



# HISTORY WEST

PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

July 2019

## GENERAL MEETING

The next meeting at Stirling House is on Wednesday 17 July at 6pm when Dr Michelle McKeough will present a paper on 'Bubonic Plague in Western Australia 1900-1906'. Refreshments available from 5.30pm; Bookshop open until 6pm.

*Western Australian Government Railways  
44 Traffic Manager's Office  
Perth, 18th March 1906*

*Special Train No. 209*

*Conveyance of Plague Patients  
And Contacts by Rail*

*Special trains — Perth—Queens Anchorage*

Stations	11/3/06	12/3/06	Stations	12/3/06	13/3/06
From Perth	11:00	11:00	Perth	7:14	7:14
Perth	12:00	12:00	Queens Anchorage	7:35	6:10
East Fremantle	12:25	5:10	Fremantle Tooby	arr	6:40
Fremantle Tooby	12:30	5:15	Perth	dep	7:10
Queens Anchorage	12:35	5:20	East Fremantle	arr	7:10
Perth	12:40	5:25	Perth	arr	7:45
Arrive Perth	12:50	5:35			

*Arrive Perth 12:50*

This paper outlines the plague's course within Western Australia and the social impact of the plague's visitation to the state. During the final years of the nineteenth century, an international pandemic of bubonic plague was carried throughout the British maritime trading world. This pandemic took only a few years to spread to every continent, reaching Australia via Sydney in January 1900, then Western Australia only a few months later.

Between 1900 and 1906 Perth and Fremantle experienced repeated outbreaks. In both places each outbreak occurred in a single area distinguished by over-crowding and poor sanitation. In Fremantle, each victim of plague either lived or worked in the West End. In Perth, most plague victims were diagnosed from the area bounded by Wellington, Hay, Pier and King streets. By 1906, Geraldton also had one outbreak in

which six people died in ten days and Kalgoorlie had a single case, but these experiences did not mimic the contributing factors seen in Fremantle and Perth.

Throughout the State's experience of bubonic plague, only thirty-three lives were lost to the disease. Western Australia's experience of plague was not about the swathes of dead bodies it left behind. Rather, the experience highlighted a crisis in health and sanitation whilst at the same time revealing our socio-cultural frailties, including some of the worst of our post-colonial prejudices.

**Michelle McKeough's** doctorate was titled 'A Community and its Crises: Challenge & Response in Fremantle during three times of crisis: The Black Plague; The Great War and Depression Era'. She has since published in academic journals and collaborations, and is currently conducting post-doctoral research into the presence of bubonic plague in Western Australia, 1900-1909.



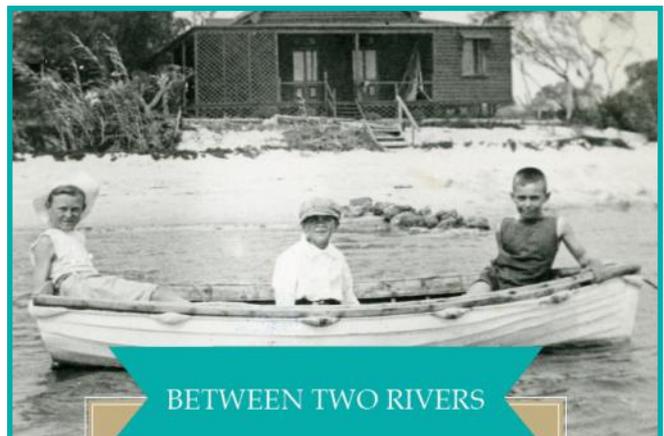
## 2019 Annual State History Conference of Affiliated Societies

This year the City of South Perth Historical Society will host the Conference from Friday evening 6 September when the Welcome Reception will be held, with the conference and dinner on Saturday 7 September and ending with an event on Sunday morning.

The conference is always an enjoyable weekend. Never been to a conference?

We encourage you to attend all the weekend or just part of it.

