



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

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

Winter Edition
1997



The team of heritage and related professionals who worked on the cell reconstruction project

FREMANTLE PRISON CELL RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

The Minister for Works, Mike Board, launched this long running project in early August. Fremantle History Society members will have the opportunity to be one of the first to view the cells, which represent eras from across the life of the Prison and get a behind the scenes view of the "making" of the project.

As many of you know, Fremantle Prison was built by convicts in the 1850s. Many of you, however, may not be aware that the convicts, unlike their modern counterparts, had running water in their cells. Well, some of the convicts that is, as the handbasins were a disaster and caused many problems and had to be removed by the 1860s.

Convicts had tiny cells, 4 ft x 7 ft in size, which, once crowded with a hammock, fold down table, stool, basin and toilet bucket left no room to swing the proverbial cat. While the size of the cells were enlarged following a commission of enquiry into the conditions at the Prison, conducted in the 1890s, it was not unusual for two men to be housed together in the one cell.

The final project includes the representation of six cells with one cell from the 1970s - 80s as part of the run and fitting in chronologically to the order. The most interesting thing to me about the project was the process. A reasonable amount was known about the cells, in the broadest sense. We knew there were hammocks and we knew there was a table and a hand basin, but

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what were they made of, how big were they, how were they attached to the wall, what colour was the stitching? These and many other questions needed to be answered before we could represent the conditions in the cells.

To try and answer some of these questions a team of people were put together to sift through the available evidence. The original work involved going over research that had already been undertaken to try and piece together what was already known. Then an historian set to doing further research in the archival record. While this was going on an archaeologist and an architect were investigating the building to see what evidence was revealed in the fabric itself. Surprisingly, much was.

To find out more, make sure you come to the next Fremantle History Society meeting to be held on Tuesday 26 August at 7.00 pm at the Fremantle Prison.



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The following were elected as members of the committee of the FHS at the last annual general meeting.

Dianne Davidson	430 6096
Elaine Berry	336 1906
Anne Brake	(wk) 335 9473
Sally Rodgers	339 7922
Lorraine Stevens	(wk) 432 9739
Ron Davidson	430 6096
Helen Brash	387 7453

There is still room on the committee for further members and our constitution allows for co-opting of committee members. Anyone

interested in joining the committee should contact Dianne Davidson on the number above.

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

**Constance Herbert
Miriam Pflieger
Fremantle Tourist Bureau
Georgina Wright
Jean Cecil
Sally May
Geoff & Noelene Trenorden**



COMING EVENTS

Fremantle Prison Cell Reconstruction Project

Anne Brake, Curator, Fremantle Prison will give you a fascinating insight into the living conditions of inmates at the Prison from the 1850s to the 1990s as well as giving you a glimpse of the processes used to piece together information from the past.

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The meeting will be held on Tuesday 26 August at the Fremantle Prison starting at 7.00 pm.

In Paddy's Tracks

The fifth National Labour History Conference organisers have requested the Fremantle History Society to organise a walk around Fremantle's historic sites which have particular labour relevance. This will be offered to Conference participants, but Fremantle History Society members will have an opportunity to preview this fascinating tour at our September general meeting, which will be held at 2 pm on Sunday 28 September. The tour will begin at the old Fremantle Trades Hall (now sadly renamed the Esplanade Manor) at the corner of Collie Street and Marine Terrace, and will be led by expert commentators. Don't miss this outstanding and different excursion into labour history.

A Small Fish Remembers Her Pond

On October 28 Imelda (Pearl) Smith, author of the recently released Fremantle Arts Centre Press publication *A Small Fish* (see review on p), will share with us her memories of Fremantle between the wars. Pearl's story is one of endurance and triumph over adversity: an illegitimate child in an age when this was a serious stigma, raised by an emotionally deprived and chilling mother, and married for over 40 years to an abusive husband, Pearl has remained astonishingly resilient and recalls her experiences without anger or bitterness. Come and share her memories and offer us your own at 7

pm at the Maritime Museum in Cliff Street.



