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# Newsletter

 Federation of  
ustralian Historical Societies Inc.

# Contents

- Editor's Introduction ..... 1
- From the President ..... 2-3
- The FAHS Survey ..... 4
- GLAM Peak Digital Access.... 5
- Canberra and District Historical Society ..... 6
- Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, NT ..... 7-8
- History Trust of South Australia ..... 9-10
- Royal Historical Society of Victoria ..... 11-12
- Royal Australian Historical Society ..... 13-14
- Royal Historical Society of Queensland ..... 15
- Royal Western Australian Historical Society ..... 16-19
- Tasmanian Historical Research Association ..... 20

# Activating Historical Collections

Historical Societies across Australia hold important parts of our history, whether this is in local memorabilia, items of national significance or through the intangible heritage of local customs and stories.

This newsletter focuses on the collections of historical societies from around Australia. As Don Garden, President of the FAHS points out these collections are important because they represent our local, grassroots and family history. They identify and recall the people who lived and worked in our villages, towns and suburbs and they describe the evolution of our communities.

Societies are becoming increasingly aware of the role they play in preserving, interpreting and making available this history for the future. At the same time public access to these collections remains low.

Not all material can be digitised and an increasing trend is targeted digitisation along with creative ways of activating collections. This newsletter outlines some old and new collection initiatives and presents examples of collections' unique power to connect, inspire and engage communities.

Dr Bernadette Flynn, Editor  
FAHS Outreach Officer

## Most historical societies in Australia have a collection



Broome Museum



Townsville Historical Society



RHSV Documents Collection Storage

**Combined, our society collections contain millions of items of moveable cultural heritage and therefore form a significant component of Australia's 'Distributed National Collection'**

## Why Historical and Heritage Society Collections Matter

Across Australia, nearly every significant suburb and town is represented by an historical society. Arguably the role and contribution of societies is more significant in non-metropolitan centres where the sense of local heritage and community is strong. When those places are also tourist centres, societies and their museums (where the latter exist) make an invaluable contribution to cultural and heritage tourism. The societies in Albany, Broome, Broken Hill, Echuca and Port Fairy spring to mind as just a tiny sample.

Of particular value for the Australian community are the historic and heritage materials that make up the collections held by our state constituents and local societies. Most societies have a collection, and these can range from just a small number of special items to broad collections numbering many thousands of items. These can include some or all of

such materials as manuscripts, images, books and archival records as well as artefacts such as furniture, machinery, household items and costumes. If they are fortunate enough to have premises, many societies will open a gallery or museum from just a few hours to several days per week.

Combined, our society collections contain millions of items of moveable cultural heritage and therefore form a significant component of Australia's so-called Distributed National Collection. That there is some uncertainty about the number of items in our collections is partly because it has not proved easy to collect data across such a diversity of organisations. However, the FAHS is currently working towards building a clearer picture of community collection by conducting a series of surveys of societies and their activities. Please help us by responding

BROOME MUSEUM: Run by volunteers of the Broome Historical Society





## From the President

to our requests for information. Our recent survey on collection management is now live at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZWLYLTN>

As well as the number of items, historical society collections particularly matter because they represent our local, grassroots and family history. They identify and recall the people who lived and worked in our villages, towns and suburbs, they describe the evolution of our communities and they exhibit the objects and structures that shaped how our predecessors lived.

Our volunteers do an enormous amount of work to collect, record, promote and disseminate this heritage material. In doing this they contribute hundreds of thousands of hours of their time to our national heritage, and many also make a significant financial contribution through covering their own travel and other costs. A rough calculation values the labour of our volunteers at well over one hundred million dollars per annum.

Society collections are used by both their volunteer members and researching visitors, contributing towards hard copy and online publications, DVDs, Web pages, Facebook pages and other types of presentation about their locality and its people. They also provide information for individuals and organisations, such as local councils, that pursue a wide range of projects that require an understanding of past developments within a community. I know of many tertiary students and postgraduates who have used society collections, which is

WOODEND RESEARCH  
ROOM: Woodend and  
District Heritage Society  
Inc.



## Volunteers do an enormous amount of work to collect, record, promote and disseminate heritage material

a reflection of the increasing recognition of the invaluable material stored within our societies.

One of the major contemporary challenges for societies is to electronically catalogue and digitise their collections. A decade ago few societies were in a position to do this because they lacked the necessary computers and the human skills to operate them and the primitive and expensive software. The scene has transformed in recent times and very many societies are becoming digitally educated, aware, skilful and accessible. The ambition of some societies is limited to digitising their collections for internal purposes, but an increasing number are presenting their catalogues and part of their collections online, or making them available for harvesting by Trove.

The software to best facilitate collection management has long created a major dilemma. There are many software programmes available, not all are fit for the varied purposes and collections of historical societies, and some are still quite expensive. However, there have been many improvements in recent years and the FAHS, in conjunction with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, has been researching the various offerings on the market and is close to making a recommendation.

So, the message to all our members and followers is that historical society collections form a major part of Australia's cultural heritage – they really do matter and they deserve recognition and support.

Associate Professor Don Garden  
President FAHS, President RSHV

Are you an historical or heritage society ?  
You are invited to participate in the Stage Two Survey to find out how Australian historical societies are managing their collections.

Got to

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZWLYLTN>

## The FAHS Survey on Collection Management is now open

The information we collect will assist the FAHS in its work of promoting society needs and interests, and of seeking recognition and support from government and the community.

**FAHS has launched the Second Survey for 2016/2017 which investigates how historical societies are managing their collections.**

In answering the questionnaire the FAHS can find out what items you have in your collection (both physical and digital) and how you are documenting, preserving and making available this material.

