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# Newsletter



FEDERATION of  
AUSTRALIAN  
HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

*Because history matters*

RHSV AND THE NATIONAL  
TRUST INSTALL A JOINT  
EXHIBITION

Source: Sophie Shilling



## Connections

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When I thought of the word *connection* in the context of historical societies, my mind was flooded with ideas and different interpretations of this word as a theme.

Connections between historical societies and between a historical society and another organisation almost always lead to success. A half-complete manuscript is published through the efforts of two societies. A book is launched with the assistance of a commercial partnership. In Tasmania, the spotlight is turned on womens stories because of true collaboration between individuals.

Connections can also be made between collections and the community. In South Australia, amazing work is being done with memory boxes to improve the wellbeing of society's elderly. This also demonstrates how the usefulness of a significant object can extend beyond the boundaries

of a glass box in a museum. Each individual's connection to a collection will be different. We look at a local history collection through the eyes of an artist. You, reader, might be pleasantly surprised at the scope of detail uncovered just by changing perspective.

Finally, we consider the complex connections between one's identity and the GLAM workplace. One's self-identification can be at odds with how they are identified by cultural institutions and their visitors and staff.

My hope is that historical societies will see the many different possible connections between their collection and other organisations, the community, and those who might be a little different from themselves.

Sophie Shilling, Online Outreach Officer

## From the President



VICTORIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES SHARING A BOOK SCANNER.

Source: Sophie Shilling

Australian historical societies share a long history of working in partnership. From the very beginning we have worked with our communities, with donors, with local libraries and museums to build collections, conduct research and share stories. Historical endeavour is rarely a solitary achievement however isolated we may feel at times. We all stand on the shoulders of others.

The partnerships outlined in this Newsletter suggest some exciting new possibilities for historical societies. Several of the articles suggest ways in which new historical perspectives of the past can be fostered and shared. In Tasmania groups interested in bringing convict women's history to light have collaborated with researchers all over the world to rescue some of these women's lives from obscurity. Our own past-President Don Garden also outlines how he has brought together researchers from every state in Australia to reflect on the history of defence fortifications around our long coastline. These

structures are part of our national heritage, but the reasons for their existence are more obscure. Hopefully that will be remedied as a result of this project. A similar collaborative effort by members of the RHSQ brought a remarkable publication, *Lost Brisbane to life*, in partnership with publishing company Queensland Book Depot. In Western Australia the Historical Society was assisted by LotteryWest to enable 32 regional communities to explore their war histories, as a contribution to the Commemoration of Anzac. If only each state had such a wonderful facilitator!

Other articles explore some fascinating ways in which the collections we manage and the stories we tell can be used in less traditional ways to bring new audiences to collections and stimulate memory. At RWAHS artist Wendy Lugg uses textile art to reflect on items in the collection, suggesting new insights and stimulating enquiry, while the History Trust of South

Australia has collaborated with other collections to develop programs aimed at stimulating memory to help those many in our community who struggle with dementia. This is work that brings history together with medical research to help those in need in our community.

In recent decades historians, historical societies and museums have worked harder to develop meaningful partnerships with First Nations people and communities, but Keeaira Aird reminds us that we still have a long way to go in respecting the multi-faceted identity of contemporary people who identify as Indigenous. As historians we are well placed to assist in empowering First Nations colleagues to tell these stories on their own terms and to seek out the histories that still need to be told. These are partnerships that assist us all to develop more inclusive histories and more informed communities.

**Margaret Anderson**



# Saving a History



What happens when a historian does not finish the history s/he is writing before life's end? This is not an uncommon event for several reasons. History writing is done by many deep into their retirement years. People keep writing despite growing frailty, and sometimes win the race against time, but sometimes they fall short. This is because of another reason. As a university lecturer once said to me 'History is too damn big'. One can keep researching and never reach the end of it, let alone begin the writing process. Like a marathon runner it is a matter of pacing yourself, but also making sure you can finish. It is not easy to time it right and this happened with the History of the suburb of Canterbury in Melbourne being written by Don Gibb. Don died in late 2017 leaving his book unfinished. It remained unfinished because Don was always helping others.

Don began his working life as a high school teacher, before lecturing in history method at Monash Teachers College, and then Deakin University where he rose to become an associate professor. He gave many services to secondary education:

being president of the Victorian Historical Association, foundation editor of the *Journal of History for Senior Students* (1969-74), co-author of HSC/VCE curricula, and a frequent lecturer to teacher and



DON MENZIES GIBB.

Image courtesy the Gibb family.

student gatherings across Victoria. Don Gibb's involvement in community history flourished at the

Royal Historical Society of Victoria. He was a councillor (1998 to 2008) and made a Fellow of the RHSV in 2005. Don was also a councillor of the FAHS (2005-08) and awarded a FAHS Certificate of Merit for his services to History. He convened the RHSV's Publications Committee for eleven years and remained a member for almost two decades to his death. On this committee he was renowned for his collegiality, succession planning and unstinting support for its history projects. He constantly reviewed books for the RHSV's *History News* and the *Victorian Historical Journal*, and was a judge for the Victorian Community History Awards (2011-16).

At the local level Don was a founding member of the Canterbury History Group, and a vital part of its publishing and lecturing program. He wrote and orchestrated the highly successful *Visions of Village* with the artist Stuart Warmington, an exploration of the Maling Road shopping precinct. At his death Don's history of Canterbury, which he began in the late 1990s, was a little more than half finished due to his many other activities for others. His friends and colleagues at the



RHSV approached the Canterbury History Group and Don's family to see if his dream of a history could be fulfilled. After preliminary discussion in 2018 plans were made to complete the history.

Don's manuscript that was retrieved from his computer contained drafts of four chapters and only fragments of writing for other chapters. These draft chapters were in various stages of completion. Sections were quite polished, but other sections of text contained gaps, notes and suggestions for his further research. How were his colleagues to complete a book of which Don would have been proud to own?

