



# Historical Society Matters

The newsletter of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies



History and heritage news from around Australia

## From the President

'Australian history is almost always picturesque; indeed, it is so curious and strange that it is itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer ... It is full of surprises, and adventures, and incongruities; but they are all true, they all happened.'

So said Mark Twain (pseudonym Samuel Clemens) in *Following the Equator*, American Publishing Company, Connecticut, 1897, p 65.

I have drawn upon Twain's quote several times across the years, usually in defence of Australian history at times of its diminution by authorities in schools and universities, or by governments who have reduced promotional or preservation funding. But the quote immediately jumped to mind when I compiled this edition of *Historical Society Matters*; the contributions embrace diverse topics, peoples, places and perspectives and are simply enjoyable reading.

Following an account last edition of a remarkable Western Australian female singer, a Tasmanian Historical Research Association member draws attention to an event some months in the planning to commemorate Tasmania's own 'nightingale'. The Historical Society of the Northern Territory continues its tradition of not finding distance a challenge and reports on a bi-centenary event at the end of 2024 valued and enjoyed as a Reconciliation event with Tiwi Islanders. South-east, the smallest contributor in terms of the geographical region it occupies, Canberra & District Historical Society, reports on significant literary historical successes within the Australian Capital Territory and across the border into New South Wales. And, in terms of 'crossing borders', the Royal Australian Historical Society looks locally *as well as*

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[FAHS Facebook page](#)

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies acknowledges that the nation of Australia boasts the longest living culture and heritage of any part of the world. We pay tribute to our First Peoples, their heritage and their contribution to our contemporary society. We will endeavour to have First Peoples engage in our historical work and participating as members. We acknowledge the First Peoples as the original custodians of the land on which our societies work and operate.

globally as part of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register. The History Council of South Australia adds testimony to Twain's 'astonishment' by publishing an eclectic set of its fascinating histories, and a Royal Western Australian Historical Society member reminds some of our more 'mature' readers of the times when hanging was an element of Australian punishment.

To help ensure that more of the above history and heritage activities can continue into 2026 and beyond, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (in an article by me) offers a variety of practical strategies for serious succession-planning. More such strategies will follow; indeed, the strategies to follow may prove better than those I have already devised or collected over time. The day after submitting the article to this newsletter's honorary designer and producer, I was contacted by the President of the Canada History Collective, the Collective being Canada's equivalent to Australia's Federation. He has written to presidents easily identified by website in the English-speaking countries of Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America to meet by webinar early in 2026 precisely to address the common challenges of declining memberships, volunteers and leaders *as well as* to share positive strategies and experiences. I have agreed to be part of the Canadian initiative, have congratulated its president for reaching out and look forward to sharing what I learn as widely as possible across Australia.

This edition of *Historical Society Matters* may be the last you read in 2025 – or one of your first as inspiring summer reading in 2026. So, what has your Federation achieved in 2025 as 'welcome' to 2026?

To begin, there has been this 'new look' newsletter which, subject to submissions received, seeks to present one article per State and Territory constituent each edition. I thank all contributors across 2025, be they Federation constituency delegates or generous society members. The Council and I sincerely thank Craige Proctor for his design and production and you will enjoy more of his work in 2026.

Much has been happening behind the scenes with the Federation website. The official launch is being held over as an exciting start to 2026—but do look beforehand if you wish; a first iteration should be 'live' before the close of 2025 and will evolve thereafter as websites do. Much that is already useful and current will be familiar, but new functions and content will progressively appear. Stay tuned also for the announcements of new 'Member Benefits' for existing members. I thank our Federation Administrative Officer, Hannah Orchard, for her competent work on the website and attention to administrative matters of many kinds.

The Federation Council agreed to extend its official membership to two delegates per constituency, where possible. Not only does this enable the Federation to achieve more in the present for all of Australia's historical societies and community historians, but is crucial to the Federation's future. Please review the names of your State and Territory representatives and, if you encounter them,

thank them for all they have done. I, for one, am immensely grateful for the work of *all* but especially thank vice-presidents Don Garden and Margaret Anderson, Honorary Treasurer Nick Drew, Honorary Secretary Ruth Kerr and Immediate Past-President Christine Yeats for their work in their official capacities or when other needs have arisen.

The Federation's Fellowship and Award of Merit criteria were reviewed and implemented in 2025; thank you, Don Garden, and committee. The August edition of *Historical Society Matters* called for nominations for both. The Federation warmly congratulates The Royal Historical Society of Queensland's Megan Martin for her extensive work over many years on diverse facets of Queensland as well as New South Wales history, all such work earning her a prestigious Federation Fellowship in 2024, presented officially to her recently. The Federation further congratulates Jared Archibald, nominated in 2025 by the Historical Society of the Northern Territory. Jared is a highly-respected staff member of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and, through it and other voluntary community activities, has contributed to a wider Australian history picture emanating from The Top End. For 2026, please may all readers consider now who they might nominate.

As President, I have self-funded in 2025 to visit constituency societies' premises and/or attend their significant events in each of Canberra, the Northern Territory, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. I look forward to visiting New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia

(if not return to other constituencies) in the second year of my term as president. Meeting and learning from Australia's most dedicated local historians has been an absolute joy and personal reward. Thank you to all who have welcomed me so warmly. Finally, you may be reading this newsletter because you have personally subscribed to receive it from personal conviction that

knowing then preserving and promoting wider Australia's history and heritage is worthwhile. Or, perhaps, an historical society of which you are a member has considered the same and shared it with you. Or, perhaps, simply this newsletter has come your way by other historical or heritage means because you are known to be 'interested'. *Any of these transmissions* is a Federation achieve-

ment and your own conviction worthy of celebration has made you part of it.

