



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305
FREMANTLE WA 6959

Autumn Edition, 2019

<https://fhs.org.au>



Tom Edwards (FCL 2697)



Bloody Sunday (FCL 2707)

Saturday 4 May 2019 marks the centenary of 'Bloody Sunday', an industrial action that took place on Fremantle Wharf in 1919. Desperate wharfies (or lumpers, as they were called) who had been locked out of their workplace, marched onto the wharf to prevent scab labour unloading the *Dimboola*, a ship that had arrived from the eastern states with influenza victims among its passengers.

In a confrontation that involved police, the premier, wharfies and their wives and children, 26 people were injured and one wharfie, Tom Edwards, afterwards died of a fractured skull. His funeral a few days later brought the state to a standstill. The unionists won their struggle to rid the wharf of scab labour and they regained preference to load and unload ships.

Tom Edwards is commemorated with a memorial fountain, now located in King Square. The fountain is undergoing refurbishment for the 100th anniversary, which will be acknowledged in this year's May Day events at Fremantle on 5 May.

In this edition of the History Society newsletter you will find a fascinating article on Tom Edwards by committee member, Heather Campbell.

Bobbie Oliver will give an illustrated lecture at the Maritime Museum on 19 May, at 2.00pm on the centenary of Edward's death and consider the labour history that emerged as allegiances were declared in the Battle of the Barricades. The lecture is free with WA Maritime Museum entry and bookings are essential by calling 1300 134 081. The lecture is part of the Fremantle and Australian Heritage Festivals.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Executive:

Allen Graham (President)	0412 933 360
Pam Harris (Secretary)	9432 9739(W)
Anne Brake (Treasurer)	0438 445 141

Committee Members:

Fay Campbell	0419 969 678
Cathy Hall	0407 086 300
Michelle McKeough	0419 043 217
Heather Campbell	0408 175 246
Judith Robison	0434 571 666
Stewart Alger	9432 9592

Ordinary meetings are generally held on the 4th Tuesday (or Sunday) of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter.

Be sure to check details as meeting days and times may vary.



MEETING REPORTS

Memorial Hill (February)

Members and friends started another year of FHS meetings at the iconic Memorial Hill. On a beautiful, if a little blustery, February evening as the sun set over our town and distant Rottneest, Carmelo Amalfi, journalist and author, provided an overview of the significance of the memorial and the preparation of the moving publication he created to celebrate the centenary of the cessation of hostilities in World War 1 in November last year.

Surprisingly, the beautiful aspect of Memorial Hill has been close to compromise on several occasions as developers have eyed off its beautiful location. A committed band of locals have fought to keep the reserve intact and free from encroachment

over the years. We thank them for their efforts.

Telling Australian Stories (March)

At our March meeting Linda Bellany, an energetic and prolific author, told us of her journey from school teacher to author inspired by a fascinating story in her husband's family that had been hidden for years. Linda believes there are many ways for people to engage with their past, reminding us that history is just that - his (or her) story. Using many of the tools of an historian she weaves stories through known historical events and places.

She is passionate about WA history and is keen to share her enthusiasm with those who like a good yarn.

Planning for the Future: Remembering the Past (April)

In a richly illustrated talk, Mayor Brad Pettit shared his vision for the future of Fremantle which he believes has history and heritage at its heart. One could not dispute Brad has big ideas for the town many of which he says are built on the rich heritage fabric, port infrastructure and streetscapes.

The devil will be in the detail however, and the strict adherence to codes and best heritage practice will have to be at the forefront of planning and delivery of these projects to ensure important tangible and intangible heritage values of our port city are not lost in the enthusiasm for progress.



COMING EVENTS

THE ESPLANADE PARK: A COMMUNITY CREATION

The Esplanade Park has been a gathering place for Fremantle's voices since its inception in 1902 and has been host to significant moments in Fremantle's history; the coming of the bubonic plague was the

impetus that led to the creation of the park; in the years following the Great War, the Esplanade became a hotbed of political activism; during the Depression era, local barbers brought their chairs down to the Esplanade and gave away free haircuts.

Later, into the modern era, from World War II to the Orange People and this month's May Day parade, the Esplanade has continued to be a site where Fremantle's major events have been witnessed, celebrated and debated.

