



## FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305  
FREMANTLE WA 6959

**Summer Edition  
2006**

Editors: Ron Davidson, Dianne Davidson, Anne Brake



Just what is this statue saying about the quiet self-effacing but passionate man who was one of our most revered Prime Ministers? Come and have your say or listen to what others have to say about this controversial statue.



### **John Curtin Statue – Have Your Say!**

The Fremantle History Society will move on to controversial territory at its April general meeting - with a forum on the appropriateness of the John Curtin statue erected outside the Fremantle Town Hall last August.

We know that Fremantle likes John Curtin, MHR for Fremantle and wartime Prime Minister from 1941 to 1945. He was a complex man: friendly but often lonely, strong but filled with self doubt; a wartime leader who planned for peace. It seems, however, that Fremantle dislikes his glowering representation outside the town hall. 'Don't put the statue at ground level; it will frighten the children,' wrote *Fremantle Herald* editor Brian Mitchell. 'Call it BOB (Bend Over, Boy), stated a *Herald* letter-writer. And Curtin does look as if he is at the top of his back swing while caning someone. Another prominent but reticent citizen told me: 'It's too old-fashioned, Eastern European totalitarian.'

Your History Society will be asking sculptors, expert critics, politicians and residents how this particular statue was selected without any community input over the last two years: and what should happen next. We are seeking a range of views, although this is proving difficult to achieve.

The process by which BOB arrived at the Town Hall began with Mark McGowan, the member for Rockingham and then a cabinet minister in the making, meeting the short-listed sculptors Joan Walsh Smith and Charles Smith, Greg James and Andrew Kay at the site. He was obviously the driver of the project. He told the sculptors that their statue must be a standing figure and set on a large plinth outside the town hall entrance. There was mention that it needed to be 'heroic'. Previously the site had been undecided, the statue life size and the plinth 'modest'. At the same meeting the statue was increased in size by 30 percent. The fee dropped, however, from \$200,000 to \$120,000 although it would creep back to the old figure: more statue for less money. A key condition was that the statue would be finished by December 2004, the year on which WA's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of white settlement would be celebrated. As it turned out the unveiling took place on 14 August 2005, eight months later than the previously non-negotiable deadline.

There was drama on tender day. Greg James, the popular choice and the artist who had given us Porcelli in King's Square and the wonderful Fishermen's Memorial, was held up in St George's Terrace traffic and was four minutes late with his tender envelope. No one would open it. Greg went home. His Curtin was a softer Curtin appealing for help from his countrymen, with the breeze lifting his coat. We don't know much about the submission of Andrew Kay, creator of Hughie Edwards. Perhaps his Curtin wasn't sufficiently heroic.

When the massive concrete plinth appeared on 'the only site', outside the Town Hall entrance, residents were shocked. They liked John Curtin but did not wish to peer into his bigger than real-life behind as they

left the hall. Also no one seemed to have followed the WA Heritage Act and considered the plinth's impact on one of our finest heritage buildings. Eventually after the plinth was poured it was decided shift it: no easy task. A new site was chosen along the northern wall. That's where BOB now stands, without his glasses which have been souvenired. Sadly it was discovered that the site chosen was immediately below where architect Ralph Hoare has been commissioned by Fremantle City Council to prepare plans to reinstate the Town Hall's historic verandah, a task now rendered impossible.

Our April forum will provide an opportunity for people to find out by what process this controversial statue arrived in our midst and to express their views about its impact and what its future should be. A flyer will be sent out to members when the exact format of the meeting has been finalized!



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### *Executive:*

Dianne Davidson (President)	9430 6096
Lisa Williams (Vice President)	9430 7966
Alison Bauer (Treasurer)	9432 9739
Kris Bizacca (Secretary)	9361 9915

### *Committee:*

Anne Brake	9336 5206
Ron Davidson	9430 6096
Marilyn Dimond	9335 3609
Sally May	0409 431 844
David Tessler	9386 4348
Bob Woollett	9335 7451

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 can be 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.



## COMING EVENTS

### WANDER AROUND THE WATERFRONT

Join members and friends on Victoria Quay on **Tuesday 28 February** to discover what changes have taken place at A-Shed since it became part of the Maritime Museum. Head of Maritime History Department Sally May will take us through and explain its current uses and architectural features, as well as giving us a tour of Victoria Quay and highlighting its major historical features. She will then take members to the slipway, wharves and South Mole and explain current uses of historic sites.

