

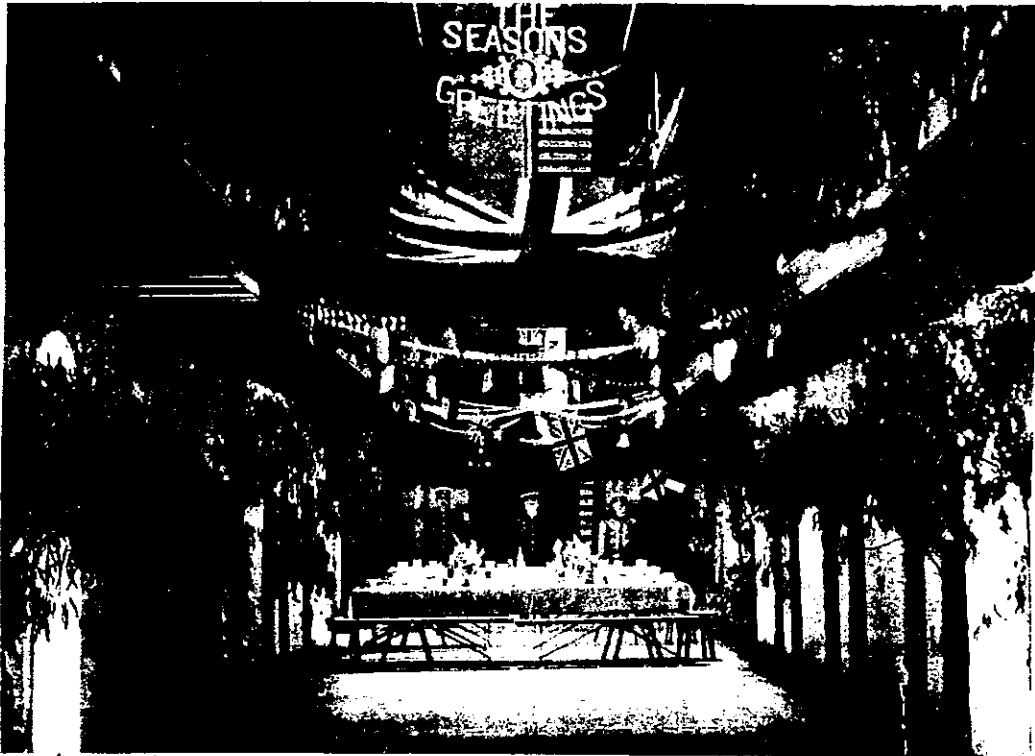
❁ Fremantle History Society Inc ❁

Established 1994

The Secretary

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Christmas celebrations, Fremantle Prison, 1916

CHRISTMAS BEHIND BARS

It is Christmas! A time when all that is genuine and kindly in man, be he rich or poor, good or bad, "bond or free" rises uppermost in his nature... So it is that we grasp this opportunity to convey our Christmas greetings to "the world beyond the walls", and join with it in fervent prayer to The One whose birth we celebrate that the New Year may indeed be a happier one to all mankind than had been the year that now wearily drags its carnaged body into eternity... We whose circumstances are such as to preclude us from the giving of material gifts to our friends, must at this festive season content ourselves in extending to them our sincere wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. (The Newsletter, 25 Dec 1941)

Over the life of the Fremantle Prison, various sources show that a little Christmas cheer was offered to those incarcerated in Western Australia's most notorious gaol.

Thoughts of Christmas often revolve around the special food that accompanies it. In 1907, authorisation was given to serve Christmas pudding as well as other rations on Christmas Day. (un-named document, 1907) For the Christmas celebrations of 1916 all prisoners dined together. Tables were brought from the workshops and sheets were used as tablecloths. The divisions were decorated with flags and greenery and flowers from the prison gardens were placed on the tables. Each table had its own plum pudding - see picture above. (*Peneological Reform in WA*, 1916)

In an article in *The Dawn*, the Women's Service Guild recorded that 'a present of biscuits and sweets was made each year to the Women's Prison'. (*The Dawn*, 13.02.24)

Extra items including corned beef, butter, eggs, cigarettes, tea and ingredients for the Christmas and New Year puddings were purchased in 1940. (*Xmas extras for 250 inmates for Xmas 1940*)

As well as the official Christmas fare, prisoners in more contemporary times were able to recreate the Christmas spirit through special purchases using their *spends*. Prisoners submitted spend slips in order to purchase extra items of food or other supplies.

