



## FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305  
FREMANTLE WA 6959

**Winter Edition, 2010**

Editors: Dianne Davidson, Anne Brake

**Patron: Dr Brad Pettitt,  
Mayor of Fremantle**



**Members of the team that brought volume 6 of Fremantle Studies to life  
Wendy Antonovsky, Ron Davidson, Cathy Hall, Mike Lefroy, Anne Brake, Ari Antonovsky, Diane Davidson, Bob Reece,  
Peter Conole and Pam Hartree (Photo - Jon Strachan)**

### **A PROUD TRADITION**

The sixth volume of *Fremantle Studies*, the journal of the Fremantle History Society, was launched by John Dowson during Fremantle Studies Day on 31 October. The journal comprised eight papers from the 2007 and 2008 studies days. There was an interesting collection of papers ranging from Bob Reece's *Fremantle's First Voice (1867-1896)* on the early days of the Fremantle Herald, to Stephen Culley's *Six years without a suicide: art in the prison*. Stephen told an enthralled Studies Day audience of the impact of his arrival to teach art at Fremantle Prison. The prison guards took an immediate dislike to the new young art teacher but he managed to survive because of the influence of his father, the city pie shop owner... This was a particularly popular paper and the audience demanded more. Other papers include Mike

Lefroy's account of the characters on both sides of his family who made the long voyage from England and Ireland to make a new life in Western Australia. They often made *Hard Landings*.

As well as the wonderful authors, there is a team of hard working people that bring the volume to print. Firstly, a very heartfelt thank you to Andrew Smith, owner of the *Fremantle Herald*, whose generous sponsorship allowed for the printing of the papers. A dedicated editorial team comprising Kris Bizzaca, Pam Hartree, Dianne Davidson and Anne Brake, worked on the manuscripts to ensure consistency and clarity of the material. Bob Woollett once again undertook the indexing of the journal and Cathy Hall methodically typed it up. With incredible patience, Ian Chambers laid out the journal for us. Thank you to all those who contributed to its success.

Volume six of Fremantle Studies represents a considerable and continuing achievement by the society in turning out such a large amount of academic quality, Fremantle-based material. You can get copies of Fremantle Studies from Pam Hartree at the Local History Collection at the City of Fremantle Library, at Society meetings or by completing the attached order form.



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Executive:

|                                   |              |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Anne Brake (President)            | 9336 5206    |
| Prof Bob Reece (Vice – President) | 9335 7892    |
| Pam Hartree (Treasurer)           | 9432 9739(W) |
| Dianne Davidson (Secretary)       | 9430 6096    |

### Committee Members:

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Bob Woollett    | 9335 7451    |
| Fay Campbell    | 9341 4102    |
| Jenny Patterson | 9438 3711    |
| Cathy Hall      | 0407 086 300 |
| Peter Conole    | 9319 2191    |
| Ron Davidson    | 9430 6096    |



## MEETING REPORTS

### THE IRON POT

Members and their friends enjoyed a very convivial 'pub lunch' at the Iron Pot restaurant adjacent to the old Newmarket Hotel, which after many years of neglect, is being turned into apartments.

Due to the nature of the restaurant, it wasn't possible to have a speaker as we normally do, but everyone had plenty of opportunity to catch up with old friends and make some new ones.

The committee is considering having our pub lunch next year at the recently refurbished Quokka Arms on Rottne Island. Your thoughts on this would be welcome as we begin to plan next year's meeting program.

### FREMANTLE GUIDES

At our September meeting, Beth Bax gave us an overview of the work and incredible commitment of the Fremantle Volunteer Guides who open and staff the Round House and Whalers Tunnel as well as operate the now controversial, 1 o'clock gun, every day of the year except Christmas and Good Friday. The group arose from the original *Endeavour* Guides. Many of those who were involved with the *Endeavour* project were keen to continue their links with Fremantle's maritime past and it seemed a natural fit for them to move into the work of the Volunteer Guides.