Meet at the Maritime History Department (midway along **A-Shed**, metal stairs leading up to set of glass doors) at **6 00 pm**.

### SHIP INTO SHAPE

Have you ever wondered what is happening with the old Maritime Museum? Now called Shipwreck Gallery, this site is an important element in the presentation of Western Australia's maritime mysteries. Dr Mike McCarthy, head of the Maritime Archaeology department at the museum, will reveal the new life of this important building and the activities that occur there.

Meet at the front door of **Shipwreck Gallery, Cliff St** at **7.00 pm** on **Tuesday 28 March**.

### INSPIRATIONAL LEADER OR BEND OVER, BOY

What is your opinion on the new John Curtin statue now in Kings Square? A variety of speakers will put arguments for and against this controversial installation. More information including venue and time will be

distributed in early April but put **Tuesday 18 April** (1 week early due to Anzac Day) in your diary now.



## MEETING REPORTS

### Christmas Feast at the Fremantle Club

On Thursday 1 December about 50 members gathered for our annual Christmas celebration at that Fremantle icon, the Fremantle Club in Bannister Street.

The Club cook Donna, famous for her traditional roast dinners, provided a sumptuous hot buffet featuring roast turkey and ham and all the trimmings, and guests were welcomed with a complimentary glass of champagne on arrival.

Committee member Anne Brake, who is back among us after four months overseas, introduced Ron Davidson, our speaker for the evening. Ron gave members an entertaining talk about the more colourful aspects of Bannister Street in its heyday, drawing on extracts from autobiographical works by authors who had known the area when it was famous for its brothels and opium dens.

Our thanks to the Fremantle Club, which once again provided the venue for a memorable evening and to committee member Bob Woollett, who has become a veritable professional at coordinating raffles!



### AUSTRALIA ICOMOS NATIONAL CONFERENCE: challenge and change: in ports, their towns and cities

**Australia ICOMOS**, the Australian chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, will be holding its annual conference this year in Fremantle. The conference will focus on historic ports and issues relating to the management of their

heritage assets in the context of commercial viability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ports have served as important gateways not only for goods but for ideas, people willing and unwilling, disease and pests, invaders and allies. Ports can be found on our coasts and our inland waterways. The towns and cities that have grown up around them have been shaped and coloured by the their activities and fortunes.

Over recent decades, ports have witnessed dramatic change. Increasing demands for safety, security and changing modes of delivery have seen many upgraded or even abandoned. This has seen ports become sites of conflict and confrontation and has put enormous pressure on their built and social fabric.

The port city of Fremantle has witnessed such change, making it an ideal location for the conference. The streets and pubs are no longer filled with wharfies and sailors but with tourists and university students. Cranes, lifts and gantries have replaced the muscle and sweat of the lumpers. For migrants, the first view of their new land is now an airport tarmac rather than the sheds and wharves of the harbour.

How can we balance the significance of the historic with the needs of today and provide for the future? How can we best manage change on an ongoing basis? What role can heritage workers have in assisting communities to adapt to this change?

The conference will explore these questions with reference to issues such as adaptive re-use, economic drivers, urban and industrial expansion, evolution and development, the role of interpretation and ongoing use of industrial sites.

A stream that explores some of these issues in a wider industrial heritage context will also be included providing an opportunity for broader debate and discussion.

A call for papers for the conference has just been launched. Further details can be found

on the ICOMOS website [www.icomos.org/australia](http://www.icomos.org/australia) or by contacting Anne Brake on 9212 1116 or at [anne.brake@ntwa.com.au](mailto:anne.brake@ntwa.com.au) .

ICOMOS includes members from over 110 countries throughout the world who work in the conservation and interpretation of heritage places.



## **NOTES FROM THE LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Alison Bauer

This has been a relatively quiet period in the Local History Collection. The main library was closed for painting and shelf replacement in November. All staff were involved in this major task.

Documents from two organisations have recently been deposited with LHC. Mrs Zuvela has lodged records of Apex. Martin Wells has collected records and photos connected with the Hilton Park Progress Association. We have also taken copies of an extensive collection of photographs from the Fremantle Rowing Club. The originals were to be deposited at the Battye Library.

LHC has acquired another Marantz Cassette Recorder and microphone for recording oral histories. Lorraine Stevens has been gathering information on the best options for long term preservation of the oral history collection; a great concern given the rapid changes in technology and equipment. She has just completed the Fremantle Foundries Project. Heather Campbell has been working on interviews with Stan Reilly Centre staff.

