



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305
FREMANTLE WA 6959

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Editors: Ron Davidson, Anne Brake, Dianne Davidson



The balcony of the Town Hall, seen in this image from 1905, was removed in the late, 1920s. There are calls for its reinstatement as part of the current conservation work (Fremantle History Centre, 826)

TOWN HALL CONSERVATION WORKS

Alan Kelsall, City of Fremantle Heritage Co-ordinator

The Fremantle Town Hall External Conservation Works is a major project to restore and conserve the exterior of our famous 130 year old town hall building. Works will include the replacement of the roof cladding and the conservation of exterior facades and the clock tower. This is a once-in-a-generation project to ensure the heritage-listed town hall will be able to be enjoyed by people for the next century and beyond.

When this work is completed the building will look much as it did when first constructed in 1887. The town hall, including the swans on the clock tower and other decorative features, will have been returned to their original unpainted state – a warm grey coloured stucco much like this photograph from the 1960s when the building was still unpainted.

However, the paint is not just being removed for aesthetic reasons and historical accuracy, it is also being removed because it will improve the condition of the masonry and protect the building and its special decorative features by allowing it to 'breathe'.

Traditionally constructed buildings like the Fremantle Town Hall have solid walls without cavities and damp proof courses to manage moisture penetration and they 'breathe' through the wall surface as a way of getting rid of damaging moisture and salts. Painting these walls is like wrapping it in plastic wrap – it traps the moisture and salt in the walls and causes the soft bricks and limestone to soften and embedded structural timbers to rot and metal to rust. Unfortunately this was not known when the building was first painted but since then a lot has been learnt about how best to care for heritage buildings and now we try and reverse this damaging work wherever possible.

Removing the many layers of paint that had accumulated on the building since it was first painted in the 1960s was difficult and slow as different types of paint required different removal methods. Many samples were prepared to trial the best way to remove the layers without damaging the wall surface. A sample of one of the techniques is shown in this photograph – here the contractor used a combination of a poultice to soften the paint as well as low pressure steam cleaning. The dark grey staining is residual pollution from the black smoke belched out by coal-fired trains and ship engines during the busy Victorian era port.



Now the paint has been removed work has started on repairing damaged render, removing rusting iron, stitching structural cracking and rebuilding missing and damaged decorative elements. Carefully colour matched hydraulic lime render is being used for these repairs.

As well as the paint work, the entire roof is being re-clad and the drainage system upgraded to address long term problems with under-capacity gutters and leaks. The City is taking this opportunity to reinstate the original features and finishes.

A special feature of the original design was its spectacular roof of slate clad turrets and mansard roofs crowned with decorative cast iron finials. In the 1950s and 60s, all the slates were gradually replaced with glazed terracotta tiles except for those on the inaccessible spire of the tower. By 2016 the terracotta roofs were in extremely poor condition, the tiles and their fixing had deteriorated and the roofs leaked badly because the larger shape of the tiles did not suit the intricate geometry of the roofs.

The slate roofs and decorative cast iron finials and balustrades are currently being reinstated by a team of specialised roofers. New stone slates for the roofs have been imported from Wales where the original slates came from in 1887. The new slate has been colour matched to remnant slates found in the roof space and will be laid by a specialist slate roofer using traditional construction techniques. Flat sections of the mansard roof and tower spire have been

clad with rolled seam lead sheeting. The cast iron elements have been recreated using historic photographs from the Fremantle History Centre and contemporaneous cast iron catalogues from eastern Australia.

The lower pitched roofs that are concealed behind the façade parapets are being clad with corrugated galvanised steel sheeting to match the original design.

From the Editors:

While the careful restoration is to be applauded it is surprising that no one promoted the idea of reinstating the ceremonial balcony presented in so many photos. After all Fremantle architect Ralph Hoare drew up plans for the reinstatement in ??? He was paid \$10,000 for the task. Is it too late to put the plans into operation? It would be an opportunity to remove the tragic Curtin statue which currently blocks the balcony site making it impossible to reinstate it. Might this be a project for the Fremantle History Society?



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Executive:

Prof Bob Reece (President)	9335 7892
Steve Errington (Vice President)	9367 5504
Pam Harris (Treasurer)	9432 9739(W)
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Committee Members:

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Jennifer Dudley	
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Ordinary meetings are generally held on the 4th Tuesday (or Sunday) of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter and reminders are often placed in the local press.

Be sure to check details as meeting dates may differ from this.

We are always looking for ideas for meetings and encourage you to contact committee members with suggestions for places to visit or topics to learn about.