Two of his colleagues, Judith Smart and I volunteered to be editors and we decided that where possible Don's text should be retained. This did not mean there would not be cuts, modifications or rearrangements for clarity and

accuracy, for his chapters were just that - drafts. Don's plans for more research had to be ignored as we were editors not researchers with unlimited time. The text was to be smoothed at these points, which might well have been done by Don himself. Researchers always have blue sky ideas about what they might achieve that realistically can never happen - given that 'History is too damn big'.

Don's text ended at 1920, so what could be done about that? Fortunately, *Visions of a Village* had proved lucrative for the Canterbury History Group, which readily agreed to provide funds to complete the history. On the advice of the editors, the Canterbury History Group employed a professional historian to write two chapters to cover the decades from the 1920s to the 1950s. Jill Barnard, who coincidentally served with Don on the RHSV's Publications Committee, was

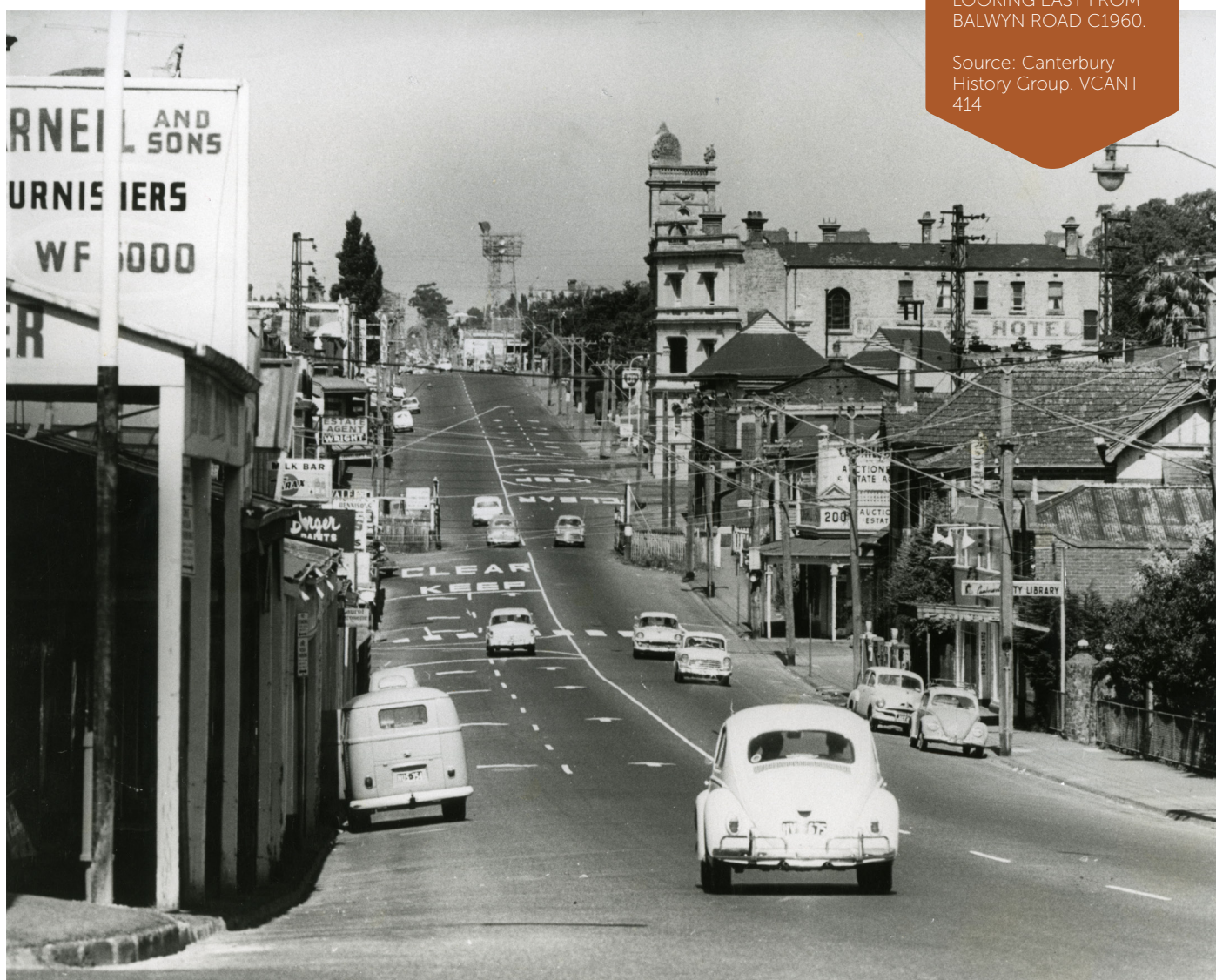
chosen. Guided by Don's inspirations and themes Jill is currently completing chapters 5 and 6. This will take Canterbury's history into the post war period by which time the suburb had reached maturity.

The Canterbury History Group has been proactive and has gained a publishing grant from the City of Boroondara, which realised that Canterbury has never had a history. This grant will enable the book to be printed later in 2019 once it is copy edited by Judith Smart of the RHSV. The CHG is also undertaking the picture research and caption writing for the book, using of course Don's ideas for illustrations embedded among all those ideas and notes in his chapters. Through a partnership between two historical societies a book that seemed lost, is found.

Richard Broome, Royal Historical Society of Victoria

CANTERBURY ROAD  
LOOKING EAST FROM  
BALWYN ROAD C1960.

Source: Canterbury  
History Group. VCANT  
414





# Amplifying womens' stories: the Convict Women's Press

Historically, womens voices have been forgotten. Histories of people and places largely describe the successes and failures of men. The Convict Women's Press is turning the spotlight on to womens' stories from female factories in Tasmania. The work involved in publishing these stories has connected people from all over the world.

Convict Women's Press was set up in Hobart in 2010 as the publishing arm of the Female Convicts Research Centre – which itself was initiated in 2004 to encourage research into female convicts. About 12,500 female convicts were transported to Van Diemen's Land in the fifty years between 1803 and 1853.