May 2026 be an especially successful year for you all who seek to know, preserve and promote Australia's history and heritage.

Rosalie Triolo  
FAHS President

### FAHS Constituents

- Canberra & District Historical Society: <https://www.canberrahistory.org.au/>
- Historical Society of the Northern Territory: <https://www.historicalsocietynt.org.au/>
- History Trust of South Australia: <https://www.history.sa.gov.au/>
- Royal Australian Historical Society: <https://www.rahs.org.au/>
- Royal Historical Society of Queensland: <https://www.queenslandhistory.org/>
- Royal Historical Society of Victoria: <https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/>
- Royal Western Australian Historical Society: <https://histwest.org.au/>
- Tasmanian Historical Research Association: <https://thra.org.au/>

### FAHS Office-Bearers

The following people were nominated by FAHS State and Territory constituents and/or elected at the FAHS Annual General Meeting in October 2025. Across 2026 they will be representing and working for your constituency as well as a stronger Australian history and heritage presence in national contexts.

President and RHSV delegate:

Dr Rosalie Triolo OAM FRHSV

Immediate Past President and RAHS delegate:

Ms Christine Yeats FRAHS

Senior Vice-President and HSNT delegate:

Dr Don Garden OAM FFAHS FRHSV

Junior Vice-President and RHSV delegate:

Ms Margaret Anderson FFAHS

Treasurer and RWAHS delegate:

Mr Nick Drew

Secretary and RHSQ delegate:

Dr Ruth Kerr OAM FFAHS

C&DHS delegates: Mr Nick Swain and Mr Gary Kent

HTSA/HCSA delegate: Dr Lainie Anderson

HTSA second delegate: To be advised

RAHS delegate: Dr Mark St Leon

RHSQ delegate: Mr Stephen Sheaffe AM

RWAHS delegate: Mr Michael Nind

THRA delegates: Ms Caroline Homer and Mr Bradley Wood



Historical Society  
of the Northern Territory inc

## Fort Dundas: the British in North Australia 1824-29

[HSNT Website](#)

[HSNT Facebook page](#)

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British settlement in Australia's north was celebrated in style at the end of 2024 by the Tiwi Land Council and the community of Pirlangimpi on Melville Island in the Northern Territory. This first northern settlement was a British military garrison on the island called Fort Dundas (after Lord Melville). It lasted from October 1824 until 1829. It was supposed to grow and develop into a trading port to rival Singapore; instead, the garrison festered in the tropical heat, the local Tiwi resisted, and no one ever came to trade.

Land was cleared, the fort was built, couples were married and babies were born ... but soon two ships were lost to piracy in the islands to the north, with their crews slaughtered or enslaved. Soldiers, Royal Marines and convicts alike fell to diseases, poisoned plants and spears as the garrison waited for something to happen.

Eventually, everything was transferred to Raffles Bay on Cobourg Peninsula (Fort Wellington 1827-29), but that was also not a success. The British Government delayed then withdrew and abandoned Australia's north coast altogether for over a decade. Its success lies only in the fact that the presence of Fort Dundas prevented the Dutch or French from arriving with their own settlements and claiming parts of the continent; Britain now "owned" all of Australia. The New South Wales border was redrawn to the 29<sup>th</sup> parallel, where Western Australia's state boundary today lies.

The story of the two forts is one of soldiers, convicts, marines, sailors, some of their families, and their commandants who, no matter how courageous, were so completely unprepared for the climate, landscape and distance from what was more



Probably the most well-thumbed copy of *Fort Dundas* in existence.

familiar. Many died and lie forgotten in the soils of Australia's Top End.

The story is also of the Tiwi people on Melville Island, and the Iwaidja of Cobourg Peninsula, and their relationships with the British. The Tiwi's resistance never faltered, but the Iwaidja, whose early interactions were terrifying and violent, were in tears when their British friends departed from Fort Wellington. In the end, under Captain Collett Barker, the problems which had beset the Fort Wellington garrison in its first year seemed to be solved and Barker was shocked when the order came to abandon his fort. Too late; the tyranny of distance ensured that he had no choice.

Two hundred years after the arrival of Captain Bremer in the Apsley Strait with three ships full of settlers, the Tiwi were happy to commemorate and share their history with modern Australia. The Land Council flew in several representatives of the Royal Australian Navy as special guests, an ABC film crew, and a couple of

extras such as me, who taught in the community school for several years last century and wrote a book about the history of the fort: Derek Pugh, *Fort Dundas: British in North Australia, 1824-29*, Rapid Creek, Northern Territory, 2017.

We were fed a substantial meal in the wood-chip company's mess, then led into the bush, to Punata, the site of the old fort. The RAN officers, in their brilliant whites, had to tread carefully because the bush had been blackened by seasonal fires. We gathered next to the stone ruins of an old building and were treated to a performance of song and dance by the local landowners. Theirs was a dance of pride. The Tiwi believe it was their ancestors' ability to run a guerilla-like resistance against the British for five years which led to the invaders leaving, defeated, in 1829. Tiwi resistance certainly played a part; British journals of the time speak of spears thrown through barrack windows and, on one fateful day, the doctor and storekeeper being speared to death on a path just outside the village. These two, and



poor Sophie Hicks who died in childbirth on the same day, remain in their graves just near where we sat. They were not the only dead to remain in that vicinity. There were also many scurvy and malaria victims.