It is with some sadness we farewell Peter Conole from the History Society Committee. Peter has been a stalwart on the Committee for a number of years and has made a number of contributions, particularly to the newsletter. While he may not be able to attend our committee meetings, we hope he will continue to enjoy our general meetings and still contribute to the newsletter following his many research passions.

Thank you Peter. We will miss you.



COMING EVENTS

CONSERVING THE PRISON

It's not just the Town Hall that is having some important conservation works carried out.

At our February meeting, Luke Donegan, Heritage Conservation Manager at Fremantle Prison will give History Society members and their guests an insight into the difficult business of prioritising the sites conservation projects to ensure the most significant and at risk buildings in this World Heritage listed site receive conservation treatment. In 2016 and 2017 the focus has been on conserving the site's exercise yard shelters, the East Workshops roofs and walls including the original Blacksmiths and Carpenters buildings, as well as the Entry Complex buildings.

Join Luke on this fascinating tour on **Tuesday 28 February**, starting at **5PM**. Meet at the **Gatehouse, Fremantle Prison**, The Terrace, Fremantle.

TOWN HALL'S FACELIFT

Join City of Fremantle Heritage Officer Gena Binet for a talk and tour of the conservation works you have been reading about in our lead story. Some of the principles you heard about at the Prison during February's meeting will be reinforced on a completely different building with quite different problems and potential solutions. Both are of high significance to Fremantle and show the great diversity which heritage managers encounter in their attempts to conserve these important places.

Meet under the **Town Hall clock** on **Tuesday 28 March at 5pm**. The tour will be followed by our usual delicious refreshments.

NOONGAR CAMPS IN AND AROUND FREMANTLE

Until the 1950s, and often later, many Noongar people lived in camps throughout the Perth metropolitan area. Camps were on the fringes of suburbs, often close to earlier, traditional campsites. These camps are an important aspect of the shared history of our suburbs, but are relatively unknown in the wider community.

Our April meeting will explore the history of camps around Fremantle, particularly the stories of people in the camps. The focus will be the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, a time within living memory and a time when many Noongar people lived in camps. In particular, Dr Denise Cook will discuss camps around the East Fremantle football oval, south of South Beach and behind the Fremantle Cemetery. In addition, Denise will discuss the importance of following Aboriginal cultural protocols, when undertaking research such as this.

Denise's fascinating talk is part of the Australian Heritage Festival as well as being a Fremantle History Society event. It will be held in the **City of Fremantle Reception Rooms** (entry via Kings Square stairs) on **Tuesday 18 April** (note this is the 3rd

Tuesday of the month as the 4th Tuesday is ANZAC Day) at **6pm**.



FREMANTLE HISTORY CENTRE

This edition's contribution from the Fremantle History Centre illustrates what an amazing resource the History Centre is. This wonderful list of amazing and interesting things that have happened in Fremantle in February over the past 60 odd years was compiled by Sabrina Bednarski.

On this day in February in Fremantle 1 February 1987

On this day, HRH Princess Anne visited Fremantle.



Fremantle History Centre E000003-01

2 February 1867

On this day, *The Herald*, Fremantle's first real local newspaper, launched. The head office was located on Cliff Street; it was published by James Pearce, William Beresford and James Roe – all ex-convicts. You can access this newspaper on microfilm at the Fremantle History Centre.

3 February 1900

On this day, the 2nd West Australian Contingent departed for the Boer War over the temporary bridge at North Fremantle. They sailed on the ship *Surrey*. There were 6 officers, 97 men, 125 horses, one spring cart, and one wagon.

4 February 1987

On this day, the Beaconsfield International Child Care Centre officially opened at 11 Doig Place, Beaconsfield. It catered for Fremantle families of non-English speaking backgrounds and continues to operate to this day.

6 February 1904

On this day, there was a fire in the empty lot of land next to the Port Brewery on Beach Street. The Fremantle Fire Brigade was called at 1:30pm



Fremantle History Centre LH000692

8 February 1913

On this day, the Maitland Brown Memorial (Explorer's Monument) sculpted by Pietro Porcelli, was unveiled at Fremantle Esplanade.

9 February 1933

On this day, the Fremantle Mercury newspaper ran its final edition after being in print for just under two years. The whole newspaper can be read via Trove: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-title1196>

10 February 1980

On this day, a plaque was laid at Mrs Trivett Place to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the First Methodist Service in Western Australia.

11 February 1861

On this day the convict ship *Palmerston* arrived at Fremantle. It carried 293 convicts on board and 106 passengers. Read more about the convict ships that came to

Fremantle in Charles Bateson's *The Convict Ships 1787 – 1868*.