Recent additions to the collection include a WAGS CDRom; "Marriage Index of Western Australia 1915-1933" and "Dating family photos" by Lenore Frost. A CDRom, "First families of the Swan River Colony" has been ordered. John Dowson has kindly donated copies of "Fremantle Railway Station" and "Fremantle: the future is in the past:

appreciating the Synagogue site and its surrounds".

Margaret Rear, a long term volunteer, has retired and Helen Marchese has started filing the newspaper clippings. Another volunteer, Shirley Walters, is about to commence cutting the local newspapers, a job which has fallen behind in the last few months. We also have some staff changes, which will commence mid February. Loretta O'Reilly will be working in LHC one day a week, plus extra days when other staff are on leave. Christy McNulty will be in three days, Lorraine Stevens on Fridays as usual and Alison Bauer five days.

David Hutchison's new book, *Fremantle Walks*, published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, will be launched at 6 pm on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March at the Fremantle City Council Reception room. For further information contact the Fremantle Arts Centre Press on 9430 6331.

See separate article for more detail on David's latest book (p. 9).



## **A Fremantle Champion – William Masters Conduit Dermer**

Rusty Christensen

Aka Bill, Billy or Dr Bill. Athlete, school boxing champ, rugby player, professional man, race horse breeder and trainer, farmer, family man, Fremantlephile, friend to the world – he dared to be remarkable.

Bill Dermer passed away in December 2005. The memory of this remarkable man will live on in so many ways, with so many people. In fact, anybody who had occasion to come into contact with Dr Bill will have a permanent recollection of a conversation, an experience, or just the privilege of knowing this unique character.

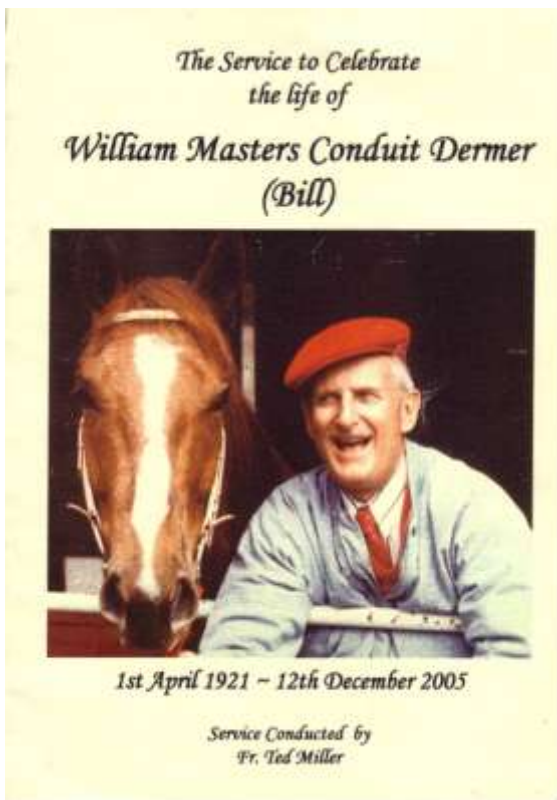
A visit to his surgery in Atwell Arcade was a trip back in time, to a Fremantle to which all genuine Fremantleites could relate. The photos and memorabilia brought back

memories of a special place in a special time, when Bill was young and the old town had still not lost its innocence.

Long before 'having a passion for Fremantle' was a buzz term, Bill had it, and exhibited it in so many ways. I recall, as a captive in his dental chair, gazing at the ceiling on which was the mural of the city of Fremantle and its environs, which the conversation (and there was always plenty of it) revolved around. Bill loved Fremantle, and Freo folk loved him. In fact, 'Luv Yu' was this colourful character's parting words as one left his waiting room – usually with one of his slogan stickers which he had furtively placed on the back of one's clothing – to negotiate the steep stairs which led to the arcade and the present, after being in the time warp of Dr Bill's rooms.

Stories abound of Bill's mostly unheralded generosity and assistance to groups and individuals in and around Fremantle. He was the first port of call for seamen of all nationalities requiring urgent dental treatment. He had the job of caring for the dental requirements of the inmates of the Fremantle Gaol and got to know the circumstances of some of the prisoners on their release, when they needed a hand up, Bill would give them accommodation on his farm at Dandaragan in return for some help on the farm until they could return to society. This was a huge help to the ex cons. I was told on good authority that a few of them repaid their benefactor by taking off with the farm truck and were apprehended as they headed for the South Australian border. Bill would have taken these setbacks in his stride.