For further details of the program and the registration form, please see the RWAHS website - [histwest.org.au](http://histwest.org.au) - or phone 9386 3841 - or email [admin@histwest.org.au](mailto:admin@histwest.org.au)



## Council News

At its meeting held on 13 June business included the following where Council

• welcomed new members – Marilyn Dunne, Maeve Harvey, Sally R May

- noted the success of the Succession Planning workshop and developed a plan to progress its findings, particularly in light of the recent constitutional changes
- discussed budget challenges and the urgent need for other sources of income to be found
- agreed to the purchase of a new computer for use in the museum collection
- congratulated Dr Lenore Layman on her award of AM in the Queen's birthday honours list
- welcomed the success of the latest *Booked in for a Cuppa* as well as the *History West Community Talk* – Margaret Forrest: traces of a life – presented by Lenore Layman
- congratulated all involved in organising the successful Enderslea Farm day tour to Chittering Valley
- resolved that, from next year, the annual Pioneers Memorial Service will be re-named the East Perth Cemeteries Memorial Service because research has revealed the existence of approximately 50 Aboriginal graves in the cemeteries
- endorsed two upcoming book and print sales at the Society — the Lilburne Australiana book and bird-print sale (25-27 July), and a prints sale (20-22 September)
- welcomed contact with The University of WA Guild and its volunteering program
- thanked all volunteers for their 1616 hours of voluntary work in May.

Lennie McCall Chairperson

## History in the City

June's interesting talk by John Parker concerned the advent of the motorcar in Perth from 1896. Not everyone welcomed the invention; there was criticism of the noise, speed and fumes as well as alarm that the horses would be frightened. Many viewed the car as an expensive novelty. However, in general, Perth business leaders and members of high society welcomed the car. An Automobile Club of WA was formed and this was the forerunner of the Royal Automobile Club. Boans vans – Boans for Service – soon appeared and became part of our history.

History in the City is held on the first Wednesday of each month from March to December. Our next talk will be on Wednesday 7 August and given by Scott Whitaker on Railway Hotels of Australia.

Lorraine Tholet

## Affiliates news

**Bayswater Historical Society** has seen the completion of 'Heritage Reveal', hopefully the first of a series of place-making heritage arts projects. The series is planned to re-use the 18 wooden pylons, over 100 year old, removed from the Garrett Road Bridge during its recent upgrading. The Society proposes to create a story boulevard using the remaining pylons placed from the town centre to the river to tell more stories, including those of the first people. This project demonstrates the benefit that community arts can offer; an idea worth considering by us all as another means of communicating historical stories.

2018 was a sad year for the **Donnybrook Historical Society** with the passing of President and Life Member John Thomson, Vice President Vern Smithers, Treasurer Mrs Marilyn Hickman and volunteer member Dorothy Maughan. These members were the backbone and life of the Society, and their tireless work and understanding of Donnybrook's local history will be missed.

**Fremantle History Society** commemorated the centenary of Bloody Sunday on 4 May 1919 when wharfie Tom Edwards was killed in a violent struggle on the waterfront intended to stop non-union labourers unloading a ship that had arrived from the eastern states with influenza patients. Tom Edwards' death caused widespread community distress and anger, and his funeral was a major public event.

The latest issue of the **Irwin Districts Historical Society's** newsletter *The Sea Lion* is another bumper publication full of interesting reading. A recent community highlight was the Easter Markets attracting 2,000 visitors. The Society was kept busy providing food and running a used book and plant stall, as well as offering two convict tours of Dongara/Port Denison. These tours showed visitors the harbourmaster's site at the estuary and the Denison foreshore. Some of the stories concerned the ex-convict 'man about town' Joseph Walton, builder of the Dongara Hotel and the police station; the raid by escaping convict 'pirates' on harbourmaster Edward Downes; at the estuary the jetty and obelisks built by convict contractors with convict labour; and the convict origins of the name of Port Denison and some of its older streets. Both tours were completely booked out and great successes, testimony to the high level of interest now shown in convict stories and the important role of convictism in WA's past. The Society has also applied for a grant from the National Library for a Significance Assessment of its collection of objects and images.

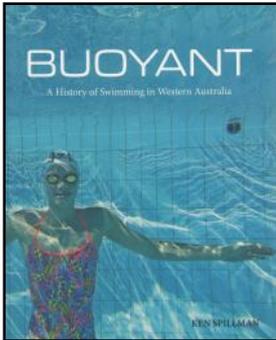
**Maylands Historical & Peninsula Assn** sadly reports the death of founder member and long-time volunteer Sonia Ford who, among other work, fought for the survival of the historic Peninsula Hotel. Two Community Service Students from Leederville TAFE have been recently adding to the volunteer effort, a promising move for students and the Association. Congrats to members who staffed a recent sausage sizzle. All of us are constantly in search of more funds to carry on essential work.

Don't forget **Rockingham District Historical Society's** 50th anniversary celebrations on Thursday 18 July when an open day will be held at the museum. Do join in the fun if you have some time free on that day.