14 February 1955

On this day, A.R.V. MacKay, Fremantle Town Clerk, wrote to inform Mrs F.C. Anderson, Librarian, that the Fremantle Free Lending Library had changed its name to the City of Fremantle Public Library.

15 February 1977

On this day Bon Scott gave his last official performance in Western Australia, at the Perth Entertainment Centre.

16 February 1895

On this day, the Orient mail steamer *Orizaba* was wrecked on a reef on the western side of Garden Island.

17 February 1875

On this day, the Fremantle Benefit Building and Investment Society was founded.

20 February 1865

On this day, Daniel Scott died. He was Fremantle's first harbour-master from 1829 to 1851. The lot where his first warehouse stood is now the location of the Esplanade Hotel. In 2012, a luncheon was held in his honour at the Esplanade Hotel.

21 February 1857

On this day, the river steamer *Lady Stirling* was launched. It had been imported from England in pieces and was reassembled here in Fremantle. For the next twenty years the *Lady Stirling* carried passengers and cargo back and forth between Perth and Fremantle.

23 February 1899

On this day, George Newman, licensee of the Plympton Hotel, faced the Fremantle Police Court. He was charged with selling watered down liquor. Newman paid the minimum penalty for his offence. The Plympton Hotel is now known as the Tradewinds Hotel.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article67042184>

24 February 1898

On this day Guthrie and Co shipped 200 tons of sandalwood from Fremantle/Geraldton to Singapore on the S.S. Australind. Sandalwood was one of the state's most profitable exports during the mid to late 1800's.



Fremantle History Centre E00055-10

25 February 1890

On this day, Alfred Locke forwarded a petition, on behalf of the parents of Beaconsfield, to the Western Australian government requesting that Beaconsfield Primary School be made a government school.

26 February 1851

On this day, John Bateman acquired Fremantle Town Lot 192 on Norfolk Street.

27 February 1915

On this day, Napoleon the elephant and his chimpanzee friend Little Hip performed at the Princess Theatre in Fremantle. This advertisement was taken from the *Fremantle Herald* <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page23166254>

28 February 1870

On this day, G.A. Forsyth painted a miniature of the Harbor Master's House and Court House in Fremantle WA.



UNDER-FLOOR ARCHAEOLOGY REVEALS HIDDEN STORIES

Leanne Brass

Fremantle's Artillery Drill Hall has recently been revealing some of its archaeological

secrets. The National Trust of Western Australia is working with archaeologists Dr Sean Winter and B'geella Romano to excavate the under floor deposits of this significant building as part of current redevelopment plans on site. The archaeologists are working in dusty and cramped conditions but have a unique opportunity to explore these deposits owing to the floorboards being raised while underpinning and re-stumping assessments are carried out.

The archaeological deposits under the floor span the history of the site – from its use as a convict garden from 1857, through to the construction of the Artillery Drill Hall in 1895 and its more recent use as the iconic *Fly By Night* music venue. Each of these historical eras is represented by the artefacts recovered from under the floors so far.



Archaeologists Sean Winter and B'geella Romano at work at the Artillery Drill Hall (Gina Pickering, NTWA)

Sharpened xanthorrhoea stalks (likely to be historic garden stakes), fragments of ceramics and broken clay pipes attest to the history of the site as a working garden, established as part of the original 1857 convict grant, that provided food for the fledgling community.

A fragile shuttlecock, made of bird feathers and cork, preserved in the bone-dry under floor deposits is a link to the Artillery Drill Hall era. Badminton was introduced in 1900 to the officers of the Fremantle No 2 Battery Field Artillery after a fellow officer had

encountered the sport in Aldershot, UK during a holiday.



The fragile shuttlecock found under the floor at the Artillery Drill Hall (Gina Pickering, NTWA)

The Artillery Drill Hall is in fact the first place in Australia where badminton was played.

Guitar picks, drum sticks, ticket stubs and innumerable cigarette packets provide a tangible link to the recent social history of the Drill Hall as a music and entertainment venue, the first venue in Australia in fact that was designated 'smoke free.'

The National Trust of Western Australia hopes to continue archaeological research into this highly significant underfloor archaeological assemblage, to further investigate the convict garden era by analysing charcoal, seeds and pollen, as well as documenting the social history of the site that is represented in the many artefacts that have found their way under the floorboards.



The Decommissioned Prison as Historical Site and Cultural Repository; Heritage of a Different Kind. Part 2.

Jennifer Dudley

In our last edition, Jennifer Dudley wrote in detail about two visits to the Fremantle Prison where she joined a tour of the collection facilities at the Prison by Curator, Olimpia Cullity and an exhibition of photographs "A Quiet Conviction: Brett Leigh Dicks prison photography project". In

the last edition she spoke of the fascinating insights provided in their exploration of the Prison's collection. In this edition she takes us back to the Prison and continues to explore this fascinating site and the impact of these 2 events.

