



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305
FREMANTLE WA 6959

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<https://fhs.org.au>

FREMANTLE HISTORY CENTRE - CALL TO ARMS!

Kristi McNulty

Former History Centre Librarian Pam Harris, former City Librarian Betty McGeever and Fremantle Society President John Dowson, have all written publicly to express their dismay and disappointment at the new Fremantle History Centre. The History Centre Librarian is pushing for extended space that is more functional and may be used more effectively as what we have now is unworkable, but he needs our support.

Early November 2021 Fremantle Council was preparing for the opening of the brand new, state-of-the-art library and one of the exciting opportunities we had to look forward to was “A larger and better equipped Fremantle Local History Centre...taking pride of place in the library. It will include digital, interactive screens as well as a vast stock of biographical files, newspapers, council minutes and agendas, publications, maps and plans.”

The library itself is an attractive space and I am told it is a pleasant place to work in and serves its various functions well. The same cannot be said about the History Centre and one wonders if anybody was listening when staff were asked to list their requirements as plans for the new building were being drawn up. Not only were future requirements ignored, resources and workable space are now a fraction of what had been available in the old library. The bulk of what is arguably the most extensive history collection in the state, was sent to an off-site storage facility and is still there 16 months later.

We do at least have the book collection housed in glass cupboards, but also a lot of small locked cupboards and drawers that were never purpose-built for anything and a faulty interactive screen, a folly never requested by staff and since removed, the cost of which would have gone a long way towards digitising all those materials not yet scanned.

Not that digitisation should be seen as an alternative to using the original resources. Certainly, it provides a convenient means of accessing a wide range of material very quickly, and is an effective means of preserving fragile items, but any researcher will tell you that it just doesn't compare to having the original documents available to study. Keyword searching completely eliminates any chance of serendipitous discovery made while flicking through hundreds of photographs stacked in a drawer, poring over maps or plans from a cabinet or reading through dozens of biographical or property files.

These resources may still all be requested by appointment from the Librarian but when he does not even have a working space allocated within the History Centre area, it would seem that general enquiries are being actively discouraged and only the most determined and thoroughly

organised researcher with plenty of time on their hands will be able to make any use of this unique and wonderful collection.

The Fremantle History Collection exists as an ongoing record of people, businesses, organisations and events in Fremantle. Since its inception in the 1950s it was intended to be a community resource, freely available to anyone who wished to know more about Fremantle and its history. It was run by a dedicated succession of librarians who continued to build up the collection and endeavored to find answers to the many queries that constantly flowed in. I am not sure what the visitor statistics have been since the new library opened but I wonder how they would compare with the figures from ten years ago.

The History Council of Western Australia, along with New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, has adopted a statement about the value of history, and the following extract sums up that importance well:

“History supports a sense of community identity and place; and that in turn promotes social cohesion, individual and collective wellbeing, and resilience... [It] is the foundation for future generations. It is crucial to our future because it explains our shared past.”

The Fremantle History Centre needs its own secure dedicated space, big enough to house the collection in its entirety, spacious enough so that researchers and staff are able to spread out and work comfortably, and then room to allow for future growth. This collection belongs to the people, it belongs to us and it needs to be accessible to us. If you feel concerned about its future, as I do, get in touch with your council representatives, write to the Mayor, send a letter to the Herald.

References:

City of Fremantle, News and Media, 03 November 2021

<https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/news-and-media/nine-things-look-forward-new-fremantle-library>

History Council of WA, Value of History Statement

<https://www.historycouncilwa.org.au/value-of-history>

Harris, P. Valuing History. *Fremantle Herald* 04.03.2023

Please see the following letter from Fremantle History Society President, Allen Graham, sent to the Mayor and Councillors of Fremantle, voicing the concerns of the Fremantle History Society

The Mayor and Councillors
City of Fremantle

Dear Hannah,

I am sending this letter to you and which I ask you to please forward onto the Councillors to let them know of the Fremantle History Society's strong support for a dedicated working space for the Fremantle History Collection. Even though I am sending this message in my role as the President of the Fremantle History Society, I am also referencing my own personal experience and connection with the History Centre which extends back over forty years.

In the 1980s, well before people had the benefit of the internet and google, the Fremantle Library had the best history centre in the state which at that time was curated by Lorraine Stevens, with

Betty McGeever as the City Librarian. Even though the space was tight, researchers like me could go into that room, spread out any maps, photographs or books that they required and to have Lorraine available to provide any assistance you needed.

