

FREMANTLE
LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION



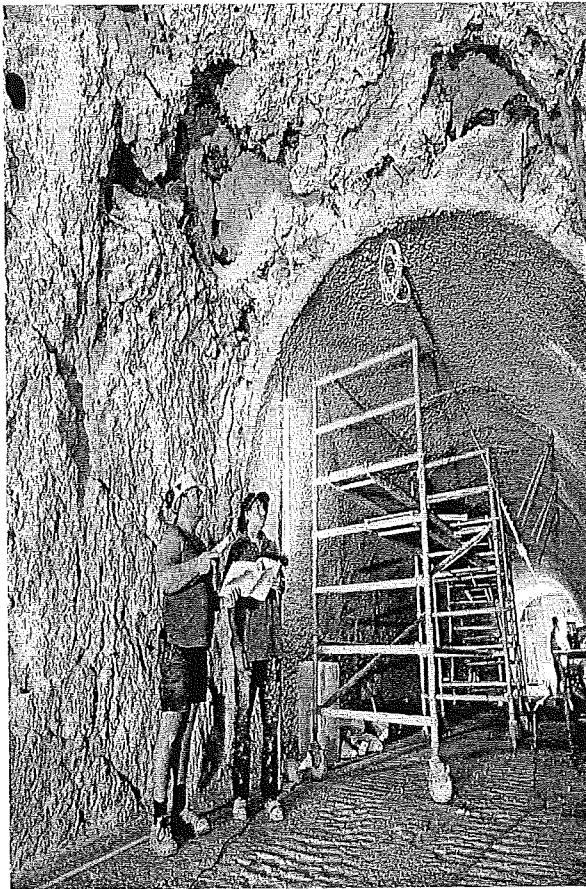
FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

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THE RESCUE OF THE ROUND HOUSE
Dianne Davidson

The Round House at Arthur Head is probably Fremantle's best known building, instantly recognisable by everyone, almost a symbol of the port city. It's so much a part of our surroundings that it came as a surprise to me to discover that it has only survived by the narrowest of squeaks - at one point demolition had actually begun!

Most people are aware that the Round House is Western Australia's oldest building, built in 1831 by Henry Reveley, Civil Engineer at the fledgling Swan River Colony. For some sixty years it was used as a jail. Even after the Fremantle Prison had been built the Round House held short-term prisoners, ticket-of-leave men who had been caught outside their lodgings after curfew, and Aboriginal prisoners waiting to be transported to Rottnest Island. However, its use for these purposes gradually declined after 1890,

and by 1900 it had been converted into a home for a constable, his wife and their ten children. The family lived there for about twelve years, using the cells not only as bedrooms, but as accommodation for ducks and for fish smoking. This use was approved by the government of the day because it was planned to demolish the old building and replace it with new dwellings for harbour employees.

By 1922 an engineer from the Department of Harbours and Rivers reported that the walls were dangerous and could collapse on neighbourhood children. Demolition was proposed, and the building was only saved by the intervention of the Chief Harbour Master, whose two-storey stone house stood on an acre of land south of the Round House. The Harbour Master claimed that if the building were demolished his

home would be fully exposed to north-westerly gales. The Round House was relieved.

However, in 1928 the Harbour Master's dwelling was removed, and demolition of the Round House actually began. It was halted within a few days because Dr J S Battye, the Public Librarian and Chief of the 1929 Centenary Committee, appealed to Premier Philip Collier and asked that the building should be saved. Collier intervened, somewhat grudgingly, writing to the Minister for Works: 'I feel that unless some greatly weighty reasons exist for its destruction we ought to endeavour to preserve the relic.'

In 1934 the WA Historical Society approached the Fremantle City Council, the Public Works Department and the Minister for Works, requesting that the Round House be restored and turned into a museum for maritime and other historical items of local interest. They followed this approach with a deputation to the Minister for Works, consisting of Paul Hasluck and G G Gregory. The deputation suggested transferring control from the Department of Works to the Fremantle Harbour Trust, with a stipulation that the Round House be preserved and maintained as an important historical building. This approach was successful, and an Order in Council vested the building in the Fremantle Harbour Trust on 24 July 1936.

Despite several meetings and conferences on the fate of the building, however, nothing much was done to either restore or maintain it. It was pressed into service during World War II as a store, and was sand-bagged for use as an air-raid shelter for naval and military personnel living nearby. After the war the Fremantle Harbour Trust used it to store forklift tyres.

Expostulations by the Royal WA Historical Society were ignored, and an attempt by the Rotary Club to raise funds to restore the Round House in 1953 aroused no interest in the community.