Our group was also led on a tour of the ruins. There is not much to see because the scrub has reclaimed its

birthright, but there are a few sites of interest such as the ditch, a well and a few crumbling walls. Yet, it is the power of the story and the living memories among the Tiwi which are significant. Fort Dundas was a first, and there can be only one first.

The ruins remain as a testament to the bravery and industry of the

colonisers, but also to their appalling lack of knowledge and preparation to live and prosper in such an environment, being something that the Tiwi had been able to do for many thousands of years.

Derek Pugh  
Historical Society of the  
Northern Territory

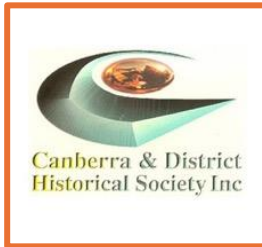


The Tiwi dance for the Royal Australian Navy and other guests.



The ruins of a small Fort Dundas building with modern-day different protection behind.





## Publication successes: stories of the National Capital and beyond

[CDHS Website](#)

[CDHS Facebook page](#)

Canberra & District Historical Society members featured prominently at the National Trust of Australia (ACT) Heritage Awards held on Wednesday, 8 October 2025.

Mark Butz, a prominent Canberra Historian, won in the Heritage Education and Promotion category for his book *Tales from Two Cities: Canberra-Queanbeyan Across Two Centuries*. The book combines social and economic history to describe the symbiotic relationship between Canberra and Queanbeyan, the latter being a close New South Wales neighbour. He received his award from the ACT Heritage Minister, Chris Steel MLA, and National Trust President, Gary Kent.

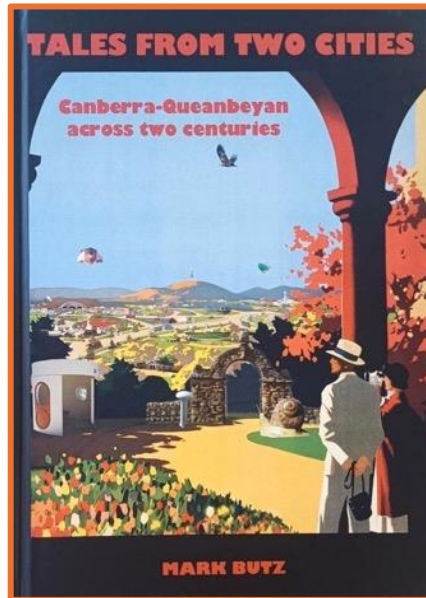
The judges assessed the book as:  
a thoroughly researched and accessible history of the heritage of Canberra and Queanbeyan, focussing on the stories of individuals and families that were (and still are in many cases) influential in the evolution of our capital and its closest neighbour. The stories celebrate our diverse cultures and provide a rich sense of place, identity and belonging.

FAHS ACT delegate, Nick Swain, was a finalist in this category for his book *Down Mugga Lane: Lost Stories and Endangered Rural Heritage*. The book describes the interesting and complex history of the land around Mugga Lane and Narrabundah Lane in inner south Canberra, including Aboriginal habitation, early European settlers, soldier-settlers and other farmers.

Allen Mawer, a former CDHS President, launched *Down Mugga Lane* at a booked-out function at Mugga Mugga, an 1850s stone cottage, off Narrabundah Lane, on Saturday 13 September.

The events were wonderful exposés and celebrations of high quality community history in and around the nation's capital.

Gary Kent  
ACT Delegate



The cover of Mark Butz's book  
*Tales from Two Cities*.



Nick Swain and  
Gary Kent at the  
launch of Nick's  
*Down Mugga Lane*.



Mark Butz receiving his  
award from ACT  
Heritage Minister, Chris  
Steel MLA, and Gary  
Kent.

## Nooks and Crannies: quirky tales from South Australia's past

### HCSA YouTube

Did you know that a high-ranking American army officer commandeered a small Mile End factory in 1942 to produce more than 100,000 cans of rabbit for the US military? Or that two brothers from Caltowie invented a cheap iron lung that saved countless lives during a 1937 polio outbreak?

*Nooks & Crannies: Stories of South Australia*, produced by the History Council of South Australia, is a vibrant collection of short stories celebrating the people, places and institutions which have shaped the state.

History Council president Professor Matthew Fitzpatrick says the 262-page volume is the result of an extraordinary collaboration, with nearly 60 writers and a large editorial team highlighting histories from right across the state, from the Barossa to Barmera, Robe to Rapid Bay.

"History Council members were invited to contribute up to 600 words, resulting in quirky, fascinating, bite-sized essays spanning the full sweep of South Australian history," Prof Fitzpatrick says.

South Australian history highlights include:

- How the Salvation Army, in the earliest days of the colony, gave Aboriginal people equal status and often leadership roles in the corps, or church. At Port Victor (later Victor Harbor) the church was nicknamed the 'Black and White' corps in recognition of its diverse membership.
- How an 1822 massacre on the Greek island of Chios helped shape Balaklava's migrant heritage.
- How Adelaide's first dedicated hospital operated without light, fuel or soap, with patients clubbing together to buy a candle and dashing

### HCSA Website

into nearby bush when "their bowels required evacuating".

- How the Workers' Educational Association of South Australia Incorporated was formed in 1914 to deliver "higher education for the working man", with a century of courses reflecting changing times, from "how to be a better hostess" and "getting to know your slide rule" to "car maintenance for women" and "tea leaf reading".

- How October's Labour Day public holiday was borne from the fight for an eight-hour working day, achieved in South Australia in 1873. Soon after, South Australia became the first colony to legalise trade unions.