**Walpole Nornalup & District Historical Society** reports a success in the naming of Grace Darling Bay outside the Nornalup Inlet. The *Grace Darling* was a two-masted schooner that sailed the Fremantle to Esperance route (1892-1911) and then Fremantle to Abrolhos Is (1912-1914) before being wrecked near Lancelin in 1915.

## Booked in for a Cuppa

These happy gatherings of book readers have become a regular event on the Society's calendar as we explore newly published books about WA's history and heritage. Our thanks to the volunteers who supplement these occasions with splendid morning teas.



Four books were on show on the morning of Friday 24 May, the first being *Buoyant: A History of Swimming in Western Australia*, published by Swimming WA. The author Ken Spillman has written a comprehensive and fascinating history taking his readers from WA's first swimmers - Aboriginal people - right through to the present.

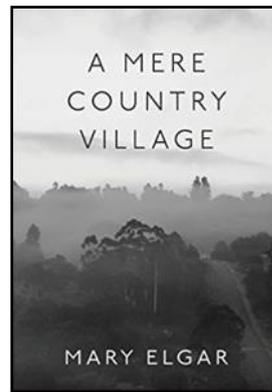
He focused his short talk, however, on the pre-1930s period because that swimming history has been almost completely forgotten. The first colonists frequently drowned as most could not swim but it was not until the demands of public decency were met in the 1880s that the first swimming baths were built. These were quickly followed by the first swimming clubs and swimming has been a very popular sport and recreation ever since. Have you heard of Ernest Cavill, a world record holder and member of the most famous swimming family in the world who pioneered what we now know as the 'Australian crawl'? He arrived in 1896 and found fertile ground on the goldfields, becoming the first manager of both the Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie public baths where he reserved times for women to swim. Did you know that more people watched swimming events than football in these early decades? There are so many more stories! If you have a love of swimming this book will deliver you much enjoyment.



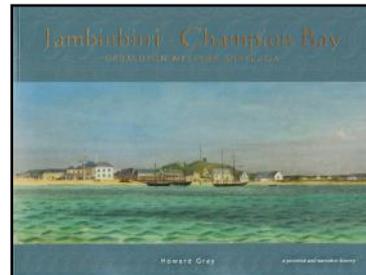
Terri-Anne White, director of UWA Publishing, publisher of *Desert River Sea: Portraits of the Kimberley*, was our next speaker. This beautifully illustrated book accompanied a recent exhibition of the same name at the Art Gallery of WA. It takes readers on a visual journey through the Kimberley from Broome to Wyndham, Balgo to

Kalumburu, One Arm Point to Warmun exploring Aboriginal Arts Centres and the artistic outcomes of a six-year-long project of commissioned artworks. The many interviews and stories as well as vivid reproductions of the art make this an interesting as well as aesthetically appealing book.

Our third speaker was author Mary Elgar who came up from Bridgetown to tell us about her new book *A Mere Country Village: Bridgetown 1868-2018*, published to mark the 150th anniversary of the gazetting of the town in 1868. It is a history of the formation, development and sustaining of a community. Mary explained that this theme was her focus - how has this small rural community survived, changed and yet maintained its life over more than a century. Her book is based on 43



oral histories undertaken with a broad cross section of the local community and all sales' proceeds go to the Bridgetown Historical Society. If you check the May issue of *History West* you will find an enthusiastic review of this book from one of our reviewers Heather Campbell.



Finally author Howard Gray spoke of his latest book *Jambinbirri - Champion Bay: Geraldton Western Australia*, another visually stunning book of historical images accompanied

by extensive and informative commentaries. It is, as the author intended, a wonderful celebration of Champion Bay - the place and its rich history.

Howard Gray also reminded us that July 2019 is the 400th anniversary of the Dutch discovery of the southwest of 'terra incognita australis'. There will be a program of commemorative activities centring on Rockingham, Geraldton and the Houtman Abrolhos Islands from 19 to 29 July. It will be worth looking out for.

## Members' research projects - part 5

Here is the last of the list of members who responded to *History West's* call to report on their current research projects. Undoubtedly there are other members also researching away, so altogether it is pleasing to know that history-making is alive and well in the Society.

