

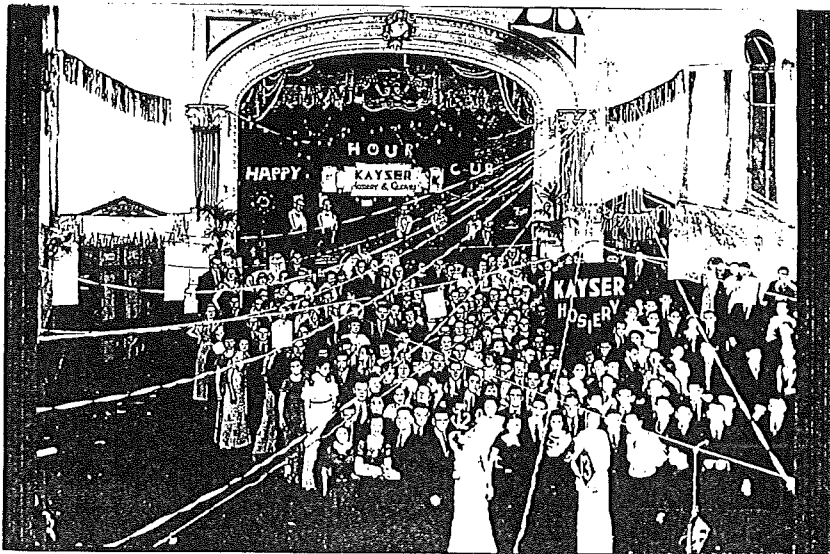


## FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, Local History Collection  
Fremantle City Library, PO Box 807,  
FREMANTLE WA 6160

Spring Edition 1996



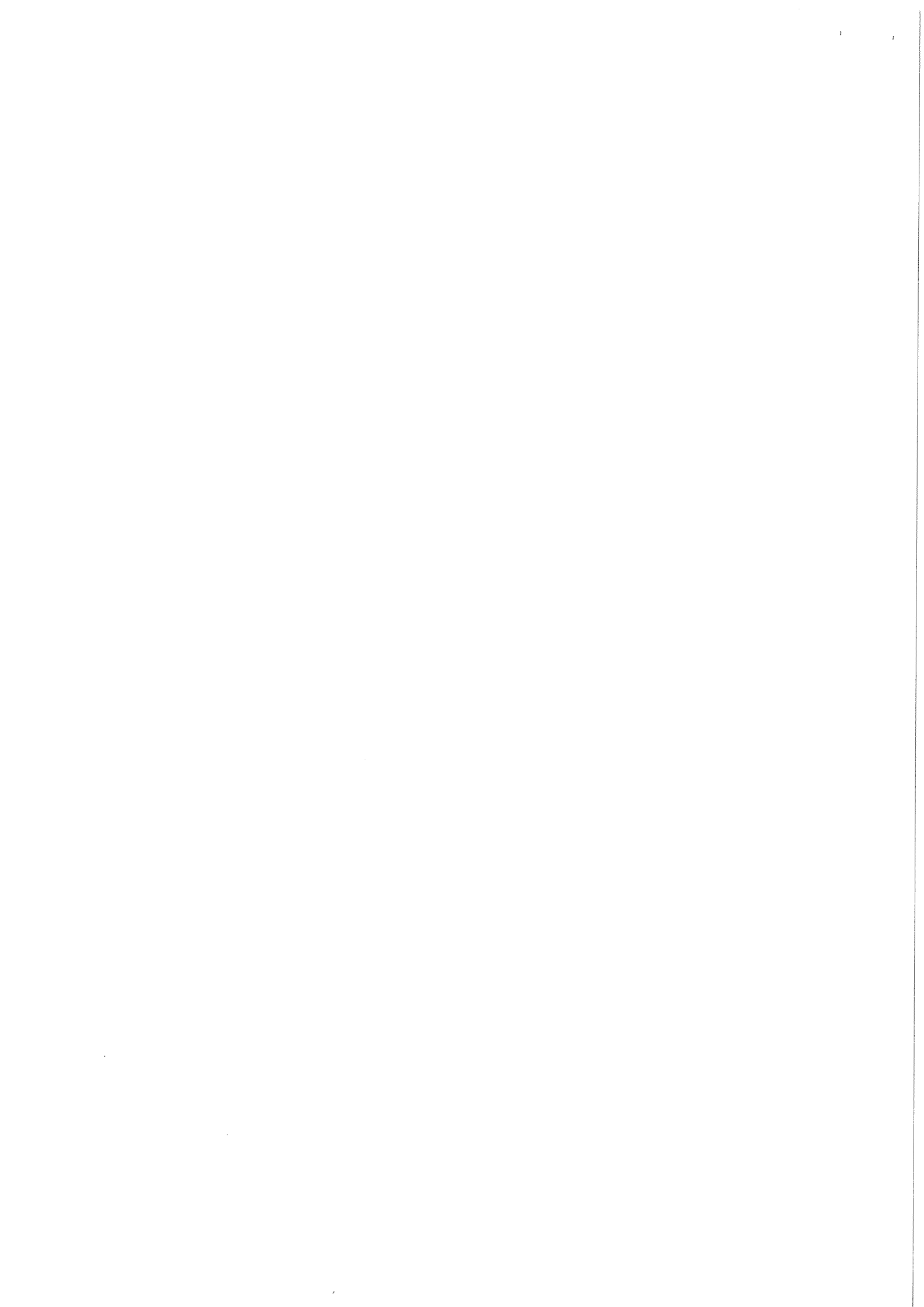
The Happy Hour Club, Victoria Hall, High St, Fremantle - dances were held on Friday nights up to WW11  
(Photo courtesy Fremantle Local History Collection)

A significant slice of Fremantle's social and architectural history was on display recently when the Victoria Hall was the subject of an open day.

This was part of a move being made by a group headed by Fremantle lawyer Peter Nettleton, musician-hotelier Mick Vodanovich and others to get the High Street landmark into public ownership and restore it for public use as a theatre.

Many of Mick's friends - the musicians and dancers of the forties, fifties and sixties - were at the open day.

Victoria Hall was built by the Church of England in 1896 for use as a theatre and hall. Open day visitors were impressed by the confident architectural style of J. Talbot Hobbs - the stuccoed classical facade, limestone walls, and the interior features of proscenium arch, painted frieze, cast iron balcony, and polished lining-board ceiling. It is the vaulted ceiling which gives the hall its wonderful acoustics where every word or musical sound directed from the stage towards the ceiling can be heard throughout the hall.



Victoria Hall was the centre of a significant battle in 1974 when it was within days of being demolished, the Fremantle City Council having granted the order. Subsequent letters indicated that council had not been informed that the hall was classified by the National Trust.

It was at that point that Fremantle Society founder-president, Les Lauder, sought the help of Jack Munday, secretary of the NSW Builders' Laborers Federation. Jack had been setting up green bans to prevent socially irresponsible demolitions in his home state. There was a spectacular moment at the auction of the hall when a BLF organiser stepped forward to say that the Victoria Hall was listed by the National Trust and the subject of a green ban. Bidding which had reached \$140,000 lapsed.