Unfortunately, the City has lost that resource since the new Civic Centre was built and it is the strongly held opinion of the Fremantle History Society that the city is poorer for it.

Having just recently had the occasion to request some books from behind the current locked bookcases of what is kindly called the Fremantle History Collection, it hit me just how hard it now is to be a researcher on any aspect of Fremantle history, whether it be on a house, a person, a building or an organisation and this will inevitably dry up the research and discovery of Fremantle history. This in turn will lead to fewer books and essays being published about Fremantle and that will be a great shame, for any history on Fremantle is a history of the state. Consequently, the whole of Western Australia (particularly as we get closer to the 200th anniversary of the state) will be poorer for the loss of that written history.

While many people think that Fremantle is the Cappuccino Strip with its coffee shops and bars, it is its history and heritage that gives Fremantle its identity and puts it on the places-to-visit list of international travellers. A tourist can get a coffee anywhere. Every city has their coffee shops and bars, but there is only one Fremantle with its unique history and heritage and the city needs to invest in those two pillars for the real riches of the town are revealed through its history. Thus, it is important that the city reinstate a dedicated history centre where the researchers of the future can continue to mine the rich history of Fremantle.

Yours faithfully

Allen Graham
President
Fremantle History Society

MEETING REPORTS

Fremantle Passenger Terminal – 21st February

A request to visit the Fremantle Passenger Terminal was made in July 2022; a visit would need to coincide with the visit of a ship as the terminal is, since 2001, in a marine security zone. Arrangements for ships arriving in February could not be given at that time. I was advised to make contact again in January. January almost slipped by without me remembering . . . plans came together quite quickly, and we were able to visit in February.

Neil Stanbury, Manager Government and Public Relations; Jane Edwards, Fremantle Ports; and volunteers of the Friends of Fremantle Ports met us on the steps of the building. Neil told us that where we were standing had been, 123 years ago, part of the river. Directly west of the building a sand spit, called Ferry Point by the settlers, had been used by generations of Noongar people as a crossing point.

Fremantle Ports recognises that in the past century, it has changed this natural environment, which was a place of significance to Aboriginal people.

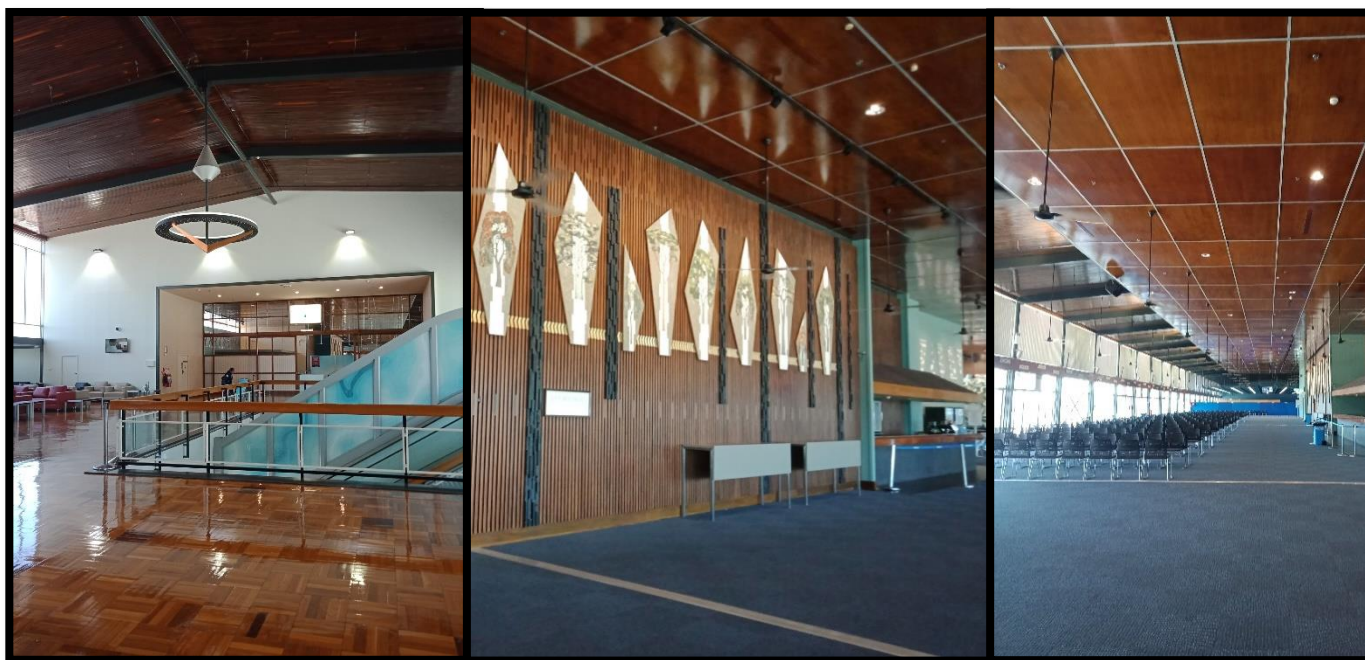
The *Zuiderdam* arrived in Fremantle on the morning of Tuesday 21st February on its 128 night Grand World Voyage. The journey began in January from Fort Lauderdale, Florida and will