The Fremantle Prison Collection includes a batch of Christmas spend slips for 1987. Spend slips were usually completed weekly but Christmas spends covered two weeks and a limit of \$100.00 was allowed. Some forethought was required as the Christmas spends had to be submitted by the 2nd of December. As would be expected, Christmas cake was a popular item, however there were surprisingly few requests for Christmas cards. Perhaps cards were bought prior to this spend in

order to reach their recipients in time for Christmas. (Spend slips, 1987)

An earlier list detailing items available for the Christmas Spend provides an interesting comparison. The notice is undated but is post 1966. The list which demands that spends be submitted by 23 November, contains items such as Medicated Brylcreem, cigarettes for 45-55 cents a packet and *Tarax* brand soft drinks. It also includes a reasonably wide range of confectionery, tinned items, biscuits, drinks and toiletries. As in 1987, all fruit and vegetable items are tinned not fresh. (Christmas spend notice, no date)

As well as dietary delights, special events were sometimes held. In 1921, all the female prisoners requested permission to attend the Christmas Eve concert in the male prison - unfortunately the request was denied. (*Superintendent's Interview Book*, 13.12.21) Christmas 1961 was celebrated with various special events - 4 movies were chosen for the holiday season - *They came to Cordura*, *Carry on nurse*, *The Benny Goodman story* and *The grass is greener*. Tournaments in tennis, bridge, volleyball, crib, euchre, draughts, chess and quoits were held as well as several raffles. Prizes were either food or tobacco. (*Jarrah Post*, December 1961)

In 1990 a Christmas Party was held for prisoners and their families. Presents were supplied for the children by WA Salvage. (*Ad Rem*, 25.12.90)

Christmas at the Prison is still celebrated in one form or another. Carols by candlelight have been held in the grounds on several occasions. However, what would have to be the most unexpected Christmas activity was held in November 1994. Potential Santas for the Myer department store, complete with white beards and rotund

red tummies, undertook a training course at Fremantle Prison.

Prisoner's Christmas Carol (excerpts from)

*Although I am in prison,
and home a prison cell,
I fail to see some reason,
Why I can't help to swell,
The songs of praise and gladness,
On day of Saviour's birth,
The babe who was predestined,
To keep all men on earth.*

*And also I remember,
That when He came to die,
This self same tiny baby,
Died between men like I.
And He did them then comfort
Though He to cross was nailed,
And since that fateful morning,
He's never sinners failed.*
(Jarrah Post, 1961)



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dianne Davidson - Chair, 430 6096
Elaine Berry - Vice Chair, 336 1906
Anne Brake - Secretary, 335 9473
Margaret McPherson - Treasurer, 377 2668
Lorraine Stevens, 430 2339
Deb Tout Smith, 427 2725
Milton Jones, 337 2331
Ron Davidson, 430 6096
Suzan Miles, 339 7625
Sally Rodgers, 339 7922
Michael Seats, 335 2890
Bob Reece, 360 2392



The committee of the Fremantle History Society meets on the second Tuesday of the month. General meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month. Committee members can be contacted

at the numbers above for those who want to discuss any of the Society's activities or to bring something to the committee. Details of the General meetings can be found in this newsletter and reminders are placed in the local press. Please note there will be no general meetings of the Fremantle History Society in December 1995 and January 1996.



NEW MEMBERS

George & Robin Goodwin
Yvonne Linton
May Flannigan
Barbara Dudding
Tony & Lesley Gibbs
WA Museum History Dept
Freo Black & White Photo Labs
M Law
Eva Errington
J Downing
G Rennie
N Johnson
L Kuzich



COMING EVENTS

Wine and cheese evening

The Society's last function for this year will be a Wine and Cheese evening at the premises of Lionel Samson & Sons at 31 Cliff Street, Fremantle on Tuesday 28 November at 7 pm. Come and join us for this pre-Christmas celebration!

Tickets for the evening are \$8 for members and \$10 for non-members. The price will include a guided tour of the Samson Business Museum. The number of tickets is limited to 45, so book now - phone Margaret McPherson on 377.2668 to reserve your place.