**Steve Errington:** My current obsession concerns the men and women confined in Fremantle Gaol ('Round House') when it was the principal gaol for the Swan River Colony. Before the Round House opened in January 1831 the colony also had its own 'convict hulk', the stranded *Marquis of Anglesea* in which runaway servants, petty thieves and others were incarcerated. The 'others' are sometimes surprising; the *Anglesea* was also the colony's first lunatic asylum. In the absence of even a public hospital, the Round House was home to mentally ill men until 1855. Gaolers' reports for 1829-55 are not quite complete but from them I have been able to compile a list of about 2500 individuals, many of whom made repeat visits. My rather daunting plan is to document them in another 'dictionary'.

**John E deB Norman:** Presently I am working on records from the isolated lugger camp and shipyard that my grandfather, Hugh Davis Norman, and his two brothers, Tom and George, had in remote Beagle Bay. Fortuitously my father kept some of the record books. My father conserved these records and it is one of my salutations to him, the family and the men and women who went to these remote places and built boats.

# A tour to Enderslea Farm

## Moondyne and Me – The making of a Bushranger

*On Sunday 26 May sixty members and friends set off for Enderslea Farm, some self-drive and others from Stirling House on Cascade Tours' dashing white coach! What a treat was in store for all. Mike Lefroy takes up the story.*

'Would you be interested in writing a play about John Boyle O'Reilly... and by the way could you include the story of Moondyne Joe, the famous outlaw?' When I received the phone call from Diane Pope of Enderslea Farm, Chittering, in September 2018, I'd never written a play. But I knew something about both gentlemen and had close connections with the Chittering Valley since the 1960s.

I was aware of the popular historic plays that were performed in Diane's 1850s heritage barn at Enderslea. She knew that my wife Joy and I were closely involved with the *Fenian Fremantle and Freedom Festival* and thought a play about O'Reilly would be of interest to the large audiences she attracts each year during the National Trust's Heritage Festival.

For many years I have marvelled at the stories of the Fenian escapes — first John Boyle O'Reilly from a road gang near Bunbury and then the famous escape of the six Fenians from Fremantle Prison on the whaling ship *Catalpa*. Joy and I had published a children's book, *The Catalpa Escape*, and so the opportunity of revisiting our research material was tempting.

So where to start?

When O'Reilly escaped to America he continued his promising career as a poet and writer and eventually became the editor of Boston's *Pilot* newspaper. One of its popular features in the late 1870s was a weekly series of connected stories, written by O'Reilly, loosely based on his time as a convict in WA. In 1879 the compilation of these stories became the novel *Moondyne*, published in Boston.

Moondyne Joe and O'Reilly never actually met so I decided my first task, through the magic of theatre, was to redress the situation. Therefore early on in the play O'Reilly explains his return to Moondyne:

I didn't really want to come back but I couldn't help myself. I have a comfortable life in Boston, but I've never been more alive than my last two weeks here in Western Australia. Those days on the run down Bunbury way, hiding in the sand hills.

And so Jim Riley, disguised as an American writer, returns to WA to hand-deliver a copy of his novel and apologise to Moondyne for using his name without permission.



John Boyle O'Reilly & Moondyne Joe

The play begins when the two men meet in a pop-up bar in the solitude of the Chittering Valley. Moondyne is initially upset that his hard-fought 'brand' as a bushranger is being abused, but he comes around when O'Reilly (his disguise lasts no time at all) suggests writing a sequel – to tell their real stories – and a book tour of the USA.

We love your sort in America... specially the outlaws that hide behind exotic names - Moondyne Joe the Outlaw from Down Under. Perfect!

While I aimed to keep the stories of their time in WA as factual as possible, I used current language and references to current social and political issues to highlight how some things never change. Knowing the skills of the actors and musicians gave me the opportunity to suggest song and dance to create moments of irreverence and whimsy.

Initially the budget for the play, directed by Will Axten of Genrefonix, a Fremantle-based art collective, allowed for two actors and two musicians. But with wise advice from Jenny Davis of Agelink theatre – writer and director of Enderslea Farm's previous plays – the budget was stretched to add a female voice.

In 1879 Moondyne Joe married Louisa Hearn. She was 26, half his age, and recently widowed. It seems very little else is known about her, which is a great gift for a writer. So I took the liberty of crowning her the Suffragette of the Chittering Valley giving voice to 'The Housewives of Australia'.

It was a great delight to work with Will Axten, and introduce these characters to such an enthusiastic audience. Will, with his many years of experience in theatre and music, brought together a stellar cast of actors, musicians and theatre professionals who turned the Enderslea barn into a magical space for the story to unfold. My grateful thanks to Will, Paul Rowe (the all-singing and dancing Moondyne), Khrob Edmonds (the impeccably accented John Boyle O'Reilly), Narda McMahon (the feisty Louisa), marvellous musicians Cathi Olivieri (viola) and Priam Bacich (guitar and mandolin), spot-on lighting from Terry Preston and videographer extraordinaire Svetlana Gartrell.