return there in May. The ship visited Kangaroo Island before Fremantle and sailed on to Port Louis in Mauritius. It is a Holland America Line ship, built in 2002, is 285 m long, it has 11 decks, 985 cabins and a crew of 817. (A 128 day Grand World Voyage is priced from \$30,699)

The Passenger Terminal was built in two stages in the early 1960s to service the influx of migrants. The building designed by Hobbs, Winning and Leighton fits into the post-war international style, as does the Port Authority Building, which FHS members visited in February 2016. It is a style exemplified by 'simple, functional, largely unadorned structures with open spaces, large areas of glass and an emphasis on steel and concrete in the building materials.'¹

The two-level building is steel-framed construction with concrete panels. The upper floor 255 m long x 26 m wide, is timber parquetry and Western Australian hardwood timbers were used extensively in the interior. There is a large balcony area at each end, these were intended to be helicopter pads.

The first stage, servicing F Berth, was opened in December 1960 by the Premier, the Hon David Brand MLA. Between then and completion of Stage 2 at G Berth in May 1962, more than a quarter of a million passengers passed through the terminal. Total cost of the building was £1.2 million. The building at that time was described as the largest of its kind in Australia, and now is the only passenger terminal in Australia with two-berth capacity. It was built for dual-purpose usage with capacity for cargo handling as well as servicing passenger needs. Two large cargo-handling sheds are at wharf level, of the terminal building.



Vast interior of the Fremantle Passenger Terminal showing panels of Howard Taylor artworks Photos: K. McNulty

A third section, which included an enclosed passenger and baggage overpass across Beach Street to a passenger pick-up centre did not eventuate. Airline travel took over and the glory days of this impressive building were 'history'. But not over, used as a function centre during the 1980s and 90s it now services the revived cruise industry. The Future of Fremantle Committee's scope of work includes imagining how Victoria Quay might work in the future.

¹ <https://www.fremantleports.com.au/the-port/history-and-heritage>

In 2000 the building was placed as a Permanent Entry on the State Register of Heritage Places, this means it needs to be preserved and any works to the building must not diminish its significant elements, nor its history.

We travelled upstairs via the escalators which up until last year had been the original escalators, these were reputed to have been the largest and fastest escalators in the state at the time of installation. Now, in a time when escalator travel happens virtually unnoticed we were still able to be impressed by the splendour of the building. In a boom period this was an opportunity to showcase Western Australia to people arriving from all over the world. The parquet floors are all made with WA hardwoods, the floor in F Berth (Customs Hall) is blackbutt; the floor in G Berth (Arrivals Hall) was wandoo, as a consequence of a not-so-distant time, it is now carpeted. The interior walls feature jarrah battens and suspended ceilings of silky oak, another native timber. Overhead light fixtures are of Queensland maple and silver ash panels surround the kiosks and other areas.

Artworks by one of Australia's leading modernist painters, Howard Taylor, are another feature of the interior. A series of 71 friezes illustrate the beauty and wonder of plants and animals of Western Australia. A major piece, 'Movement of the Waters of the Ocean' has recently been placed in the Arrivals' Hall. You can also see Taylor's art in the foyer of the Port Authority Building and the WA Art Gallery has 231 of his works.

An enjoyable and interesting outing, thanks to those in attendance and Neil and Jane at Fremantle Ports.

The History of Wooden Boat Building in Western Australia – 28th March

Elly Spillekom, Curator of the Dutch Australian Foundation

European knowledge of Australia started in 1606 with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship *Duyfken* at Cape York, 160 years before Captain Cook was researching the east coast. In 1616 another Dutch seafarer, Dirk Hartog, visited on the *Eendracht*.