What's working and what's not - the survey canvasses information about the nature and size of your collection and the importance of different parts of your collection.

Historical Societies manage an array of collections materials, sites and buildings. Our last survey showed that nearly all historical societies manage collections and over 50% of societies run a museum. In the survey societies identified the challenge of digitisation (including cataloguing and collections).

To support societies with collections management the

FAHS is interested in finding out how you are looking after your heritage materials. We are interested in the methods you are using for cataloguing and how you are digitising your collection. What comes into your collection and why.

To help us identify what support you need in planning for the future enter the survey. Go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZWLYLTN>

**The results of the FAHS First Survey on historical societies activity is now online.**

Earlier this year the FAHS conducted Stage One of the 2016/17 survey. Responses were received from more than 300 societies and detailed responses were collated into a report. This first stage provides an overview of membership numbers, premises, the contribution of volunteers, local and state government support, collections, the use of computers, and society activities.

It shows that many societies are active in publishing books, newsletters and research along with conducting tours and special events and offering advice and support to the community and visitors. The main challenges identified are maintaining volunteer engagement; ageing (membership and office bearers); succession planning; funding; premises and space.

Comparisons are made where appropriate with the results of the previous survey of this kind conducted by the FAHS in the year 2000.

The full report can be viewed on the FAHS website [http://history.org.au/Report%20on%20Stage%201%20\(General\).html](http://history.org.au/Report%20on%20Stage%201%20(General).html)

**Stage three of the Survey on Governance** will be conducted in the first half of 2017. The survey will look at the business side of doing history including succession planning, financial management and strategic planning.

Thanks to all participants. We look forward to reading your responses.

## Digital Access Project on track to unlock collections nationwide



REBECCA JONES & MELINDA RANKIN, Director, Murray Bridge Regional Gallery, SA

The GLAM Peak Bodies have appointed Rebecca Jones and John Petersen as the consultants to deliver the national Digital access to Collections project. The GLAM Peak Bodies represent galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and other research collections. Funded by the Commonwealth Government's Catalyst program, this project will set out the nation's ambition for open access to a rich diversity of Australian content by national and international audiences.

The success of Trove, for example, shows the demand for information about our culture held not just in galleries, libraries, archives and museums, but also in Indigenous keeping places, sporting clubs, returned services clubs and historical societies. While processes to digitise and make collections accessible are well advanced, the percentage of items digitally accessible remains low. This can be substantially improved through a national framework and its implementation.

A draft national framework will set out the nation's ambition for digital access to collections – for open access to a rich

diversity of Australian content by national and international audiences. Putting items from our collections online, enabling and promoting digital access increases participation exponentially. It brings valuable and unique works to the attention of those who may never be able to visit the institutions where the originals are held. Not only does this contribute to a stronger sense of identity and wellbeing for individuals and communities, it also supports students and researchers and provides genuine economic and infrastructure benefits.

Not everything can or should be digitised and the framework will provide principles to help institutions of all sizes prioritise their approach to digital access.

The framework will recommend a range of common standards, in line with international thinking, to make Australian collections more discoverable globally. The framework and the accompanying case study-based prototype toolkit will support capacity building in the sector, particularly for the smaller institutions, and knowledge transfer between collecting institutions of all types, sizes and jurisdictions.

By early 2017, the project will have delivered:

- A draft framework document, including the current state of play with regards to digital access to collections, with recommendations for principles and common standards for digital access to Australian collections.

- Minimum of six case studies of smaller regional organisations from different states and territories, identifying the barriers to digitising collections and making them available online and learning from the success of organisations that have been successful in achieving digital access for their collections.

- Toolkit/'how to' guide developed from the case studies.

Frank Howarth, co-Chair of the GLAM Peak Bodies, said, **'Fundamental to this project are visits to regional galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies to see first-hand what is working and what challenges and opportunities these institutions face in opening their collections to the world.'**

A GLAM peak website has been developed in order for interested parties to track progress. <http://www.glampeak.org.au/p/digital-access-to-collections-project.html>

KYLIE JENNINGS, Administrator, Broome Historical Society and Museum, WA. Photographer, John Petersen





OPENING OF PARLIAMENT  
HOUSE: Duke & Duchess of  
York, 1927. Photographs by  
Frederick Sare



Amongst the Canberra and District Historical Society's collection of photographs are four which come with a story about an unusual event connected to the opening of Parliament House on 9 May 1927.

The original story was written by Frederick Sare, a public servant who lived in Deakin during the 1960s and 70s but who was present in 1927 as a tennager. He donated his photographs to the Society after he left Canberra.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ACT Electoral rolls, 1965 – 1974. The Sares lived in Kent Street, Deakin

## The Pictures Tell the Story: The Duke and the Boy Scouts

In 1927 the Commonwealth Government invited the Boy Scouts Association to send one hundred members to represent all states and take part in the official opening of Parliament House by the Duke and Duchess of York on 9 May 1927.<sup>2</sup> The scouts consisted of senior scouts and leaders and Sare, who was quartermaster with the 1st Camberwell Scout Troop in Melbourne, was one of the fifteen senior scouts selected from Victoria. They camped in tents not far from the site of new Parliament House.

On the day of the opening ceremony there was a guard of honour flanking either side of the main steps of Parliament House consisting of cadets from the Royal Military College, Duntroon on one side and the naval cadets from Jervis Bay on the other. The scouts were added to the end of each line of cadets. According to Sare, 'when HRH the Duke of York arrived he was taken by a small party of CO's and staff from the naval and military detachments to inspect the guard. When he reached the end of the first line of cadets he said 'and the scouts' but he was escorted away to inspect the cadets on the other side. We thought that this was pretty hard but after all, the officers were only concerned with their own cadets and had nothing to do with the scouts.'<sup>3</sup>

Also present at the ceremony was the Governor of Victoria, Lord Somers, who was Chief Scout for

Victoria. He heard of the scouts' disappointment at not meeting the Duke so arranged a private inspection at Yarralumla for the following morning, just before the Royal couple were to leave to plant a commemorative tree.<sup>4</sup> The next morning they assembled on the lawns of Yarralumla where Sare and the other scouts 'were proud to have our Royal inspection'.