Newspapers of the time presented the story as a "battle between the progressives and conservationists". One quoted Les Lauder as saying that demolition could start that day; and that Fremantle Society members were watching the site and would stand in front of the bulldozers if necessary. Tom Uren, the Whitlam Government's Minister for Urban and Regional Development, also took an interest.

The crisis lapsed but the events of 1974 had important sequels. One was that the Victoria Hall drew attention to the Fremantle City Council's plans to widen High Street, and, in the process, destroy the spectacular facades on both sides of the street. Fortunately that plan was eventually abandoned. Another was that a clear message had been sent to developers that strong action would be taken to preserve Fremantle's built heritage.

That was a message which caused some anxiety among some less radical members of the Fremantle Society who quickly withdrew from the organisation.

The Victoria Hall has had a chequered career in recent times and our best wishes go to Mick and Peter in their attempts to restore this magnificent building for use as a public venue. History Society members are encouraged to join the Victoria Hall Association (write to P O Box 1133, Fremantle 6160; telephone 335 3384; fax 335 3348) to help with this worthwhile project.



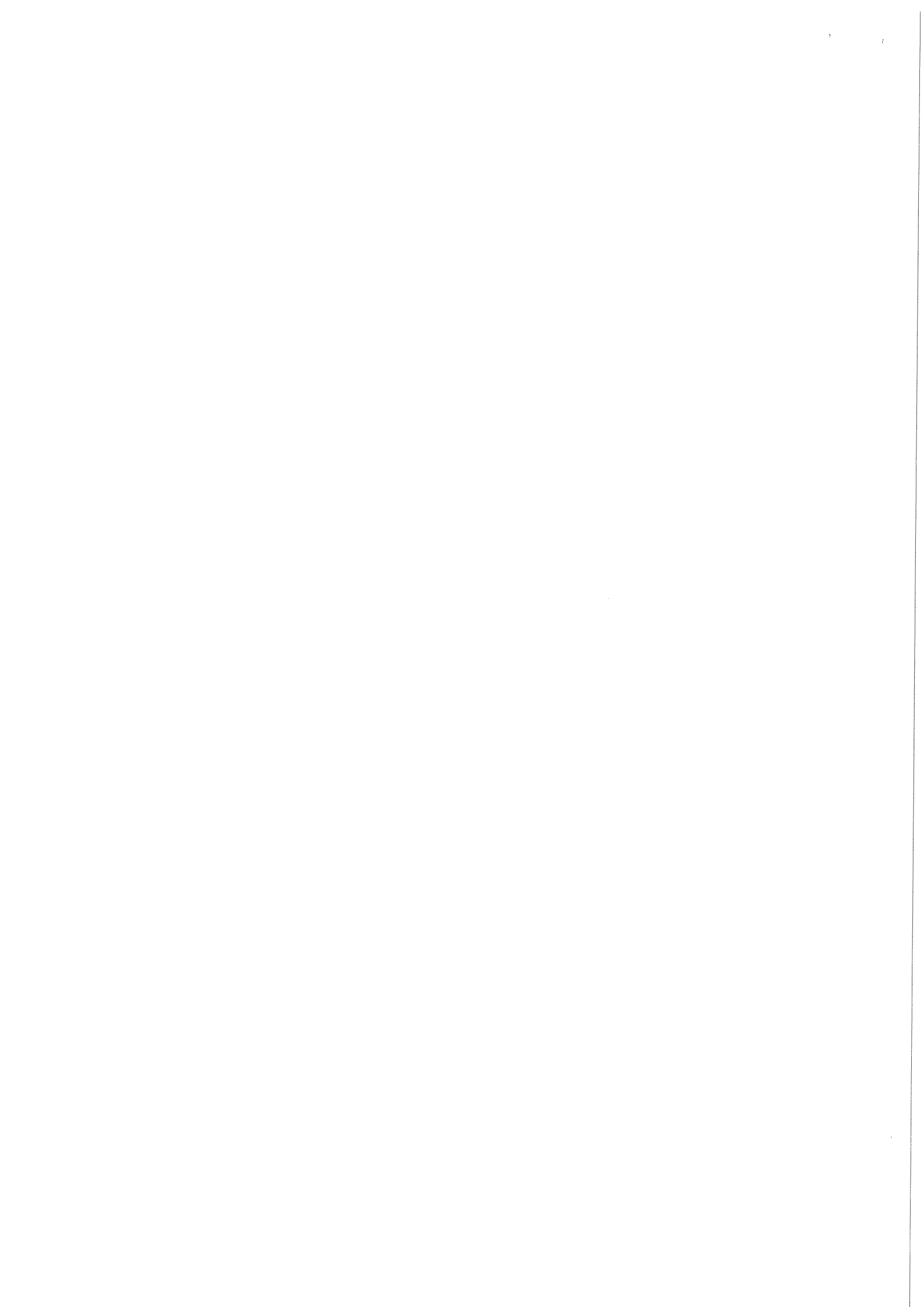
## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The following are members of the committee of the FHS

Dianne Davidson	430 6096
Elaine Berry	336 1906
Margaret McPherson	337 2668
Anne Brake (wk)	335 9473
Sally Rodgers	339 7922
Lorraine Stevens(wk)	430 2266
Ron Davidson	430 6096
Milton Jones	337 2331
Helen Brash	387 7453
Linley Batterham	364 2356

Fremantle History Society's committee meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month. If you have something you would like discussed at a meeting, please contact one of the members on the numbers indicated.

General meetings of the Society are generally held on the 4th Tuesday of the month. Details of these meetings are found in your newsletter and reminders are placed in the local press. As we have started to have



Sunday afternoon meetings occasionally, please be sure to check details.



### NEW MEMBERS

**Fred Kingswood**

**J. Garvey**

**M. Oostryck**

**Carole Steggall**

**Sth Fremantle Senior High School**



### COMING EVENTS

#### Christmas Party



Bob Woollett has very generously invited members of the Fremantle History Society and their friends to have their Christmas function in his historic home. Built in 1862, it is the oldest continuously lived in private home in Fremantle. It was classified by the National Trust in 1972 and has recently received a heritage listing by the WA heritage Council. Research on the house by the Heritage Council will be available on the night for inspection.

Following a tour of the house, members and their friends can cheer in the festive season with finger food and a glass of wine (or bubbly for

those who really want to get into the swing of the season).

This special event to end a very successful year for the Society will be held on Tuesday 26 November starting at 7.00 pm. Bob's house is at 28 Norfolk St Fremantle. Charge for the evening will be \$10.00 for members and \$12.00 for non members.

This is a unique opportunity to view this historic property and to share some bonhomie with your fellow members.

Please RSVP to Di Davidson 430 6096 by 24 November. See you there.