In 1727 VOC ship the *Zeewijk* was wrecked on Half Moon Reef in the Abrolhos Islands off modern day Geraldton. To save themselves, the remaining survivors salvaged timbers and material from the wreck on the reef, and using mangrove timber from the islands and the most basic tools, they built a vessel in around 8 months, they called a sloop. This was the first vessel built in the European tradition in Australian waters. 270 years later, the very same boat building traditions and techniques were once again in use to build a replica of the *Duyfken*.

In 2016 researcher Adriaan de Jong painstakingly reconstructed what the sloop must have looked like from the archaeological and documentary evidence, the model is in the Shipwrecks Museum, Cliff Street.

The first ship to be repaired in the Swan River Colony, post settlement, was Captain James Stirling's HMS *Success* which had run aground near



Elly Spillekom addressing the meeting at the Mardoo Room, Walyalup Civic Centre
Photo: T. Heyne

Carnac Island in November 1829. It was repaired at Garden Island by the ship's carpenters and James Lawson Smith. It was the first use of the timber they called "Swan River mahogany", which we now call jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*).

The first official shipyard was set up in Perth in 1831 by J. L. Smith, on what is now Mounts Bay Road. Boats were urgently needed in the colony as it was initially virgin bush with no roads. All goods had to be carried on the river from Fremantle to Perth and to Guildford. Boat building centres were established at Perth and Fremantle.

The shipwrights were also finding other places to build boats, and undertook a large amount of boat building and repair work wherever suitable riverside land existed. Boat building sites soon sprang up along the Swan River at Claremont, Nedlands, Canning Bridge and South Perth.

Fremantle rapidly became a centre for boat and ship building for the colony, where larger boats could be built capable of trading up and down the coast. Shipyards lined the foreshore in the area now reclaimed and known as the Esplanade Park, and both sides of the river in North and East Fremantle.

Boats were built from a variety of local timbers including jarrah, tuart, white and spotted gum, karri and marri. Jarrah was harvested from south of Fremantle, Rockingham and Woodman's Point. Imported timbers such as oregon, spruce and kauri pine were also used.



Mews family in Henry Street, Thomas William Mews on balcony at left
Photo: FHC

The Mews family has the distinction of having the longest association with boat building in Western Australia, spanning five successive generations from 1832 to today. Thomas William Mews arrived at Fremantle on the ship *Rockingham*, which gave its name to the locality where it was subsequently wrecked.

T. W. Mews and Samuel Cox, another passenger on the same ship, established a building business together but soon diversified into building ferries and whaling boats, as well as

bridges and jetties. Mews took over the Government shipyard at Spring Street from J. L. Smith after Smith went back to England.

One of Mews' sons, T. W. Junior, moved to Fremantle and set up a shipyard at the seaward end of the Whalers' Tunnel. Later another son took over the former Chamberlain and Cooper boatyard in Freshwater Bay, Claremont.

The historic boat shed in Claremont is now a key part of the Freshwater Bay Museum. It was donated to the Museum by the Mews family and moved from its Victoria Avenue, Claremont, site to its current location at The Freshwater Bay Museum in 1996.

In 1886 Alfred Edmund Brown came to Western Australia; he and his partner William Taylor came to Fremantle to try their luck here. Alfred bought a property opposite the beach on

Fitzgerald Terrace (now Marine Terrace) and set up as a boat builder. With a reputation established for innovation and speed, he quickly became one of the most important builders, sending his boats as far away as Queensland. At the peak of his production Alfred's yard was turning out a vessel every fortnight, mostly pearling luggers, but also yachts and river craft.

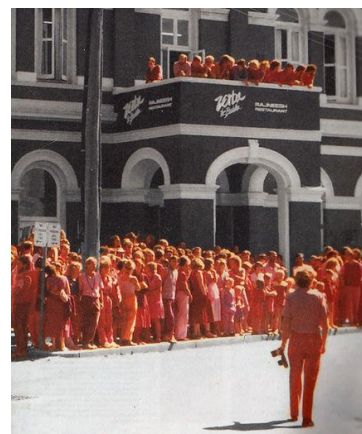
In 1910 he moved his business to North Fremantle, where he built a large shed which allowed him to build ships undercover in all weather. Probably his most recognised vessel was the double-ended, double-decked steam ferry S.S. *Perth*, built for the South Perth ferry service in 1914. Now 109 years old and still afloat, the *Perth* has been converted to diesel power, and her original steam machinery is on display at the WA Maritime Museum on Victoria Quay.