My thanks also to the ladies of the combined CWAs of Bindoon and Bullsbrook who continued their famous tradition of providing mouth-watering country fare for each of the five performances. And finally to producer Diane Pope who bravely offered a novice his first attempt at play writing, and trusted me to bring some of WA's remarkable historic characters to life.

**Mike Lefroy**

*This wonderful performance was followed by a picnic lunch with the backdrop of the 1887 Holy Trinity Church near Bindoon. Many thanks to all of those who supported this fundraising day for the Society.*



Picnic lunch at Trinity Church

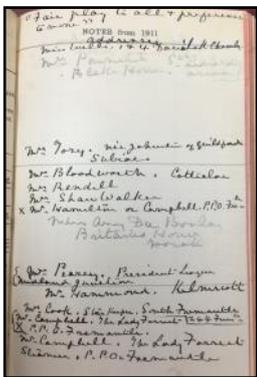
# Community Talk

## Margaret Elvire, Lady Forrest (1844-1929) - traces of a life

Lenore Layman's talk on Friday 17 May attracted a good crowd, quite a few of whom were related in some way to the lady herself, which isn't surprising given the number of her nieces and nephews. Lenore's talk highlighted the archival collection recently donated by Nicholas Hasluck to the Society and comprising personal papers from John and Margaret Forrest, as well as her sister Flora and husband Frederick North. It is a wonderful collection to explore and here is a taste.

Margaret Forrest (née Hamersley) lived for 85 years across a lifetime that stretched from convict WA through the gaining of self-government, then votes for women and federation, World War I to her death on the eve of the Great Depression. It was a time of enormous change. Hers was a fortunate life, centred on a very happy marriage although a childless one.

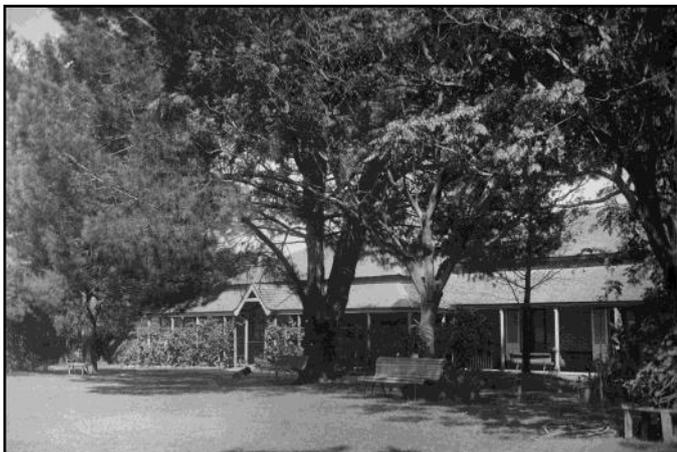
We learnt most about her most important role in life – as political leader's wife, partner, helpmate, hostess and political campaigner, especially among women. One journalist observing Margaret Forrest's role as the WA Premier's partner in London in 1897 commented: 'As a helpmeet to her husband she is to be regarded as a Lady Beaconsfield or a Mrs Gladstone of colonial life'. Comparing her to the influential wives of British prime ministers Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone was compliment indeed!



Page in 1912 Diary

This archival collection suggests three ways in which Margaret Forrest achieved this political and social influence. She was a superb hostess, and entertainment at The Bungalow - the Forrests' home on over an acre of land between what is now Shafto Lane and Milligan Street, Hay and Murray Streets - underpinned John Forrest's political support base and his community leadership. Invoices and receipts as well as photographs paint a picture of

daily life as well as grand occasions at the home they shared from their marriage in 1876 to his death in 1918.



The Bungalow before 1908 extensions



Margaret Forrest 1887

The many large photographs in the collection of Lady Forrest in a splendid array of evening dress, some for Imperial court occasions as well as a plethora of news reports and invitations testify to her social success as wife and partner of a colonial political leader. Then also in the collection is her diary for 1912 where she recorded her day-to-day work as a founder of the first Liberal women's organisations in WA.

Margaret Forrest was in her day an influential political figure and needs to be remembered for that role as well as for her botanical artistry.