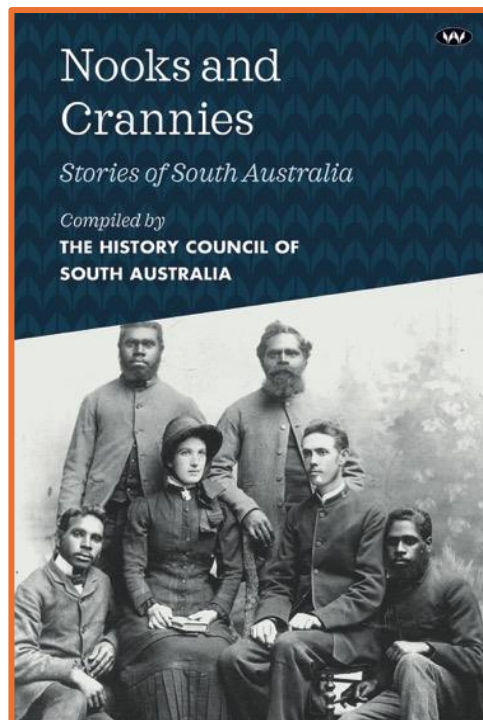
- The charming tale of explorer Matthew Flinders' childhood flute, bought by his father for eight shillings for his 14th birthday in 1788 and carried on the *Investigator* voyage to circumnavigate Australia.

*Nooks and Crannies* is organised into ten themed sections including Aboriginal-settler relations, education, heritage, individuals of note, migration, regional communities and industry. Contributors include both emerging voices and established historians, from school students to renowned scholars.

"The History Council was formed twenty-one years ago out of concern for the erasure of history in education – it's now the state's peak body advocating for history, championing excellence in research and bringing passionate people together," Prof Fitzpatrick says.

"While tertiary history departments continue to face shrinking resources, community history groups and professional and amateur historians are actively involved in recording, preserving and interpreting the past.

### HCSA Facebook page

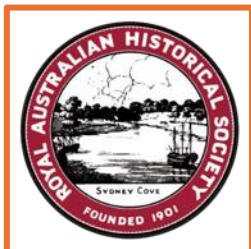


"By sharing stories, we build a collective understanding and appreciation of the state's rich and diverse heritage. The History Council is indebted to principal editors Yianni Cartledge and Bridget Jolly and the editorial team for creating such a terrific and diverse historical record."

Wakefield Press publisher Michael Bollen says *Nooks and Crannies* traverses widely through the past to reveal hints for South Australia's possible futures. "Storytelling has a powerful role to play in connecting us to past events and figures, making history accessible and ensuring that diverse voices and experiences are represented in the story of our state."

*Nooks and Crannies: Stories of South Australia* is now available for \$39.95 from bookstores or direct from Wakefield Press at [www.wakefieldpress.com.au](http://www.wakefieldpress.com.au)

Lainie Anderson  
HTSA/HCSA Delegate



## Recognising and preserving our documentary heritage: UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register

### [RAHS Website](#)

### [RAHS Facebook page](#)

The Australian Memory of the World (AMW) Program was established in December 2000 under the auspices of the Australian National Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Part of a global network of more than 60 national programs, it operates within the regional framework of MOWCAP, UNESCO's Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific. One of the key aims of the Australian program is the development and maintenance of the AMW Register. For the list of the other aims visit the 'About the Australian Memory of the World Program' page of the website.<sup>1</sup>

The AMW Register was established in 2001 and now includes 98 inscriptions of documentary heritage items and collections from across Australia. Its first entries were two works already recognised on UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register: Lieutenant James Cook's *Endeavour Journal* and the *Mabo Case Papers*.

The biennial call for nominations for inscription on the Australian Register will open on 30 November 2025, with a deadline for submissions at 30 June 2026. The outcomes will be announced in December 2026, with successful inscriptions formally recognised at a ceremony in early 2027.

Governments, institutions, organisations, groups or individuals are welcome to submit nominations to the Register. However, nominations lodged through recognised heritage institutions and of documentary heritage

considered at risk have priority. ('Heritage institutions' encompasses the larger cultural organisations as well as local historical societies and museums.) For more information, visit the 'How to Nominate' page (<https://www.amw.org.au/how-nominate>)

While nominations from the larger cultural institutions dominate the Register, local and regional historical societies and museums in New South Wales are already represented. They demonstrate the national importance of community-held documentary heritage at a local level.

#### **Annabella Boswell's Papers**

The Port Macquarie Historical Society holds the papers of Annabella Alexandra Campbell Innes, later Boswell. Annabella was born in Australia in 1826 and began her journals at the age of 16. Continued through her twenties and supplemented by letters, they provide a rare example of a young woman's personal writings from nineteenth-century regional Australia – depicting the 'life of landed gentry in a newly colonised country' (<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/annabella-boswells-papers-1826-1901>)

#### **Ison's Cinema Slides Collection**

The Ison's Cinema Slides Collection of over 400 quarter-plate slides of local soldiers was shown at the Tamworth Royal Theatre and Ison's Open Air Theatre during World War One. The soldiers' portraits also include images from Egypt and the field. Each slide names the soldier, often with updates on battles, wounds, or deaths. Donated to Tamworth Historical Society by the Returned & Services League of Australia, the collection is

now with the Tamworth Regional Film and Sound Archive

(<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/tamworths-isons-world-war-i-cinema-slides-collection>)