FROM THE LOCAL HISTORY DESK

Recent additions to the Fremantle City Library's Local History collection.

- The Western Australian Pioneer's Index 1841-1905. A CD-ROM index of births, deaths and marriages.
- Post Office Directories. A complete set of directories is now available in book form or microfilm. They cover the period 1893 - 1949. The entries include address, occupation, business names, house names, etc.
- Capo D'Orlando oral history tapes. In May 1995 Margaret Howroyd, an oral history interviewer with the library, visited Capo D'Orlando in Sicily to conduct interviews with returned migrants. The resulting ten tapes provide a fascinating insight into why they migrated to Fremantle and why they returned to their homeland. One Sicilian born woman migrated to Fremantle in 1962 as a child with her family for economic reasons. She met her Sicilian husband to be on the Fremantle wharf when 15 and fell in love. When he proposed two months later, her parents advised them to wait. The couple married in 1970 and in 1975 moved to Capo D'Orlando to be near his parents.
- South Terrace School interviews - In 1994/95 21 former students were interviewed. In addition 8 others have supplied written recollections of their school days. The interviews cover the years from 1914 - 1946 and highlight lessons, games, teachers, visits of the school inspector, etc.



FOR YOUR DIARY

28 November - Wine and cheese evening - Christmas cheer in Samson's historic building. The evening includes a visit to the Samson business museum. \$8 mem, \$10 non mem, 7 pm.

REMEMBER, THERE WILL BE NO GENERAL MEETINGS FOR THE FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY IN DECEMBER OR JANUARY.



MEETING REPORTS

The Researcher's best friend

Lorraine Stevens, Local History librarian for the City of Fremantle hosted the August meeting in the Local History Collection room at the Fremantle Library. Libraries can often be a daunting, even formidable place to the uninitiated. However first time researchers or even people tackling new topics for their research could not want for a more helpful and informed staff than those at the Fremantle Local History collection. Lorraine has played a key role in the development of the collection and its recognition as a specialist area in the library. She has also been a major player in the design and development of the dedicated space for the collection and its users, including the fire proof room for the most fragile pieces in the collection.

Lorraine's presentation highlighted the range of material available in the collection which includes directories, published histories, annual reports, photographs, oral histories and much more. One of the most recent acquisitions has been a CD-ROM index

of births, deaths and marriages in WA which Lorraine demonstrated.

"His brain's were in his fingertips"

More than 40 members and friends attended Fremantle Prison for Ron Davidson's talk on the life and times of Ernie "Shiner" Ryan. The choice of venue was appropriate as Shiner Ryan spent a significant portion of his life in Fremantle Prison.

Ron told how his interest in Shiner developed while he was writing a Fremantle Arts Centre book, *High Jinks at the Hot Pool*, based on the *Mirror*, Perth's naughty newspaper which closed in 1956.

It was the *Mirror* which helped change Shiner's image from that of a professional criminal specialising in picking locks to one of Fremantle's best-loved citizens during the forties and fifties.

A high point in Shiner's life was his marriage to Sydney's Queen of the Underworld, Kate Leigh, in St John's Church, Fremantle, in 1950. He had first met her in 1914 when he was about to become Australia's first payroll bandit to use a getaway car.

Some of those who knew Shiner came along and told their stories. Constance Law who was a student teacher at South Fremantle kindergarten in the early fifties told how Shiner would "let himself into the school over the weekend, repair any broken toys or equipment, then let himself out again". Josephine Outram and Pat Cranny told similar stories.

After the talk members inspected the shimmering white model sailing ships moulded by Shiner from left-over prison porridge, rock salt and crushed glass during a stay in prison.

As a result of the meeting Fremantle fine art dealer, Larry Foley, donated a rural scene, painted by Shiner on a piece of galvanised iron while he was a prisoner to the Fremantle Prison collection.

Shiner had an Australia-wide reputation as an artist. His most celebrated painting was the Black Sheep which showed Christ coming down from Fremantle Prison's main cell block carrying a black lamb bearing Shiner's face.

Who Was Who in Fremantle?

The old Fremantle is not dead. It has not been killed by the recent flood of new arrivals. Fremantle families are still alive and well.