COMING EVENTS

THE ORANGE PEOPLE

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room
151 High Street, Walyalup Koort, Fremantle 6160
2 May 5.00 pm

The Orange People were a conspicuous and powerful element in the Fremantle community for some years during the 1980s. Under the guidance of their leader Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh the movement became a global phenomenon and Fremantle a major centre, a large 'satellite' commune and ashram established in the centre of town. Many young and educated people became disciples and were encouraged to cast off their worldly possessions and expand their religious dimensions through sex.



Filmmaker, Joseph London grew up in Fremantle and had many childhood friends whose parents became devotees of the Bhagwan. London has made a documentary about the Orange People or Sannyasins - a "compelling mystery that has remained in the fabric of the city" and is coming to talk to the History Society about his experience with this controversial movement.

We will be serving nibbles and drinks at 5.00 pm prior to the talk at 6.00 pm.

A FREMANTLE FAMILY – LOVE, LOSS AND LOCALITY

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room
151 High Street, Walyalup Koort, Fremantle 6160
30 May 5.00 pm

Dr Deborah Hindley has a PhD from Murdoch University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from Curtin University. She has held a number of academic positions at The University of Western Australia, Curtin and Murdoch Universities, and has authored a number of publications. Deborah's talk will be a personal story of her family and its connection to Fremantle and how it intersects with world events and some well-known local identities.

Maggie Hicks is included in the 1978 publication: 'Reflections: Profiles of 150 Women who helped make Western Australian History'. She ran a corner store with a liquor licence in Quarry

Street, Fremantle. Her son Will left Fremantle to serve in the Great War, first in Gallipoli but was ultimately killed in Passchendaele. The tragedy of war hit the family again in World War 2. Maggie's son-in-law had been employed at Fremantle Harbour and was living in East Street when he enlisted. Unfortunately he was the first Western Australian to be killed.

SOUTH FREMANTLE HERITAGE

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room 151 High Street, Walyalup Koort, Fremantle 6160 27 June, 5.00 pm

Annabel Wills, the Fremantle Heritage Projects Officer will talk to us about the City's project to meet current heritage legislation requirements.

Heritage Areas are designated precincts comprising of places that contribute to the area's defined character and heritage significance. Planning controls apply to heritage areas to help:

- Protect elements important to the heritage significance and cultural integrity of the area.
- Encourage new development and continued use of the area while simultaneously conserving the cultural heritage significance.
- Increase amenity, conserve a 'sense of place' and character and maintain the cultural heritage and history.
- Increase the desirability of the place as residents know the heritage significance and integrity of their environment is protected.

The project requires immense detailed work, including reviewing records for every single place in each area. This review will be the first comprehensive review since recent legislation changes required additional information to be recorded in heritage areas. This will also be one of the largest and most comprehensive reviews since the heritage list was adopted in 2008.

2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

St. John's Anglican Church 3 Adelaide Street, Walyalup Koort, Fremantle 6160 25 July, 5.00 pm

The original St. John's Anglican Church was consecrated in Fremantle in 1843 and to connect with the 180 year celebration of their presence in the heart of Fremantle, this year's AGM will be held in the church.

There will be a speaker to talk to us about the heritage of St. John's Church followed by the Annual General Meeting where President Allen Graham will deliver his annual report and the 2023/24 committee will be elected.

TREASURES FROM TROVE

May Day 'in this region of topsey-turveydom'
Heather Campbell

1883 - 'Whisperings', *Herald*, 5 May 1883, p.2

On Tuesday last we entered upon what in England is known as the growing or shooting month, the month of May - the month devoted to those great annual religious sprees designated May Meetings, in which the clergy of the Anglican Church get rid of any superfluous steam they have failed to blow off from their pulpits. At home the present month is the month, if not of fruits, of

flowers, and commences that brilliantly festive period known as "The Season," when the opera, theatres, and social reunions of the upper ten thousand are in full swing.

In this region of topsy-turveydom May is the month that ushers in the wet wintry season, the only great social festivity marking it being the Birthday Ball, that sets a few maiden hearts beating with thoughts of a triumphant debut, which shall bring the gilded youth of the city prostrate at those diminutive and shapely feet for which the fair sex of this colony are so celebrated. ...