#### **James Tyson Papers**

The Deniliquin & District Historical Society is one of several institutions across Australia holding James Tyson Papers. Others include the National Library of Australia, Queensland State Archives and State Library of Queensland. There are also some Tyson Papers in the State Library of NSW but they have not been added to the inscription yet. The papers document the life of Australia's first millionaire and one of its most influential pastoralists. Tyson was celebrated after his death in Banjo Paterson's poem *T.Y.S.O.N.*

(<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/james-tyson-papers>)

#### **Lithgow Small Arms Factory Collection**

The Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum holds a unique and nationally significant archival collection documenting the history of Australia's first precision manufacturing facility. Established in the early 1900s, the Factory became the nation's primary ordnance and weapons producer, playing a crucial role through both world wars. The collection spans its operations into the 1980s. As the only archive of its kind, it preserves the story of the Factory's contribution to Australia's military history

(<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/lithgow-small-arms-factory-archive>)



### Miss Porter's House

Miss Porter's House offers a vivid snapshot of twentieth-century life in Newcastle through collections preserved on site. These span three themes: domestic textiles, craft, and documentary heritage, accumulated by the Porter and Jolley families over more than a century. The documentary collection, comprising 1,878 items, provides essential context for the others

(<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/miss-porter%E2%80%99s-house-documentary-heritage-collection-1910-1997>)

### Veness Letter Book

The Veness Letter Book at the Tamworth Powerstation Museum is the only known surviving record of official correspondence relating to the creation of Australia's first municipal electric lighting system in Tamworth. Covering 1881–1890, it documents the development and installation of electricity in Australia and reflects decisions executed by Council Clerk Daniel Frederick William Veness

(<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/veness-letter-book>)

Inscription can bring significant benefits, especially for smaller, volunteer-based organisations. UNESCO recognition confers prestige and visibility, raising the profile of a society and its collection within the wider community. Successful nominees are granted the right to use the UNESCO Memory of the World logo, a respected promotional tool which can enhance exhibitions, public talks and community engagement. Importantly, inscription also strengthens the case for sponsorships, grants and ongoing funding for preservation and access. For many local historical societies, museums and others, which rely heavily on external support, this recognition can make a real difference when seeking resources from councils, funding bodies and donors.

At the same time, it is important to note that not every collection will meet the criteria for national significance required for inscription on the Australian Register. While many societies and museums hold rare and unique items which are of enduring importance to their local community, only a proportion of these will meet the threshold for recognition at the national level. The criteria are clearly outlined in the nomination form, and

it may be helpful for nominators to also consult *Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections*. This resource provides a practical framework for evaluating collections and may assist societies in considering both current and future nominations.

Nevertheless, the call for nominations itself is an excellent opportunity. Even if a collection is not inscribed, the process encourages societies and museums to reflect on the value of their holdings, reassess their preservation priorities, and consider how their collections contribute to both local identity and the broader national story.

The nomination process is straightforward. Societies, museums and others considering a nomination are encouraged to contact the AMW Committee through the 'Contact Us' facility on the website ([www.amw.org.au/how-nominate](http://www.amw.org.au/how-nominate)) to discuss their proposal. The nomination form can also be downloaded and submitted through the website. Guidance and advice are available to assist in preparing strong applications.

Christine Yeats  
RAHS Delegate

<sup>1</sup> 'About the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Program', *National Committee of Australia*, <https://www.amw.org.au/about-australian-memory-world-program> (accessed 20 September 2025).



<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/annabella-boswells-papers-1826-1901>



<https://www.amw.org.au/register/listings/miss-porter%E2%80%99s-house-documentary-heritage-collection-1910-1997>



## New visitors, members, volunteers and leaders: positive approaches to attracting family, friends and young people to your society

### RHSV Website

This is the first of three articles from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria to help your society develop your human resources. You might schedule opportunities to discuss the recommendations for your locality's set of circumstances and, even if some (or most) suggestions seem impossible, the scheduling of a serious discussion about what is possible can be positive in itself.

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For many years, through RHSV and its Historical Societies Support Committee, I have run sessions in response to a repeated concern, Australia-wide; 'We're struggling to find new people'.

The best strategies to reverse any declines are deliberate as well as open-minded and creative. Societies which think strategically soon discover that attracting new visitors from within their community can result in those people becoming new members. New members can eventually become volunteers; they, in time, can become new leaders. Affirmative action is also necessary to overcome any perception that a historical society is 'only for older or retired people'.

The advice here is based on what I have learned from historical societies' different experiences across time, as well as what I have learned from my own engagement with other groups which rely on successions of competent and generous volunteers. Other suggestions are ones I have discovered through research. Where relevant, attributions follow. But the advice is based also on over 40 years in 'History education, teaching school students and 'teaching History teachers' to value, preserve and promote historical knowledge.

This article suggests strategies for attracting family members and friends, as well as other much younger people in your community.

### **Personal invitations to family and friends**

Have you tried personally asking family and friends to enjoy a society event or exhibition with you?

Perhaps neither you nor family and friends have considered a direct invitation; you and they might think the historical society is yours alone. But, having a son or daughter, niece or nephew, grandchild or older relation accompany you can enable them to see what you do *inside* the building where they know you often go. You might add upon any successful experience together that you would value their joining of the society 'one day', perhaps with you, or perhaps not, and not necessarily 'now', but 'one day'. (The family members and friends might also then know where to donate any locally significant historical items of yours in the future, as has also been known to happen.)

A new member might also be a good friend whom you could invite to an event or two, enabling them to see how excellent your society is, either for its history or social opportunities, or both. If you and your friend wish to see each other more often, then society events will help you note the opportunities in advance in your diaries and more likely adhere to them.