Back at the entry door in the small foyer where the exhibition "A quiet conviction: Brett Leigh Dicks prison photography project" began, our group was joined by the photographer himself.

Olimpia and Brett briefly discussed the reasons behind their respective curatorial and artistic choices for the photographs selected for exhibition. The scope of Brett's body of black and white work documenting decommissioned and sometimes simply vacated prisons, gaols and penitentiaries collected over many years is impressive and what we were about to see merely a small fraction of this.

Brett spoke of his fascination with these structures as places worth special photographic consideration for their bareness, their silences, their metaphoric potential and the dramatic atmospheres condensed within; a passion fuelled long ago by Fremantle's historic Prison which he had photographed extensively as an artist in residence and exhibited in the main exhibition space some years earlier.

Since that exhibition, Fremantle Prison has been World Heritage listed, a point of significant difference between this and the majority of prisons depicted in the exhibition. Even if these American prisons once shared locational similarities like geographical remoteness at the time they were first built, architecturally imposing castle-like tower structures either side of a central gated entrance designed to strike remorse into the hearts of prisoners entering within and a range of variants on the structural requirements associated with incarcerating large numbers of wrong doers and criminals in a confined space, none were built by the prisoners themselves as was Fremantle. All share a range of stylistic features which

have been designed, developed and embellished in different ways in countries all over the world, forming a universal architectural lexicon still employed in prison design today whilst simultaneously lodging themselves in the public imagination as iconographic signifiers for imprisonment.

Beyond design and technological application, the architectural structures, layouts, surfaces and furniture employed in these facilities convey societal attitudes to offenders at specific historic points in time, particularly those concerning changing concepts of human-ness, humanity and humane-ness, morality and the limitations of punishment. From the hangman's noose to the electric chair, to execution by lethal injection and finally the abolition of the death sentence in favour of life imprisonment, these decommissioned prisons remain conflicted sites attesting the cultural and social histories of their times. For instance, those built from the 1920's onward in the US, so tellingly and dramatically captured in Brett Leigh Dick's photographs, were paraded as "modern", but their smooth industrial surfaces, proliferating metal grills, stair treads, cage-like holding cells and shining death capsules coldly and clinically eradicated the humanising man made traces of C19th prisons, no matter how confined and dour. And these "new" prisons rapidly

became just as overcrowded as the old and ever more frequently the scene of violence, murders and bloody riots.

Most of the facilities depicted in Brett's exhibition were eventually closed when they became too small and too crowded out by their surroundings to permit further extension or too obsolete to house the numbers of prisoners assigned there. When these prisons closed and the prisoners were moved elsewhere, many of the small towns whose existence they had at first justified and which had grown to support them as a local industry, shrank and sometimes died. After decommissioning, very few of these prisons, gaols and penitentiaries found other lives because those interested in trying to preserve them as sites of alternative industries, community activities or museums attracting visitors to their towns failed to find the funds required for such projects.

Seeking out those which have somehow survived as publicly accessible sites, Brett immortalises one which closed as a prison but reopened as an adaptive re-use facility, becoming a centre for community activities and small museum starring its state of the art electrocution chamber. It was also able to

retain a small wing housing a few ageing lifers with nowhere else to go. Another in Arizona is partially decommissioned, becoming instead a strange hybrid of modernist monument preservation and



tourism. Its facade opens onto an art gallery and shop stocking Native American souvenirs while just behind lies a still functioning and recently improved high security prison for violent offenders. The notorious New Mexico State Penitentiary in Santa Fe preserves the scene of an infamous riot in 1980 in which 33 prisoners died and more than 200 inmates were injured, resulting in the prison's closure. Untouched since then, this wing has become a principal attraction and testament to the inhumane reputation of the institution at the time.

By far the most extreme solution to the predicament of vacated prisons has, contrastingly, resulted in a series of very poetic - even romantic - photographs, displayed in the open space of the Prison's exhibition entrance foyer. Here Leigh Dicks depicts a C19th. site in Pennsylvania where a long abandoned prison, Eastern States Penitentiary, survives as a Managed Ruin. Encouraged by years of neglect, the vegetation outside has burst through gaps in the flooring, snaking through windows, up walls and across cells, even forcing its way into its once upgraded facilities. Tourists seeking adventure are encouraged to visit the site as it is now, not obviously "conserved", but popular and as safe as a ruin can be made.