At this time the Mayor of Fremantle, W F Samson, called a meeting to discuss the site. There were some twenty interested parties present, including the Minister for Works and Education, J T Tonkin. The meeting resulted in a report which was prepared by the General Manager of the Fremantle Harbour Trust, Colonel Tydeman, and an architect from the Department of Public Works, E Dickens, and presented in July 1955. The report claimed that the Round House was too damp for a museum, and pointed out that it would quite possibly need to be demolished anyway in the interests of port development. The destruction of heritage to make way for port development seems to have a long history!

But this time Mayor Samson leapt to the defence of the building. It couldn't possibly be demolished, he stated in an interview published in the *West Australian* on 19 July 1955: 'Fremantle would not be Fremantle without the Round House. The Round House is part of our heritage.' The Fremantle Harbour Trust relented, did some repairs to the building, and opened the Round House to the public in September 1959.

By 1965 some 22,000 people from 44 countries had signed the Attendance Book, proving the popularity of the site with visitors. However, the Fremantle Harbour Trust had not finished with its attempts to get rid of the Round House. In February 1966 it proposed to remove the building to another site, to make way for the construction of a standard gauge railway. The grounds of the Fremantle Arts Museum, then in the planning

stages, was a favoured option for receiving a reconstructed Round House. In the event nothing came of this latest attempt at destroying the State's oldest building, and it only lost the aesthetically pleasing paired steps on either side of the central whaling tunnel which met above it before proceeding upwards in a single stairway to the Round House itself.

That was finally the end of threats to the existence of this historic building. The seventies saw an increased interest in heritage, and the granting by government bodies of funds to carry out reports and conservation plans. These culminated in a grant of \$42,000 by the Federal government and \$30,000 by the WA Department of Tourism for major restoration work in 1975/76.

The Fremantle Harbour Trust (now the Fremantle Port Authority) was still determined to get rid of the Round House one way or another. It closed the site to tourists in 1978, refusing to spend any money on maintenance. But serious danger had passed, and the building was reopened in 1981 at the insistence of the Royal WA Historical Society and the Fremantle Society, who provided a roster of volunteers to act as guides during weekends. Finally, after much complicated negotiations, the Round House was removed from the control of the FPA and vested in the Fremantle City Council in November 1982. It became an A Class Reserve in 1987.

Photo: Works being undertaken in the Whaler's Tunnel beneath the Round House. Our February meeting gives you a sneak preview of these works plus a recap on the history of this fascinating site.

Information from Arthur Head Compendium, Vol. 4: Round House Report, held in the Local History Collection of the Fremantle City Council Library



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

Executive:

Bob Woollett (President)	9335 7451
Alison Gregg (Vice President)	9432 9739
Dianne Davidson (Secretary)	9430 6096
Alan Kelsall (Treasurer)	9336 4573

Committee:

Elaine Berry	9336 1906
Anne Brake (wk)	9212 1116
Ron Davidson	9430 6096
Kristy Bizzaca	9332 7664
David Hutchison	9335 1594
Jean Cecil	9335 2352

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 at the numbers shown above.

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

Dr Margaret Loman-Hall



COMING EVENTS

Whaling Tunnel Resurrection

Our February meeting will be a real treat. The old whaling tunnel under the Round House has been closed for some time for repairs and restoration, and now the work is nearing completion. Members will be fortunate enough to get an advance view of what has been going on inside when Derek Pennington, who has been working on the site, will show us around and talk about the original construction methods and current restoration philosophy and techniques. In addition Elaine Berry will give us a briefing on the extremely interesting history of the tunnel.

The beach front is a wonderful place to spend a summer evening, and after our meeting members will be able to repair to the Fishermen's Harbour for an al fresco meal if they wish to do so.

Assemble at **6 pm** at the eastern end of the tunnel on **Tuesday 20 February**.

Roam Around Rottnest

How long is it since you last visited Rottnest? We have organised a very special package for our March meeting. We will travel to the island on the Rottnest Express, leaving at 9.30am from C Shed on the Victoria Quay on **Sunday 25 March**, and returning at around 4.30pm. A lot of work has been done at Rottnest, and our tour will include visits to convict heritage sites (gaol, boys' reformatory, warders' cottages), the recently restored museum and chapel and the historic Kingston Barracks, where we will be treated to a buffet lunch. We will also be given a bus tour of bays, wrecks, beaches, salt lakes and conservation areas. All inclusive cost will be \$41.60 (ferry,

tours, lunch). Don't miss this special experience!