*Can you commit yourself to finding in the next 12 months at least one new member from your family or friends?*

### RHSV Facebook page

### **Engaging with school and tertiary education settings, and younger people overall**

Inviting school groups is a regular activity for some societies, but not all. (Remember, too, that all people who 'work' in an historical society should have Working with Children Checks). There is merit in simply showcasing what you do and possess regarding your local history, but asking the teachers for what they are specifically seeking adds value. *You do not need to know the latest curriculum; teachers should be able to outline what they need.* During the visit, make the attendees – students, teachers and perhaps accompanying parents – very welcome with edible treats as well as takeaway reminders, such as bookmarks or small publications.

Inviting local teachers *without students* can be a better idea, before any excursion or simply as a sociable information event. Too few teachers receive treats in their days, so make them feel special with a quality afternoon or morning tea and publication gifts for their library or themselves. Without undue pressure, invite them to think about joining your society as individuals or as a school, especially if they identify as History/Humanities at secondary level or express an overall interest in Australian history at any school level. Indicate that membership will update them easily on what you do and how you might assist them in their work, (for example, relevant documents and objects).

Finding out at which year level(s) the local schools' teachers and students are undertaking the most – and best – work in Australian history adds another dimension. Ask teachers to nominate their best students for Australian history prizes. If giving a book, such as a local history, ensure that a book-plate or similar is attached with a written enduring reminder to the awardee of why they received the prize, presented by whom.

Then again, there can be merit in focusing not only on the History/Humanities teachers and students. Can 'Drama' perform re-enactments? 'Art' in simple displays? 'Trades' in small building and fixture tasks? 'Information Technology' in general word-processing or in digitally cataloguing the society's simple items? 'English' in creative thinking and writing of stories about objects? All such activities will build connections and purpose. Again, a positive impression of your society is created for 'now' and/or 'the future'.

Related to diversity of school subjects, can your society offer work experience to school students in areas where you need support? In this case, you should specifically contact your schools' Careers and Work Experience teachers.

Inviting school and university students to join your society is also worthwhile. Offer them free digital membership which will not cost you a great deal. A simple scheme only requires students to opt to 're-join free while students' then transfer to paid subscription, if they wish, when no longer students.

Offering internships to university students, such as those undertaking Museum Studies or Collection Management/Archiving, can present membership opportunities. Can your society advertise then offer casual employment? You will more likely be successful in securing and retaining quality volunteers if you appeal, specifically, for History-inclined tertiary students. Promote the

opportunity as one which will adorn their *résumé* and for which you might provide a reference.

Several Victorian historical societies have had competent tertiary-and secondary-History students on their committees because the societies have asked those students to join and take up the roles. Existing leaders in the societies have mentored the students and all members have made the students feel special.

Many Victorian State primary schools are presently celebrating or soon to celebrate their sesqui-centenaries. Becoming involved in schools' celebrations and promoting your existence and community worth in publicity is another positive strategy.

But the biggest tip of all for when working with school groups ... if visiting their school, or having them visit you, resist any temptation to try to tell them everything about their local history, all the more if they are standing somewhere. The far better approach is to select several significant 'snapshot stories' and objects or documents related to those stories. In fact, ask the students first for what they already know about the story or can glean about it from the objects or documents you are presenting. Use 'what, who, where, when, how and why' questions. *Let students be the local historians.* Be kind with their answers; gently guide them in the right direction and fill in only essential gaps when their thinking has concluded. The students will feel more ownership of the history they have revealed – and their interest for more of it in study, leisure or career just might have been piqued by the time with you.

Although nearly a decade old, two FAHS resources can prove useful. For some accounts by primary pre-service teachers who specialised in History, see Suzanne Boatto, Sarah Cammarano, Shehani Rukanayake & Rosalie Triolo [History Education, Monash University] 'Teachers, Historical Societies and Primary School Children: "Doing History"', FAHS Newsletter,

No. 43, June 2017, pp 14-15: [https://www.history.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FAHSNewsletter43\\_June2017.pdf](https://www.history.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FAHSNewsletter43_June2017.pdf)

A bigger FAHS guide applicable mainly for primary and lower secondary school audiences is that of Ann Parry, *Local History and Schools' Curriculum Guidelines*, FAHS, Canberra, 2016: <https://www.history.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Local-History-and-Schools-Curriculum-FAHS.pdf>

For ideas generally on how to engage with young adults, read 'Engaging with younger members', Associations Forum, *Associations*, Edition 57, April 2020, p. 23: <https://associations.net.au/magazine/AssociationsEdition57>

See also Museums and Galleries of New South Wales, 'How to Engage with Young People': <https://mgns.w.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/exhibition/how-engage-young-people/>

Finally, your State or Territory History Teachers' Association would be especially pleased to hear from and support you. Google search yours.

