was being extended. With so much prisoner accommodation available, the sentence of transportation was abolished. Four years penal servitude replaced seven years transportation.

Steve Errington

1 Steve Errington, *Locked Up in Fremantle 1829 to 1856*, Hesperian Press 2023



Membership Subscription (Annually from 1 July to 30 June - GST inclusive). Please see subscription form on page 32 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.friendsofbattyelibrary.org.au

For membership information, subscription, change of address etc email Cherie Strickland at *membership@friendsofbattyelibrary.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 Editor
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 has co-located to 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.*