## Exhibitions now at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA

Open: Tues-Sat 11am-5pm — to 17 August

### Well worth visiting!

#### Philip Noakes: Sculptural Silver

This beautiful exhibition of silver work is complemented by member Dorothy Erickson's new book *A Passion For Silversmithing*. Philip Noakes – Gold and Silversmith.

#### Nikulinsky Naturally

Philippa Nikulinsky is an internationally recognised botanical and wildlife artist, and this exhibition surveys her work from the 1970s to the present.

#### The Artist and her Work

Lady Sheila Cruthers took an immediate shine to women's self-portraiture when she began collecting art in the mid-1970s. This interest expanded into a collection strategy she referred to as 'the artist and her work'. Items from her collection are exhibited here.

#### Carrolup Revisited: A Journey through the South West of WA

This exhibition celebrates the small group of children remembered for their distinctive representational drawings in pastel. As members of the Stolen Generations, removed from their families and relocated to the Carrolup Native Settlement, they lived in isolation from the world. These small works on paper, speak to their strength and willingness to survive, and is a reminder of the fortitude of Aboriginal people in the harshest of circumstances.

## Pioneers Memorial Service 2019 Commemorating John Rowland Jones

*The 65th annual service was held on Sunday 2 June at St Bartholomew's Chapel at the East Perth Cemeteries, the Revd Canon Joanne Baynes from St George's Cathedral conducting the service. History West especially thanks Bevan Carter who researched and wrote the citation from which this life story has been drawn.*

Who was John Rowland Jones? He arrived in the colony as a convict on the *Hougoumont* in 1868. His age is not entirely certain because his headstone says he was born in 1838 while his birth certificate, when located, states that he was born in 1841. So he was in his mid to late twenties on arrival.

As a young man he lived for five years in London working as a chemist's assistant. However his employment gave him ready access to drugs and he began experimenting with them. By the time he returned to Wales in 1865 to work as a journalist he was addicted to opium derivatives, a problem with which he struggled for much of his life.

His first job was at Ruthin where he worked as a reporter for the *Wrexham Advertiser*. But it didn't last long — six weeks after arrival he fled to Liverpool with debt money he had collected. After spending it all he gave himself up to police who notified the *Advertiser*. The only evidence against him was his confession to police. He was committed to trial at the Sessions and given a sentence of four months.

On the strength of 'penitent verses' published in the *Carnarvon Herald* under his name, he was employed as a legal clerk on his release. Unfortunately his addiction and the lure of the fun times he had had in London prompted him to forge his employer's name on a cheque, and he ran off to London with the money. After his second arrest, the *Advertiser* reported that he spent the 'whole of the money in riotous living in the short period of three weeks'. He was given an eight-year sentence at the Ruthin assizes and spent another two months in the prison before being transported to Fremantle.

On receipt of his ticket of leave, he worked as a journalist for the *Fremantle Herald* started by three former convicts Pearce, Beresford and Roe. But his troubles continued. He appeared in court as a witness to an assault by Pearce. The magistrate's finding on Jones

was scathing: 'Jones, I can find no excuse for your conduct. You witness a breach of the peace and do not attempt to stop it. One of you [Jones or Young] act as bottle holder, and the other as second. Your conduct is gross'. His engagement with Mr Pearce was cancelled.

He then spent three months in Toodyay before returning to Perth in 1871 and he was a patient in both Fremantle and Perth Prison hospitals on a number of occasions, on at least one admission for 'poisoning by opium'.

On 21 September 1872 he married Elizabeth Connor and they had a family of nine, seven boys and two girls. From this point his life seems to have become more settled and successful. He took up work as a freelance stenographer and he was editor of the *Western Australian Times* when the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the colony was celebrated in 1879.

As well he bought suburban land. When the Subiaco Estate was subdivided in 1885, J Rowland Jones was an early buyer and he also entered the rental market. In 1889 he became sole agent for Remington typewriters and opened a business school teaching shorthand and typewriting skills. His employment as a Hansard reporter gave him security in the last decade of his life.

His early years of excess no doubt contributed to his increasingly poor health although he was not an old man. He died the day before Christmas 1895 and was buried on Christmas Day, this tribute appearing in the *West Australian* on the same day:

An old journalistic identity has passed away in Mr J Rowland Jones, who in his later years occupied the position of head of the Hansard staff. Mr Jones in the earlier days of the colony was employed as shorthand writer to the Legislative Council before the introduction of Responsible Government after which his work was confined to the Legislative Assembly, in which he was recognised as a most capable recorder of the proceedings. Indeed, for a long time he had the reputation of being the best stenographer in the colony.