For the first two years the group operated under the auspices of the Fremantle Tourism Association but changing circumstances of the Association saw the guides become an independent incorporated body. Currently there are about 40 members but more are always needed. Of the 40 only ten have a licence to fire the 1 o'clock canon. This daily ceremony

simulates the firing of a canon in colonial times to mark 1 o'clock. A signal was sent down from the observatory in West Perth to allow for the accurate setting of time pieces not just for the good folk of Fremantle, but also for the ship's whose chronometers were set accordingly. A ball was dropped also from the top of the tower on the residence of the colonial astronomer, which was adjacent to the observatory, at the same time. This allowed the people of Perth to set their watches as well. This 'service' ceased in 1938.

The Fremantle Volunteer Guides operate the Arthur Head precinct under a license from the City of Fremantle. They use donations from visitors to run their operation including expenses such as uniforms and insurance. The canon they use is on long-term loan from the Fremantle Dockers which also assist in funding the charges that are used daily. It is these charges that have got the Guides hot under the collar of late. Over zealous complaints of a local worker regarding noise prompted the City to take, what some considered, extreme actions. It seems that a decision to reduce the size of the charge and therefore the amount of noise it makes has been the final outcome of a reasonably public debate over the subject.

Other buildings in the precinct were built for the early pilots and Fremantle Ports pilots still operate out of one of the houses. The land is now vested in the City of Fremantle. Artists, the guides and private rentals now occupy the cottages.

## STUDIES DAY 2010

An audience of more than sixty arrived at the Fremantle City Council Committee rooms on 31 October for Fremantle Studies Day, our signature event. There were four papers delivered during the afternoon.

In her paper Notre Dame University Ph.D. student, Madison Lloyd-Jones, explored the experience of Fremantle women remaining

on the home front in the Second World War and how they responded to wartime conditions like blackouts and strict rationing, and to their changing roles within the workplace. They took on tasks that were previously reserved for men.

Madison also discussed the impact of accommodating more than 2000 American servicemen and nurses. Having examined local and state newspapers, magazines, and oral histories, Madison considered the social whirlpool created by the presence of the American servicemen and discussed the long and short term implications of the American presence in the Port, including the loss of 400 war brides.

Steve Errington was head of chemistry at Curtin University of Technology until he retired to concentrate on the study of football in colonial times. His paper ranged over a number of periods as football came to mean soccer, rugby, and the Victorian game - and back again. The game was influenced by star players attracted by the gold rushes, gambling, corruption and the use of intriguingly large footballs. Steve told how games at Fremantle Park in the 1890s could easily end in a riot.



**Expensive Victorian import, Tom O'Dea, kicks his first goal for Fremantle in 1896. This is thought to be the oldest action shot of WA competitive football (courtesy Ron Davidson)**

Dr Martin Drum, also from Notre Dame University, presented a paper looking at the

nature of the state and federal seats of Fremantle, with a discussion about their changing dynamics. Given that Fremantle is such a unique community, he said we need to consider the types of people who live here and how they differ from residents of times past. We can then imagine what public life in Fremantle will be like in the future.

Now retired, Charlie Dorsch spent most of his professional life and continues to explore evidence of the lives of Noongar people in the greater Perth area. Like most archaeologists, Charlie is fascinated by the material evidence of past lives, or in this case, a lack of it. Analysis of this material against other fields of study, such as geology and archival endeavour, helps to build a picture of a world pre and post the arrival of European settlers in the Swan Valley and the daily lives and beliefs of the Aboriginal people who live here and their ancestors.



Steve Errington, Charlie Dortch, Martin Drum, and Madison Lloyd Jones with President, Anne Brake, at the 2010 Fremantle Studies Day (Photo - Jon Strachan)

### **Christmas festivities**

The Fremantle History Society's Christmas dinner was a big hit. During the afternoon the omens were not good: it had been hot and unpleasant. However when we arrived a gentle breeze drifted through Nunzio's Villa Roma alfresco courtyard as he and his staff hurried about delivering plates of antipasto and small, deep-fried local whiting. They were delicious. Then Bob Reece delivered a wry talk on Christmas in Fremantle which had the diners shouting for more. The

evening closed with our president Anne Brake wishing us a Happy Christmas and thanking Nunzio for use of his magical courtyard. In a fitting finale, Fay Campbell brought out her wonderful Christmas cake to go with the coffee. Dinners don't come any better than this.