A friend of mine, a stonemason, was working on a job in Fremantle on a hot summer's day, wearing a hat, trousers and boots – no shirt. He told me that a bloke, a complete stranger, had spoken to him and moved on, to return some time later with a \$30 shirt, insisting that my friend put the shirt on to guard against skin cancer. You guessed it – Bill Dermer.



Talking horses on one occasion, while I was in his chair, Bill remarked that he was the only trainer in Australia who was also a dentist. He thought awhile before adding that, on the other hand, he was the only dentist who was also a trainer. Another of his rituals was to ring his many friends and patients on their birthday. When my calls ceased a few years back, I realised that he was shortening stride.

The Fremantle icon was very proud of his background. He was a fourth generation professional person in his family. His great grandfather was a doctor who had been sent out from England to care for convicts in the colony. His grandmother had been a medico and a dentist, while his father was a well known and respected GP in Fremantle and had his rooms at the other end of Atwell Arcade. As a point of personal interest, his father delivered my wife and patched me up on a couple of occasions when I was accident prone in my early working days.

The term icon can be over-used. In the context of Bill Dermer I consider it appropriate. There are many identities who have contributed to the social mosaic of our unique city, but to me Billy Dermer was not

only a champion bloke but a champion of Fremantle.



## **FREMANTLE PRISON GATEHOUSE RENDER CONSERVATION AND FAÇADE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

Sandra Murray  
Curator, Fremantle Prison

A major capital works project for the removal of the render and conservation of the original masonry of the Gatehouse has just been completed. The Gatehouse was constructed in the 1850s from limestone quarried on site; and had been treated in a variety of ways to rectify the problems of rising damp and stone deterioration over the years. In the 1960s, short-term remedial action was taken by covering the masonry to first floor height in a hard cement render.

The cement render was not only unsightly, intruding upon the cultural significance of the main entrance to the Prison, but exacerbated the deterioration of the original stone. Cement render is less permeable than stone, which needs to breathe. Evidence of damp could be seen where paint had bubbled and stone flaked.

The exterior walls were investigated in 1997 to develop a strategy for removal of the render and conservation of the original stone. Kevin Palassis Architects and Transfield Maintenance removed a section of the cement render to examine the condition of the underlying stone and assess methods for the total removal of the render and repair of the face stone. Investigation found that the wall was constructed of a variety of stone types.

It was also found that a more compatible earlier render, made of lime, was applied to the wall surface. Original limestone quoins (cornerstones) were discovered beneath the patterned render.



*The recently conserved Fremantle Prison Gatehouse with its original clock. (Photo courtesy Fremantle Prison).*

Following analysis, a specification for the conservation of the walls was derived. The stonemason, under the direction of the conservation architect, applied these conservation techniques to the north face test area. In the final stage of the Gatehouse Render Investigation, conservation techniques applied during the investigation stage were assessed and a strategy for the conservation of the complete building developed. The resultant work in 2005 was the removal of all render and rectification to the ground floor walls of the Gatehouse coupled with the restoration of the badly deteriorated upper facade of the building. Under the guidance of Griffiths Architects, Tony Graneri Building Conservationists applied a mortar composition using a traditional method of tooling, including a slaked lime.

The Gatehouse clock was removed, assessed and its face found to have originally included gold leaf. It has now been fully restored with its original materials.

In recent news, an archaeological excavation project under the direction of Dr Alistair Paterson will be held in February 2006 to introduce UWA archaeology students to archaeological fieldwork. Students will be part of an ongoing collaborative research project between Fremantle Prison and the Department of Archaeology (UWA). The site is in the eastern part of the Prison in an area where

an Engine House and early wells were once located. They will test for archaeological remains of structures related to the No. 18 Well (dug 1852, once an important water source for the colony) and the Engine House.



### **Fremantle History Society Submission to Council on Proposed Development of the Old Synagogue Site in South Terrace**

A very large development has been proposed between 92 South Terrace and the Victoria Pavilion, including a three-level apartment block. The proposal was advertised early in the New Year during the Christmas holiday season, with a closing date for submissions within two weeks although after public protest this was later extended to 9 February.