Bookings are essential: telephone Dianne on 9430 6096 by **22 March**.

Down Memory Lane at Melville

Old bakeries are wonderful places, and it is fascinating to view all the implements that were once used to turn out the crusty loaves, sweet buns and pies of yesteryear. Our April meeting will be held at the Melville History Society's Miller Bakehouse Museum in Baal Street, Palmyra (near the corner of Hammad Street).

Long-standing Melville History Society member Robin Reid will give a talk on the history of the bakery and its preservation, and the usual refreshments will be offered afterwards.

Meet at **7pm** at Old Bakery Museum on **Tuesday 24 April**.



MEETING REPORTS

Santa at St Pat's

Our Christmas function last year was an outstanding success, with a large number of members (and non-members) attending.

Conservation architect Alan Kelsall, who has written the conservation plan for the Basilica, took us through the construction and social history of the building. Then Dominic Perissinotto, the organist at the Basilica, gave members a fascinating demonstration of the capacities of the famous organ - a demonstration which prompted many of us to book in for the pre-Christmas performance of Handel's Messiah!

After the talk and the organ recital members repaired to the beautiful presbytery for a very generous serve of refreshments. The success of the evening can be judged by the fact that participants tended to linger and socialise far longer than usual.

All in all, a wonderful evening - many thanks to Father Hughes for making the Basilica and the presbytery available to us, and to Dominic for his inspiring demonstration of the organist's art.



For Your Diary

Tuesday 20 February: Whaling Tunnel Resurrection. Visit the old whaling tunnel under the Round House and see the latest restoration. Talks by Derek Pennington of the restoration team, and Elaine Berry on the history of the tunnel. Fish and chips (or what you will) at Fishermen's Harbour afterwards. **Assemble at east side gate of tunnel at 6 pm.**

Sunday 25 March: Roam Around Rottneest: Fascinating guided tour of the latest Rottneest developments, visit to the museum and restored chapel. Buffet lunch at restored Kingston Barracks. Cost \$41.60 all inclusive. Assemble at **C Shed** on Victoria Quay at **9.30 am** for trip on Rottneest Express. **Bookings essential: telephone Dianne on 9430 6096 by 22 March.**

Tuesday 24 April: Down Memory Lane: Visit the Melville History Society's Miller Bakehouse Museum, view its interesting artefacts and find out about its history. Refreshments afterwards. Assemble at **7 pm** at **Old Bakery Museum** in Baal Street, Palmyra (near corner of Hammad Street)

Does History Have a Future?

During the last quarter of 2000 The WA History Foundation convened several meetings of a large number of bodies involved in the teaching, preservation and promotion of history in all its forms. The aim of the meetings was to identify the concerns and priorities of these various bodies, and to discuss the best ways of encouraging more interest in Western Australia's past and finding effective means of funding more research.

At the plenary session held on 30 November last year, the WA History Foundation suggested that the various history organisations work together to establish a peak history body in WA which could speak for the entire profession at all its levels in, for example, negotiating with government on funding and other issues, promoting the role of history in tourism and so on.

The meeting resolved that:

- a) representatives attending this meeting take the proposal for a peak history body back to their individual organisations for discussion, organisations to provide their responses in writing to the WAHF by 30 March 2001. Organisations might wish to consider not only whether they think that the general idea is a good one but also, if their view is positive, how such a body should/should not be constituted and what roles it should/should not play.
- b) this umbrella / co-ordinating organisation should represent the views of history organisations in the State, acting as a peak body to liaise and work with governments. It should be an inclusive organisation, reflecting the social, cultural and

organisational diversity of those active in WA history.

- c) if response is generally positive, the WAHF convene another meeting of all interested organisations in mid-April 2001 and facilitate the establishment of a working party, the aim of which would be to submit a properly argued proposal to government by the end of June 2001.
- d) in this process, the models offered by the History Trust of South Australia, the History Council of NSW, the WA Conservation Council and any others suggested as appropriate, be thoroughly investigated.

Some members of the Fremantle History Society Committee attended the above meetings, and undertook to discuss the issues with our members. Would anyone who wishes to comment on the above or put forward any proposals which should be sent on to the WA History Foundation please contact Dianne on 9430 6096.



A Visitor's Impression of Fremantle Elaine Berry

Jane Roberts visited Fremantle in late 1829 and recorded her impressions in a book called *Two Years at Sea*. She was travelling with her husband and spent seven weeks in the Swan River Colony before travelling on to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and then to Malaysia and finally returning to England. She describes her first impression of Fremantle as sand - everywhere the eye could see brilliant white sand - for the children on board it was snow and to them the wonder was the trees were green.