The scouts were told that they could not ask for autographs but that they could bring cameras as the inspection was an unofficial event. The Duke was renowned for his shyness, yet after inspecting the scouts he stood patiently while they took photographs. Sare snapped several images of a relaxed looking future king of England (including the featured photograph number 1558) noting that 'he rotated in the centre of a circle so that all could have a fair go and said to one section 'Look you chaps, you had better move a bit as you will have the sun in your cameras.'<sup>5</sup> Sare continued: 'In the meantime the Duchess was waiting with Lord Stonehaven, the Governor General, close by. When we saw them together we rushed over and they posed for us. The G-G then stood aside and the Duke took his place beside the Duchess and thus posed for some memorable photos. They were very gracious and cooperative.'<sup>6</sup>

Michael Hall, republished from the Canberra Historical Journal, Issue 77 (September 2016)

<sup>2</sup> The Age (Melbourne), 5 March 1927.

<sup>3</sup> CDHS Newsletter, April 2000, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> The Bunya pine on the corner of Kings Avenue and State Circle.

<sup>5</sup> CHDS Newsletter, April 2000, p.5

<sup>6</sup> ibid

## Protected sacred sites, Arnhem Land East



The Arnhem Land East region covers all that land from central Arnhem extending to the north, east and south coast including all offshore Island such as Bickerton, Groote Eylandt taking in major communities such as Milingimbi, Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala and Numbulwar. This region is home to Yolngu and Warnindilyakwa people.

## Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority: Protecting Sacred Sites across the Territory

As a result of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 passed by the Fraser Government, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly passed complimentary legislation, Aboriginal Sacred Sites (Northern Territory) Act 1978, setting up the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority.

Subsequently, under an amendment to this act, the Authority became the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, a statutory body under the Northern Territory government. The Authority has power only within the Northern Territory jurisdiction and has offices in Darwin and Alice Springs.

'Aboriginal' is defined as a person who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia and 'Sacred Site' means a sacred site within the meaning of the Land Rights Act (s.69). Mr Justice Woodward in 'Seven Years On' stated that sites were important

to...the preservation where possible of the spiritual links with his own land which gives each Aboriginal his sense of identity.

A sacred site can be an area of land, a geological or geographical feature, vegetation, waterhole, etc. which is important to people for cultural history, ceremonial or historical reasons.

Sites are recommended to the Authority to investigate on the advice of Aboriginal people or groups who deem the area to, perhaps, be under threat or of special interest.

The staff of the Authority talk with the people involved, looking at the ownership of the site and the people responsible for the site, its history, stories of the site, location and extent of the site, physical features and restrictions of the site as it may be a site for men only or women only.



BORROLOOLA & GULF:  
<http://www.aapant.org.au/sacred-sites/sacred-sites-nt/borroloola-gulf>



After considerable consultation a written report is given to custodians and other person interested in the area, giving them an opportunity to comment and, perhaps, record detrimental effects the recording of the site may have. After this the report and recommendations go to the Board of the Authority.

The Board of the Authority has an equal number of Aboriginal male and female members recommended by the Land Councils of the Northern Territory - Northern Land Council, Central Land Council, Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council and two members nominated by the Northern Territory Government. Under certain circumstances the Administrator may appoint a person to the Board. The Board meets four times each year in different areas of the Territory.

If recommended and approved the site is added to the Register of Sites held securely in the Authority's office in Darwin. Persons can apply to view these records through the AAPA website [www.aapant.org.au](http://www.aapant.org.au) and on payment of a fee. Companies and persons doing works in the Northern Territory are required to get permission from the Authority and are issued with a Certificate showing the extent of the site. If this area is violated the Authority can prosecute - companies, government departments, private persons, etc.

Signs are erected around sacred site areas which warn the general public not to enter and the penalties involved if



## AAPA registered sacred site in Alice Springs - Ntyarlkarle Tyaneme or Caterpillar Dreaming site

the site is violated, however people can speak directly to relevant custodians regarding a site and Aboriginal people can have direct access to these sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.

The AAPA has a library, which is not directly responsible for the Register but provides support for the inquiries relevant to the sites. The Library has a very general collections of books, pamphlets, papers, etc. with its important collections the Land Rights reports and the Ranger Uranium Inquiry.

The library is open to the public on request and an appointment can be made with the Librarian

who works part time.

Contact:  
[enquiries.aapa@nt.gov.au](mailto:enquiries.aapa@nt.gov.au)  
(08) 8999 5511

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Yvonne Forrest OAM,  
Librarian, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority





Kilkenny Primary Students



All Wrapped Up for Winter



Dressing Up Launch

This year's History Festival was the biggest ever, with around 127,500 visits to 629 events presented by 366 different event organisers during May 2016.

Events were held all around South Australia.

## History Festival 2016 - Outings with Objects

South Australia's History Festival program was launched on 1 April by the Hon Jack Snelling MP, South Australian Minister for the Arts, a month before the Festival itself. In keeping with the History Trust's aims of continuing to develop the Festival in regional SA, we held our first regional launch, in Loxton in the Riverland, hosted in conjunction with the District Council of Loxton Waikerie.