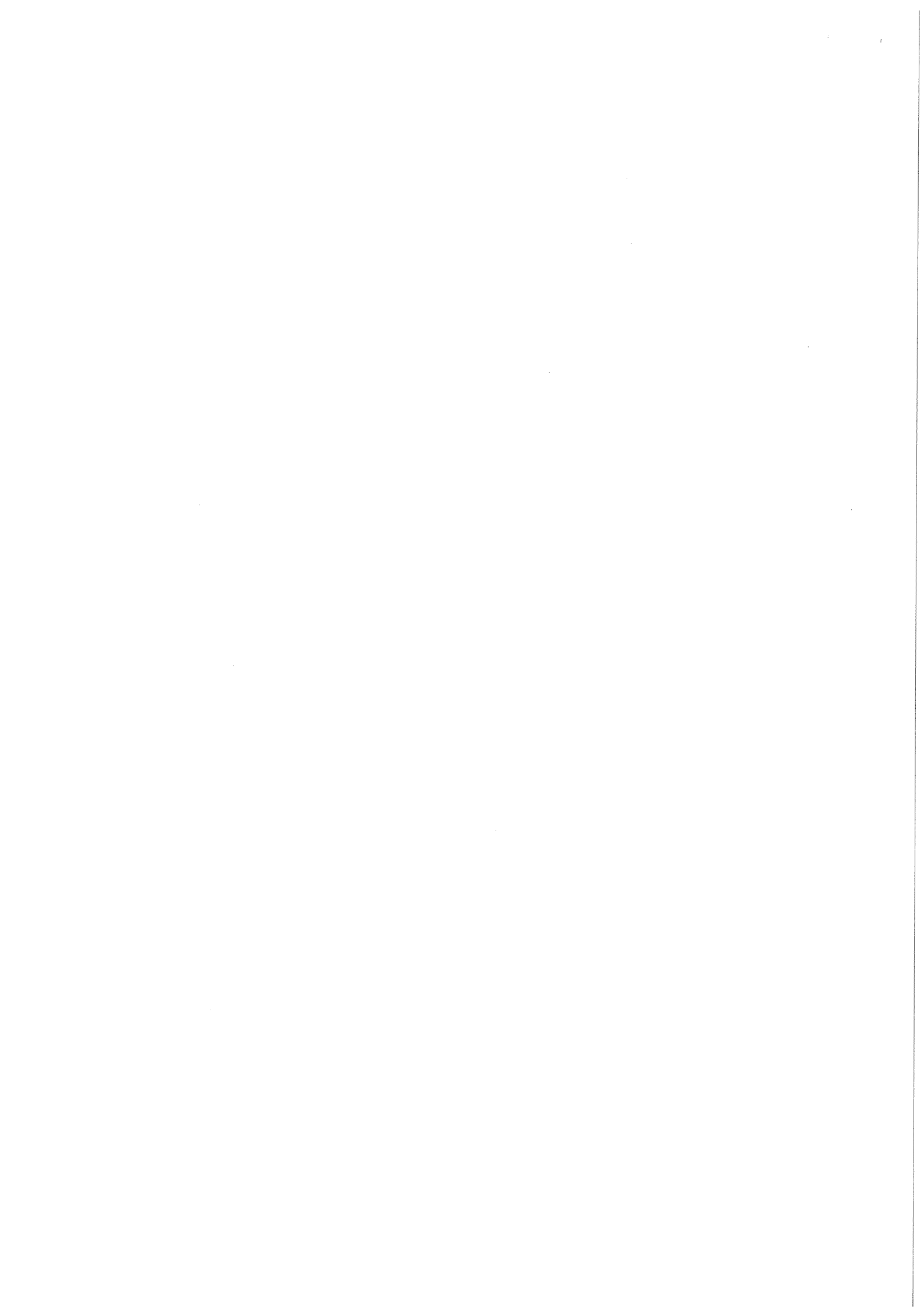
### Your Memories Immortalised

For some time we have been taping the sessions of our General Meetings to retain some record of the unique insights offered by our speakers. The Fremantle City Council has now very generously offered to have these tapes transcribed for us, which will make the information contained on them much more readily accessible.

Once the transcripts have been done, The Council feels it may also be possible to publish them. One option being considered is the production of pamphlets which could then be made available to interested members and other Fremantle history buffs.

**MANY THANKS TO THE FCC FOR THIS INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE**





## MEETING REPORTS

### **Jews in Fremantle - 1930s**

A enthusiastic crowd in the Maritime Museum heard Eric Silbert speak on the Jewish contribution to Fremantle at the Fremantle History Society's September meeting.

Eric skilfully linked the story of the Jewish impact on the port in its first century of white settlement with the rich cultural baggage Jews brought with them including their Yiddish language.

He told of merchant Lionel Samson who was in Fremantle in 1829, his wife Fanny Levy who was the first Jewish woman in Fremantle, and William, Lionel's brother and Fremantle's first banker. Businessman and mayor Elias Solomon and Abraham Josephson, the manufacturer of bed ends, were added to the picture. So was Theodore Krakouer who came to Fremantle as a convict in 1851 with a 15 year sentence for stealing. Later he and servant girl Brina Israel formed WA's second Jewish family. The Krakouers eventually moved to the Great Southern and Eric wondered about the possibility of Jewish origins for footballers Jimmy and Phil Krakouer.

An important part of Eric's talk concerned the establishment of the Jewish synagogue at the corner of Norfolk street and South Terrace, which is now a Greek restaurant. The Fremantle group took on the grand title of the Western Australian Hebrew Congregation, much to the annoyance of the more numerous Perth Jews. As the Goldrush fizzled out many Jews

returned from the fields - but to Perth, not Fremantle. Sixty Jewish families abandoned the port and joined them. This left the Fremantle synagogue without a congregation and without money.

Eric Silbert's father ran a grocery store at the corner of High and Market streets (now celebrated as Barney Silbert's corner) and the talk ended with Eric living in Ellen street and growing up in the colourful environment of Fremantle in the thirties.