Shortly after they dropped anchor in Gage Roads a settler came aboard, eager for news of 'home'. He brought with him a black swan which he presented to the captain. This was prepared for dinner and considered excellent by those present.

The man explained that the birds had left Fremantle since the arrival of the first settlers, but where he had been exploring he had seen 'thousands of black swans darken the sky for a distance of eight to ten miles.' Unfortunately Jane doesn't say where he had been exploring.

Jane noted the well-erected tents and wooden houses she could see near the shore and the wood about a mile further away which was the best place, she thought, for temporary tents as it offered fuel and supports for the tents.

A more unusual form of accommodation she wrote about was the 'horse house'. A settler brought a very valuable horse out in the horse house, but it died from severe bruising in the rough weather experienced on the voyage. On arriving in Fremantle, it was decided that the horse house would make adequate accommodation on land and so with great difficulty it was dropped overboard and towed to the shore where it was dragged through the sand and finally erected under a shady tree. It was fitted up with some shelving and a hammock and became the temporary home for the captain and his wife. To make it more comfortable they placed logs of wood each side of the door as seats, rushes were laid down between them and a table and chair set up in the centre. Those settlers going on to Tasmania set up their tents alongside the 'horse house.'

The greatest annoyance to the settlers though was from the sand. The burnt

wood from the fires mixed with the loose sand which not only filled their shoes but covered everyone and everything with black dirty sand. So the first occupation of the day was to pull rushes to make a fresh carpet

Meals were difficult and sparse for the group. There were no vegetables or milk available. Breakfast consisted of 'cakes made of flour, water and a little butter, badly baked on the embers, biscuit and tea without milk and sweetened with coarse brown sugar.' The second meal of the day consisted of salt and occasionally fresh meat, potatoes from the ship, and biscuit and cheese. 'A tolerable good wine' was also served.

Around 6pm tea was served, but the best meal of the day Jane considered was the evening meal when fresh fish caught during the day was cooked over open fires. Although then they also had to contend with mosquitoes and the 'snapping noise of lizards.'

For Jane it was a temporary stay, she joined other women in exploring the area surrounding their camp, but for those who intended to remain in the Swan River Colony, arrangements had to be made to see the Governor in Perth and to find out about their grant of land. Some form of shelter had to be erected for their families, their personal property had to be secured and in many cases the animals landed had strayed away into the bush and had to be tracked down. Clean clothing was a luxury as washing was expensive; Jane quoted a charge of 5/- (five shillings) for a dozen items.

Jane set sail from the Swan River Settlement on 19 March 1830 for Van Diemen's Land, concerned for the settlers' welfare and success in the new Colony.



Nothing Has Changed

Ron Davidson

Local History Collection librarian Allison Gregg was surprised when she uncovered a paper on the causes of the sand drift at South Beach and surrounds, and a detailed guide on how to prevent it. The report blamed the problem on the 'denudation of the scrub along the low sand hills or dunes on the sea coast which, being formed on blown sand, were exposed to the action of the winds, more particularly of the strong sea breezes...'

The report offered a three-stage program to solve the problem: fence the area in question, cover the area with brush securely pegged, and keep people and animals out of the fenced area.

All of this seems eminently modern in the tradition of recent land care movements. However, the report came from a committee appointed to 'inquire into the origins and causes of the Sand Drift in the South Ward at Fremantle'. It was presented to the Legislative Council by His Excellency's Command in 1888. The chair was the director of Public Works, J Arthur Wright, and the Mayor of Fremantle, D K Congdon, was a committee member.

The reports had strong things to say about the private landholders whose cattle caused 'the evil': they should pay for the cost of repairs. The Government would be asked to provide prison labour. The report concluded:

"This may appear to be a hardship to these landowners: but there seems to the Committee to be no other course open, with fairness to the community at large, to put a stop to a nuisance which

threatens, if not checked, to cause at a distant date wholesale destruction and loss of that part of Fremantle, and to spread over a great portion of the town at present unaffected by it.'