Throughout the month, visitors enjoyed tours, talks, exhibitions, special events, bus trips, open days, performances, dinners, workshops and more at a variety of venues. Program highlights included Bar Yarns: History in the Pub, a diverse family-friendly program, International Museum Day events, Indigenous history events as part of National Reconciliation Week and the popular built heritage program.

Spotlight on objects and

collections - The creative team from Influx worked with us to design a new look for the cover, which featured objects from the State History Collection. Short 'object biographies' of the featured objects were also printed throughout the program. This year's cover proved enormously popular, and we received very positive feedback about the prominence of collection items. Clearly this demonstrates the ongoing value of collections to our understanding of ourselves and our communities, and the way that objects can help us to make connections between our own experiences, each other and the past. Our tag line this year – **Immerse Yourself** – invited people to explore the rich diversity of history and their place within it.

With UNESCO's International Museum Day falling within the month, the History Festival





provides an opportunity for us to focus on museums and collections, and the various ways in which we can facilitate access. As usual, event organisers took the opportunity to explore different ways of engaging audiences. Some successful events included:

- State Bank Dreaming – presented by Flinders University Art Museum. This event attracted a capacity audience to the Museum, to hear two speakers talk about different aspects of a single work in the collection – Trevor Nickolls painting ‘State Bank Dreaming’. Professor John Spoehr and Nic Brown shared information about the artist and his work, and also the events (the collapse of the State Bank of South Australia) which inspired the work.
- ‘All Wrapped up for Winter’ – presented by the Tea Tree Gully Branch of the National Trust. The team at the Old Highercombe Hotel (National Trust) got to work knitting museum objects and decorating their historic building with cosies of all kinds. This quirky and whimsical display attracted large numbers of visitors of all ages, provided visitors with an incentive to explore the site and the collections with new eyes.
- ‘My Favourite Thing’ – presented by the City of Holdfast Bay. This exhibition invited local identities to select their ‘favourite thing’ from the local history collection, and these items were woven into an exhibition.
- ‘Dressing Up’ – presented by History SA. From Steampunk to Queen Victoria, this pop-up museum featured items from the collections of History SA’s three museums – the Migration Museum, the South Australian Maritime Museum and the National Motor Museum. Presented over four days, the event also included family-

STEAMPUNK POP UP  
MUSEUM: With steampunk  
author, costumer and devo-  
tee Karen J Carlisle.



# dressing up!

## Exploring Steampunk

friendly activities, a program of short talks and workshops, and the chance for people to bring collection items of their own to display.

- Losing the Plot exhibition tours – presented by the Migration Museum and Kilkenny Primary School. Students from Kilkenny Primary School were involved in the development of the Migration Museum’s exhibition about food gardens, and as part of the History Festival, students from the school offered guided tours to aged care residents and to dementia patients. The ‘students eye view’ of the collections and exhibition proved very popular, and the perspective of the students was enlightening.

The History Festival provides small museums and collections with an opportunity to take centre stage in their communities in May. The most popular events continue to be those that bend the accepted rules or stretch the boundaries of what people expect. Beyond objects in cases, the events which capture public attention tend to be those which offer access or information

that allow participants to make personal connections.

The success of the History Festival lies in the extraordinary dedication and commitment of the event organisers, many of whom are volunteers. (56% of the History Festival event organising groups that answered our 2016 survey were run solely by volunteers).

On behalf of everyone at the History Trust of South Australia, I would like to extend a sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the Festival in 2016. We are very proud that the History Festival has continued to grow and prosper, thanks to the people all around South Australia who work so hard to ensure its success. Our thanks, too, to our major sponsors, Adelaide City Council and SA Power Networks. Planning for 2017 has already commenced, and we look forward to doing it all again in May 2017.

Allison Russell, Director,  
History Festival and Community  
Programs, History Trust of South  
Australia



## Summary Report on Digital Engagement in Victorian historical societies



KATE PRINSLEY, EO at RHSV:  
FAHS Councillors and  
Colleagues explore early  
records held in the RHSV  
Collections Room

## 70% of groups surveyed have at least one digitisation project underway or in the planning stages

While planning for the RHSV's future digital engagement it's important that we have an eye to the digital engagement of our affiliate groups, and here it became apparent that we had an information gap which a quick survey would help us to fill.

Our 10-question survey broadly covered internet connection and usage, cataloguing, websites and digitisation projects, and the results were reported on 1st September. The results of these kinds of surveys are always very interesting, and highlighted for us that we have a very broad range of groups doing a wide variety of activities. Around one third of our groups responded in the allotted time. That 98% of our societies were contactable by email and could complete the survey online was a good thing. The other groups were sent a print version and their responses also collated.

We found some pleasing things. 61% of responding groups have a website maintained by the group, 21% have a web page hosted by the local municipality or other organisation and only 18% have no website at all.

Around 70% of groups have at least one digitisation project underway or in the planning

stages. Most of these are for images, historic documents and newspapers.

9% of respondents indicated that their entire collections are digitised.

Only 54% of respondents have the internet connected at their groups' premises. This looks alarming at first, but some groups don't have premises, and some groups said they don't need the internet at their premises because their members carry out research and cataloguing at their homes. Some groups couldn't justify the cost when their society is only open for a short period of time each week and some of these groups are using dongles at their premises in lieu of a permanent connection.

Of the 18 groups that said they would be connected if not for the cost, only one had applied for a grant for digital engagement in the last 5 years, and we don't know if this was for connection costs.

It is concerning that 33% of respondents have not computerised their catalogues. Of those, 63% has up to 1000 records and 36% has over 1000 records.