Since 2010, the small committee which runs Convict Women's Press has published seven books. Five are in the *Convict Lives* series, each of which includes about twenty brief (2000-3000 words) biographies of women who passed through one of the five female factories in Van Diemen's Land (Hobart, the Cascades outside Hobart, Launceston, Ross, and George Town). There is also an introductory chapter about the history of the factory.

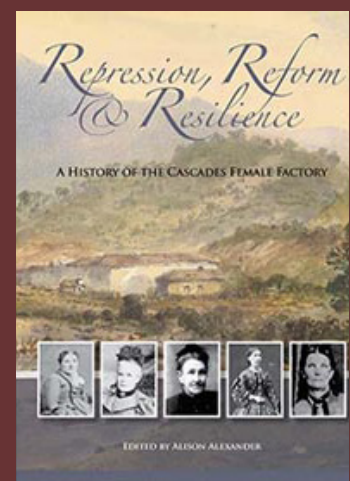
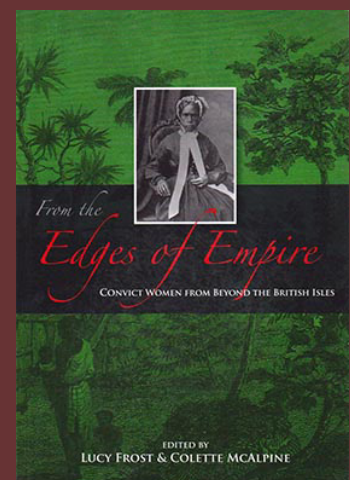
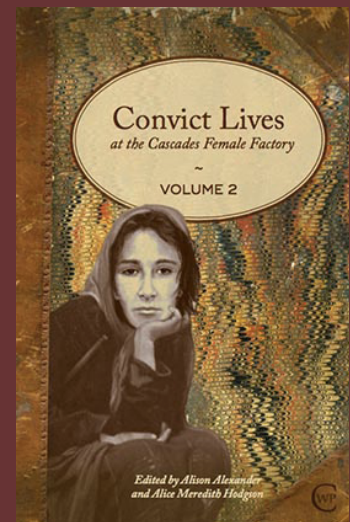
To produce one of these books, the committee asks members of the Female Convicts Research Centre if they would like to contribute a chapter about a convict. The only stipulation is

that she must have been in the factory concerned. We have always received an enthusiastic response.

Some authors are descendants, which brings a special tone to the stories – these women are family, not just names on records. Others are academics, with their interesting analysis and cutting-edge intellectual brilliance. Others are interested members of the public. Authors come from all Australian states and territories, as well as Britain, Ireland, America and Canada, and these writers add their own touches of local knowledge. Most are women but an appreciable minority are men.

The editor appointed by the committee then works with the authors to hone each story, to make sure that it is factually and grammatically accurate, that it uses all the relevant information the records contain, and that it does not repeat information contained in other stories. By this stage the editor can see how the book is shaping. Often there are gaps in the saga (for example, no stories about early convicts, too many sad or too many happy stories, no story about an escape, or any aspect that is underplayed) and the editor tries to maintain balance and variation in the stories.

The editor and authors then find illustrations, which is often difficult for the period before 1850 and we have to do a fair bit of lateral thinking. Fortunately Van Diemen's Land was home to a number of painters in this period. Recent books have been published in full colour,



*Convict Lives at the Cascades Female Factory; From the Edges of Empire; Repression, Reform & Resilience.*

Source: Convict Women's Press





which means paintings can be reproduced in their original beauty.

The books are then designed, printed and launched. So far we have made a profit on all books. The first books about the Cascades Factory has sold out after several editions, and we have produced a second volume of lives at the Cascades. This was the largest factory so there are plenty of women to choose from.

We have had debates about whether to include fictionalised stories. I feel that as long as every statement is based on evidence, stories can be told in the first person. Others disagree, and we have left it up to the editor of each book to decide. Editing a book gratis is a huge (sometimes thankless) job, and the editor should have a few perks.

Convict Women's Press has also published *From the Edges of Empire: Convict women from beyond the British Isles*. The overwhelming majority of female convicts came from Britain and

Ireland but a few came from other countries – other parts of the British Empire, or people from other countries visiting Britain. A few were slaves.

These are different stories, with people from different backgrounds. For example, I was fascinated when writing about Jane Franklin to find that when she visited the Huon River, an extremely remote, wild area where a new settlement had started of men harvesting Huon pine, one of the wives living in a wretched bark hut was French. What was a Frenchwoman doing at the ends of the earth in a British colony in 1839? She was a convict, and I enjoyed researching her story for the book.

The Convict Women's Press have also published *Repression, Reform and Resilience: a history of the Cascades Female Factory*. I edited this volume, writing the background history with chapters on specialist areas by several members. This was a fascinating task which I greatly enjoyed. I had not realised until I did the

research that the treatment of the women changed considerably over fifty years – in theory, though in practice the change was less. Actions ordered by the authorities in Britain tended to become watered down by the time they actually reached the factory.

Initially we called the book *Riot, Reform and Resilience*, which had a fine ring to it – until it was pointed out that there had not actually been a riot at the Cascades. At other factories yes, but not the Cascades. So, sadly, we had to change it. *Repression, Reform and Resilience* is accurate but not quite as dashing, and we can never remember it and always have to look it up before announcing it. It has become just *The Three Rs*.

Convict Women's Press books can be purchased from [www.convictwomenspress.com.au](http://www.convictwomenspress.com.au) using the order form. Books are priced between \$25 and \$35. Some eBooks are also available for purchase.

**Alison Alexander**



# Making Friends: how business partnerships can benefit history societies

The tireless work that historical societies around Australia undertake to preserve community heritage has many academic, cultural and economic benefits. However, restricted by financial and workload pressures, it is often difficult for historical organisations to project their messages to communities beyond their own, even in the digital age. One way in which historical organisations may be able to successfully amplify their message to wider audiences include partnerships with private sector supporters which create beneficial outcomes for all parties involved.