It is hardly necessary to inform the majority of my readers that the custom of celebrating the first of May by that deserving but grimy individual the chimney sweep is fast dying out, which is hardly a matter for regret. The sight of one or two of that worthy fraternity perambulating the town, in company with a Lord and Lady Mayoress, clad in very nondescript and decidedly uncivic garments, accompanied by a mythical personage inside a bower of greenery, called Jack in the Green, who does an ungraceful dance to a melody elicited from the pipes of Pan, is not calculated to give one a very good idea of those charming old rural May Day festivities, when a queen of the May was chosen, and the villagers set up May Poles, and passed the day in archery, Morris dancing, and other amusements. The custom I have referred to can as well be spared as can the senseless letting off of squibs and crackers, and the burning in effigy of that arch "Invincible" Guy Fawkes. But it seems a pity that the charming and innocent village festivities which formerly ushered in the month should be abandoned, and allowed to become things of the past....

But it is not impossible to perpetuate those customs in these colonies. We have in this colony one village, I believe, at least so it is called, and certainly it is about the only truly rural spot in the colony. I refer to Guildford. Let me suggest then that the inhabitants of that village should on future May Days celebrate the occasion by reproducing those old May Day customs to which I have referred. The "Morris" dancing might be very appropriately conducted in front of the dwelling of a popular resident of the village known as Morrison.

1910 - Note 'May Day Socialist demonstrations'
Western Mail, 21 May 1910, p.31

1918 - May Day Cake
Sunday Times 26 May 1918, p.15

OUR CALENDAR.

MAY.

- 1.—Children's Hospital Sunday: £414 realised. Annual public meeting in Perth of the Western Australian Auxilliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Rt. Rev. John Ferguson, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, visited this State. May Day Socialist demonstrations.
- 2.—Japanese warships Aso and Soya visited this State. Perth meeting decided to establish a Maternity Hospital and Girls' Home in Perth.
- 3.—Western grapes averaged in London 19s. per case. Fiftieth anniversary of Garibaldi's departure from Rome to relieve Naples. Earthquake in Costa Rica: 500 people killed.

Honorable Mention.

May Day Cake.—Beat together until light and creamy half a cupful of butter and one cupful of sugar. Next put in two-thirds of a cupful of milk and three scant cupfuls of flour sifted with two teaspoonfuls of baking powder and one-third teaspoonful of salt. Last of all fold in very gently the well-beaten whites of three eggs. Divide this cake batter into three portions, color two of them a delicate pink and flavor with rosewater; color the third green with pistachio. Bake in three layers and when cold put together with boiled icing to which a generous quantity of chopped walnuts and raisins has been added. Cook with a teaspoonful of vanilla extract, frost with plain white frosting, and decorate with halves of nut.—Miss E. Brown, Olivia-terrace, Carnarvon.

1925 – May Day rubbish collection - *Westralian Worker*, 1 May 1925, p.14

By the irony of fate, coincidence, or perhaps contempt of the principles of organised labor which should control the communal life of Fremantle, the contractor for the removal of rubbish will commence operations on May 1st. May Day is the workers' day in all countries for celebration and demonstration of the internationality of Labour - Our civic fathers will celebrate it by yet another reactionary step calculated to still further burden the unfortunate citizens, who are compelled by economic circumstances to live under the disastrous administration of the Fremantle Town Council.

1936 – Fremantle Labor Day Committee - *Westralian Worker*, 3 April 1936, p.10

The inaugural meeting of the Fremantle Labor Day Committee will be held on Monday next... when the secretary Mr. Fred Mann expects to welcome a big contingent of representatives of affiliated organisations. ...It is now a tradition that Laborites regard it as a duty to participate in the Labor Day Organisation, and there is always a very fine feeling of comradeship among the big team of men and women who comprise the Fremantle Labor Day Committee. Local business people also always support enthusiastically the Fremantle effort, and as trade at the Port has been booming during the past month owing to the shipping revival, a generous response to the appeal for donations and trophies is anticipated...

1944 – A grand dance in the Fremantle Town Hall - *Westralian Worker*, 21 April 1944, p.1

Celebration of May Day, 1944, will take the form of a grand dance in Fremantle Town Hall, conducted by the Fremantle Labor Women's Organisation. Those of us who know the Fremantle Labor Women's Organisation's flair for successes in this type of entertainment can assure intending patrons of a right royal time on the night of May 1....