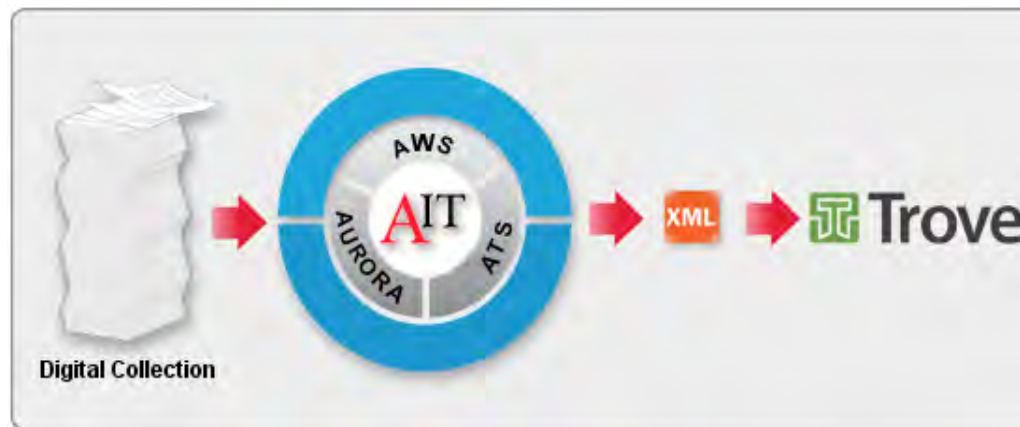
Over 50% of groups have catalogues that are computerised but not online. This survey did not address how many of these groups would be happy for their catalogues to be online or would do so if they had an easy way to do it.

For cataloguing, most groups use DB/Textworks, Victorian Collections, and Office applications such as Word or Excel.

The other 35% are using about a dozen different packages. Importantly, only around 16% are using software compliant with international standards for materials description and data harvesting (to sites such as Trove).

Some conclusions and recommendations that came out of this survey include the following:

- If a society has a desire to have the internet connected at their premises we could be exploring ways of helping them to find the means and funding to make this possible.
- We can encourage societies to future-proof their catalogues by advocating for compliance with international standards for describing collections and for data harvesting – we could provide our member groups with a list of questions for their prospective software providers.
- We can encourage societies to increase their digital engagement by continuing in our outreach to demonstrate the benefits of free social media, increasing access and potential to network with other groups online.



## Ensuring digital collections can be data harvested by aggregation services such as Trove

- The RHSV can show leadership in compliance with international standards for collection description and access.

While the survey clarified for us that a lack of an internet connection at the premises of the group certainly doesn't mean the group is not digitally engaged, there are also groups without the technical expertise to take that step. Just as accountants make volunteer contributions to non-profits, perhaps we can find ways to encourage IT professionals to do the same for our member groups needing that assistance.

There is still much we can learn about how groups feel about having their catalogues online, especially catalogues that lend themselves to the digital display of images, objects and manuscripts. There are great conversations we can have with our member groups about protecting and controlling their collections while enhancing access to them online.

The experiences of groups that have recently made their catalogues accessible online can inform how we encourage groups to increase their online access. We know anecdotally that some groups are also concerned about being inundated with enquiries if their collections go online (though in some important ways online catalogues can also decrease workload) and we can explore ways of assisting them to manage that through the experiences of other groups that have taken the step.

We congratulate the efforts of the FAHS in its recent surveys of historical groups throughout Australia and look forward to assisting with increased digital engagement of historical groups.

Christine Worthington,  
Collections Manager and  
Volunteer Coordinator, RHSV



JOSEPHINE ETHEL FOSTER:  
Founding member of  
RAHS, first female council-  
lor and Fellow of the RAHS



## Foster Press Clipping Collection: 1880-1930

Despite the advent of Trove, and the research possibilities it offers the digitally and intellectually dextrous researcher, local collections of indexed press clippings and memorabilia remain an important resource for historians. The Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) is fortunate in having two such significant collections. They are the James Watson Collection, comprising thirty-two volumes of press clippings, and the thirty-five volume Foster Press Clippings Collection.

The focus of this article is the Foster Press Clippings Collection. The Foster collection was named in honour of Josephine Ethel (1870-1955) and her husband Theodore Arthur Foster (1861-1924), who donated the clippings to the RAHS. When the Australian Historical Society,<sup>1</sup> as the RAHS was then known, was established in 1901 Ethel and Arthur were two of its founding members. They shared an interest in photographing the often soon to be demolished buildings and landmarks of Sydney. These included the Devonshire Street or Sandhills Cemetery, which was resumed in 1901 to make way for Sydney's Central Railway.

Ethel Foster was active in the historical society's affairs. In 1912 she became the Society's first woman Councillor, later serving as the Vice President. Ethel Foster was also the first woman to be appointed a Fellow of the Society in 1924, her husband Arthur having received this honour in 1921. In addition, she founded the RAHS Women's Auxiliary in 1927, to encourage fund raising and social activities.

Both the Foster Press Clippings Collection and James Watson's Collection include scrapbooks of articles from contemporary newspapers. The Foster collection however contains more than newspapers, hence its added importance to researchers. Assembled between the 1880's and 1930's, the thirty-five volumes highlight important historical events as well as the social history of New South Wales and Australia. What also adds to the charm of this collection is the lack of uniformity in the format of the volumes. There are some scrapbook albums designed for newspaper and other cuttings but old books, including one by Sir Walter Scott, and even a cash book (volume 33) were also utilised. In one case an 1880 atlas was used.

The newspaper clippings relate to people, places,

<sup>1</sup> The Australian Historical Society received the right to prefix the title 'Royal' to its name in 1918.

buildings, obituaries, illustrations, biographies, shipping, and events. They were selected from an array of newspapers. In addition to clippings from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Bulletin*, *Australasian*, *Evening News*, *Truth*, *The Sun*, *Sunday Times*, *Australian Star*, *Daily Telegraph* and other assorted papers of the time are included in the scrapbooks.