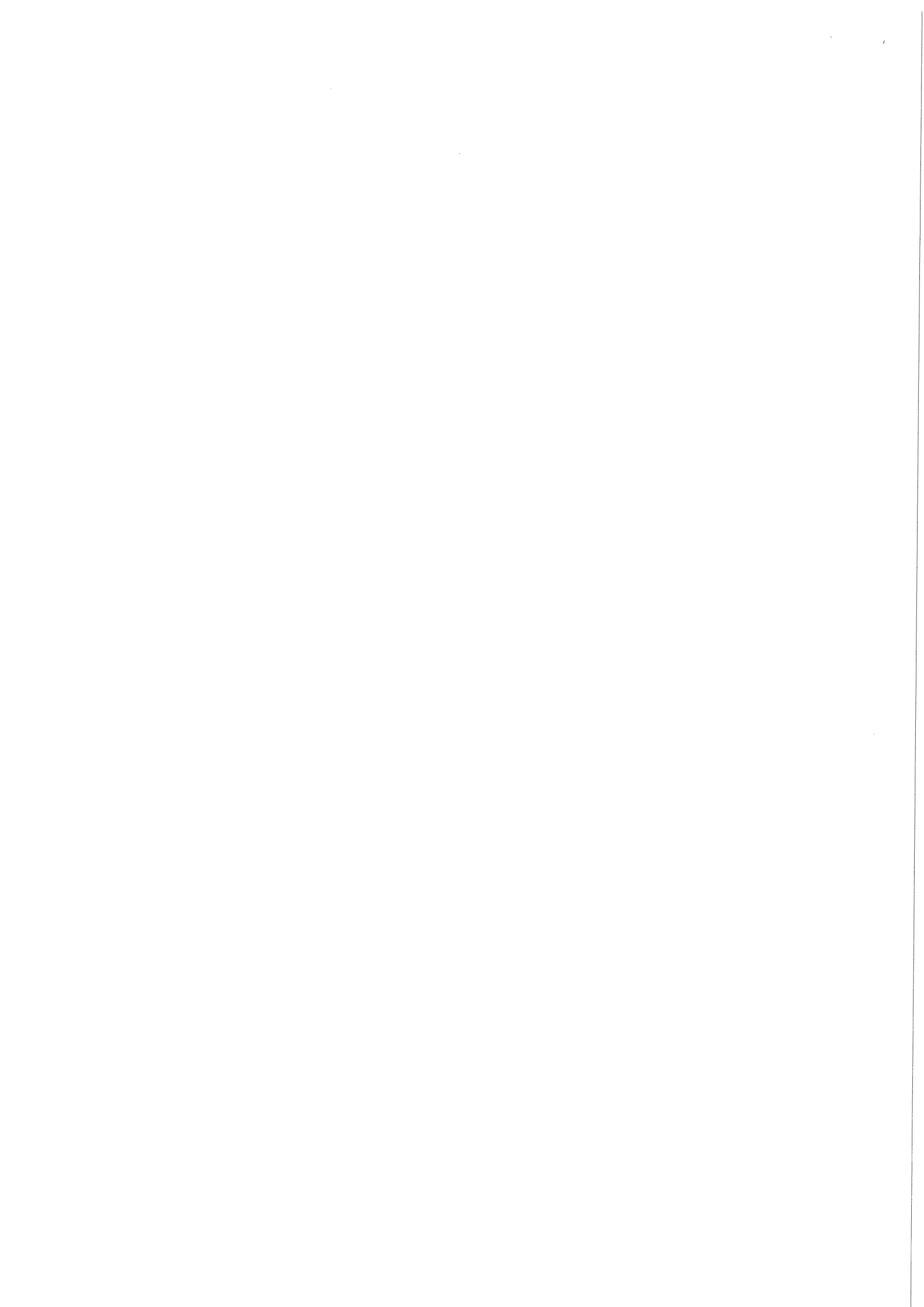
The talk was very well attended, with many of Eric's old friends and acquaintances being present. Our thanks to Eric for a stimulating and informative evening - we hope to hear from him again!



### **Women in sport**

This was a most interesting meeting. We were privileged to have on our panel women who had given many years to their chosen sport, and who were well versed in the problems that can and do occur, not only for women but for clubs as a whole.

Shirley de la Hunty (Strickland) was excellent in her role as Panel Co-ordinator, keeping the audience and the speakers entwined, as well as giving some very interesting insights into Olympic Committee's decisions and manipulations. Obviously the excellence and worthiness of a particular sport has nothing to do with inclusion in the Games - its the politics and money that count, and gender is also important. Shirley was pleased that we were recording this





aspect of our history for future generations.

Gail Mounsey has spent many years involved with Women's Hockey. This year marks the 25th Anniversary of Fremantle Hockey Club and so far their celebrations have proved a great success. Gail is a Life Member of the club and has held almost every position from Secretary to President. She is also a State Umpire and has a daughter in the State Team. This year due to economic reasons the club has amalgamated with Fremantle Men's Hockey Club, and they jointly occupy the clubrooms at Stevens Street Reserve in Fremantle. Though there were some reservations about the amalgamation, the fact that the ground is the best maintained turf ground in the state was important in their decision to join with the men.

Meg Stalley is a member of the Fremantle Croquet Club, which has been in Fremantle since the late 1800's. It was affiliated with the Fremantle Bowling Club in 1896 and plays at the grounds in Ellen Street. Unfortunately croquet has a low profile in the state and is not able to reach many people as to its potential for a very satisfying sport. We were told that in order to hit the ball strength was needed, shown in recent championships when one of the players actually broke two of the steel hoops that are used in the game. This year they held the West Australian Championships in Fremantle and the Australian Championships will be held in Bunbury also this year.

Judith Pilatti is the President of the Women's Netball Association and has been in this position for 7 years. She also is a Life Member of her sport, both at Fremantle and Tingarra Clubs

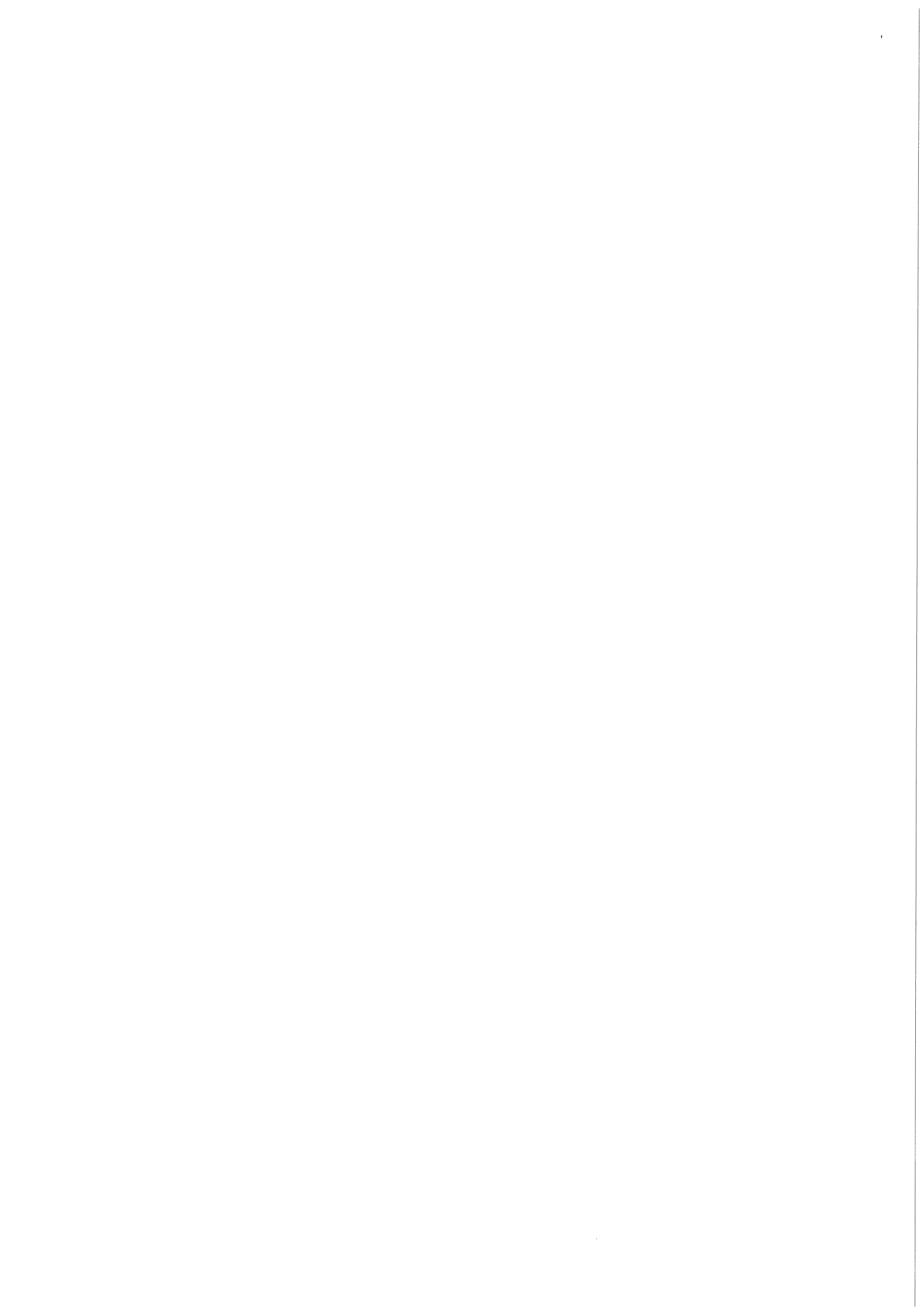
having played as an active member for over 38 years. Judith explained to us the problems involved with local councils and residents in the areas where they play - open courts and daytime games can produce worries. The field that borders Gibson Park and High Streets in Fremantle is a classic case. The number of girls, their supporters and car parking are constant problems.