In 2012 The Royal Historical Society of Queensland (RHSQ) was invited to partner with Queensland Book Depot (QBD) to create a substantial history publication: *Lost Brisbane and surrounding areas 1860-1960*. The publication had its roots in a similar work edited by Philip Davies for British Heritage titled *Lost London 1870-1945*, published in 2009. QBD wished to use the RHSQ's extensive photographic archives and research skills to produce a volume which at once took readers back to days gone by, and revealed interesting aspects of Brisbane's past.

captions which conveyed the significance of the chosen sites to readers. QBD in turn would be fully responsible for the design and printing of the publication. A cost agreement was also drafted and agreed upon by the two organisations, so each party was aware of financial responsibilities, and publication rights were also negotiated at this time.

The proposal was attractive to the RHSQ, as it would create an enduring piece of research with a far wider reach than what The Society could develop on its own. Nonetheless, the proposal presented challenges to the small team at the RHSQ. Since the publication of its first journal in 1914, the RHSQ has been noted for unwavering rigour

MEMBERS OF THE *LOST BRISBANE* PUBLICATIONS TEAM WITH HIS EXCELLENCY, PAUL DE JERSEY, GOVERNOR OF QUEENSLAND AT SEPARATION DAY COCKTAILS, 10TH DECEMBER 2016.

Source: Royal Historical Society of Queensland.





in research and publishing, which provided QBD with the reassurance of quality of content. However, for the RHSQ, this meant strict prioritisation of workload to ensure that the research and publication volunteers could maintain their usual standard of diligence to all aspects of the Society's research activities while researching and creating content for the *Lost Brisbane* project.

Over two years, RHSQ's volunteer researcher Kay Cohen, Val Donovan, Ruth Kerr, Margaret Kowald, Lyndsay Smith and Jean Stewart sorted through nearly 22,000 images in the Society's collection to select 500 snapshots of Brisbane's development from colonial outpost to modern city. The research team regularly liaised with QBD to provide updates of their activities, and kept the RHSQ Council aware of the status of the project on a monthly basis. After selection of images, research and writing of captions, fact-checking and proofreading, the publication was available for purchase in late 2014. Described enthusiastically as 'arguably the most comprehensive collection of such pictures ever published' the publication was well received with the first print run of 9,000 copies selling out – a result that far exceeded the expectations of QBD and the RHSQ.

So successful was community reception of this first volume that a second partnership was begun to produce a sequential volume titled *Lost Brisbane 2 and surrounding areas: the later years*, published in 2016. This volume concentrated on much more recent memories of Brisbane and its surrounds, restricted to photographic content from the 1940s to 1990s. Unlike the first volume this edition included colour images, but also required special attention to intellectual property,



MEMBERS OF THE NOOSA-COOROY HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP RECEIVING THE CENTENARY MEDAL FROM THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND, MARCH 2019.

Source: Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

as many of the images fell under Australian copyright protections. Despite the additional effort required for this second work, the results were even more noticeable; at the launch of *Lost Brisbane 2* at the Separation Day Cocktails on 10 December 2016 one attendee opened a book and exclaimed "that's next door to my house!", sharing what they knew of their local area.

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland's partnerships with Queensland Book Depot for the two *Lost Brisbane* books was one that benefitted both organisations. Aside from the financial benefit received by both partners, the RHSQ was able to engage an audience far greater than possible using their own resources, thus projecting Queensland's history further. It is important for any historical organisation to carefully consider their abilities and limitations, and weigh up any risks when partnering with any other entity, but a carefully defined project with achievable goals and an appropriate level of risk can reap great rewards for an organisation of any size.

Outside the private sector, The Society promotes Queensland's regional history through visits to

regional historical societies and mentoring of historians across the state. This is being done with history groups in Stanthorpe, Caboolture, Cairns, Chillagoe, and Cooroy-Noosa, and through regular regional news segments in the RHSQ Bulletin. Recognition of service and excellence reinforces the value that regional communities add to historical research. On 9 March 2019 The Society presented a Centenary Medal to the Cooroy-Noosa Genealogical and Historical Research Group. The event was attended by the Noosa Shire Mayor, a Councillor and local Librarian, and received publicity in the local press. The RHSQ President Stephen Sheaffe and Glenda Sheaffe, Hon Secretary Ruth Kerr, and Councillor John Pearn and Vena Pearn proudly represented The Society at the presentation. The Royal Historical Society of Queensland looks forward to strengthening more relationships through 2019 and beyond to present Queensland's history to new publics.

**Timothy Roberts**  
Councillor, The Royal Historical Society of Queensland



# Ring of Collaboration



DAWES BATTERY AND  
FORT MACQUARIE, NSW.  
Source: State Library New  
South Wales

For several months FAHS has been researching, writing and organising a large collaborative project compiling histories of the ring of fortifications that were established around Australia. The work has connected community historians and military history enthusiasts from all over the country.

FAHS supporters may recall that in early 2018, FAHS conducted a campaign to persuade the Commonwealth to restore its discontinued funding. In response to a flood of community support, we were granted a Protection of National Heritage Sites grant which required us to produce two thematic papers for the advice of the Australian Heritage Council. One was to be broadly about nineteenth century east coast fortifications and the other to be focussed on the fixed defence sites in Port Phillip and Port Jackson.

Officers in the Commonwealth Department pointed out that this was an excellent opportunity to call upon our hundreds of societies and their members in a collaborative project.

Underlying the PNHS grant was the fact that a number of individual sites in Port Phillip and Port Jackson have been nominated for the National Heritage List but, because there was little chance that they could all be listed individually, it was recognised that it might be more appropriate to list together a group of the most significant sites in each of the two harbours.

I undertook to write the core chapters and set out to develop a list of the coastal fortifications and I soon realised that rather than limiting the study to the nineteenth century and the east coast, it would be more appropriate to examine all the main fixed defence sites around the Australian coast and to take the study through until WWII.

It was also very apparent that the

significance of Australia's coastal fortifications lies only partly in the fortifications that were built and the extant remnant built heritage sites. At least as important is what the sites represent about Australian cultural history – the strong sense of isolation and external threat that has been an embedded part of the Australian psyche, how Australians have viewed themselves and how they have seen Australia in relation to the wider world.