All of this became very clear at the Society's November workshop on "ordinary Fremantle families" held on Tuesday 24 October.

All the chairs were quickly snapped up and many stood or sat on the floor at Bob Hewitt's Door Gallery in High Street, where the workshop was held to test interest in the topic.

Fremantle and surrounds were very obviously very interested indeed.

Present were family members from the Bakers, Carters, Collins, Doigs, Kronbergers, Blincos, Moyses, Trueloves, Tilleys, Thomas, Rotondellas, Solomons, Sowdens, Silichs, Millers, Sucklings, lots of Smiths, and many many more.

The evening was hosted by Fremantle Herald publisher Andrew Smith, who prompted those present to tell about times when North, South, East and Central Fremantle residents rarely left their plot and almost certainly married within their area. Movement was restricted: workshop participants remembered when even a push bike was a rarity, and the tram was their major way to visit friends or go to work.

Ross Smith whose family ran the Richmond Dairy on the corner of Glyde and George Streets for 60 years said he could still go from house to house in the area and run off the names of residents from the days when he was a schoolboy milko in the fifties.

Cec Smith recalled his days as caretaker at the Town Hall.

Nick Silich's family operated a guest house for Yugoslav workers arriving at Fremantle in the twenties. He could name all his neighbours in Russell Street including the celebrated ginger beer maker and stall seller Jack "Tinny" Thomas and Tony Parentich, the South centreman who mastered the muddy cricket pitch areas on Fremantle Oval while playing with the great port side of the fifties.

Ross McGuffie ran off a string of names of families he knew in North Fremantle in the fifties and sixties: Cotton, Meiers, Hogan, Nylander, Mouat, Backhouse, McClarty, Fenner, Dedman and Heaperman.

Vicki Cooper mentioned that her family came to Fremantle in the 1830s.

A number of people telephoned the Society after reading about the evening in the Herald newspaper, and signalled their support. We will be developing the Fremantle families theme further through the coming year - watch the Newsletter and the local papers for details!



JIGSAW COLUMN

Here is a story about early American-Australian relationships, just before the major American invasion of 1942. Can you contribute any other memories?

About 10-12 American naval personnel, separated from their units following the fall of Surabaya to the Japanese, found refuge in the Old Women's Home in Finnerty Street. They were playing poker, thought they would like some beer and asked Norman, the non-smoker and non-drinker in the group, to arrange some. He met an "old Codger" driving a horse and two-wheeled cart and asked if he could find some beer. The Australian could, but as it was hard to get it would cost £1 per case. The Americans thought this was daylight

robbery, as a case of American beer only cost \$1.25, but they said go ahead.

When the "old Codger" returned he asked for help to bring the beer in. Norman thought "that after being robbed blind the least he could do was to bring it upstairs." However, he went down to the cart, looked at its contents, and went back to the group to say help was needed. Grumbling about Australian hospitality, or the lack of it, the sailors went down. What they say changed their minds immediately.

A case of Australian Emu Beer did not resemble a case of American Schiltz cans. Instead of 24 cans, there were 60 litre bottles, and the case was not cardboard but made of jarrah. It took four men to struggle up the stairs with the beer, whilst at the same time blessing Australian hospitality.



Memories of My Grandfather Gerry Blinco

Early in 1932 I resolved to do a mini walkabout in the footsteps of my grandfather, Henry Blinco, Prison Warder, 1832-1907. He lived for a time in Lenaville on the corner of Ord and High Streets and also in High Street approximately opposite the Memorial Gardens.

After we had finished study for the day at the nearby Fremantle Christian Brothers College I walked up High Street and looked at both homes from the footpath. While I was inspecting the second home I became aware of a woman staring at me from the rear garden, and this caused me to move on.

The following morning before study commenced the Brother of our class called us to order and asked if any boy had been looking over a front fence of a High Street house the previous afternoon. I stood up (one always stood up to answer questions to anyone in authority) and found to my utter astonishment and great embarrassment that I was thought to be the thief who had stolen the lady's lemons! My

awkward protestations received a dubious hearing, leaving my innocence in partial doubt, and I received a warning to keep away in future or else.