Discussion on changes in sport due to different attitudes and their effect on planning for future outcomes added to the interest of the night. We were given an impromptu talk by a visitor on the problems besetting the Women's Water Polo Team. Despite the fact that they are Australian Champions, they have no funding, unlike the men's team, and they are not even being considered by the Olympic Committee to play a representative match at the Games.

It was unfortunate that so very few of our members were present to enjoy this meeting. Even though it was a cold night, the interest and humour of the night, including a man who was looking for his dog, would have kept the audience warm. All meetings are planned for your enjoyment - please support the guests and your committee at future meetings.

### **Samson House Gardens**

Our October meeting was held on a fine and hot Sunday afternoon - very suitable for the discussions on the heritage aspects of the Samson House gardens. Oline Richards, a well known heritage consultant who has prepared a conservation plan on the gardens for the WA Museum which manages the house, was our guest speaker.



Samson House was built in two stages - the first part in 1888 -89 and the later addition around the turn of the century. At this time a coach house and stables were built for the use of the main house. A cottage was also built at the rear of the property and research shows that it was intended for rental. All this is still virtually intact.

In the early part of the century grape trellises stretched from the eastern veranda to the fence line. The rose garden that is still evident was established by Fred Samson in the 1930s. In an attempt to interpret the gardens the WA Museum has investigated developing a range of roses that were grown in the 1930s but are no longer available.

The Samson House gardens are significant because of their association with the Samson family and as a good representation of a garden of a middle class family.

Gardens, particularly the back yard, often show people's idiosyncrasies more than their houses which were often the public face of the family. Fred's installation of a water folly as a gift to his wife and examples of garden furniture such as a swinging boat seat from the 1930s which remain at the house are indicative of the nature of the man.

Recommendations from Oline's report to the Museum included the restoration of the cottage, reinstatement of the fence that separated the cottage from the house and the redevelopment of the gardens to represent a typical middle class 1930s garden among other things. Of special interest are the two Norfolk

Island pines that frame the entry to the house.

As well as giving us a fascinating insight into the history of the family and their doings in the garden, Oline also expressed her hopes that gardens and landscapes in general would be recognised as having the same heritage value as buildings.



### For Your Diary

**Tuesday 26 November - Christmas Cheer** - kick up your heels at the Society's Christmas festivities at Bob Woollett's historic 1862 home. Bubbles start to flow at 7.00 pm at 28 Norfolk St, Fremantle.

Members - \$10.00  
Non-members - \$12.00  
RSVP - 24 November - 430 6096



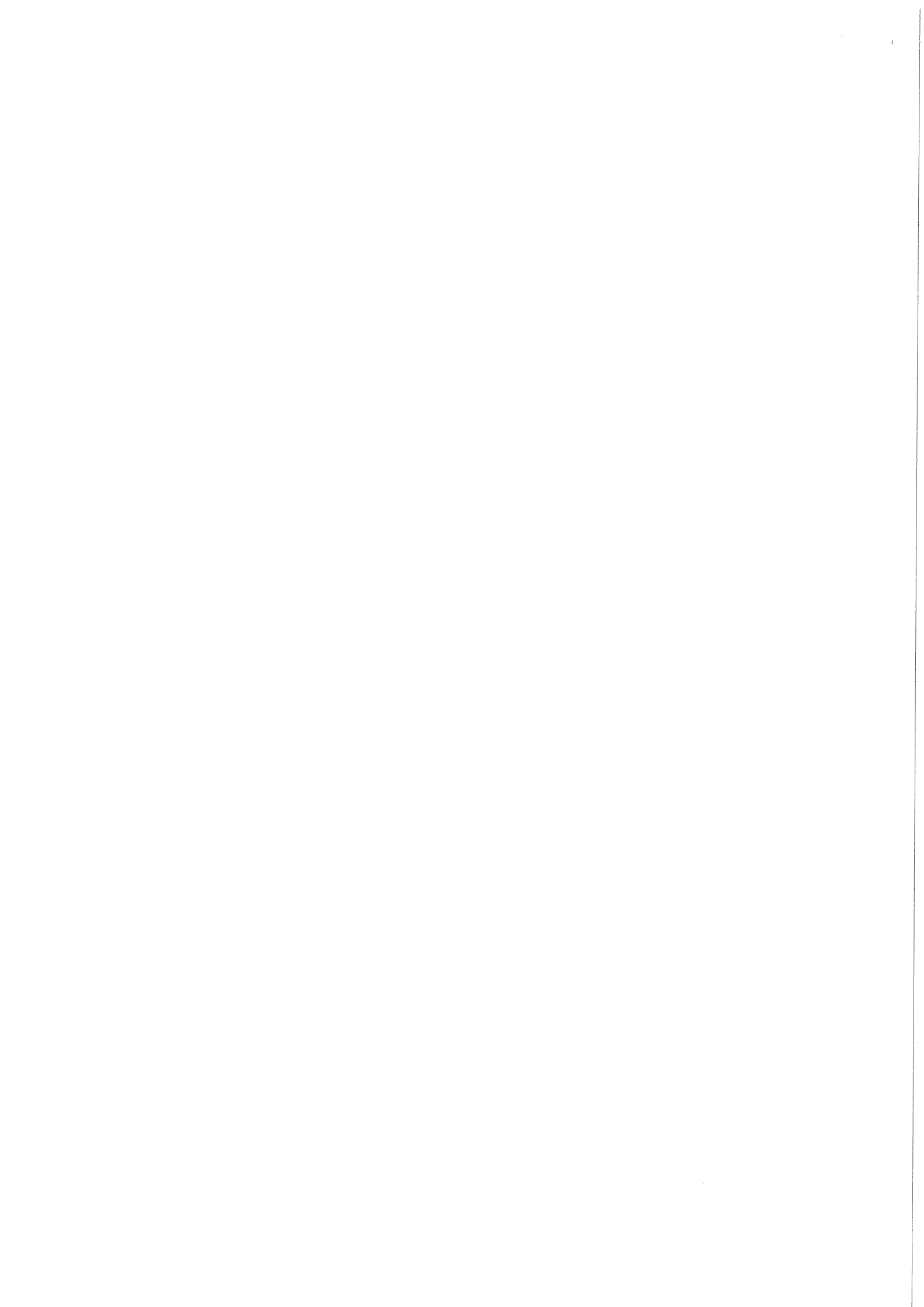
### JIG SAW COLUMN

The Christmas Season is fast approaching, the decorations are already in the stores!