John Rowland Jones is one of many former convicts buried in the East Perth Cemeteries, but one of only a handful who has a street named after him. While he had his early troubles, he built a life in Western Australia and contributed to the growth and development of the colony. We are delighted to commemorate him.



At the grave



In the chapel

## ***‘From Another View’ - a State Library WA exhibition reviewed***

This exhibition at the State Library of WA is described as a ‘contemporary reimagination project’ of the Forrest journey of exploration from Geraldton to Adelaide in 1874, in partnership with the Forrest family’s Minderoo Foundation — ‘a new journey of discovery...[engaging] with communities in Yamaji country, the Western Desert and Ngaanyatjarra Lands to explore First Peoples’ connections to the lands travelled by Forrest and his team in 1874’.

And so it does, although the connection between this particular Forrest expedition and what Traditional Owners actually thought – and think – of it, is surprisingly disparate. The exhibition sets out to show modern viewers what motivated Forrest and his European companions to explore what was to them unknown country, while also showcasing video pictures of a modern field trip in four wheel drive vehicles to Ngaanyatjara country and the Canning Stock Route to demonstrate what the country traversed really looks like.

There are likewise pictures of Aboriginal people obtaining traditional foods in this ‘desert’ country, and some commentary about the Aboriginal guides – the Noongar men Tommy Windich and Tommy Pierre – who were an essential component of the 1874 expedition group. The point isn’t well made, though, that for both Noongar men the interior country was just as much a mystery as it was to the Europeans – the Forrests, being what used to be called ‘native’ born, realised the value of such men as trackers, water-finders and food gatherers. But the Noongar men were out of their own country – one reason for them being ‘faithful’ is that they would probably have been speared as intruders by the locals had they become totally separated from the main party.

The exhibition makes proper acknowledgement of the skills of the two Noongar guides in obtaining food and water, but implies as well that the explorers would have been ‘lost’ without them, which was never the case – the Forrests (John and younger brother Alexander) were both trained surveyors who knew how to navigate by the stars and use sextants, and so were not actually ‘lost’ at any time. Their carefully drawn and annotated map – a credit to them – is one indication of this, and for me at least is one of the highlights of the exhibition.

While the exhibition contains only carefully edited, accurate information regarding its Aboriginal history, it contains a number of errors regarding the 19th century Europeans who also explored the areas of central Australia traversed by the Forrests. The list starts with ‘John Edward Eyre’, whose given names were actually the other way about – a mistake which is repeated. Others include ‘W.H. Tiekins’, whose surname has

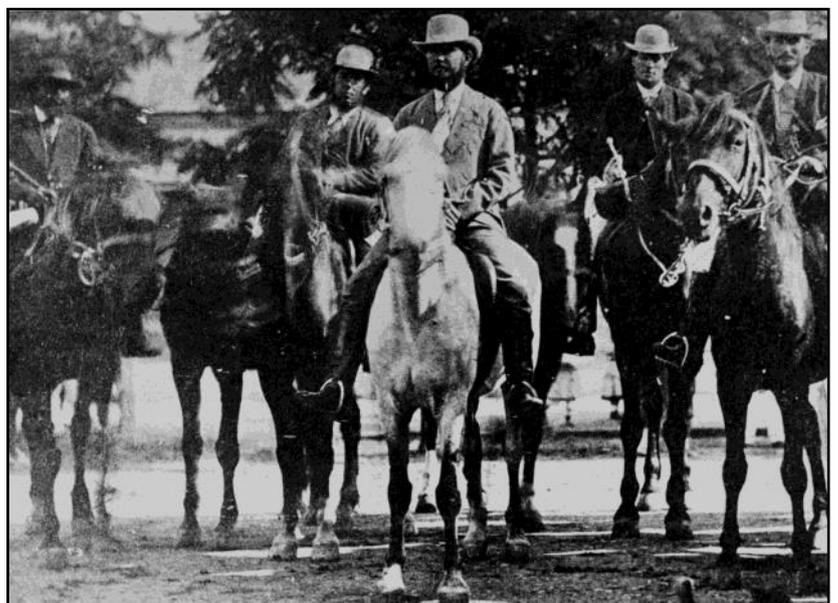
an extra ‘t’, ‘Ayres Rock’ which should be ‘Ayers’, and ‘Lake More’, which is missing a second ‘o’. Small things perhaps, but their absence on the Aboriginal side could lead to speculation that more care was paid to that side of things than to the ‘Europeans’ – the intruding ‘bad guys’, to one school of thought.