MEETING REPORTS

Vlamingh Exhibition - Lecture and Special Viewing

Mike Lefroy from the Fremantle Maritime Museum took members on a specially conducted tour of the exhibition, which included rare items loaned, by various museums in Holland. Members were able to inspect the journal of Pelsaert, commander of the *Batavia*, which he wrote while on the Abrolhos, as well as two journals covering the Vlamingh expedition of 1696-7. Also on exhibit were maps and charts made during early exploration of the Southland, later to become Australia. A video provided members with a fascinating history of navigation, while television screens in the shape of portholes showed the views Vlamingh and his companions would have seen when approaching Rottneest Island. Many other interesting artefacts relating to early exploration were on display, and all those present agreed that it had been a most worthwhile evening - many thanks to Mike for his informative and wide-ranging commentary.

Fremantle Studies Day

This took place on Sunday 22 June at the Fremantle Maritime Centre, and was another very successful event. The papers focused on the port of Fremantle, which was celebrating its centenary, and the thematic approach proved fruitful. The overall history of the port provided by Malcolm Turnbull was amplified by David Hutchison's analysis of the buildings on Victoria Quay, and was given a social

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dimension by Sally May's discussion of the Italian fishing industry and Geoff Harcourt's very entertaining account of work practices and traditions in the wheat silo on North Wharf. Di Shaw rounded off the formal session by an illustrated talk, punctuated with amusing anecdotes, about the ways in which historical information can be turned into various art forms. Finally, those attending took part in an information-sharing session chaired by Stuart Reid from the Battye Library, who had also been recording the proceedings.

Special acknowledgement should be made of Geoff Harcourt's nine-year-old daughter Jessica, who not only heroically sat through the entire proceedings, but contributed an anecdote to Stuart Reid's forum and afterwards expressed a wish to join the Society! We would be honoured to have you as a member, Jess.

We would like to thank the City of Fremantle for providing the venue for this event, as well as assisting with publicity. Special thanks to Di Shaw, who was responsible for liaising with the Fremantle Maritime Centre, and for overseeing publicity design.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM took place in the luxurious premises of the East Fremantle Town Hall, and after the formal proceedings newly elected Mayor of East Fremantle, Andrew Smith, gave a very interesting talk on his involvement with the East Fremantle Town Council and the background which led to the production of a pictorial history of East Fremantle to celebrate its centenary. He expressed a wish to promote more

detailed studies of various aspects of the area's history, and in particular to discover what circumstances led East Fremantle to separate from the City of Fremantle, and to maintain its independence with such determination. We hope the Fremantle History Society may be able to dig up the answer to this question!

Andrew also presented the History Society with a copy of *Small But Strong: A Pictorial History of East Fremantle* by Helene Charlesworth. Thank you for the addition to our library, Andrew, and for providing the beautiful premises and refreshments for our 1997 AGM.



Farewell, Margaret!

Our esteemed founding Treasurer, Margaret McPherson, has decided to hang up her account books after slaving over them for the last two years. Her other duties and responsibilities are calling her with increasing urgency, and she has decided to hand over the weighty financial burden imposed by the Fremantle History Society to her colleague on the Committee, Anne Brake. We will miss Margaret's conscientiousness and determination to keep the FHS in the black - her eagle eye has ensured that we have finished each year with a reasonably healthy bank balance. Our best wishes go to Margaret and we wish her success in her other activities. Hope we see you back on the Committee some day, Marg!



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Associated with the Royals

Fremantle History Society has become an affiliated member of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. The benefits of membership include a regular newsletter, an annual journal, access to other history groups throughout the state and information on historical events.



Gibson's Gamble

The concept of preserving our heritage buildings is not new - in 1928 the Mayor and Councillors were taken to task for trying to preserve the Roundhouse from progress. Following is an article in the *Fremantle Advocate*, Thursday October 18 1928, under the heading:

Advance Fremantle – The Roundhouse

An effort is being made by Mayor Gibson and others to prevent the demolition of the Roundhouse - a relic of the days of barbarism, which is situated at the end of Arthur's Head.

They are keen to preserve this relic, claiming that it possesses great historical interest.

The Roundhouse may be considered a place of historical interest - but if Mayor Gibson or those interested in its preservation want it preserved, let them reserve it in another place- as far out of Fremantle as can be arranged.