We often sing the song, **Jingle Bells** and say the poem

**Twas The Night Before Christmas,  
When all Through the House,  
Not a Creature Was Stirring,  
Not Even a Mouse**

but do you know who wrote them and when they were written?



The winners will receive an extra Christmas present in their stockings this year. The Christmas Fairies will be the judges.



## A REVIEW

### ***FLEETING ATTRACTIONS - A Social History of American Servicemen in Western Australia during the Second World War.*** (UWA Press) \$29.95

Tony Barker and Lisa Jackson must be complimented on the research and documentation of this book. Their time and effort has produced an interesting, easily read publication that enables their readers to understand the impact of so many American servicemen on a small parochial state such as Western Australia. In his innocence a "North Cottesloe man offered a weekend at his beach flat to any Americans who have no friends in Perth" while at the same time offering his daughter's services to "pick them up in town." The Americans may have put a different interpretation on his offer, considering that by 1943 the Vice Chancellor of UWA was notifying the Naval authorities that enlisted men were harassing the female students at night and "causing considerable agitation".

To a relatively unsophisticated and, at that time, female dominated society, the Americans would have personified the Robert Taylors and Clark Gables of the silver screen. They had money, charming manners, and always brought flowers or chocolates as gifts to their dates - on the other hand the Australian male wasn't quite as personable ( familiarity breeds

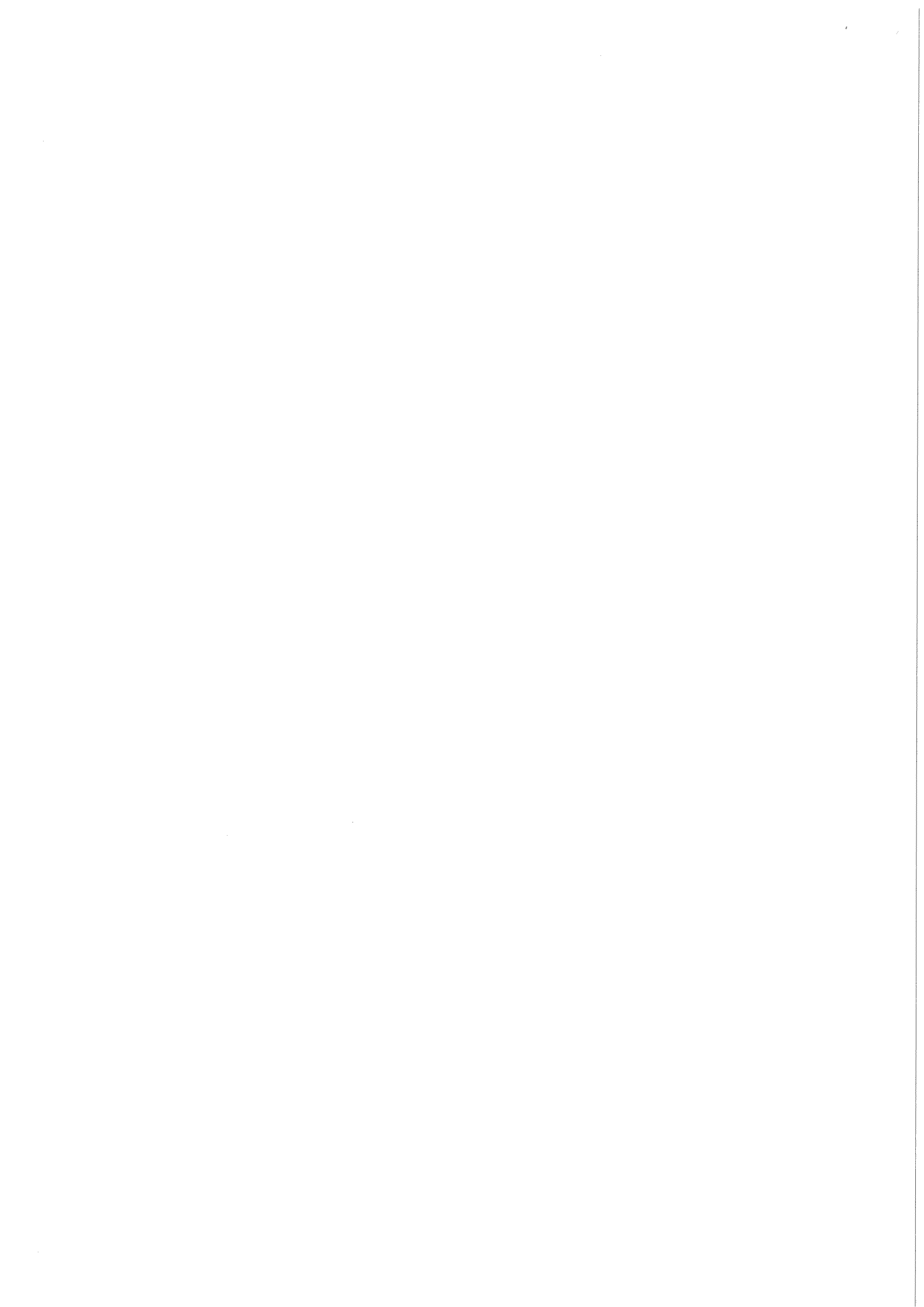
contempt) and certainly did not have as much money. The fact that many of our service men were also overseas or interstate, did not help any anxieties they may have had about the American influence on their women at home. It was inevitable that clashes and resentment would result, as well as exploitation of the Americans by businesses and taxi operators, amongst others.

Tony Barker has dealt with this area in a reasonably objective way, so that both sides of the argument are presented, though at times I feel women are presented as being nothing less than "easy pickings" and willing to go to bed with any American anytime.

West Australia was perceived as friendly and willing (at first) to extend all necessary help to our visitors. How and why this attitude changed is explained in the book - American presence represented security, but as the threat to West Australia diminished, the brashness of the Americans increased discontent. Increasing social problems such as VD abortion, and unwanted pregnancies became an issue and with Australian servicemen returning home, tensions already existing increased.

The book is worth reading as the research undertaken allows the veil of censorship imposed during the war to be lifted, and we are given an insight into many aspects of American/Australian relationships at various levels including military, political and local government.