The scrapbooks also include a miscellany of other items such as: souvenir booklets; small monographs; illustrations; invoices and accounts; handwritten correspondence; lists; plans and notes; postcards and photographs; rail and tram tickets; receipts; invitations and brochures for RAHS excursions.

The recent Significance Assessment of the collection highlighted the value to researchers of Ethel Foster's imprint on the selection of the content in the scrapbooks – noting that the choice of the scrapbooks' contents appeared to be predominantly hers.

'The collection is a representative example of a common activity and artefact of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century ...a way of creating a history resource at a period when there were few published works and little historical information. The content is unique and personal; news articles are rare although some may be found as the National Library of Australia's newspaper digitisation project progresses.'

While the contents of the scrapbooks largely relate to Sydney's history, they also reflect what was happening in Ethel Foster's life at the time. Examples include letters received by her in response to research about a

THE FOSTER PRESS CLIPPINGS: Located at the RAHS library, Sydney



**'The Foster albums are amazing in their content. Those of us who have had the pleasure of browsing them, cannot put one down without finding some treasure'**

department store, the role of an Archibald prize winner's wife in supporting his work, the arrival of an aviatrix, photographs of buildings and exquisitely drawn headstones from the Devonshire Street Cemetery.

According to the Significance Assessment

**'The Press clipping volumes have exceptional rarity and are in themselves artefacts reflecting the collecting philosophies and interests of people such as... Ethel Foster.'**

Unfortunately, with age the volumes had begun to deteriorate and become damaged. Given their importance to researchers, the RAHS made it a priority to have the volumes preserved and rehoused so that they could continue to be made accessible to researchers. Fortunately, this was made possible through a Community Heritage Grant from the National Library of Australia.

In addition, these volumes have been fully indexed and are available in a database for searching in the Library, and are accessible through the RAHS website along with our other databases.

This unique collection is one of the jewels in the RAHS library collections and it will continue to be an invaluable resource.

To quote one of our recent researchers: **'The Fosters albums are amazing in their content. Those of us who have had the pleasure of browsing them, cannot put one down without finding some treasure.'**

The assistance of RAHS librarian Donna Newton in preparing this article is acknowledged with thanks.

Christine Yeats  
Senior Vice President  
Royal Australian historical Society



## Tour brochures in French, German and Spanish



Helen Brackin, RHSQ manager



The Commissariat Store Museum



Items from the Lucinda on display

## RHSQ launches multilingual brochures

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland has launched self-guided tour brochures in several languages to improve access to the Commissariat Store's museum collection for overseas visitors. The brochures enable a more rewarding experience for those who speak little or no English or whose second language is English. Visitors gain a greater insight into Queensland's convict and colonial history while at the same time gaining an appreciation of Queensland's oldest habitable and most significant heritage building.

In early 2016, the RHSQ introduced tour brochures in French and German followed by Spanish. Since this time around sixty French, sixty German and forty Spanish pamphlets have been distributed. Another brochure is being written for Chinese visitors.

The inspiration for this initiative came from RHSQ Manager, Helen Brackin. With several of the Commissariat's Store's tour guides being multilingual, Helen recognised the opportunities this afforded the museum and engaged volunteers Phil Adam

and Ilona Fekete to translate the existing English tour brochure into several languages.

A further benefit of having such a diverse volunteer base is that tours can be conducted in languages other than English including French, German, Spanish, Finnish, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Polish, Slovenian and Mandarin by the RHSQ's knowledgeable, enthusiastic and skilled guides.

At the end of their tour, visitors are invited to complete a survey which includes questions about their country of origin and how they heard about the museum. This information informs the RHSQ's marketing strategy.

The Commissariat Store attracts hundreds of backpackers and international visitors each year. Most visitors hear about the Store through the Lonely Planet travel guides and the TripAdvisor website. By using this media, the RHSQ has captured an international audience.

Maryanne Pender, RHSQ Delegate



## The tale of our journey to create the exhibition 'Western Land - a journey of discovery and rediscovery'

REPLICA OF DIRK HARTOG  
PLATE: Jill Maughan, library  
convener in front of plate  
replica made in 1938.  
Photo: Simon Santi



The Royal Western Australian Historical Society (RWAHS) celebrated its 90th anniversary on 10 September. In this auspicious year of 2016 we also commemorate the 400th year of the first known European landing on the west coast of Australia. Dirk Hartog landed on 25 October 1616 on what is now known as Hartog Island in Shark Bay, Western Australia.

The Society decided to bring a focus to these events through an exhibition based on our significant, but largely unseen, collection and to publish a book on the life and times of Dirk Hartog. These projects were underpinned by the only known replica of the inscribed plate, which Hartog left nailed to a post secured in a cleft in the rock, as the starting point of discovery. The original plate is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the replica was presented to the Society in 1938 courtesy of the

Dutch East Indies government through the WA government. The theme of 'discovery and rediscovery' was the National Trust of WA 2016 Heritage Month project to which we agreed to contribute. Discussions were held between our key Councillors and the society's library and museum convenors to canvass the possibility of a joint collaborative exhibition. This would be a first for the Society as displays had previously been the responsibility of our museum committee. It was particularly important in 2016 to illustrate our capabilities and also to display our collection - that is artefacts, costume, artworks, photographs, maps, books, archives - notwithstanding a degree of scepticism as to whether we had a budget and sufficient curatorial time to complete a project of this kind. I should say that the dates did match our proposed timing for removal of our displays

commemorating the year of 1915 and WW1. In spite of many misgivings as to budget, time, curatorial voice and story line themes, after much discussion a larger professionally designed theme came together, and one that used our collection in new ways. A concept outline was written. The title 'Western Land - a journey of discovery and rediscovery' was born. At short notice we sought funding but were not successful. The project might have stopped right there, but fortunately a casual comment to a member brought forth enthusiastic support and a much-appreciated cheque. Another member also gave generously and the remainder of the budget of \$20,000 was supplied from the library and museum funds and the annual donation from the Auxiliary that runs a monthly program of 'History in the City'.