We do not want the Roundhouse. Even if it does possess historical interest there are other features to be considered. The Roundhouse is,

and has been for many years, the rendezvous of drunks and down-and-outs, and is used more as a sanitary convenience than for any other purpose. The wonder is that the health authorities have not taken action in this connection long ago.

Why is it that a certain section of the populace-a section far too small to be considered-should endeavour to preserve such an abominable relic of the days of barbarism? Surely they cannot point with pride to such a place when they know that it was used to punish persons-or, rather persecute them-for offences which today would be met with a fine or even a caution.

There are too many blots in this country which convey to the present generation the barbarity of early officialdom, and the sooner they are razed to the ground the better it will be.

The Roundhouse is an unclean, insanitary, filthy hole, which only conveys to the average mind something that was vicious and cruel, and for these and many other reasons the Government should be asked to complete the task it started and bring about its complete demolition. If those who value historical associations want to preserve a link with the past, let them go to the Roundhouse before it is demolished and take photos of the building from all angles. The photos should satisfy them - just as the demolition of the building would please a majority of our people.

Thanks to Mick McGinley for noting and submitting this "piece of informed advocacy". We would like more of our members to submit interesting pieces that can be enjoyed by all.



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For Your Diary

Tuesday 26 August – Fremantle Prison Cell Reconstruction Project – get the behind the scenes story on this fascinating project. Fremantle Prison, 7.00 pm.

Sunday 28 September – In Paddy's Tracks - This tour of Fremantle's sites of Labour heritage will begin at the old Fremantle Trades Hall at the corner of Collie Street and Marine Terrace, 2.00 pm.

Tuesday 28 October – A little fish remembers her pond – come and share Pearl Smith's memories of Fremantle between the wars. Maritime Museum meeting room, Cliff St, 7.00 pm.



JIGSAW COLUMN

Here is some trivia about "Australiana" that you have been dying to know!

Lamingtons - lightly cooked cubed chocolate-coated sponge cakes covered in coconut. It is thought that they originated in Queensland at the Government House kitchens. From 1896-1901 Charles, the second Baron Lamington served as Queensland's governor - hence the connection.

Damper - a type of bread made from flour and water, cooked in hot embers in a camp fire and eaten warm or cold. The name Damper comes from the act of damping down a fire to achieve red-hot coals for cooking without a flame. Records state that William Bond, in Sydney in the 1700's, was the first baker in Australia to produce and sell Damper.

Finally a little bit of advice - If you get *Crook*, see your doctor. If you go *Crook* at someone, make sure you are the bigger of the two, and if someone goes *Crook*; at you, well, you probably deserved it.

Definition of the word *Crook* - a negative condition meaning to be sick or angry.



CONFERENCES COMING UP

Timekeepers: Forging Links in Local Studies

The first national Local Studies conference will be held in Perth on 19 and 20 September. The conference will be held at Heritage House, South Perth with Prof Luciana Duranti of the University of British Columbia, Canada as the keynote speaker. Professor Duranti's paper is entitled *Heritage records: What they tell us about culture through the ages*. Session themes include: prepare to publish, managing records, heritage at home, heritage management, in the locality, managing resources, hands on history and hidden treasures. The conference is organised by the Australian Library and information Association. Details on the conference can be obtained by telephoning Lorraine Stevens on (08) 9430 2239.

Halt, Who goes there? Challenges and responses in Australian Defense Heritage

This interesting conference, hosted by the Defense heritage Committee of the National Trust, will be held on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 August. Saturday's program includes a number of papers, while Sunday is devoted to a tour of

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defense heritage sites, following a Brunch. Participants can attend for both days or Saturday only. For further enquiries contact Pam Jackes (08) 9450 4985.

The Australian Maritime Museums Council will be holding their 1997 Annual Meeting in Fremantle on Tuesday 2 September.

The meeting will only constitute a small part of what looks like a very interesting program. Speaker's papers will explore such diverse topics as restoring the hull of the wooden vessel *Akarana* to interpreting Port Headland. Les Bail will outline current programs at Whale World in Albany and there will also be a paper focusing on the relaunch of the *James Craig* by the Sydney Maritime Museum.

Anyone interested in attending should contact Sally May or Karen Jackson at the WA Maritime Museum on (08) 9431 8448.