From purely a personal point of view I would have liked a little more depth in discussing relationships between



Americans and average West. Australian families - I feel this may have given a different perspective to female relationships. Also little was said about the Waterside Workers (lumpers), the State Implement Works engineers and others who worked tirelessly throughout this time keeping the submarines seaworthy and the wharf functioning. Fremantle Harbour was not all tension, disruption and aggression. However in a book that covers such a wide area of time and circumstance, these are merely small issues. Tony Barker and Lisa Jackson have done a wonderful job in producing this well written documentation of the American influence on Australian society - a *Fleeting Attraction* that we could argue has stayed with us till today.  
Margaret McPherson



#### **From the Local History Desk** Lorraine Stevens

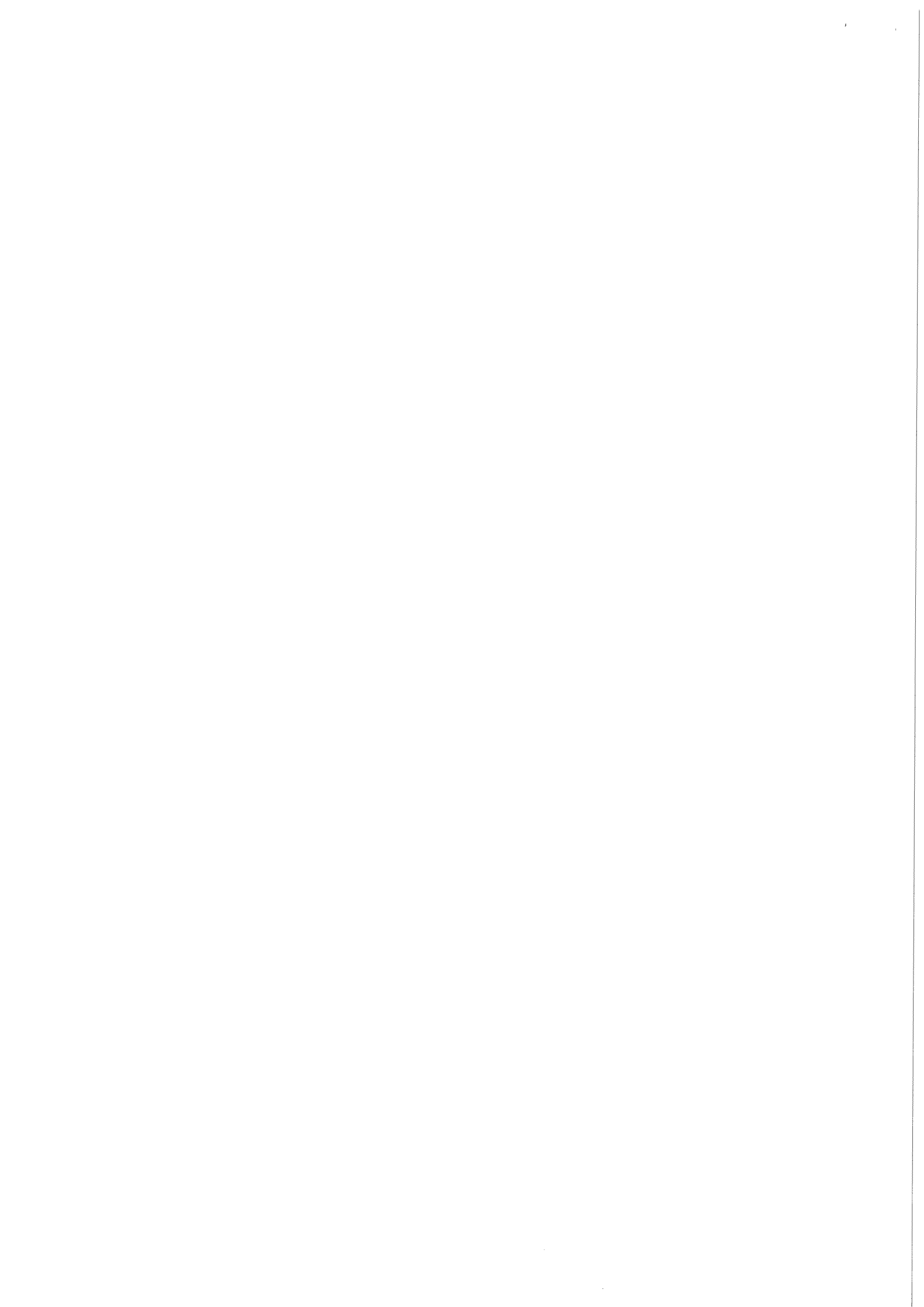
Eric Silbert's fascinating talk at our August meeting on the Jewish community in Fremantle raised a number of questions, one of which was the origin of street names with possible Jewish connections ie Gold, Silver, Solomon and Reuben. This led me to search the nomenclature files in the Local History Collection which revealed the following:-

*Gold and Silver Sts* in South Fremantle were gazetted as public highways in 1905 and were part of a large subdivision of land owned by Sir Henry Briggs, a local school teacher and President of the Legislative Council. Known as Briggs's Paddock, the names Gold and Silver were apparently mere fancy. The land certainly did not possess any mineral

wealth, but was pure white sand covered with rushes. Gold St was originally known as George St, the name change occurring in 1921.

*Solomon St* was also dedicated as a public highway in 1905 and was originally known as Mary St. In 1951/52 the street name changed to honour Elias Solomon (1839-1909) a Fremantle merchant who built a home in the street in 1887 which was known as "Ocean View". Elias was the youngest son of London Jewish parents, Moss and Leah Solomon (ne Myers). When he was two years of age the family migrated to Sydney. They subsequently moved to Adelaide to be close to relatives. A severe depression in Adelaide in 1841 however, led to the family's return to Sydney.

On Moss Solomon's death in 1849, his widow and family returned to Adelaide. On completion of his schooling, Elias joined his uncle's firm and at the age of 18 was sent to Mauritius to purchase a large consignment of sugar. On 21.01.1888 he arrived in Fremantle aboard the "Eliza Blanche" and found lodgings in Henry St. In March he formed a partnership with his two nephews as land agents and auctioneers. In letters to his family, Elias described the town as a 'very poor place... and after leaving buildings like there are in Bourke St and being deposited as it were in the centre of a town built of nothing but white stone, the contrast was not at all a pleasant one.' Despite the small Jewish population in WA, Elias was determined to maintain his Judaism. In fact, he was the first in the colony to import matza, the unleavened bread eaten at Passover. He was also president of the Fremantle Hebrew congregation and





instrumental in obtaining land for a Jewish section in the cemetery and a synagogue.

Elias actively participated in many areas of public life serving as a councillor (1878-1880, 1883-1886), Mayor (1889-1891, 1896-1898, 1900-1901), MLA South Fremantle (Oct 1892 - April 1901) and MHR for Fremantle (1901-1903). He died on 23.05.1909 and is buried in the Jewish section of the Fremantle Cemetery.

*Reuben St* - Reuben Johnson was well known in Fremantle as a blacksmith operating from premises in Market St adjacent to the Newport (originally Newcastle Club) Hotel. In 1898 he built a six-roomed house on the corner of McCleary and South Sts. In 1904 Mr Johnson sold the property to Captain George Francis (1857-1934) a N-W pearler. The Francis family continued to own/occupy "Hazlemere" until 1980. Today the property is owned by Sally Gordon who spent 5 years restoring it to its former glory. Known as "Moonrakers" it provides visitors with bed and breakfast accommodation.

Reuben Johnson died on 30.10.1934 in Perth and is buried in the Congregational Section (BA247) of Karrakatta Cemetery.



## **LABOUR HISTORY CONFERENCE 1997**

The 1997 conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History will be held in Perth from October 2 - 4. The conference theme, Frontiers of Labour, was chosen to highlight the notion of boundaries and

horizons in labour history - geographical, temporal, political and conceptual. It also draws attention to the regional position of the host state, WA, and links with countries in South East Asia and Africa.