My paternal grandfather's death certificate describes him as a Gentleman, and the cause of his death on 5 December 1907 is given as Apoplexy. Interested parties view apoplexy with either amusement, curiosity or puzzlement, while the Oxford Dictionary describes it as "inability to feel or move caused by blockage or ruptured artery."

On a visit to Auntie Daisy, youngest child of Henry Blinco's second marriage, new evidence unfolded as to how he met his death.

Auntie Daisy lived in Swanbourne Street, in Henry's last home, which he had built himself - with some convict help, I suspect. During our inspection Auntie showed my wife and myself into the kitchen to see a painting, and quite by chance the conversation turned to grandfather's death.

We were told that we were standing on the spot where he was found lying upon her returning from shopping. There was a pool of blood coming from a severe axe wound to his head.

Two convicts who had threatened him were said to be on the loose at the time, but it could also have happened chopping wood which he seemed to have been doing.

Convicts? Accident? We will never know for, on the day following his injury, he took the answer with him.



Notes on RAAF Reunion Courtney Thomson

On 1 August 1995 I was on the early morning flight from Perth to Brisbane to celebrate the Australia Remembers 39-45 Reunion of RAAF Radar Association, at Nelson Bay in Port Stephens in NSW.

Because my mother, Hannah Rennix, was born in Raymond Terrace NSW, I was doubly interested in calling on cousins in Brisbane and Casino, with whom I have been corresponding about family history for years.

Raymond Terrace is at the mouth of the Hunter River which flows into Port Stephens, a beautiful expanse of river similar in size to Sydney Harbour, north of Newcastle.

Remembering the lush tropical green of Brisbane when I was stationed there in 1943, I was shocked to see the drought-ravaged north of NSW up to Brisbane. While staying with Carole Young at Lawnton, a northern suburb on the electric train line, I was delighted to see a koala mother and baby come to a clump of tall, rather sparse Blue Gums growing in the front garden. Blue Gums are decidedly grey and seemed a very flimsy support for the two koalas when, after resting, they decided to eat their favourite food of gum leaves.

From Brisbane I caught a train south to Casino through spectacular hills to fertile plains supporting dairy farming, sugar cane and rich pastures - very green where irrigation was available from local rivers, but very dry otherwise.

Some of my mother's Irish grandparents had settled at Casino about 1850, in the pioneering days when Australian Cedar was cut and floated down the tidal rivers - the lifeline of communication, where bridges still open to allow passing river traffic. Mostly fishing and pleasure boats these days.

With Pat MacDonald, whose family runs a dairy farm between Casino and Lismore, I attended a commemoration service at Casino, where mounted Light Horsemen joined the parade with other ex-servicemen and women. We were welcomed to the RSL Club by the officials surrounded by nurses in their old style uniforms, veils and capes. The nurses honoured their many friends by reading out the names of those who had died in war service. We also visited the Casino Family History Research rooms and the pioneer cemetery.

From Casino to Newcastle, for most of the day, by train through heavily timbered and coastal land opening out to pasture and hillsides covered by banana plantations. We were met at Broadmeadow by a young Scot in the RAAF grey-blue uniform of today. Not the navy which we wore, which was reputedly a mistake that had to be endured because of wartime shortages. We were driven to our motels at Nelson Bay in a very comfortable mini-bus: a far cry from the dusty rides we had on backs of utilities in 1939-45.

Next day we registered and had a welcome lunch at the RSL Club where we were made honorary members to enjoy all the facilities. One wall of the entrance hall beside the stairs is covered with a very striking mural depicting Air Force wartime activities, executed in raw wool of earth colours. It may also have helped the acoustics when about 400 old friends met, found their identity kits and proceeded to the bar, the dining area and the "pokies" - the noisy hallmark of all NSW and RSL Clubs. Could we push the idea of raw wool murals?

On Tuesday 15 August we all marched to the local war memorial to the stirring music of a Scottish band for a memorial service, and were then taken on to the Soldiers Point Bowling Club for the Victory Pacific lunch where we enjoyed another spectacular view over the waters of Port Stephens.

The following day we went to the RAAF Base at Williamtown, where we looked over the museum and climbed through wartime aircraft. The CO estimated that the running costs per aircraft were approximately \$2000 per hour for fuel and \$10,000 per hour when all airport facilities and support personnel were added.