You may wonder at the need to involve a designer. The Society's largest room has to serve two major purposes - that of an exhibition space for members and public, and also a meeting room for committees and large seated general meetings. The fixed display cases and intervening wall spaces gave a disjointed appearance. It needed an expert eye to pull the different components together and provide a new way of seeing the room and use of the internal spaces of the cases. It was also deemed necessary to have this external expertise to order to exploit the visual





possibilities of our collection. The designer was involved in every step of the process and undertook the preparation and installation of the displays. He was accompanied by his patient black Labrador dog Eva, who was in training as a guide dog. His experience of working with volunteers gained from many other museums across the state was put to very good use.

Following the decision to go ahead with the exhibition our next step was to share the load, especially as the time frame was short with the Christmas holiday period intervening. It was to be a collaborative exercise and we used the expertise of many members. While the library and museum personnel were instrumental in undertaking the choices within their respective collections and writing accompanying text labels, our various researchers and authors in the Society wrote the text for each theme. It was a chicken and egg exercise as often one step was reliant on the other. All the texts were edited by one person and one member became the project manager keeping the dialogue with the designer and a strict timetable for texts and meetings.

We had the opportunity for some marvellous loans that supplemented our collection and expanded the story. The themes

have been further expanded by a series of Community Talks which have proved over popular. The exhibition will remain in place throughout 2017.

Our editor of the exhibition texts catches its essence with these words: 'This is an exciting exhibition for the Royal WA Historical Society because it is the first one the Society has ever presented which tells the story of WA from 50,000 years of Aboriginal life through to the present. It takes visitors on a fascinating journey of discoveries and re-discoveries - with objects, images and stories about Aboriginal life, about Hartog's landing in 1616 (400 years ago), through Willem de Vlamingh's visit in 1696-7 and the Swan River Settlement in 1829, to the present. It includes early colonial life, explorations for agricultural and pastoral lands to support the new colony, and the discovery of mineral and energy resources, such as gold, iron ore and oil and gas that have brought greater prosperity.

There is also an interesting section on how crafts traditions have developed and local plants used to make useful utensils and personal decorations - and how such knowledge has been shared between Aboriginal people and newer arrivals. And there is a strong focus on the growing knowledge of WA

flora and how, over time, West Australians have developed a better understanding of the land and a feeling for its beauty and uniqueness. So there is something for everyone in this exhibition.'

The formation of our Society in 1926 is marked in WA state and federal history through two other events that link us across the Nullabor. It was the year shared with the centenary of Major Edmund Lockyer landing in Albany on our south coast on 26 December 1826. He arrived with a company of soldiers from Sydney to raise the flag and claim the land for Britain prior to the settlement of Swan River by Lieutenant Governor James Stirling in 1829. As the Society planned their future in 1926, Australians across the nation were following the building of first Federal Parliament in Canberra. Our previous membership would have been conscious of these alignments across the continent as they held their first meeting, formed their objectives and worked to commemorate the centenary of settlement in 1929.

We hope that our present exhibition in some way pays a tribute to the foresight and vision of our founders.

Sally Anne Hasluck OAM  
Immediate Past President, RWAS

### Explore the collections

Our Museum, Library and Photograph collections are now online. You are invited to explore them.



Wool train - Roebourne to Cossack, RWAHS P1999.4260

## RWAHS web site reconfigured to provide access to West Australia Collections Migration

<http://www.histwest.org.au>

The Royal Western Australian Historical Society recently launched its new website (<http://www.histwest.org.au>). This project commenced back in 2013. Council asked the Technology Committee to prepare a grant application that covered an upgrade of the website, the migration of its historical collection datasets (Museum, Library, Photographs and Public Memorials) from CollectionsMOSAIC into software to enable details of collection records to be made accessible on the internet via the website. Knowing the support received from a Lotterywest grant in 2011 for fees to digitise c 6,000 highly significant original Western Australian historical photographs in the collection communication was maintained with Lotterywest to ensure their support for the development of a future website. An e-shop facility was requested to allow book and archival products and photographs orders, new membership subscription applications and events bookings to be processed and paid for online.

Following consultations with Councillors and the various stakeholders, the Technology Committee commenced the work of drafting a requirements document. This took almost two years to prepare. This was because of the level of detail needed to ensure that the funding agency and the future contractor were clear about what was wanted to enable realistic assessment of the cost implications. The development of the requirement document involved considerable research on the readily available collections database software options, many consultations with the collection curators to obtain the level of detail relating to fields required in the new database program, and with Committee Convenors to assess their needs as

far as the website and e-shop were concerned. After considerable online searching for a suitable collections database program, CollectiveAccess was chosen for the new historical collections datasets.

CollectiveAccess is free open-source software for managing and publishing museum and archival collections. The two main components of CollectiveAccess are Providence, the core cataloguing and data management application, and Pawtucket, an optional "front-end" publication and discovery platform which enables linking to the internet via a website. We were impressed by its capability and the number of collecting organisations in America and Europe using it (see <http://www.collectiveaccess.org>) for details. We became more confident about adopting CollectiveAccess when we learnt that the Western Australian Museum was migrating their collection databases into that software program.