### **NAMES – MOSTLY FREMANTLE Rusty Christensen**

It is said that the most important word in a person's language is their first name. The other adage is: there is no such thing as bad advertising, providing they spell your name correctly.

Names have played a big part in my life. At birth I automatically inherited my father's surname of Christensen, which is of Danish origin. About the time of my christening, an Irish patriot named Kevin was assassinated on his way to church. My mother being very strong with her faith gave me his Christian name for my first name. For good measure as families often did I was given my paternal grandfather's name of Johannis, so I became Kevin Johannis Christensen and as I was the youngest of four my family called me Kevin John until I went to the East Fremantle (Plympton) primary school where I first encountered nicknames.

It was the middle of the 1930s when nicknames were the norm, most blokes had at least one, usually a shortening of their surname. In our small group a bloke named Nichol became 'Nixie', Williams became 'Willie', Brown was 'Brownie', Templeton was 'Temps' or 'Tempy' or because the poor boy had a speech impediment, he got 'Stuts'. Having spent a forgettable first year at the Christian Brothers where you were invariably addressed by your surname I was amazed at the variety of names. Some of the lads in my class had names like 'Possum' Watts, 'Skinny' Hopkinson, 'Nuts' Peacock (and he was nuts). A bloke with a

Scandinavian name which sounded like Kelly was 'Ned'.

I have been asked how I got the name 'Rusty', which over the years has become my recognized name. When I was born (at home) I weighed in at 14lbs, which is about 6.5kg, a pretty big lump of a baby. Having a head start in the weight for age stakes and having a mother who believed in feeding the family plenty good wholesome tucker, by the time I arrived at the East Fremantle primary school I was what would be classified as 'overweight' so I was dubbed 'Fat' which I wore for some time. My nearest sibling Doreen, who was six years older with a very direct manner, didn't like my new name. I well recall when a couple of mates called at the back door and asked in a manner which didn't appeal to Doreen 'Is Fat 'ome?' to which she replied in a stern tone 'Fat doesn't live here.' 'Well, what can we call him?' (everybody had to have a nickname). 'Call him Rusty' she quickly replied which was a reference to my goldy coloured hair, and Rusty it has been since.

My father worked on the Fremantle wharf through good times and bad – when I was a lad in the Depression days it was mostly bad – for over 50 years when the cargo was loaded or unloaded manually. You were either 'necking' or 'skull dragging' (terms for carrying) bagged wheat or bales of wool, plus other general cargo; it was hard work in anyone's language. It was a Union port and at its peak employed over 3000 men including the 'Seagulls'. A Seagull was a casual lumper; the term 'wharfie' was not used until after World War II. Some of the Seagulls were 'scabs', remnants from the big strike in 1919 and tolerated by the lumpers. They were called Seagulls because they only got the jobs that were left over or jobs the lumpers wouldn't do.

There was another tier of labour on the wharf, the Painters and Dockers. They were organised by Paddy Troy, a well known Communist, organiser of labour, an articulate advocate and a good bloke.

Unfortunately the Communist tag was, and still is in most areas, the kiss of death. This group's main work was scraping and painting vessels which had been pulled up onto the slip for maintenance, plus other menial and dirty tasks on the waterfront; they were referred to as 'shit hawks'. Paddy eventually amalgamated the Painters and Dockers with all the disparate groups of casual workers on and around the wharf and expanded his influence to other non-union groups until he organised the Miscellaneous Workers' Union which as the name implies brought them together under one banner. This union survives and thrives to this day thanks to a man of principle and a champion of the workers.

One time I was between jobs and did a few shifts as a 'sugar bag carpenter', so named because they carried what tools they needed in a jute sugar bag slung over their shoulder, leaving both hands free to climb down an back up the vertical ladders going down into the ship's hold. They needed few tools as the work was basic, shoring up cargo which may shift when the ship was in rough seas.