Then we were taken to the mess for lunch. How things have changed - buffet style serveries, groaning with salads, fruit, cream as well as hot dishes. Radar Stations were never like this; we got very basic meat and three veg, followed by steamed pud (dynamite sinker).

Sometimes the cook was incapacitated and we had to "volunteer"; when, for instance, an WAAF officer handed our the brandy for Brandy Sauce and the cook forgot about making the sauce.

We also visited the Radar Centre where we were dazzled by the newer computerised systems now in use and climbed the hill to the "doover" as it was called 54 years ago.

The last day was highlighted by a visit to New Lambton Public School, where the pupils turned on a most memorable concert of wartime music and activities. The RAAF presented the school with the Air Force Standard and granted them the right to fly it.

The finale was a farewell dinner, where decorations of blue and white balloons, highlighted by imitations of the local red majestic "Lily" which stands about 5-6 ft tall growing in nearby forest land. A great send-off to old memories and friends of our youth.



History of the Silich Family Nicholas Silich

My father Victor Silich arrived in Fremantle in 1924 with his wife Mandalena, his two daughters Maud and Vera, and his three sons, Victor, Joseph and myself. A fourth son, Thomas, was born in Fremantle in 1924.

In the years about 1925-30 my father established a lodging house at 96 Marine Terrace in Fremantle for Yugoslavs migrating to Western Australia.

Many new settlers passed through and were physically and financially assisted, then guided to their new venture in woodcutting at Manjimup or Kurrawang near Kalgoorlie. Some moved on as far as New Zealand. Various shipping companies in Fremantle recognised Victor's efforts by presenting him with framed large pictures of Orient line ships.

When we were kids our house was always the centre of attraction for neighbouring friends. From 1927-28 onward we always played football or cricket on the road in Marine Terrace where motorised vehicles passed only once every half hour to an hour. Fremantle Esplanade was another place where we kicked a football around for hours. Many a football was lost in the ocean from over the sea wall along Marine Terrace.

All the boys were involved in various grades of football in South Fremantle. I eventually represented South Fremantle in the WANF League runners up in 1945.

All morning and afternoon we swam at the fish market's old wooden jetty or opposite our house, or at South Beach.

The social life of the city was an enjoyable diversion - I joined a dance band, playing a banjolin and drums. We played for five years at venues like the Fremantle Town Hall, the old RSL rooms (where South Fremantle now have their Clubrooms), the old Fremantle Sailing Clubrooms in Marine Terrace/Louisa Street (now demolished), the Queens Hall opposite Stammers in Palmyra and many other places further afield.

In 1938 I joined the WA Government Railways as an apprentice Plumber at the Midland Junction Workshops, and after 22 years branched out into my own plumbing business from East Fremantle. During the war I was manpowered by the Railways, while my brother Victor, who was also with the Railways as an engine driver, went into the Navy. My other brothers Joseph and Thomas went into the Army and served in the Islands and in Darwin. Thankfully they all returned safely from the war.

In 1964 I qualified as Health Inspector with the Fremantle City Council, the Melville City Council and the Perth City Council, retiring in 1986 after 17 years service with the PCC.

Historic Hotel

There's a lot of Fremantle history in the unpretentious, 101 years old Railway Hotel in North Fremantle.

It saw the harbour built and was a favourite spot later when 6000 lumpers worked on the wharves. It served North Fremantle when it was a densely populated suburb. It was a resting place for train travellers. It served thirsty servicemen from many countries during two world wars.

In more recent times it became famous for its Saturday afternoon jazz sessions.

Now all that history is under threat. The State Government's draft Metropolitan Regional Plan has just become available for public comment. The plan has the hotel obliterated to provide a recreation space.



REMINDER to watch!

The Silent Fleets, a documentary on all submarines stationed at Fremantle during the second world war, will be shown on Channel in 2 on Sunday 19 November at 8.30 pm in their *True Stories* program.

One of the best kept secrets of World War II was that WA had the biggest submarine fleet in the southern hemisphere and were responsible for sinking more enemy shipping tonnage than any of the other Allies.

To add to its Fremantle appeal, the program is a local production from start to finish.

Happy reading and a very Merry Christmas to you all.