Please join us at the **Italian Club, Saturday 25 May at 3.30pm**. There will be a cuppa on arrival and drinks at the bar after the meeting. **NOTE this is on Saturday.**

FREMANTLE BOYS SCHOOL

Built in 1854 by convicts and originally known as the Fremantle School, this heritage listed building operated for a long time as the FTI and is now home to several tenants, the major ones being DADAA and the Fremantle Foundation. With substantial funding through the City of Fremantle and Lotterywest, DADAA is leading an extensive adaptive reuse project. Come along and learn more about the history of the building and its various tenants as well as the aspirations of its current tenants to create a multi-use community facility.

Our meeting will be followed as usual by a convivial supper. All welcome.

Tuesday 25th June, 6pm. Fremantle Boy's School, 92 Adelaide St, Fremantle.

SPANISH INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC (AGM)

The Spanish flu pandemic was the most severe in recent history. It spread worldwide in 1918-19. An estimated 500 million, or one-third of the world's population, becoming infected and at least 50 million people died. It was the dispute over the unloading of the *Dimboola* believed to have passengers on board with the Spanish flu which led to the death of Tom Edwards.

Ian Darroch, who has published two books on the subject will speak about the Spanish flu in 1919, particularly concentrating on the experiences of the inpatients at Woodman Point, as part of this year's AGM.

Join us at the **North Fremantle Community Hall, Thompson Rd Nth Fremantle Tuesday 23 July at 6pm**. A hearty supper will follow the meeting.



NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to Robert Smith who joined the Society in February.



LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Stewart Alger

Down at the Fremantle History Centre we love to show off our impressive photographic collection whenever given the chance. And what better way to do that than to have a floor to ceiling reproduction of one in a vibrant new Fremantle bar and music



Fremantle Rifle Volunteers, 1886 – FCL E000896

venue pumping with locals, out-of-towners and tourists?

The History Centre was approached in March by Jo Darbyshire, on behalf of the National Trust, to take part in a project promoting Australia's rich cultural history in repurposed heritage listed buildings. Darbyshire had found a photo in our online catalogue that she wanted to use for an art installation, however needed the original to make a high resolution reproduction.

The History Centre then had the adventure of hunting down the original 1886 photograph to a relative of one the people in the photograph, a Mr Simmons, who kindly donated it to our collection in time for the launch of the new Freo.Social bar and music venue.

The Fremantle History Centre is really proud to have assisted Jo Darbyshire in this project and love the idea that customers at the Freo.Social can look at the life size photo (pictured above) and imagine how back in the late nineteenth century the same building they sit in was once similarly filled with people practising military drills or listening to a Volunteers Rifles Band in the what was then the Fremantle Artillery Drill Hall. What a wonderful way to celebrate our connection with the past.

If you have any historical enquiries about Fremantle's heritage please feel welcome to contact the Fremantle History Centre. Our email address is: LHC@fremantle.wa.gov.au or phone: 08 9432 9592.



Resignation of Bob Reece from the Committee

Allen Graham, President

It is with regret that the Committee recently received the resignation from Bob Reece,

¹ www2.mcb.wa.gov.au/NameSearch/search.php
www.mcb.wa.gov.au/our-cemeteries/fremantle-cemetery/heritage-walk-trail/5-thomas-edwards-sarah-jane-kent

² *Wise's Post Office Directory*, 1919.

our esteemed member, and immediate Past President of the Society, from his position on the Committee.

Bob has been a mainstay on the committee for a long time and his experience, knowledge and connections will be sorely missed. Nonetheless, we understand his reasons for stepping down and so we wish Bob all the best with his health and future research and writing endeavours. Bob has indicated that he will continue to make contributions to the newsletter and provide assistance with Studies Day and that help will be much appreciated.

So Bob, thanks for your service and best wishes from all your friends at the Fremantle History Society.



A HUNDRED YEARS AGO – TOM EDWARDS

Heather Campbell

Tom Edwards was born in Victoria in 1878. He worked on the mines and married Sarah Jane Phillips (known as Jane) in 1901. They moved to Western Australia in 1910¹ and by 1919 were renting a house at 14 Howard Street², raising their three daughters there. Tom worked as a lumper and would have turned up at the 'bull pen' every morning in the hope of being picked to work the long and arduous shifts to provide for his growing family. The system favoured the young and strong but older men still had families to feed and no work meant no money³. This must have been a concern for Tom, a member of the Fremantle Lumpers Union (FLU), who was 41 years old in 1919.