I had been allocated two of the Painters and Dockers as labourers, one bloke named Roger always wore shorts despite the fact that he had bad varicose veins in both legs. He considered himself a ladies man and something of a ballroom dancer. I had seen him around the town. The other bloke was called 'the Galley Pig' as one of his activities was going through the waste food bins to salvage edible (to him) food which the cook had thrown out. A lot of good food was thrown out, so I think the Galley Pig lived pretty well out of the bin. Roger pointed out another fellow whom they called 'Snapper Head' or the 'King of Siam' because of the unusual shape of his head and facial features. When you looked at him you could see what they were getting at. That was my first encounter with nicknames from the wharf; the rest I heard from my father or from knocking around Fremantle where they abounded. **(to be continued)**



## EATING AND DRINKING IN EARLY SWAN RIVER COLONY (cont'd)

Bob Reece

By late 1831, the inns in Fremantle were offering first-class fare for those who visitors could afford it. Lieut. General Joseph Hanson, Quartermaster General at Madras, took up residence at the 'Stirling Arms', which he described as 'no contemptible inn'. His first dinner

consisted of a leg of prime boiled Mutton, another of corned Pork, a barn door Fowl, and a splendid dish of Fish, which with Potatoes, Turnips and other vegetables, was you will say a very palpable proof that the Colony was in anything but a starving condition.

A few nights later, he sat down to dinner with the Stirlings at the Perth home of Surveyor-General, J.S. Roe, and enjoyed 'as good a repast as I could have had in India'. Alas, he did not record the details for us.

Less well-to-do but still comfortably off settlers such as James Purkis and his family of High St., Perth, enjoyed a diet that featured vegetables and local game to supplement imported salted meat. In June 1832 he wrote:

We live chiefly on salt pork (Irish) and vegetables; very few sheep are killed, as live stock is very valuable for breeding; we do not taste beef or mutton once in three months; kangaroo, cockatoos, wild ducks, turkeys, and swans, with abundance of fish in due season, suffice ...

Nor were enterprising and resourceful artisans, such as the brick-maker, Thomas Bayley, at all badly off:

Our houses are built with Mahogany and bricks and teached with rushes – we have no rent to pay, no wood to buy, we just go out of doors, and cut it down - we are not afraid of our

Stacks wasteing, we have plenty of Ducks on the river, and Swans, hundreds of Cockatoos, butiful eating, plenty of Pigeons, quails – sugar 4d pound, the same as you give eightpence for, very best tea is 3s 6d a lb. English ale and porter is 1s a quart.

And at 'Millendon' at Upper Swan in June 1833, settler and Advocate-General George Fletcher Moore described to his family back in Ireland how he provided for the three indentured servants that he had brought with him:

At early morning they get a breakfast of bread & tea, with sugar & milk, in unlimited quantity. At midday, they get bread & meat with flour pudding or dough boy and as long as we have them, potatoes or other vegetables, all without limit or stint. At evening they get bread & tea as I do myself, never limit or stint in any meal. They get now 2 glasses of wine & one of rum in the day.

Moore, incidentally, was highly critical of Stirling's 1830 proclamation that indentured servants (both women and men, incidentally) should be given a stipulated daily ration of alcohol, something to which he attributed the fact that his younger servant, Johnny, was 'fonder of his grog than any one of his age ought to be'.

I want to stay with Moore because his journals are not only the most detailed that we have for Swan River Colony's first decade (he took up his land grant in late 1830), but reveal him both as a farmer anxious to raise stock and grow food crops and as a gourmand who loved nothing more than a hearty dinner, particularly if it was his own produce. The accounts he provided of various meals are the best continuous source we have for the diet of more well-to-do settlers during this period, not just for Swan River Colony but for the eastern colonies as well. One reason for the detail was to persuade other members of his family to join him by whetting their appetites, as it were. The other reason, as I have already suggested, is that he took great interest in food and drink. As a bachelor, it

was the one sensual pleasure that he seems to have allowed himself.