In the end I wrote ten core chapters, six in the first thematic paper covering the period to 1900, and a further four in the second paper taking the outline narrative up to 1945.

Concurrently, I set out to recruit people who could write about the individual fortification sites. I was very fortunate that by tapping into historical society networks, both community and military, and discovering some other military history enthusiasts, I soon found a wonderful group of people to collaborate on the project. I am unable to quantify





Fort Queenscliff, Victoria;  
Fort Lytton, Queensland;  
Fort Denison, New South  
Wales; Fort Glanville; South  
Australia; Middle Head Fort,  
New South Wales.

Sources: Kgbo, Andy Mitchell, Peripitus,  
--Adam.

how many hours of work they have contributed, but it would mount to several hundred. FAHS is deeply indebted to them for their enthusiasm and contribution.

I identified eleven sites outside the two focus study areas. In alphabetical order they are Adelaide, Albany, Brisbane, Hobart, Newcastle, Port Fairy, Portland, Thursday Island, Townsville, Warrnambool and Wollongong. All were produced on time. Albany, which I wrote myself, is of particular significance for a number of aspects of Australian history, and I have recommended that the town and its harbour be assessed for the National Heritage List.

Most of the coastal fortifications were little more than fairly unsophisticated, low-technology gun platforms that were built in the second half of the century, and predominantly in the last twenty years when mounting threats from Russia and Asia were perceived.

Sites in Port Jackson and Port Phillip represent a different pattern that reflect major changes in nineteenth century military technology. Until the 1850s the limited capacity of cannons necessitated a 'let them in' approach to defence. That is, because it was not possible to keep enemy ships outside the Heads, a number of small fortifications were built closer to the towns of Sydney and Melbourne to fend off any attack. However, from the 1860s advances in cannons (such as rifle boring and breach loading) and in ship technology (steam powered with armour plating and low-slung design) led to the gradual adoption from the 1870s of 'keep them out' defence systems. In both harbours, several fortifications and other new technology such as mines and torpedoes were sited nearer

to the Heads. Some of these were subsequently refortified or supplemented in the twentieth century, especially in the early stages of WWII when Japanese attack was a possibility.

Six sites have been recommended for a group listing in Port Jackson, representing the changing nature of fortification technology and defence planning - Fort Denison/ Pinchgut (representing the early stages of defence construction), Middle Head and Georges Head fortifications, South Head fortifications, Bradleys Head fortifications, Bare Island (in Botany Bay but representing backup for the Sydney sites) and North Head (already on the NHL for its quarantine station, but the site of major WWII military development).

Seven sites are recommended for Port Phillip - Fort Gellibrand at Williamstown (representing the early stage of defence), HMVS Cerberus (already NHL, but a major component in the Port Phillip defence scheme), Point/Fort Nepean (already NHL but mainly for the quarantine station), Queenscliff Forts, South Channel Fort, Swan Island Fort and Defence Base, and Point Lonsdale (representing twentieth century, particularly WWII defences).

The first draft of the papers has been submitted to the Department for review. It is expected that after the papers are finalised they will be available as downloadable PDF from the Australian Heritage Council website.

**Don Garden**  
**Federation of Australian**  
**Historical Societies, Royal**  
**Historical Society of Victoria**



# Remembering Them – Century of Service Project, 2014-2018



At the end of 2018 the four-year-long centennial commemoration of Australia's involvement in World War I drew to a close. Over those four years communities around Western Australia held heartfelt events to commemorate the people and stories of that time and the heavy impact the war had on local communities. Remembering Them above all aimed to connect generations and communities as a worthy and lasting commemoration of the service, sacrifice and support engendered by the war.

The RWAHS has been delighted to be part of this four-year enterprise to assist 32 regional partners from all across the state to tell the histories of their communities' involvement.

We are thankful to Lotterywest for funding



the project, to Robert Mitchell, Museums Galleries Australia Western Australia, for administering it; and to Western Australian Museum, particularly Clare-Frances Craig and her team, who conceived and drove the project.

Regional partners conducted local research to provide the stories of local people who were involved

TOP: PARTICIPANTS ENJOYED A MORNING TEA AT THE END OF THE PROJECT.

BELOW: CORRIGIN'S REMEMBERING THEM EXHIBITION.

Source: RWAHS

in the war and in the war effort. They were offered support to tell their chosen stories and provided with a Tashco Avelon™ showcase crafted from the finest conservation and museum grade materials to display objects. These showcases ensured lasting benefit



for the partners both for this and future exhibitions, safeguarding collections from fluctuations in environment which is an issue throughout the State. Partners were also provided with five panels, with the story panels providing rich local content developed by the regional partners. They also had an opportunity to engage in digital storytelling through WAM's developing partnership with ABC broadcasting. In many instances there were follow-on publications produced by the community groups, incorporating local veterans and families. Relevant artefacts supporting stories

came from dusty tins or back closets as donations. Collecting and curatorial skills were enhanced through accessioning or arranging loans between museums. Public programs were developed with schools, RSL Sub-branches and other community groups.

A team from the Royal Western Australian Historical Society provided expert research assistance to the regional partners. Fact was separated from legend or misinterpretation; family recollection confirmed or realigned; honour boards re-evaluated; threads drawn together; and new stories discovered. Most of this work was done by the regional partners

themselves with the Society's team providing assistance where needed. Everyone involved in Remembering Them benefited from the experience and the RWAHS has been delighted to collaborate in a major Australian commemoration and to see local organisations from across the State empowered to tell their histories.

**Lennie McCall, Sally Anne Hasluck, Robert Mitchell, and Lenore Layman**  
Royal Western Australian Historical Society

RWAHS RESEARCH TEAM - LENORE LAYMAN, JENNIE & BEVAN CARTER, HEATHER CAMPBELL, KRIS BIZZACA (ABSENT: SUE GRAHAM TAYLOR).

Source: RWAHS

This article originally appeared in the March 2019 issue of History West.





# Engaging Aging: the therapeutic potential of historical objects



Here are some sobering thoughts:

We're having fewer children, and living longer.