There is a strange set shot stillness to some of these images, especially those of the Managed Ruin, those depicting Death Row and its appurtenances, and those where the documentary device of a long centrally placed corridor leads the eye past a succession of grilled gates, punctuated by the finality of repeated metal cell doors, establishing a predictable but powerful rhythm. No one inhabits these silent photographs but they are full of drama, profound sadness and melancholy. Whether condensed within the small and stark inner exhibition space or allowed to breathe more freely in the foyer, this atmosphere is further amplified by the careful sequencing of two or three images from each site and the formal repetition of a thematic iconography in their subject matter as the photographs

bounce off each other across the room. Photographer and viewer alike experientially engage in the quiet conviction of the exhibition's title.

Only occasionally do we encounter the prisoners themselves although they are not represented personally. Rather, they, their respective fates and the marks they have made on the surfaces enclosing them live on in the spaces they once inhabited. Whether artful or clumsy, expressions of identity, loss, violence and angst characterise the remnants of art on the walls captured by Brett Leigh Dick's camera. These few photographs speak of the cultural origins and social affiliations of these now long-gone artists. Black, poor white, country, American Indian, Hispanic, ghetto dweller, gang member, misfit, loner - we can imagine them from their dining hall murals, their personal graffiti on cell walls, and torturous spiritual journeys expressed in idioms derived from tattoo art and head shop graphics.

Standing in front of the photographs portraying a particularly cold, ominously efficient and formerly state of the art Mid-West penitentiary, now a local museum, Brett recounted his own prison story in which he accidentally locked himself in a cell and was forced to spend the night testing the tourist administration's stories of ghosts roaming the corridors, floating through grilled gates and the doors of still locked rooms. After eerie footsteps above his head in the wee small hours, he was inclined to believe their existence, but failed to catch a ghost or equally improbable feral ghost buster in his camera. He was released next day after the Pen was open for business.

Imagine the surprise. No-one on the staff that day believed he had been locked in. It seems they assumed he would eventually reappear at closing time, and when he didn't, decided they must have been looking the other way when he passed by and had not seen him leave! No-one went back to check.

At the end of the tour as we stood in the foyer, I shared a similar experience with Brett and the group, recounting my own "accidentally locked in" story. Many years before the massacre at Port Arthur, I had visited this Australia's "other" iconic convict penal institution with a tourist group. Having dallied too long in the now ruined Solitary Confinement cells, absorbing their weird atmosphere on a day of sunshine and howling wind and attempting to take at least some meaningful photos, I missed my group's departure through the main gate by five minutes. Try as I might to gain their attention as they straggled up the hill to the waiting bus, it was another half an hour before the mandatory head count revealed I had been left behind and the tour leader and guide returned to unlock the door and release me. Like Brett, I could not believe that this could actually have happened without anyone else realising.

Brett's masterful and emotionally powerful black and white photographic images, his artist's experiential account of creating them, his recounted stories of the prisons themselves and our questions during his presentation had created a palpable resonant tension, heightened by their confinement within the two small Exhibition Galleries in a once formidable and remote Australian prison.

But the mutual laughter generated by our shared "locked in" stories broke this spell. Our special participatory guided tour of the exhibition was over. We emerged - or perhaps, were released - into the drizzling day with a truly memorable experience and lots to think about.

All photos by Brett Leigh Dicks
Photo 1. Fremantle yard and first wings from watchtower
Photo 2. Eastern States Penitentiary grilled corridor
Photo 3. New Mexico Penitentiary Electrocutation Chamber



Committee members are often asked how the Fremantle History Society came to have its logo similar to that of the Fremantle Society. We can recall that we decided in 1995 to run a competition of which the winner was Melinda Ricci whose entry met all the criteria even though there was a similarity to the Fremantle Society's logo. The Fremantle Society logo was based on a sketch of the Round House. The Fremantle History Society's logo is not of a particular place but is more of a symbolic reflection of heritage and history in Fremantle.

We are not sure what happened to Melinda who was about sixteen at the time of the competition. Perhaps you might like to tell the editor.



FOR YOUR DIARY

February:

Conserving the Prison. Meet at 5pm at the **Gatehouse, Fremantle Prison, the Terrace, Fremantle** on **Tuesday 28 February** for a fascinating tour of recent conservation works.

March:

Learn more about why the Town Hall has been covered in scaffolding. Meet under the **Town Hall clock** at **5pm** on **Tuesday 28 March**.



April:

Dr Denise Cook will explore a fascinating but little known area of Fremantle's history – the Noongar camps of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. City of **Fremantle Reception Rooms** (enter via the stairs of Kings Square), **Tuesday 18 April at 6pm**. Note this is the third Tuesday of the month as the fourth Tuesday is ANZAC Day).