## WORKING WITH CITY

The committee has decided to become a little more proactive in broader history issues and have consequently contacted the Mayor, our patron, to instigate a meeting to discuss a range of issues. It is hoped that this will become a regular event – possibly 3 or 4 times a year. In this way, we can keep him aware of our activities, raise and discuss issues of concern and assist him in areas of our expertise.

Issues up for discussion in our first meeting will include the future of Cantonment Hill, the loss of the Fremantle History Museum, urgent conservation works at Arthur Head, community representation on the Fremantle Prison Advisory Committee (formerly the Fremantle Prison Trust) and supporting the retention of the Fremantle Heritage Festival as a stand alone event rather than it being melded with the Fremantle Festival, which has been mooted.



## LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION NEWS Pam Hartree

Visitors to the collection have been many and varied over the last couple of months with customer requests for information relating to family history and the general history of Fremantle. The use of the Ancestry.com database has been steadily increasing due to the ever-growing popularity of family history research in the community. The database is continually updated and provides a valuable service to library clients. Please feel free to use the database if you are researching your family history, a call beforehand to book is wise, you can reach the Local History Collection on 9432 9739

Digitisation of the collection continues and a further 42 hours of oral histories have been converted to digital format. Interest in the oral histories from family members has been increasing and many queries have been received from relatives from interstate and overseas.

The collection received funds in the budget to purchase an additional plan filing cabinet. This will enable the safe storage of the many plans which are associated with buildings currently on the City's heritage list. In conjunction with this project there has been a consolidation and notation of the large print photograph collection to improve access to these photographs.

We are constantly striving to make the collection easier to access both for staff and researchers and the re-organisation and digitisation of the collection is starting to reap benefits and set a new direction the future of the collection.

Titles added to the collection include:

*The clubs* / David Dare Parker and Ron Davidson, 2010, LH 367 PAR

*The Dalmatian connection* / Norma King. 2010, LH B/KAZ

*Fremantle Prison conservation management plan : revised February 2010* / Palassis Architects, LH 725.6 PAL

*A local institution: the Royal George Hotel, East Fremantle* / Dianne Davidson, 1993 LH 647.94 DAV

*Mr. Barrington Clarke Wood : first mayor of Fremantle 1883-1885* / Kay Howard, 1958 LH B/WOO

Report on the City of Fremantle cruise ship visit survey - March 2010/ Asset Research LH 387.2 ASS

Can you Help?

Below are two photographs of two houses we are trying to locate in Fremantle, please let us know if you can offer any suggestions. Just call Pam or Kristi on 9432 9739.



## MORE THAN A STOCKING FILLER

Immediate past president of the Fremantle History Society and long time committee member and secretary, Dianne and Ron Davidson, have not been sitting on their hands. Despite a couple of years plagued by health issues, the duo has produced a very lively and engaging history of the port city's heritage activist group – the Fremantle Society.

*Fighting for Fremantle* was launched by Premier Colin Barnett at a packed Victoria Hall on Friday 19 November; the venue being the society's first victory over the demolition ball.

The two authors have quite different styles which complement each other brilliantly as

the story is told with accuracy and attention to detail as well as with warmth, humour and candour – necessary for this intriguing tale.

The Fremantle Society was established, along with other similar groups in other cities across Australia, in the 1970s when a ground swell of community activism rose against the machines of progress by demolition. Importantly, groups like this looked not just at individual buildings but worked to recognise and save the essence of the communities – what many refer to as the sense of place.

This is the first serious history undertaken of these community groups and it adds much not only to our understanding of the more recent past of Fremantle but its continuing place in Australia's history and heritage.

Copies are available from a range of bookshops including New Edition and Dymocks or complete the attached order form.



## FESTIVE GREETINGS

The committee of the Fremantle History Society would like to wish all of its members, friends and supporters a very happy and safe festive season. We hope there is the chance for review and renewal as you look back over the year that was and consider the one ahead. We look forward to seeing you at one of our many activities in 2011.

Please let us know what's on your mind: ideas for meetings; send in contributions to the newsletter including letters and articles. All of these and more always welcome.

And don't forget to stock up on your holiday reading or as presents for friends – *Fremantle Studies vol 6* and *Fighting for Fremantle*.