1946 – Solidarity - *Workers Star*, 12 April 1946, p.6

All unionists should rally for the May Day Procession and make the march a demonstration of their solidarity on the question of shorter hours and increased wages.

**1950 - Tom Edwards remembered
Workers Star, 28 April 1950, p.8**

**1964 – Highlights of the march : A-test in the Pacific,
attacks on union rights
Tribune, Sydney, 15 April, 1964, p.9**

**MAY DAY MARCH
FOR FREMANTLE**

A MARCH to the memorial of Tom Edwards, murdered by Sir Hal Colebatch's troopers in the great wharf strike of 1919, is proposed on May 7—the first Sunday in May—by the Maritime Unity Committee of Fremantle.

It is proposed that workers march from the Railway Station through the town, to the Trades Hall and Edwards' Memorial, culminating in an anti-Menzies rally on the Fremantle Esplanade.

Fremantle May Day plans

PERTH: Hard-hitting South Australian Senator James Cavanagh will be the main guest speaker at the May Day celebration in Fremantle on Sunday, May 3.

THE march this year was expected to be larger and more colourful than ever, said Mr. D. Lippiatt, secretary of the 1964 Fremantle May Day Committee.

The campaign for a basic wage rise, the demand for an end to the French A-test in the Pacific, and protests against attacks on trade union rights on the waterfront will be highlights of the march.

Seventeen teams from W.A. Marching Girls' alliance will take part, with Highland bands interspersed between the trade union marchers and floats.

Three unions—W.W.F., Seamen (jointly with the Eureka Youth League) and Ship Painters and Dockers have nominated entrants in the May Queen competition for a prize of a trip to Sydney with spending money and a spirited contest is expected.

Senator Cavanagh will speak at the Fremantle Esplanade meeting and the traditional May Day dinner, to be held at the Hotel Orient, Fremantle will wind up the celebration on May 3.

1995 - May Day Parade, South Terrace, Fremantle 'Unity is Strength'



Alas no longer any
Morris Dancers or
chimney sweeps!

Brent Sumner Collection
c.1995
FHC ES00012

We shared Molly Parkin's amusing reminiscences in the summer newsletter; they continue here.

Lillian Jane Embleton – a daughter's memories

by Molly Embleton/English/Parkin

Greener fields or distant pastures tempted my mother again and a little hotel at Hines Hill was our next port of call. The school had 12 pupils and by then I was in year 7 and used extensively by its teacher as an assistant. I heard the children read, gave and marked spelling and listened to tables – a teacher was born. It might be thought that being an itinerant student would have had a deleterious effect, not so, I reveled in the ever-changing scene and within hours of enrolment in the new school, the poor bewildered children were playing, with enthusiasm – 'fly', 'giggi', 'prisoners', 'base' (peeling eggs), and 'tip cat'. It won't surprise anyone that I was very good at these and by the second day I had the school in my hands.

Being city bred, farm animals had a great fascination for us, and shortly we collected three motherless lambs and the runt of the pig litter and because of the persistent and demanding feeding times, I became a surrogate mother. I was rewarded by the grateful animals following me bleating hopefully. It was a winter time and the only warm spot in the non-airconditioned hotel was in the kitchen so we often trailed in there. This didn't exactly coincide with the wishes of the cook, a martinet of a woman (no doubt her circumstances determined her approach to her life). One bleak day the cook was taking a roast out of the oven and stumbled over a lamb sleeping snugly on the hearth. Half the roast ended up on the lamb and the rest wiped the laugh off my face. The cook walked out, the animals returned to the farm, and the kitchen was out of bounds to me forever. As my mother had to do the cooking until a new cook arrived from Perth her attitude to me was somewhat cool.

The Coronation Hotel at Queen's Park was next on the list. During this time I attended boarding school and spent some of my weekends at the hotel. It was a meeting place for the racing fraternity and my first real introduction to the world of gambling. Horses were tied up outside where there was a horse trough – appropriate to the needs of the horses and for sobering up disconsolate punters and trainers. The hotel was built next to a playing field, which in winter was often ankle deep in water and used as a breeding place for loud mouthed frogs – I always had trouble sleeping the first night home and would stuff my ears with cotton wool. However our clients staged monthly frog jumping contests and the names of the frogs were more exotic than those of the horses. Frogs which didn't jump convincingly were summarily returned to the field to eke out their noisy existence.