Baby Boomers – born between 1946 and 1965 – are the fastest growing age group, double the size of present generation of older persons.

Most people who get dementia are older (but not all), mainly over 65.

Dementia has overtaken heart disease as the leading cause of death for Australian women.

Dementia is terminal. Enhancing quality of life is the key treatment.

But what has this to do with historical societies? Research has proved that quality of life in older people can be enhanced through programs that involve handling heritage objects and that our sense of touch can stimulate memory. Research has also shown that reminiscence therapy has a sustained impact on the health and wellbeing of the elderly who may be experiencing various levels of loneliness or depression, or have been diagnosed with dementia. Reminiscence therapy uses objects, photographs, music, and smells to trigger memories of the past and to encourage conversation. This process raises self-esteem, heightens mood, and helps to reclaim a person's identity. At best it can encourage people to start communicating again when they have become withdrawn and morose. This therapy is beneficial to not only the participant but also the carer or family member, who will also gain a lift from the experience.

Reminiscence therapy is typically used in aged care facilities by diversional therapists or lifestyle coordinators who create reminiscence or memory boxes of historical objects chosen to stimulate the senses and promote recall for their residents. However in recent years, museum-based reminiscence work has become a growing concern, particularly in the UK, where museums have been redefining their traditional role and demonstrating the important part they can play in social inclusion.

Historical societies may look to many worldwide museums and galleries forming partnerships with the health sector and rolling out programs to cater for positive ageing and those living with dementia. These may take the form of creating a series of themed memory boxes, made up of non-core items in the collection which can be lent to care homes, handled and shared; or special presentations

or tours within the museum or gallery. Those museums with recreated streetscapes or open air museums to use these for special visits by aged care groups. Beamish, the Living Museum of the North has a 1940s farmhouse, Orchard Cottage, offering a homely historic setting for afternoon tea and chats about a treasure trove of objects. The Museum of Liverpool's innovative House of Memories goes a step further in its dementia awareness program, providing training, access to resources, and museum-based activities to enable carers to provide person-centred care for people living with dementia. Its app My House of Memories is a great conversational tool and can be used to share memories via an iPad, and in 2018 launched a new US element, featuring objects from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS).

Many major Australian museums have introduced reminiscence



Italian migrants visit the Migration Museum and share their stories and objects from home.

Source: HTSA, photographer: Pauline Cockrill



Memory boxes made from Peterborough Local History collections being used at Nalya Lodge.

Source: HTSA, photographer: Pauline Cockrill

programs while in 2014 the National Wool Museum in Geelong opened its award winning Reminiscence Cottage, a sensory experience reflecting Australian home life from 1930-1950 for people with dementia and their families. Its collection of domestic objects was donated by the public and offers an easy to negotiate, safe environment that can be shared by all the family. There's music to play, things can be touched and handled. The smallest of details evoke memories such as an empty ink bottle that can be opened and which still retains the smell of ink, reminding some of their schooldays. It has been recorded that for an hour or so those visitors living with dementia were completely engaged and their mood lifted.

Here at the History Trust of South Australia we have also trialled various outreach programs in recent years that demonstrate the therapeutic potential of historical objects.

One of our branches, the National Motor Museum collaborated with the Morris Register of SA and Resthaven Aged Care facility in Malvern, an inner southern suburb of Adelaide, to celebrate the combined 75th anniversary of the Morris 8 car and Resthaven. Part of the project involved the car club members taking some of the residents for a spin around the block in their old 1930s Morris 8s. Cars can be seen as reminiscence boxes in themselves, evoking

many memories of childhood, family holidays etc. The project had several outcomes for all concerned but in particular the event triggered many memories and conversations as well as raising the mood of those involved. Our Migration Museum invited a social group of Italian migrants to the museum for a tour in Italian followed by

is much potential in this area. We are aware that so many have items in collections that might not be significant but are typical, and might be useful for outreach programs as described above. We have inspired the Embroiderers' Guild of SA Museum and the Peterborough History Group to create their own memory boxes for reminiscence work at their local aged care facilities.



Embroiderers' Guild of SA Museum with their historic embroidery memory box.

Source: HTSA, photographer: Pauline Cockrill

afternoon tea when each were asked to bring objects with special memories of home. It was clear from the enthusiastic chatter that the show and tell was a successful formula for boosting wellbeing.

The History Trust also supports the work of over 300 community museums and history groups in the state and we believe there

Reminiscence work can be seen as a beneficial partnership between two organisations within the community: for the aged care facility in need of ways of delivering a variety of stimulating programs for their residents; and for the local volunteer-run museum or historical society that might have a surplus of objects in their collection without significance, plus volunteers looking for new avenues to explore (or a way of encouraging new volunteers to be involved in their museum, or finding new audiences, or ways of seeking out sources of oral histories to help develop displays). We hope that this might inspire other historical societies to consider developing a reminiscence program for their local community.

Pauline runs workshops about making memory boxes. She can be contacted at [pcockrill@history.sa.gov.au](mailto:pcockrill@history.sa.gov.au).

**Pauline Cockrill**  
Community History Officer,  
History Trust of SA





## Every blemish whispers stories of past lives

Historical collections are usually studied only by historians, archivists, and researchers. They might connect to people and place through facts, objects, or words. But when an artist studies a collection, the people, places, and stories are laid out in the details, in the imperfections, in the wear and tear. Wendy Lugg describes her process in connecting to collections through art.

I am an artist who rescues old cloth, embedded with memory, and gives it new life in artworks which explore my Western Australian heritage. My fondness for old domestic textiles comes from childhood memories of faded embroideries stitched by my grandfather, a young disabled WWI soldier who died long before I was born. Old cloth speaks to me, every blemish whispering stories of past lives.