A vigorous performance and display component will be included in the program and a 'downriver' twilight trip from Perth to Fremantle with dinner and a tour also being planned. The conference sessions will be held in the Perth Cultural Precinct.

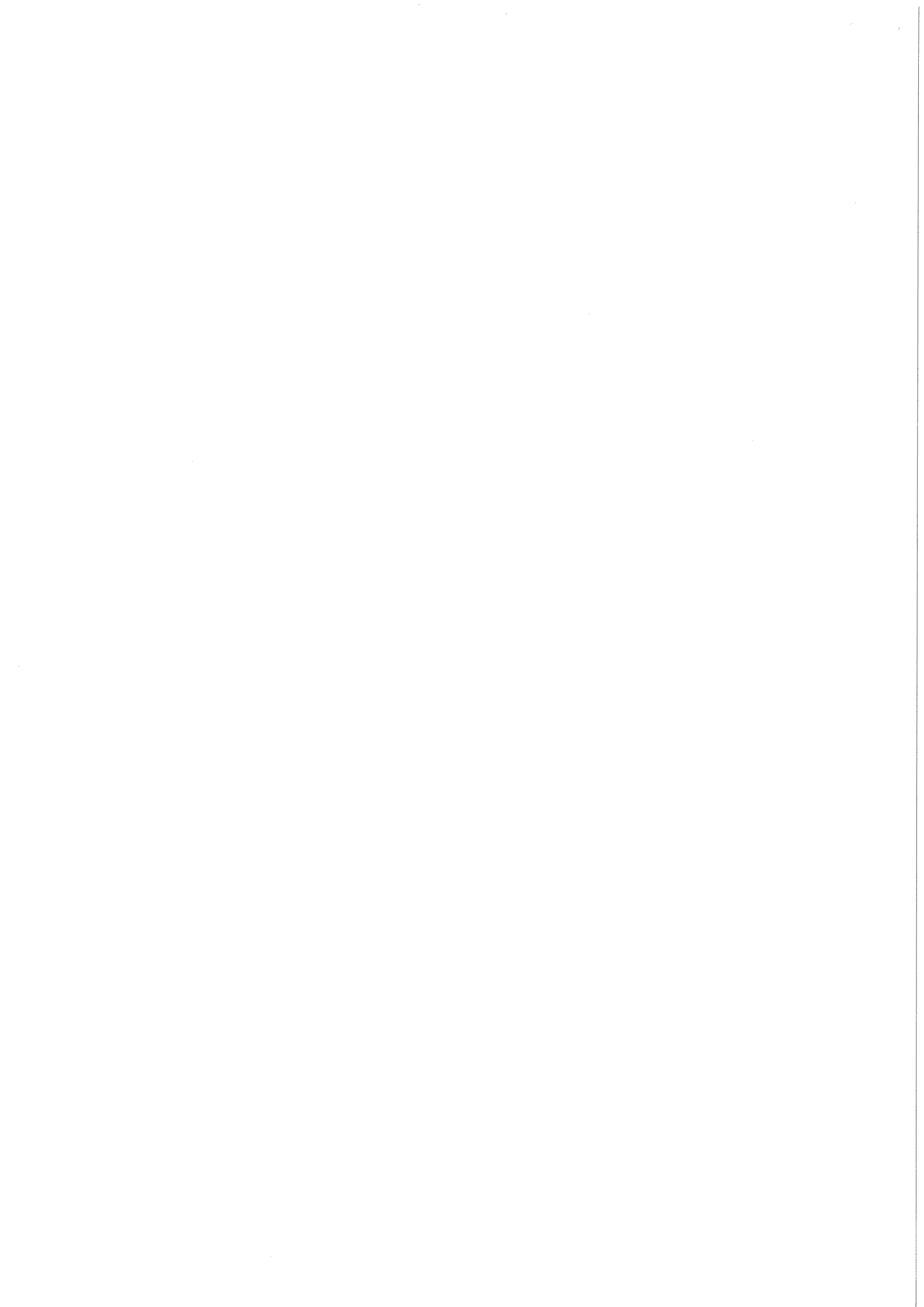
Proposals for papers, panels, workshops and roundtables will be requested early next year. Further enquiries may be made to Janis Bailey, School of Management and Law, Edith Cowan Uni, Joondalup, ph 405 5694.



## **Fremantle hospital - 100 years old.**

On 22 January 1997 Fremantle Hospital will celebrate its centenary by a walk from Point St to the hospital. One hundred years ago on that day, Matron Bessie Steel and five nurses carried the first patient from the old hospital on the corner of Cantonment and Point Sts to the Knowle, which originally had been the home of the Comptroller General of Prisons. The hospital was founded 'for the treatment of indigent cases only' and has always been supported by donations from Fremantle people, so it has a special place in Fremantle's history.

Judith Lancaster, who is organising the celebrations, has asked if any members of our society would like to join the walk to add to the occasion of the event. The walk will take place at



approx 10.00 am on Wednesday 22 January 1997, leaving from Point Street. Nurses from Fremantle Hospital in original costumes will act out the role of Bessie Steel, nurses and patient, with male staff from the hospital acting as stretcher bearers. Judith would like our members to wear period costume and perhaps act the role of relatives and supporters of the patient or even one of the doctors.

Other events will be staged during the year and these will be publicised in the local papers. If anyone has memorabilia that relates to the Knowle or to the hospital that you would be willing to lend for the celebrations please ring Judith on 431 2007. She will be very grateful for your support.

If you are interested in joining the walk, please contact Margaret McPherson on 337 2668 before 14 November or leave your name with Lorraine Stevens at the Local History Library on 430 2239.



### Reminiscences of George Geddes

There was a restaurant in Packerham St in 1937 called Peace and Plenty where you could get a three course meal for 9d. A more upmarket restaurant was the Albany Bells in Market St where a three course meal would set you back 1/6. Also in the culinary line were cooked crayfish and Mawley Cackers at 6d each.

The only Japanese in Fremantle pre war was Jimmy Yamaguchi. When war broke out I can recall climbing on some bags of stacked chaff with a rubbish tin lid. Jimmy was talking about the war - 'the Japanese at that time were not involved, it was around

November 1939 - I dropped the lid behind him and frightened the living daylights out of him.

'The Palms', the only brothel in Fremantle, was in Bannister St.



### Christmas Greetings

As well as wishing all our members a very happy and safe Christmas season, the committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all the speakers that have so willingly and ably given up their time this year to speak at our meetings. We would also like to thank those organisations who have supported us in the past and will hopefully continue to do so in the coming year. They are - the Fremantle City Council, the Western Australian Maritime Museum, the Fremantle Prison, the Fremantle History Museum and the Fremantle Herald.



### Jigsaw Column answers

- A. Jingle Bells - John Pierpont 1837**
- B. Night Before Christmas - Clement C. Moore 1823**



### Language laughs

Moscow hotel: *If this is your first visit you are welcome to it.*

Paris hotel: *Please leave your values at the front desk*

Mexico hotel: *All the water in this hotel has been personally passed by the manager.*