In 1917 Australia was embroiled in the First World War in Europe and in industrial warfare on the home front. A general strike in the East resulted in the formation of

³ Bobbie Oliver, 'Fremantle's Bloody Sunday': The finest exhibition of solidarity in Western Australian History' in *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle*, Black Swan Press, 2017, pp 35-42

national workers' unions for critical industries, one of which was the National Waterside Workers Union (NWWU). This was made up of non-union personnel, putting them very much at odds with affiliated unions such as the FLU. In Fremantle the FLU refused to load a ship bound for the Dutch East Indies with Australian flour, suspecting it travelled to Germany via the Netherlands. After a fourteen-week strike the FLU were forced to concede and accept conditions which included giving preference to the NWWU.⁴

From then on Fremantle wharf became a battlefield and police resources were severely tested in efforts to protect NWWU workers. This violence culminated in the events of Bloody Sunday on 4 May 1919, leading to the death of Tom Edwards.

The post-war influenza epidemic prompted Premier Hal Colebatch to impose a seven-day quarantine on ships and their cargo, delaying unloading. In April 1919 the coastal vessel *Dimboola* with influenza victims on board arrived. Tempers flared when the FLU refused to unload the ship or allow it to be unloaded by the NWWU⁵. After a prolonged strike the FLU sought financial support and two major demonstrations were held in which:

*The sight of hundreds of women, many of whom carried little babies, or to whose skirts clung tiny, ill-clothed children, marching at the head of a column of men numbering thousands, was distressingly impressive.*⁶

The government took over the wharf on 30 April and Premier Colebatch laid plans to barricade the *Dimboola* and to transport blackleg workers down the river on Sunday 4 May to unload the vessel. Police - kept out of sight in 'B' shed - and 50 mounted police cordoned off the wharf entrance. Learning of this move lumpers had gathered on the railway bridge as launches carrying the Premier and the strike-breakers passed beneath. 'Bars of iron, lumps of road surface and rocks' rained down on them, despite the efforts of police with drawn bayonets.⁷

The action then moved to the wharf and in the melee police 'seemed to bayonet' one of the lumpers. This sparked further violence and William Renton, the Lumpers' president, was hit on the head, subsequently being floored by a blow from a baton. His comrade, fellow unionist Tom Edwards, was hit with a baton or rifle butt when he went to Renton's aid, fracturing his skull. 'In no Tom Edward's' funeral procession (FCL 20161D)



industrial trouble before did the women folk stick to the men as did the wives, daughters

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *West Australian*, 1 May 1919, p 5 and *Daily News*, 1 May 1919, p 9

⁶ *The Fremantle Wharf Crisis of 1919*, ALP 1920, quoted in Bobbie Oliver, *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* p. 37-38.

⁷ Ibid. See also: *West Australian*, 5 May 1919, p 4,6

and sweethearts of the Fremantle lumpers⁸. Tom Edwards' wife Jane was present, remaining with him until the ambulance took him to Fremantle Hospital. The situation continued to deteriorate and the Riot Act was read⁹ before union officials regained control. This was of no help to Tom Edwards however as he died in Fremantle Hospital on 7 May; his 'solemn and impressing' funeral was held on 9 May.

An inquest found the death of Tom Edwards to be accidental¹⁰, the government would not accept blame and Fremantle Harbour Trust refused to allow a memorial in the port area. The ALP however erected a drinking fountain in Fremantle Trades Hall. It was subsequently moved to Kings Square where it still sits. The inscription reads:

'... erected to the memory of Comrade Tom Edwards, working class martyr, who sacrificed his life on the Fremantle wharf on Sunday May 4, 1919. "Great love hath no man....

To finish Jane's story. Early in 1922 Frank Rowe, secretary of the Lumpers Union handed her 'the deeds of the four roomed brick dwelling with shop attached', the result of an appeal to unionists on behalf of the Edwards family. She expressed 'deep appreciation' for what had been done.¹¹

Electoral rolls of 1936 record Jane as 'shopkeeper' at 15 Price Street, Fremantle, however in December 1936 at St John's Church, she married William Kent of Fremantle, an iron moulder.¹² They started married life in West Leederville, but by 1943 had moved back to 15-17 Price Street (which today is two small modern houses) remaining there until William's death in April 1950. Jane lived at Price Street a further

eight years before moving to 71 Tuckfield Street in the early sixties. She died in 1964, aged 80¹³ and is buried in the same plot as Tom, among graves sponsored by the Fremantle Lumpers' Union.¹⁴

The name of Tom Edwards is frequently invoked as a 'working class martyr', 'a powerful symbol for the working-class movement'¹⁵. However as 'a man who loved his home and was in his home beloved'¹⁶ we should remember that his loss was also felt on a very personal level by his wife and family, whose lives were changed forever by his death. They share his martyrdom.