BOOK REVIEWS

A G Evans: *Fanatic Heart: A Life of John Boyle O'Reilly 1844-1890*
(UWA Press, 1997: HB \$49.95, SB\$34.95)

What did John Boyle O'Reilly remember about his first view of Fremantle as he was marched down the centre of High Street at dawn on January 10, 1868?

It was that the town seemed strangely old fashioned and dazzlingly white.

This is one of A G (Tony) Evans' glimpses of the port city from

Fanatic Heart, his biography of the handsome young Irish independence activist, poet and writer.

O'Reilly arrived with the last group of convicts to be transported to WA, 280 of them in all. He was one of the 62 Fenian prisoners who caused Fremantle settlers to fear bombardment and a desperate rescue attempt.

Tony Evans has travelled and read widely, and used O'Reilly's vivid poetry and prose to recreate his subject's life and times in three continents.

O'Reilly was sentenced to death for infiltrating the British Army and planning a mutiny. He had made three attempts to escape before he arrived in Fremantle Prison. It wasn't till he was sent to Bunbury and became assistant to Warder Henry that he got away - on a whaler to the United States.

O'Reilly's contact with Fremantle did not end there. When moves were being made by Irish in America to free the remaining six Fenians in Fremantle Prison their first thought was to send in 14 commandos to breach the wall and escape in a chartered ship. A less reckless O'Reilly said this wouldn't work even in the small colony. The result was the no less dramatic rescue in the *Catalpa*.

This is a handsome book in the UWA Press tradition. With it Tony Evans has done O'Reilly - and Fremantle - proud.

Imelda P Smith: *A Small Fish*
(Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997; \$16.95)

The Fremantle History Society is fortunate to have been able to organise for Imelda Pearl Smith to come to the October meeting on 28 October. Pearl

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has just had her first book, *A Small Fish*, published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press. It is a very good book, rich in Fremantle history and legend.

Anyone wondering what it would have been like to grow up in Fremantle in the twenties and thirties should read Pearl's book. But Pearl's story has an added layer of meaning. She was an illegitimate child, with a harsh struggling mother, and a church, which was often unsympathetic. She also had two aunts who were prominent prostitutes in Perth and Fremantle. Their continual publicity did nothing for Pearl's status among neighbours or her self esteem.

As for many women, World War 11 offered Pearl independence and status with the WAAAFs. Again like many women, she found that the excitement did not continue beyond the outbreak of peace in 1945. Instead she married a Fremantle lad, Jack (later known as Jock) Smith.

Jock Smith was a lumper on the Fremantle wharves, then became the vigilance officer with the Waterside Workers Federation, and finally its Australian president. Among the wharfies Jock was a hero. There was nothing he wouldn't do for his mates - and there were a lot of them. He helped win the workers considerable improvements in pay and conditions.

But when he came home, late, drunk and often violent, it was a different and very sad story. But Pearl has survived and her story is written without bitterness. "I guess Jack married the wrong girl and I certainly married the wrong bloke. I loved music and dancing; he loved

pubs", she said at the launch of her book.

Come along on October 28th and hear Pearl interviewed by Ron Davidson - and meet this extraordinary Fremantle woman.



Victoria Hall, Fremantle

Since October last year an intrepid band of locals has been fighting to save the Victoria Hall from developers and retain it for the enjoyment of the community. The Victoria Hall Association has taken out a two year lease on the Hall and the doors opened for business in early March. Since that time drummers, clog dancers, clowns, benefit dances and community groups of all types have hired the Hall. Regular bookings have developed, and the word continues to spread that the 'Old Vic' is back!

Meanwhile negotiations go on behind the scenes to secure the necessary funding from the State government to purchase and restore the Victoria Hall to its former glory. The National Trust has provided invaluable support and advice, believing that 'this historic place should remain as a venue for variety style family entertainment not only for the community of Fremantle but for the people of Western Australia'. The National Trust goes on to say 'it is a marvellous example of the confident late Victorian architectural style with a stuccoed classical facade, Corinthian columns, limestone walls and a magnificent lined jarrah ceiling'.