It was made known from the outset to prospective contractors that they would have to agree to provide a costing that was realistic for them and which could not be exceeded as the Society did not have the financial resources to pay for cost over-runs. A Lotterywest grant application for \$171,839 was submitted in March 2015 and was successful after the Society's Council agreed to contribute \$30,000. The total grant was \$141,839. The chosen providers were GAIA Resources who had had previous experience with CollectiveAccess for the Western Australian Museum.

The Project started in earnest at the beginning of January 2016. Since then and until the website



went live on 8th August 2016 the Society's Volunteers and the GAIA teams have been working together. The Volunteers participated in acceptance testing meetings with the GAIA team relating to the website, the collections databases and, shortly, will be involved in acceptance testing of the e-Shop which is due to go live in September. GAIA has assisted the Library and Museum collections database managers to clean data ready for inclusion in CollectiveAccess.

CollectionsMOSAIC is a purely Museum collections database program with an added component to record the Museum's reference books; it does not have all the usual requirements for managing library records nor is it suitable for making records available on the internet. Given the high cost of professional library software, which the Society could not afford, it was decided to use CollectionsMOSAIC for its library collection records. This and data entry inconsistencies across the collection databases have posed many challenges with regard to the migration of data to CollectiveAccess.

GAIA Resources has redeveloped the RWAHS website to enable easier site maintenance, deliver a fresh look and feel as well as a brand-new online shop with an e-commerce facility. The website has been developed in Drupal software, and the e-shop in Magento. The CollectiveAccess database has been seamlessly linked to the website and the e-shop will be similarly linked when it goes to air on 12 September 2016. On GAIA's recommendation Paypal has been chosen to manage e-shop sales transactions.



## RWAHS with GAIA Resources provides new web enabled collection management systems

All the Society's areas of interest are represented on the website with ease of access by members and the public to staff and to section volunteers and up-to-date information being an important achievement. A new exhibitions page has been added with the intention of providing online stories about the State's history drawing upon the Society's extensive and important collections. An online exhibition is yet to come. Affiliated Societies have been accorded an expanded section with easy access to information about their office bearers, contact details and where relevant, links to their websites. There is an email form whereby they can submit information about their activities for inclusion on the 'Affiliates News' page.

The Public Memorials dataset includes records of memorials around the State that were erected by the Society and/

or its Affiliated Societies. It is planned that the dataset will be enlarged to include other memorials commemorating iconic individual, groups and events that have been erected by other organisations. To facilitate this process an e-mail form has been included on the website to enable visitors to place on record any memorials they discover. These inputs will be managed to ensure that the dataset is free of extraneous data.

It is envisaged that this website and its associated components will enhance the Society's reach with regard to promoting the understanding and appreciation of Western Australian History and with other positive outcomes being increased membership and annual income.

Dr Helen Henderson,  
Vice-Chairperson of Council  
AM PhD FRWAHS

## Discovery in the Archives

Brian Rieusset, Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA) Committee member, historian and former curator at the Penitentiary Chapel historic site in Hobart, recently came across a series of records in the Tasmanian archive and Heritage Office (TAHO) that have proven to be a treasure trove.

The record series is SC389, files relating to the administration of intestate estates, in other words records created in the course of administering the estates of deceased persons who did not have a will. The files date from 1827 to 1948 and were created by the Curator of Intestate Estates and later the Public Trustee. The files contain a wide variety of information including affidavits, statements of assets and liabilities, legal correspondence, family information, occasional photographs and personal belongings of individuals such as diaries and personal correspondence. It is the personal information and belongings that are proving most interesting.

Brian first investigated the records because he was looking for information about Mary Blay the wife of Solomon Blay the Tasmanian executioner whom Brian has been researching for many years. Brian found the following advertisement in the Mercury newspaper in TROVE, which lead him to investigate Curator of Intestate Estates records at TAHO.

*Curator's Office, August 15, 1884*

*In the matter of Estate and*

***Effects of MARY BLAY late of Hobart in Tasmania deceased intestate***

***All persons having CLAIMS against the Estate of the abovenamed MARY BLAY (deceased) are required to come in and prove their respective DEBTS before me at my office in the Courthouse Macquarie-street Hobart on or before the 25th day of August instant or in default thereof they will be peremptorily ex-cluded from all benefit accruing from the said Estate. Accounts must be verified by affidavit.***

**GEO. BROWNE**  
***h559 Curator of Intestate Estates***

<sup>1</sup>

TAHO staff were able to locate a file for Mary Blay and finding the contents useful Brian then set about investigating other files in the series. Working his way through all 28 boxes, Brian examined the contents of 1135 files unearthing birth, death and marriage records, old stamps and coins, convict free certificates, business letterheads and even a lock of hair. In some cases family members sent these items to the Curator to establish their connection with the deceased person, in other cases personal items were collected by family or in some circumstances the police and given to the Curator to help identify living relatives.

One such example can be found in George Tickner's file, which contains his convict conditional pardon. This was found in his roof space during a search of his

house after he and his wife were murdered. It is in almost perfect condition as it was still in the original parchment envelope, when issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land in 1853.



Along with examining the contents of the files Brian also undertook to index them as he went. Each file is now described online with the person's name and date making them far more discoverable to other researchers. Before Brian began his investigation, the files only had a basic general description and were given little attention. Brian's indexing and efforts to promote the records have resulted in many more researchers requesting the files and benefiting from the treasures they contain.<sup>2</sup>

Caroline Homer, Acting Manager of the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office (TAHO) and President of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA).

With thanks to Brian Rieusset for his assistance.

1. 1884 'Advertising', The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), 16 August, p. 4., viewed 05 Dec 2016, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article9091801>

2. <http://search.archives.tas.gov.au/default.aspx?detail=1&type=S&id=SC389>