Introducing Stewart Alger Local History Engagement Officer at the City of Fremantle

Stewart Alger has recently been appointed the full-time position of managing the City of Fremantle Local History Collection. He comes with a good deal of experience in this role, after working for the City of Perth History Centre for the past four years.

Prior to working with a local studies collection, Stewart was enjoying a successful career in state government, developing his IT and customer service skills within a variety of contexts, for example the Department of Education and the Department of the Attorney General.

During his employment in the DOTAG Records Department, he was given a tour of Births, Deaths and Marriages, in which he handled the beautiful hand-written leather-bound registry books and was given hands-on experience with their large-scale digitisation project. This tour, in combination

⁸ *The Fremantle Wharf Crisis of 1919*, op cit

⁹ *Daily News*, 5 May 1919, p 4

¹⁰ *Daily News*, 6 June 1919, p 4

¹¹ *Westralian Worker*, 20 January 1922, p 5

¹² *West Australian*, 4 January 1937, p 1

¹³ *West Australian Electoral rolls 1936-1964 and Wise's Post Office Directories 1936-1949*.

¹⁴ www.mcb.wa.gov.au/our-cemeteries/fremantle-cemetery/heritage-walk-trail/5-thomas-edwards-sarah-jane-kent

¹⁵ *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* op cit

¹⁶ *Westralian Worker*, 16 May 1919, p 5

with his passion for his own family history research, spurred him on to take further studies in Librarianship and Archives and to pursue a career in this field.

This new pathway was life changing for Stewart as it led to a great deal of job satisfaction. In reflecting on his career within local studies collections, Stewart stated: "I find that I enjoy all aspects of my work, whether it be an interesting enquiry from the public to stumbling across a fascinating historical item while cataloguing. I love the fact that this type of work allows me to learn something new every day."

Despite his intimate knowledge and love for the City of Perth History Centre collection, being a Freo local, he was particularly excited to receive the appointment here. He looks forward to becoming very familiar with all the hidden treasures that the City of Fremantle Collection holds and being involved in exciting future projects in the pipeline promoting and preserving Fremantle's history for future generations.



Samson House – open again

Sir Freddy Samson bequeathed his home to the state on his death under the proviso his sister Rita could live there until her death. Rita moved back to Western Australia after her husband died and lived with Fred in the house taking on the various duties of Lady Mayoress after Fred's wife, Daphne, died.

The house is full to overflowing with a wide range of furniture, gifts, photos, collectables and nick knacks that Fred amassed during his life. It is a treasure trove but Fred's desire that nothing in the place should change has created its challenges for firstly the WA Museum and then later the National Trust who the property is now vested in.

A very knowledgeable and dedicated band of volunteers opened the house for the WA Museum but maintaining a regular group of volunteers to continue opening the place

was difficult for the Museum and remains so for the Trust.

Over the last few years the Trust has opened the house for special events and occasions as well as for a number of pre-booked group and education visits. This has provided some access but there is always a need for more.

Recently the Trust has begun a program to open the house one Sunday a month as well as for the various festivals and other opportunities that arise. On these Sundays the house is open for 2 booked tours. Visitors are given a guided tour of the place at set times only finishing with a viewing of around 10 minutes of highlights of Fred's home movies in the small theatre he created on his back verandah. There is also a self-guided tour of his garden for those who wish to stay on.

This approach has proved popular so far. It helps focus people on specific opening dates and times and the volunteers who assist are active and engaged with visitors during the tour – a more rewarding experience for both visitor and volunteer.

If you would like to visit Samson House, maybe a friend or relative is coming to town, you can get all the details on opening times and how to book at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/samson-house/>.

Or you might be interested in volunteering. As well as the monthly tours, there is an energetic band of garden volunteers. Call 9321 6088 for more details.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 25 May, 3.30pm. *The Esplanade Park: A community creation.* Italian Club, 65 Marine Tce, Fremantle

Tuesday 25 June, 6.00pm. *Fremantle Boy's School.* Fremantle Boy's School, 92 Adelaide St, Fremantle

Tuesday 23 July, 6.00pm. *AGM and Spanish Influenza Epidemic.* North Fremantle Community Hall, Nth Fremantle.