Quotable Quote

'We're finished as a residential area,' said Sir Frederick Samson, the Mayor of Fremantle. 'Most of the houses that will remain after the next five years' changes will be on quarter-acre blocks out of the main city...We are going industrial in the best way, with plenty of advance planning.'
(*Sunday Times*, 7.11.1965)



Fremantle Streets (continued)

QUEEN: KING: Queen Street and the Queen's Squares perpetuate the memory of Queen Adelaide, as they do not appear until the survey of 1833, although King's Square was in existence earlier, in the time of George IV. King's Square has since disappeared, the land being alienated and forming part of the triangle on which is built St John's Church and the Town Hall. The old church was built directly across High Street and the town had to buy the land so that the street might be continued eastward, as evidently was the intention at the time of the original survey. The King honoured may have been George IV, who did not die till June 26, 1830, and his death could not have been known in the Colony before September of that year. King Street, however, would seem to have been in honour of William IV, as the streets in the 1833 survey appear in the following

order: King, William, Queen, Adelaide. Before 1844 when a 'survey of Fremantle as marked on the ground' was taken, Queen and William Streets were both continued through the present Oval or earlier Barracks' Green to the top of Church Hill (now called the Gaol Hill). King Street then ran from Queen Street and joined South Terrace somewhere near the present Alma Street junction, at a more acute angle, however, than is at present the case. When the town was re-surveyed in 1844 all the land between the Public Cemetery of four acres (since converted into the Alma Street children's playground) and the present Henderson Street was used exclusively for Crown purposes, and the Comptroller's residence, the Knowle (later the Old Men's Depot and now part of the Public Hospital) was built on the ground through which King Street used to pass.

QUEEN VICTORIA: This was originally known as Cantonment Road, but owing to confusion with the street of the same name, it was termed Victoria Road, which it retained for some years and then, as there was also a Victoria Road in East Fremantle, to make assurance doubly sure, another change took place to Queen Victoria Street. After its many vicissitudes there is even a chance that it may yet get back to its early status of a road.

REUBEN: Reuben Johnson was an owner of property in Reuben Street.

ROBINSON: Sir William Frederick Cleaver Robinson was three times Governor of the Colony, 1875-1877, 1880-1883, 1890-1895. It was during his period of office that Responsible Government was proclaimed. Perth also has Robinson Avenue and Cleaver Street.

(From K Caldwell, 'Fremantle Street Names', in *WA Historical Society Journal & Proceedings* Vol 1 Part IX. 1931. 45-57)



Wray Gates

Jackie Sherriff

Designed by Capt. H Wray RE and J Manning CW. Executed by Serjeant J Nelson 20th Co RSM

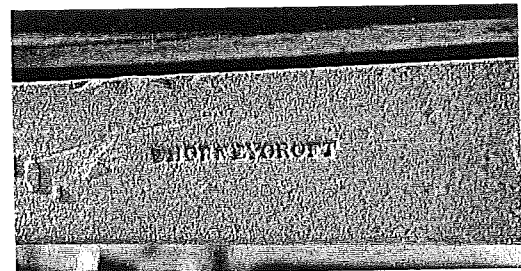
Conservation of the Wray Gates, the inner gates that separate the Gatehouse courtyard from the prison proper, commenced at Fremantle Prison in January 2001. These works form part of the wider Gatehouse Conservation Works, which have been ongoing for several years.

The gates were fabricated at the Prison in 1855/6, to a design by Captain Henry Wray of the Royal Engineers and James Manning, Clerk of Works. According to an inscription on the gates, they were constructed by, or at least under the direction of, Serjeant (sic) Joseph Nelson of the 20th Company of Royal Sappers and Miners. In 1856, Captain Wray reported the following:

A pair of iron gates with small side gates have been prepared and fixed at the entrance leading from the outer yard to the prison. These gates have been made principally from the iron from convict ships, which from its generally inferior quality is unfit for ordinary purposes where welding is required. They have been so constructed as not to require welding, and, as finished, present a good appearance, and are a substantial as well as economical piece of work.¹

Before the works commenced, archaeologist Fiona Bush completed a paint survey of the gates. She found that the gates had been painted many colours over the years – including green, black and grey. After much deliberation, the gates were painted black (the most consistent colour in the paint scrapes), following a light sand blasting and undercoat.

An interesting discovery was made through this process – three imprints or stamps were found which give hints to the origin of the iron used to construct the gates. The stamps, located at various points of the gates, read 'Thorneycroft', 'Clydach' and 'Netherton'. Initial investigations suggest that these were foundries and/or areas where the iron was made. We are hoping that further research will shed more light on this.



We are now in the process of having replica medallions made to replace those missing from the gates. When all the pieces are put back together, we will not only have significantly improved the appearance of the gates, but more importantly, will have ensured their long-term conservation. Fremantle Prison owes a debt of gratitude to the descendants of Joseph Nelson who contributed about \$4,000 towards the cost of the works.

¹ British Parliamentary Papers, Half Yearly Report of Works in Fremantle District for year ending 30 June 1856, 26 July 1856, Convict System, Vol. 7.