My grandparents all arrived in WA from elsewhere, overcoming isolation and

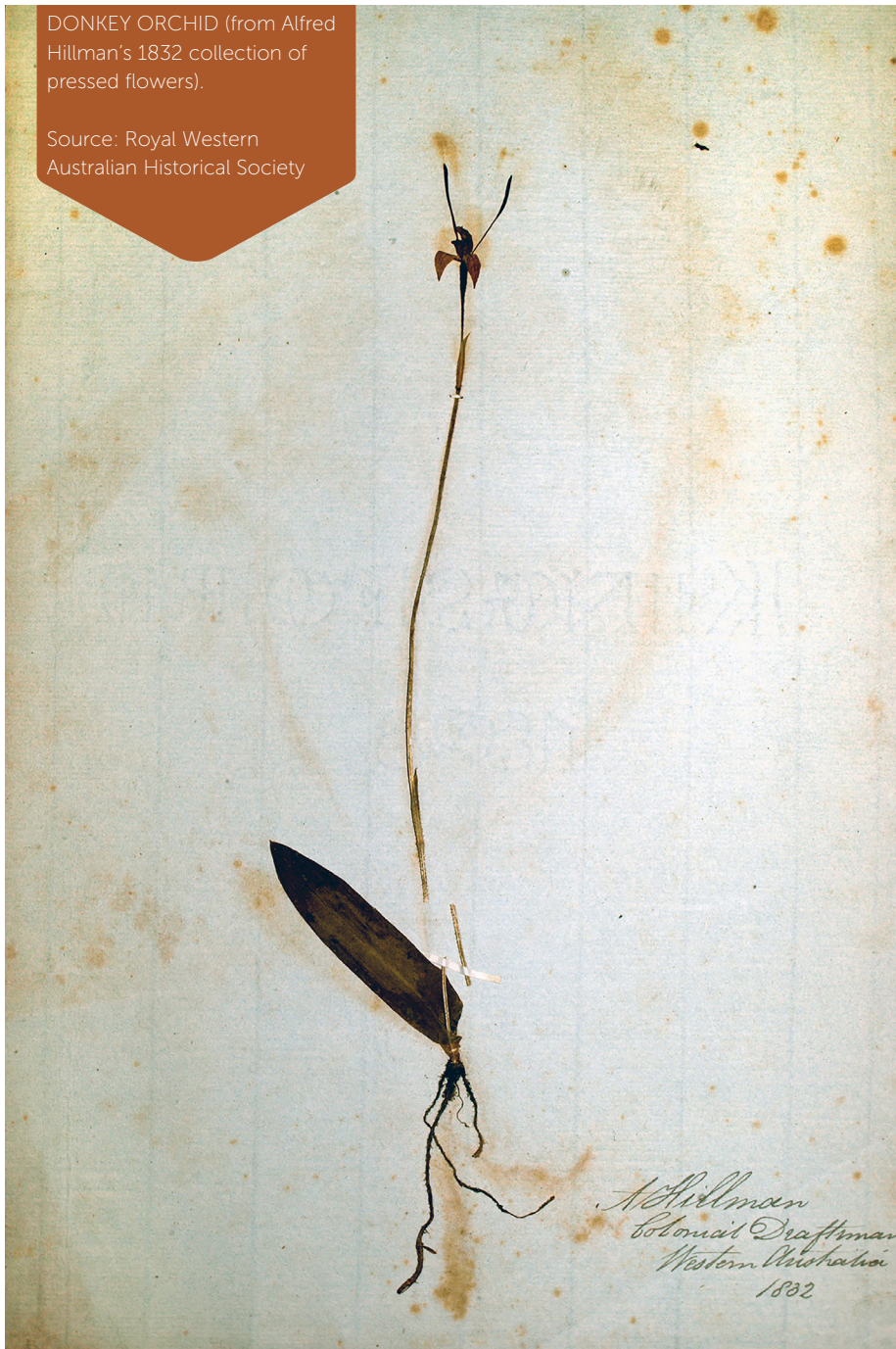


TOP: INDIFFERENT LAND (exhibition view).  
BOTTOM: BLANKET FOR HARRY (from *Mapping Memory*), honouring Lugg's WWI veteran grandfather.



DONKEY ORCHID (from Alfred Hillman's 1832 collection of pressed flowers).

Source: Royal Western Australian Historical Society



economic hardship to create lives for themselves in an unfamiliar landscape. Improvisation and making-do were as natural to them as breathing, a way of life passed down through the generations. I learned very young that with scant materials, makeshift tools and a little imagination, it is possible to create wonders.

My family heritage of thrift and making do has been an underlying thread through my artworks over the years. In an art career spanning

several decades, whilst travelling the world to exhibit and teach, I've had the good fortune to explore and find connections with other cultures, particularly through the universal art of making-do evidenced in so many of the museum collections I've visited.

However, my Western Australian heritage remains central my work and for the last decade has been my focus. In 2008 I learned about new WA government grants enabling collection



FOUR PATCH (from *Indifferent Land*), made using discarded blanket and rusty metal found items.

intended to be mutually beneficial, giving artists access to collections and in turn exposing the collections to new audiences and encouraging those already familiar with them to see them with fresh eyes.

Having heard about the Royal Western Australian Historical Society's wonderful costume collection, I approached the Society and suggested it would be a good idea to apply for funding to bring me in for a residency. The Society took that leap of faith, applied for and received the grant.

I commenced my residency in 2009, spreading the six funded weeks out over as many months. This longer timeframe enabled me to become gently embedded in the Society's volunteer community and allowed me to more deeply explore the collection as well as visit affiliated Societies both in Perth and country regions. When the funded residency was completed and the grant acquitted I felt I had still barely scratched the surface of the collection.

So, with the Society's blessing, I have remained as Honorary Artist in Residence ever since. As a child I was captivated by tales of my parents' childhood





experiences in both suburban and remote Western Australia. My residency at the Historical Society has allowed me to learn how those stories fit into the broader community and state history.

I approach history from an artist's viewpoint, more with the emotions than the intellect. My interest is in the intimate stories history tells about people's lives in different cultures, places and times. Art offers me a way of connecting with those stories.

My childhood memories are filled with the presence of long-gone family members who were made real to me through stories and memorabilia. From treasured family mementos I learned that humble objects can tell powerful stories.