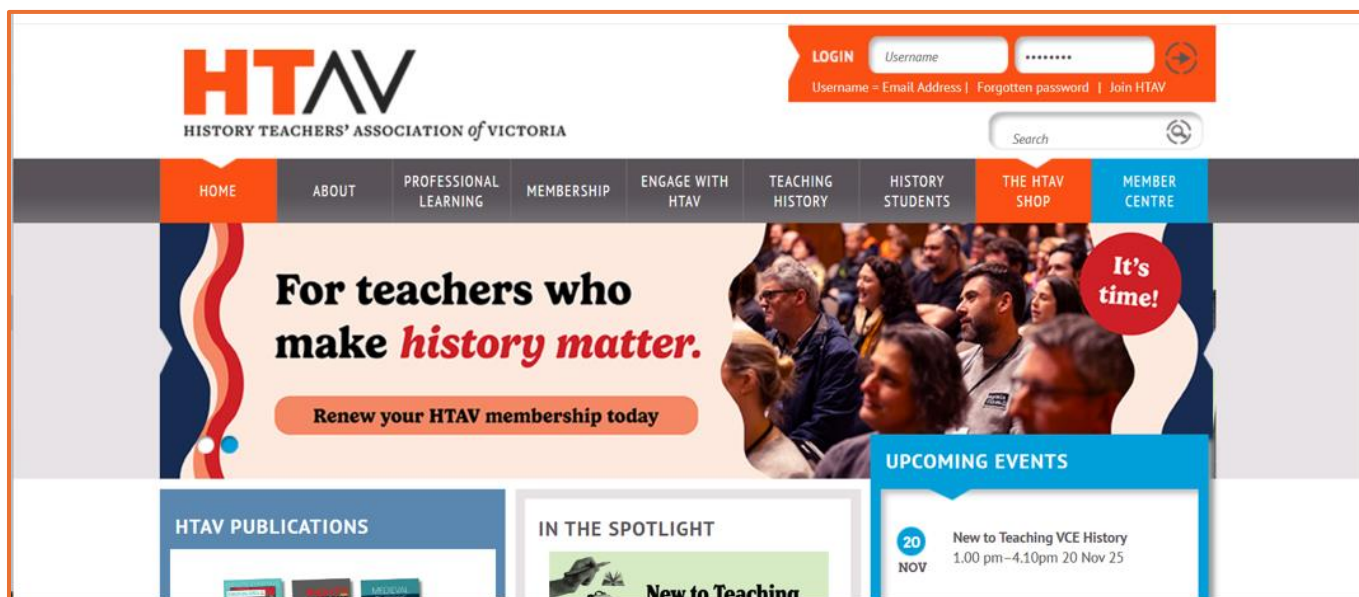
*If you do not already have relationships with school or tertiary groups, establish them now. Investigate the entities' websites for the people to email directly or request to speak with when calling Reception or a bigger switchboard.*

*Can your society commit to enacting at least two (or more) of the above strategies in the next 12 months?*

*I believe it can.*

Rosalie Triolo  
RHSV Delegate





Organisations such as the History Teachers' Association of Victoria are keen to support local historians and school groups.  
Source: <https://www.htav.asn.au/>



It is increasingly common for historical societies to reach out to younger generations. At Jeparit in north-western Victoria the Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum and the Jeparit and District Historical Society are forging connections with the Hindmarsh Shire Youth Council by inviting them to hold meetings at the Museum and at the Historical Society. Additionally, the Youth Council members learn a little about the work local historians undertake but also hear how they, in time, may support this work.



Hindmarsh Shire Youth Councillors visiting the Detpa School Museum at Jeparit's Wimmera Mallee Pioneer Museum in May 2025 and a few months later exploring – and learning about – the collection of the Jeparit and District Historical Society.  
Photos: Hindmarsh Shire Council and Craige Proctor



## The night the Hangman came to Bunbury

[RWAHS Website](#)

[RWAHS Facebook page](#)

After the Second World War, boarding houses in Bunbury provided many people with alternative accommodation. The port town boasted a range of lodgings for tourists, travellers, single men and women, everyday working class people, and boarders of all ilk. Everyone had a story and boarding houses were known for their characters, although mostly, apart from advertising, the houses received more attention for mundane matters. In 1951, the *South Western Times* editor lectured about parked cars that 'must be somewhere, of course. People who work in the town and get to that work by car, must leave their vehicles somewhere—but it does NOT necessarily have to be right outside the door of their hotel or boarding house'.<sup>1</sup>

However, sometimes there was more excitement, like the night the hangman stayed in town.

In 1952, the arrival of a mystery visitor would be whispered about as 'the night the hangman came to Bunbury'. There was only one hanging in Perth in the 1950s, that of Karol Tapci on 23 June 1952, who was hanged for the murder of Norman Perfect at Wubin on 17 March. The newspaper report told how:

The execution was the first in Fremantle Gaol since 1932. It was watched by the Comptroller-General of Prisons (Mr A McKillop), the superintendent of the prison, the prison doctor, two priests and a number of duty warders. After the hanging Mr McKillop returned to his office in Perth where he issued the following statement: 'The execution of Karol Tapci was effectively carried out at Fremantle Prison

this morning at 8 o'clock in the presence of the usual panel of gaol officials. The proceedings were décor-ous and without untoward incident. The Rev Father W Cowan assisted by the Rev. Father Joseph Peksa, attended Tapci, whose last words, in reply to the usual inquiry, were: "Goodbye, Thanks for everything. I am very sorry I killed a citizen of your country.'" The identity of the hangman, who is believed to have come from the Eastern States, is known to only two or three prison officials.<sup>2</sup>

In Bunbury it was rumoured that a certain stranger, who had checked in to one of the town's boarding houses was in fact the Eastern States hangman. Why the hangman would be in Bunbury is not explained. Perhaps he came by coastal ship from Melbourne or Sydney, to the port of Albany—an anonymous trip? Then by train from Albany to Bunbury, stopping over prior to travelling to Fremantle, to execute his grisly task. Whatever the case, overnighter or not, the suggestion that the grim executioner should be in Bunbury

was enough to get tongues wagging. Somebody always knew someone, who had heard from somebody else, of the comings and goings of boarders. If they were outsiders, all the better ground for speculation and hearsay. Neighbourhood chatter about the social happenings in Bunbury, true or not, was always a rich source of gossip. A hangman on a mission was quite the story, maybe good business for the keeper of the house, maybe not.