The building was designed by Sir Talbot Hobbs in 1896 as a theatre, and later became a music hall. The archives in the Fremantle Local History

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Collection detail a long and chequered career for the Victoria Hall. As the only remaining example of the thirty music halls, which previously operated in Fremantle, the Victoria Hall hosted the important social events of the town at the turn of the century, before becoming the Wrightson Dance Studio. Many of Fremantle's older residents recall the 'Vic' as the place to go on the weekend, and there are cheerful reminiscences of enduring marriages and families that had their first spark over a foxtrot or slow waltz at the Hall.

The Victoria Hall has survived an attempted demolition order in the 1970s, an incarnation as a shoppers' market, and most recently a stint as the huge Red Shield Op Shop of the Salvation Army.

All the many tasks related to booking the hall, promotion, office work, bookkeeping, funding negotiations etc are being carried out voluntarily by members of the Association. They desperately need help with any of these jobs, and would welcome any contributions to the massive work of saving the Hall. In particular they require a person who could commit five to eight hours a week to help in the office, bank money and keep daily financial books.

Members of the community are welcome to inspect the Hall and have a chat about its history. If any of our members would like to visit, please call the caretaker, Mick Vodanovich, on 9431 7270.

For all enquiries about membership, assistance with tasks, or hall

bookings, please call David Thackrah on 9335 8380.



Lance Holt School

The oldest alternative school in Western Australia, Lance Holt School at 10 Henry Street in Fremantle's West End, is researching its history. The school has been given funds by the Lotteries Commission to produce a conservation plan prior to seeking Heritage Council funds to restore the school's facade and to expand the premises.

10 Henry Street was built in 1892, and school members researching the building's past have so far discovered that it functioned as the Federal Coffee Palace in 1904 and was later used as a printing works. However, the building passed through many hands during its existence, and the school is anxious to discover as many details of its past as possible. If any of our members remember other functions this building has served, Lance Holt School would love to hear from you.

Please contact Rosemary Atwell or Christine Kennedy on 9335 6742 if you have any information.



From the Local History Desk

This section of the newsletter will now include information on historical material available about Fremantle: books, theses, articles, biographical material etc. The following are some essential introductory texts.

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The History of Fremantle: the Front Gate of Australia 1829-1929
(1929)

Hitchcock, J K

A chronological history of Fremantle, beginning with a detailed account of the foundation of the town, through to the beginning of the 20th century. Includes a list of names of the purchasers of allotments between 1829 and 1837, recorded because they represent pioneer residents of the town. The history of the Fremantle harbour, recording the design, construction and development of the harbour at Fremantle.

The Western Gateway: a History of Fremantle (2nd revised edition, 1971)

Ewers, John K

A chronological history of Fremantle 1829-1961. The first edition of this book was written to commemorate the centenary of local government in Fremantle. This revised and enlarged edition is the result of the City Council's desire to commemorate the centenary of local government in Western Australia as a whole. This book was intended to show the nature of municipal activity from 1848 to 1961, and the content is predominantly about the domestic affairs of Fremantle Council, with a general background of state and world affairs. Provides an historical overview of Fremantle and its local institutions, outlining the background of the Fremantle Town Trust, the Town Council, Fremantle in the 1870s, the Harbour, the first Mayor, the building of the Town Hall, Fremantle Oval, municipal facilities, services and transport, the Fremantle War Memorial, Fremantle City Council, public health,

education, library and financial institutions.

This is East Fremantle: the Story of a Town and its People (c1979)

Lee, Jack

A history of East Fremantle from 1897, based on East Fremantle Town Council minutes, and the stories and personal accounts of local people who helped shape the nature and character of East Fremantle. Includes the stories of the Lockes, Pearses, Moores, Eastons, Shacks, Mulcahys, and local characters Toby Regan and Rubberneck Taylor. Records the progress of the town from an outlying district to a municipality.

A Place of Consequence: a Pictorial History of Fremantle (1983)

Reece, R and Pascoe, R

The first 'modern' history of Fremantle. Based on collections of old photographs, it also charts the social development of the port, with quotes from letters, diaries, and newspaper reports. Section on artists and photographers of Fremantle, and a detailed history of the house at 15 Holland Street and its occupants.



Membership Fees for July 1997 - 98 are now due. For those who haven't paid, please send your remittance with the slip enclosed with this newsletter to:

**Anne Brake
Treasurer,
Fremantle History Society
c/- Fremantle Prison
The Terrace
Fremantle 6160.**

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