The Fremantle History Society put in a submission to the Director of Urban Planning expressing strong concerns that the new development would completely overwhelm the two buildings between which it is sited, both of which are on the permanent register of the Heritage Council of WA.

These concerns were reinforced at a presentation given by the developer and his architect on 2 February. No images were provided by the presenters, but Cr John Dowson made available a photograph of the existing streetscape on which the planned structure had been superimposed by an architect working from the submitted drawings. This clearly showed that the bulk and scale of the planned development will completely dominate the existing buildings in the area.



**Book review: *Into the West: when Henry Lawson came to Western Australia***  
Ron Davidson

'Heads it's Fremantle, tails it's Armidale (NSW)'. The Furphy brothers Sam and

Felix, sons of Joseph and Leonie Furphy, are leaving their struggling foundry in Shepparton in Victoria and deciding on a new home. The coin comes down heads and in 1903 they build a foundry within a cottage in Grey Street then two years later construct a brick and iron factory on the site. The parents arrive two years later, after the publishing of the Joseph Furphy Australian classic *Such is life*.

Joseph Furphy, under his pen-name Tom Collins, is one of a number of writers from the east who, a century or so ago, came to WA and whose local work is featured in *Into the West: When bush poet Henry Lawson came to Western Australia*. The book is edited by Chris Holyday and was published recently by Hesperian Press. It highlights two little-known visits to WA by Henry Lawson. The first was to Albany in 1890 when he wrote approvingly of the town where 'labourers received 14 shillings a day and were so independent that it was impossible to get a man to carry your luggage'. Lawson returned in 1896 and lived in a tent, with his new bride Bertha, near Claisebrook, which is now packed with ill-assorted houses in the East Perth re-development. He worked as a house-painter and also sent stories to the *Western Mail*. The contents of this book are interesting and significant, although editor Holyday, when he praises the importance of his new arrivals, runs the risk of understating the role in writing of earlier arrivals like George Fletcher Moore.

And returning to Fremantle...The Furphy building is still at 12 Grey Street. It is now a sailmakers' loft, Extreme, after operating as a foundry until 1986. It is not known whether the Fremantle factory ever made parts for the Furphy water carrying device of a wooden barrel on wheels with cast iron ends, usually made by an eastern states branch of the Furphy foundries. It provided the name 'furphy' the Australian term meaning rumour.



*The foundry was about to close in 1986. Gran Hickling, one of the final owners whose name provided the G of E and G Foundry still visible on the facade, was still pouring liquid metal - in bare feet.*

Out of this book review came the idea for a new series for our newsletter, featuring interesting Fremantle buildings and their stories. Next edition we'll feature the Marine Parade factory-café of a celebrated Fremantle ginger beer manufacturer. If you have a favourite story to tell about a building, a business or a site, please send it to us!



## **History and the Fremantle Prison Update**

There have been some developments since the report in our previous newsletter about our failure to establish contact with the Prison team from the Department of Building and Works.

We have now had a response from the Executive Manager at Fremantle Prison, Graeme Gammie, apologising, explaining the reasons for the long delay in replying to our initial letter, and outlining some of the projects which have been under way at this important heritage site. He has assured us



that any suggestions we make will be raised at future Prison Advisory Committee meetings.

We have also written to the current community representative on the Committee, the Mayor of Fremantle, expressing our concerns about the apparent lack of research and writing about the more recent history of Fremantle Prison (there seems to be a heavy emphasis on the early convict era) and also the sensitive issue of Aboriginal involvement. In addition we requested that the minutes of the Advisory Committee (excluding personal and financially sensitive matters) should be made available to the Fremantle community so that residents can be kept up to date on developments within this important heritage landmark.

Mr Tagliaferri has assured us that he will raise these concerns at the February meeting of the Committee, and we await with interest the results of the Committee's deliberations.



### **Fremantle Walks**

David Hutchison

Over eighteen months ago, Fremantle Arts Centre Press commissioned me to write a book with the above title. It will be launched by the City on Friday 3 March, but is already available in bookshops. I was pleased to receive this commission and thank the Press.

As most of you know, I have for some years conducted walking tours of the West End, so I had well-formed ideas on what a walking guide to our city should be like, and had accumulated during those years much information about our heritage buildings. However, I undertook more research. Primary sources have been the City's *Municipal Inventory*, the associated 'blue files' and earlier publications such as JS Battye's *Cyclopaedia of Western Australia* (1912, 1913). Many people have contributed to the information in the *Inventory* and in the

'blue files'. I thank them for their labours. As always, the Librarians — and Society members — Loretta O'Reilly and Alison Bauer were very helpful and generous with their time. I thank others in my acknowledgments.