My mother had no dearth of suitors during these years. If anyone became too ardent we closed ranks and if possible were more obnoxious than usual and the prospect of being stepfather to six children of doubtful charm was daunting and most seemed unequal to the task. Mother claimed that the ones who withstood the onslaught and remained interested had to be after her money as even she could see that the challenge was great. Would life had been sweeter for her had love triumphed? I sometimes wonder this with some guilt. Nevertheless, in case there is a picture of children being dragged endlessly around the state at the whim of an ambitious parent, let me assure the readers that our family home was maintained and after each of our excursions we returned to Scott Street, South Fremantle and were re-enrolled at our local school (Beaconsfield Primary) where we renewed friendships and settled in with a minimum of fuss, our personalities coloured somewhat by our lifestyle.

I have no idea whether these businesses were lucrative or not (in the time of the Great Depression) but with the passing years we all grew up and my older brothers and sisters went their several ways, and my mother sallied forth on her last jaunt. The Duke of Cornwall Hotel in Hannan Street Kalgoorlie was leased. This was one of the myriad hostelries that graced the main street and existed to quench the seemingly unquenchable thirst of the miners. This was in effect a return to the womb for me as I was born right on the Boulder Block in the Mine Manager's (South Kalgurli mine) house in Fimiston Street. Now a massive open pit mine and the street no longer exists with its beautiful iron fence.

This sojourn was chiefly memorable for being next door to the Cremorne Gardens, an outdoor theatre. From an upstairs window we had an excellent and free view of its screen. As can be imagined, we quickly gathered a wide circle of friends and sustained an enduring popularity. After the show we would stroll down busy Hannan Street to enjoy a tutti frutti at Bell's Café.

It was time now to return once more to the family home or other locations where fate and the fullness of time had led us.

Yes, it was a time of living in a very busy lifetime. Meekatharra was next to welcome us and I joined the family in the Christmas holidays. The journey by train took two days and a night. I remember the journey well. Although supplied with a 'sleeper' this was a complete misnomer. Sleep was virtually impossible. The warmth of the bed and something delectable about me encouraged a myriad of bedbugs. There is something about sleeping on a train that encourages snorers to give of their best and the entire carriage reverberated to this cacophony of sound. I envied them if not their vocal capacities at least the situation that enabled them to perform. Morning saw me bleary eyed with my skin punctured with raised bites. At least the bugs had enjoyed the night.

The Meekatharra Hotel was memorable as it was the home for huge cockroaches which scuttled everywhere resembling a Bungarra in full flight as they stood high on their six legs

poised for attacking crickets clustered over the shower where the air was moist in an otherwise arid climate. Have you ever noticed that crickets wear a type of desert boot with sandpaper soles that enable them to cling to any surface? And a wet slippery body was no exception.

However, as ever I adapted quickly even to the nightly thunderstorms in which lightning appeared so close that it seemed possible to touch the sheets of light. These electrical storms seldom brought rain or relief but one night the heavens opened and a deluge ensued. About 100 metres from the back of the hotel ran a dry creek bed. I had never met anyone who remembered it flowing, but within half an hour the creek was in spate and the whole town was in shock to find that a man had drowned creek overnight. Wrens, robin red breasts and parrots chirped merrily in the trees that lined the edges.....

And so ended Molly's journey down memory lane.....

This memoir was penned towards the end of Molly's amazing life and transcribed by her niece Annelle Embleton/Perotti who managed to achieve an outstanding result with an inherently challenging task.

While not focussed on Fremantle as such, Fremantle was the centre of the family with the Scott Street property passing to my Uncle Trevor who became Chief Engineer of Mills and Wares Factory down the road. During my childhood with my cousins, many family gatherings and swims in the shark-proof enclosure at South Beach brought immense joy to me and live on in my happiest memories.

Darryl James (nee English/Parkin) - Lillian's granddaughter and Molly's daughter

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Ordinary meetings are generally held on the 4th Tuesday (or Sunday) of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter.
Be sure to check details as meeting days and times may vary.

FOR YOUR DIARY

May Tuesday 2nd, 5.00 pm

The Orange People

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

May Tuesday 30th, 5.00 pm

A Fremantle Family

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

June Tuesday 27th, 5.00 pm

South Fremantle Heritage

Walyalup Civic Centre – Mardoo Room
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

July Tuesday 25th, 5.00 pm

AGM

St. John's Anglican Church

3 Adelaide Street, Walyalup Koort,
Fremantle 6160