Detritus collected from beach, bush and abandoned town-sites are "treasures" that inspire my work. I remember listening to the wind sweep through towering karri forests, kneeling to study tiny wildflowers emerging from damp winter soil and collecting shells and seaweed on wind-swept beaches.

**Through my residency I discovered that collecting seaweed and arranging it in albums was a popular local pastime at the turn of the 20th century. The Society's several albums of seaweed are among my favourite items in the collection.**

I've found many items in the Society's collection that relate to my family stories. I was able to build on this

connection when invited to curate an exhibition at the State Library of Western Australia, a glorious indulgence that resulted in the 2011 exhibition *Mapping Memory*. This collaboration between myself, the Society and the Library was mounted for three months in the Library's main exhibition space.

Over the years I have often exhibited my artworks alongside related historical artefacts because together they create a richer storytelling experience. *Mapping Memory* placed artefacts from the Library and Society collections and my personal collection of family memorabilia alongside my textile and photographic artworks, interspersed with didactic panels, to paint a picture of life in WA during the first half of the 20th Century.





'GWALIA WIFE' (from *Mapping Memory*). Made using discarded vintage cotton net bodice and embroidery inspired by markings on an old plan showing levels of the Gwalia mine.

Building the relationship between words, photographs, artefacts, and artworks was important. All were essential to telling the stories, but in different ways. Artworks and artefacts can do more than share information, connecting on a more personal level. The exhibition struck a chord with visitors, resulting in the Library inviting further collaboration. In 2015 we redesigned and launched *Mapping Memory*

as a permanent online exhibit hosted on the State Library's website.

Whilst my family history in WA dates back only to 1899, since childhood I have had a keen desire to learn more about the Aboriginal people who are the traditional owners of the landscape I find so inspiring. The primary artwork resulting from my original funded residency, *Indifferent Land*, draws on settler maps describing as "poor soil" the same land that had proved plentiful for the original inhabitants, and is an acknowledgement that it was not just those who came to WA, but also those who lived here already, who were forced to adjust to strange and difficult new circumstances.

From the beginning of my decade-long residency I have volunteered in the Society's museum, a role that has allowed me to get to

know parts of the collection intimately. Before long I was immersed in the museum world, completing a Certificate in Museum Studies in 2011. Much more recently I have become the museum team representative on the Society's Council. I feel fortunate to work amongst and learn from people who donate their time and expertise to ensure the state's history is preserved, but I confess it is now a juggling act to find time to make art.

Mapping Memory (online exhibition): <http://slwa.wa.gov.au/mappingmemory/index.html>

<https://wendylugg.com/>

**Wendy Lugg**  
Councillor, Royal Western  
Australian Historical Society



*INDIFFERENT LAND* (detail), which samples Alfred Hillman's pressed flower collection.



# The Self and The Statistic



DATA VISUALISATION  
OF W.E.B DU BOIS' *THE  
COLOUR LINE* (DETAIL).

Source: Library of  
Congress

Self-definition offers liberation. By this, I believe that when someone is empowered to define themselves, they also define their future. Galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) harbour this potential for empowerment, as environments for both retrospection and advancement. They are the institutions which carry histories and objects. And for Aboriginal communities subject to fragmentation and trauma, they are a reconnection force for meaningful self-definition. However, through my work in galleries and museums, I have encountered an alarming distinction between how I perceive myself and how I am

perceived as an Indigenous person.

African-American philosopher, W.E.B. Du Bois theorised on this curiosity, referencing the racial classifications that delineate society. Du Bois formulated the Colour Line or the Line; a divide wherein those on the disempowered side are bound in a double consciousness. A dual comprehension of the Western world and one's hierarchal position within it, while also experiencing life as one's authentic self. As an Indigenous worker in the GLAM sector, I often feel compelled into this kind of double consciousness,

manifesting in an institutional definition and my own self-definition.

Predominant institutional definitions of Aboriginality are idealised, tokenistic and disseminated throughout other places of knowledge that serve to prejudice broader societal interpretations. Within this dynamic, I am required to trivialise my own identity to accommodate the commercial and profitable version of Aboriginal culture. Dot paintings, tribes and dreamtime stories.

By contrast, self-definition is who I believe myself to



be, aside from ethnographic categorisation. It is the story I tell as a human who exists within the framework of several intersecting cultures, belief systems and traditions. Further, as a human who hopes to be treated as an employee at work, rather than a convenient tool for some reconciliation action plan.

From my perspective, the GLAM sector is not yet sophisticated enough to represent the parts of me that are Aboriginal, South-Sea Islander, Scottish, Irish, African-American and Australian all at once. I must be either Aboriginal or Non-Aboriginal. I must be on one side of the Line or the Other as Simone de Beauvoir conceptualised. Nevertheless, when working in cultural institutions, my brown skin decides for me like a default setting.

**I recall the tourist who grabbed me by the shoulders and exclaimed in a fervour: "I am so happy to meet a real life Aboriginal!" Followed by "Have you assimilated well?" Dumbstruck, I asked what she meant and she rambled on about my long commute from the bush. In this respect, I am never a casual observer. I am a statistic, an anomaly, a real life representative of something mythical and rare. The poor, down-trodden blakfella, who treks in from the wilderness each morning to captivate the masses. I am as much an object on display as the canoes and shields.**

Yet to my mind, I wake up in a leafy, inner-suburb of Melbourne. Some days, I take the tram to work at a prestigious gallery. Other days, I study and debate Philosophy at my sandstone university.

So, when people supplant my privileged reality with their own stereotyped construct of Indigeneity, I am jolted into acknowledging the chasm between my world and theirs. This is the life of an urban blakfella, as Vernon Ah Kee would have it, learning to connect the disparate parts of my identity. The Indigenous and the Australian. The Self and the Statistic.

For this reason, I hold steadfast in the GLAM sector. I cherish the projects where Indigenous stories are told by Indigenous communities. And I endure the ignorant questions and curious stares. Because in defining myself, I move ever closer to connecting the Indigenous with the world.

Keeaira Aird