As I explain in the book's *Preface*, it is not possible in a guidebook of this sort to mention all the 4000 or so sites and buildings in the *Municipal Inventory*. I have had to concentrate on the major sites, but there are suggestions for roaming further afield. A bibliography will enable interested readers to obtain more information.

The book contains general tourist information and two brief histories: of the City and of the Harbour. Those histories concentrate on explaining how the City came to value and conserve its heritage. I note that we still need a comprehensive guide to Aboriginal sites and a study of Fremantle's modern architecture. Nine walks are described in detail and there is a map for each walk as well as several larger maps to show general features, the Cat-Bus routes, etc.

The Press have turned my manuscript into a handsome volume and I thank all of its staff, including the designers. I end with one of the quotes that appear on the flyleaf of the book. May Vivienne visited WA in the 1890s and wrote a book about the state. After a visit to Fremantle, she wrote:

*Fremantle is rapidly increasing in size and population, and the social life is not so divided as in Perth; there seems to be more geniality and not so much stiffness about the people.*

I hope that we will retain that geniality.



### **The Old Capstan Lives!**

The FHS newsletter of Autumn 1998 announced an important find. Shane Boyle, the bush regenerator for the Fremantle City Council, had investigated an area on Beach

Street which he quickly classified as an 'eyesore'. The sandy bank was covered with wild fennel and weeds. It looked like a suitable place for regeneration. When he cleared the weeds a worn circle of limestone blocks was revealed. It had a hole in the centre where there had been a winch. He had uncovered an old capstan which had, in conjunction with a capstan on the northern bank, been used to pull barges back and forth across the river during the construction of the first bridge over the Swan River. When the bridge was completed use of the capstan stopped. It is now on the WA Heritage Council's Register of Heritage Places along with the present traffic bridge. It has been suggested that convicts used the capstan to pull the old dredge, *Black Swan*, into position but this is unlikely to have been true.

When massive earthworks began for the new traffic lights and roads around Beach Street, many thought the capstan must have been submerged under hundreds of tons of concrete. But a search of the area showed the capstan still lives. Well done, FCC and Heritage Council of WA. But the capstan has no interpretation to say what it is, what it did and when. Not so well done, FCC and Heritage Council!



### **POLITICAL LEADERS AND THEIR VISIONARY BUILDERS: RECIPE FOR GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS AND DARK REACTION**

Jeremy Dawkins, Chair of the West Australian Planning Commission and great grandson of CY O'Connor will present this year's CY O'Connor Annual Address.

The event is held on or about the date of O'Connor's death (10 March) and is an opportunity to celebrate not only O'Connor's work, but also the characteristics which underpinned his life – innovation, sustainability, efficiency in design and work practice, worker's rights and professional and personal integrity.

Jeremy's presentation will focus on the challenges that face people who dare to make a difference.

*Australia's egalitarian and open society has seen some brilliant partnerships between political leaders and great engineers, planners and architects, attacked by whiteants in the government and ratbags in the media. Such partnerships, able to withstand the assault, have never been more needed.*

This year's lecture will be held in conjunction with the WA Maritime Museum's Batavia Lecture series. It will be held at the Maritime Museum's theatre (Victoria Quay) on Friday 10 March starting at 6.00 pm.

The lecture will cost \$10 per person, which includes refreshments after the lecture. Please pay at the door but **BOOKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL AS SEATS ARE STRICTLY LIMITED.**

To reserve your place phone 9431 8455 or email [elaine.berry@museum.wa.gov.au](mailto:elaine.berry@museum.wa.gov.au)

#### **FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Tuesday 28 February**, Wander Around the Water Front – a look into the WA Maritime Museum activities in A Shed. Meet on the **southern side of A Shed at the metal stairs at 6.00 pm.**

**Tuesday 28 March**, Shipwrecked or not? A new role for the old maritime museum. **Shipwreck Gallery, Cliff St. 6.00 pm.**

**Tuesday 18 April**, BOB or Inspirational leader? Have your say on the new statue of John Curtin. Meet at the **statue in King's Square at 6.00 pm.** The meeting will then adjourn to the old council chambers.