I say this because the list of explorers includes the name of David Wynford Carnegie, who paid for his expedition in 1896-7 from the goldfields to the Kimberley with money he had earned from prospecting. Carnegie, the younger son of a Scottish lord, seems to have made a good impression among most of the people he encountered in WA – he didn’t condescend, for example, even when he encountered colonial snobbery after arriving at Albany – and he was respected and liked by his fellow prospectors. But all the explorer video sees fit to say about him is that he captured Aboriginal people when short of water in the desert, and fed them salt meat to make them reveal the nearest water source. This allegation is repeated every time Carnegie is mentioned these days and, while true, it fails to add that he was just about the only explorer honest enough to admit to the practice, which was widespread. Those who condemn it don’t seem to realise that it was far more humane than shooting or otherwise torturing Aboriginal people to obtain information, and Carnegie at least was careful to allow his prisoners to drink their fill after revealing the water source. It was a matter of survival for both Europeans and their beasts of burden – the unfortunate part about it being that no-one knows how many Aboriginal people perished after long, waterless marches to places which in some years would have contained plenty of stored rainwater but were at that point dry. This is all a matter of context, which the exhibition does not contain.

Despite these quibbles, however, the organisers deserve credit – the exhibition is definitely worth a visit.

**Dr Peter Gifford**

*You have a little time to catch this exhibition before it closes on 19 July.*



John Forrest and his exploring party leaving Perth on horseback

# Book Review

**Chris Owen, 'Every mother's son is guilty'. Policing the Kimberley frontier of Western Australia 1882-1905, Crawley, University of WA Publishing, 2016.**

**Reviewer: Bevan Carter**



'Pastoralists believed that police should act in their interests, protecting their stock, punishing people they called cattle killers and returning runaway Aboriginal workers to their stations.' [Introduction p.15]

What an impressively detailed, scholarly, and well-written work this is. Although documenting just 23 years, from the establishment of the police service in the Kimberley region to the 1905 *Aborigines Act*, Owen's book deftly sets historical

events in their economic and political contexts. The extensive notes and references alone take up 140 pages of Owen's 632 page book which convincingly shows that the Kimberley pastoral industry was successful precisely because the police increasingly came to see their role as enabling pastoralists to dispossess Indigenous landowners.

The title comes from Royal Commissioner Dr Walter Roth's query whether the summary arrest and gaoling of Aboriginal people without due process was a 'rather one-sided justice', to which Police Constable John Inglis replied, 'It's a queer country where I am. Every mother's son is guilty'.

Policing in the Kimberley was a difficult undertaking. The environment was harsh, policemen had to patrol

enormous distances, they were poorly paid, and supplies were often scanty. Far from critical eyes, pastoralists held significant power over the activities of the police and many did not hesitate to wield it to their advantage. Owen argues that the arrival of responsible government in 1890 and the organisation of pastoralists into a powerful parliamentary group supported by Premier John Forrest, resulted in legislation which drastically affected Aboriginal people.

Although during the early 1880s, some police officers were keen to learn about and report on Aboriginal language and culture, by the 1890s their role was almost solely punitive. Owen charts the 'radical' changes in police practice from one of protection, where policemen on occasions actively prevented the killing of Aboriginal people, to one of compliance in murder through 'dispersal' raids, or long forced marches of prisoners in chains. Owen concedes that it is impossible to calculate with any accuracy how many Aboriginal people were killed, but from a conservative pre-contact estimation of 10,000 inhabitants in the region, by 1900 the number was 'approximately 5000 with 1500 of those employed in the pastoral industry'. A current initiative, the *Newcastle University Colonial Frontier Massacres project*, has only just begun researching killing sites in Western Australia and this book will be a timely and useful resource.

Undoubtedly some Aboriginal deaths would have been due to disease, but Owen soundly rebuts Keith Windschuttle's claim made in his 2002 book, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, that historians have over-stated the extent and numbers of massacres in Australia. Owen takes issue too with Kevin Moran whose *Sand and Stone*, also about policing in the Kimberley, portrays 'Aboriginal people and their actions in resisting colonisation as criminal acts to which the police, of necessity, reply'.

This book is an important contribution to documenting the history of racism in Australia and a fascinating examination of a comparatively little-known aspect of our history. It is only a pity that the quality of the black and white illustrations are so poor.

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