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> *South Western Times*, 15 February 1951, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *West Australian*, 24 June 1952, p. 1.

### OTHER SOURCES USED:

Personal Comms. (Bunbury Identity) Judy Jones, 9 February 2024.

'List of people legally executed in Western Australia', WIKIPEDIA, retrieved 9 February 2024.

Brendan Kelly  
RWAHS member

With thanks to *Friends of the Battyee Library Inc Newsletter*, No 184, November 2025, Perth, pp 19-20.





## Remembering Amy Sherwin (the Tasmanian nightingale): community historical heritage in action

[THRA Website](#)

[THRA Facebook page](#)

On the weekend of 15 and 16 February in 2026, two statues of Amy Sherwin, the renowned Tasmanian soprano, will be unveiled at Hadley's Hotel in Hobart. A beautiful marble version carved by Australian sculptor Peter Schipperheyn will be placed in the foyer and a bronze full-size replica on a balcony overlooking Murray Street.

Amy Sherwin was a pioneering Australian soprano, six years older and a few years in advance of Dame Nellie Melba in gaining fame, but equally renowned in the late nineteenth century. She is not as well remembered as Melba because her career petered out in the early twentieth-century and her voice was apparently never recorded.

In a period when statues of public figures are often questioned (and even vandalised), it might seem unusual for such a project. However, a committee of community members (including me) have come together to do this because of the poor recognition of Amy Sherwin for Tasmania and Australia, and because of the absence in Tasmania of statues of named women of historic significance.

The initiative for the project came from Bob Brown, the environmental activist, Greens founder and former Senator. As a lover of music, he was aware of Amy and believed it was time for her to gain due recognition. He brought together the Amy Sherwin Fund: <https://amysherwinfund.au>, being a committee of people in the performing arts and humanities with an interest in history and heritage to raise \$200,000 (not yet

all raised) to create the statue.

Frances Amy Lillian Sherwin was born on 23 March 1855 on a farm at Judbury in the Huon Valley, about 30 km south-west of Hobart. Hers was a musical family and, from an early age, Amy sang and was taught to play the family piano by her mother. She performed at times in local concerts from at least 1866 but blossomed as a performer in her late teens. There are many reports of her singing in concerts in Launceston and Hobart with one or two of her sisters in the first half of the 1870s. Most impressive, when Amy was 17 at the end of 1872 and start of 1873, she and a sister represented Tasmania at an intercolonial music festival in Melbourne. She continued to give public performances in Tasmania.

This amateur work is particularly significant as it contradicts a version of her early career and 'discovery' that Amy gave in interviews and articles across her professional life. Her often-repeated version was that she was an unknown and virtually untrained ingenue who sang mainly in the family orchard. One day in April 1878, a picnic party from an Italian opera company who were performing in Hobart happened to be passing by and heard her. Please note that Judbury was off the main Huon Valley road, and thirty kilometres from Hobart over primitive mountainous roads, so the story of an accidental encounter on a day's picnic is more than unreal.

Whatever the truth, the opera company heard of and then heard Amy, and invited her to perform.



A young Amy Sherwin photographed in Sydney, likely from when she was performing there in September 1878. Courtesy Bowler family.

29 April, the *Hobart Mercury* announced that 'Miss Amy Sherwin, the Tasmanian prima donna, will personate the character of "Norma", in Don Pasquale'. The performance on 1 May was a great success and the opera company recruited her, taking her to play lead roles in Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand, in all places receiving standing ovations and rave reviews as 'the Tasmanian Nightingale'. From there she went on to a professional career which over more than twenty-five years saw her perform in many grand opera houses across the United States, United Kingdom, Europe and Japan, interspersed with three triumphant tours back to Australia, including Tasmania.



To me, this story and the statue project are significant on three main grounds. First, this is a wonderful example of self-generating 'community history', a gathering of volunteers who have come together to ensure that Tasmanians remember part of their cultural heritage and one of their most accomplished women.

Second, delving into Amy's story and her early life has opened discoveries about grassroots local history in the Huon Valley and Tasmania in the nineteenth, and notably in the areas of family and social life.

Third, there has been a sense of excitement in tearing away myth to discover Amy's reality. Initially I set out to research and write a brief biography and soon found the fallacies

in Amy's version of her early life. This was not a popular discovery for everyone, but eventually the new story was embraced. It emerged that the late Judith Bowler in a 1982 short published biography had been puzzled by the contradictory evidence. Then the committee was approached by a Huon Valley local historian, Richie Woolley, who had a short unpublished manuscript biography of Amy which set out her history, especially in the context of the Huon Valley community. He described her early performances and 'discovery' in more accurate detail than previously recognised, and the committee published the manuscript as part of the campaign.

Big plans are already underway for the grand unveiling of the statues next February. Watch out for this 2026 event and join us if you can.

Sadly, Amy's story did not end happily. Declining health and financial hardship crippled her career. She taught singing in London in the years prior to World War One but then declined into poverty. In May 1934, a benefit concert in Hobart raised £200 to support her, but she died a near-pauper on 20 September 1935 in England, aged 81.

Don Garden, Hobart  
for THRA

#### References:

Judith A Bowler, *Amy Sherwin: The Tasmanian Nightingale*, author published, 1982.

Richie Woolley, *Amy Sherwin: The Tasmanian Nightingale*, Amy Sherwin Fund, 2024.



Left: Peter Schipperheyn working on the life-size model of the Amy Sherwin statue in his Melbourne studio.

Courtesy Peter Schipperheyn.

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