



Transcript of The Great Debate

“Is History Relevant?”

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THE GREAT DEBATE

CHAIR

I would like to start by showing my respect and acknowledgement to the spirits of the ancestors of the Whadjak people, the traditional custodians of this land on which this meeting is taking place. I would like to welcome you all here today to this Proclamation Day event, it is an event celebrating the anniversary of self government in Western Australia and I think it will be a great evening. I apologise for Jenny Gregory's absence, Jenny has been President of the History Council, and I'm the Vice-President standing in her place. I would like to tell you the event this evening is being recorded by the ABC.

The great debate is, "Is History Relevant". Lots were drawn to select the members of each team and for the affirmative side we have Karen Brown, the West Australian news editor of *The Australian*. We have Dr Ronda Jamieson, former Director of the Battye Library, who has a passion for history and we have Mr Ian Scott, the President of the Western Australian Genealogical Society. Then for the negative we have Professor Geoffrey Bolton, Chancellor of Murdoch University and well known for his work in teaching and writing history in Western Australia and Australia. Then we have Ms Juliet Ludbrook, a historian who's also worked as a teacher and a radio script writer and an educator, performer and librarian. Then we have Justice John McKechnie, who you know has been a Judge of the Supreme Court of Western Australia since 1999. He's also been a visiting lecturer at the University of Western Australia and the University of Toledo in Ohio. Our very highly qualified adjudicator will have a very difficult task I'm sure and he's Dr Bill Leadbetter, teacher and historian and at present senior lecturer in Education at ECU. He's an author of a number of works relating to the ancient world. So the first speaker on each side will speak for 10 minutes and each of the other speakers will speak for 5 minutes and I'll then, at the end, hand over to Bill. The first speaker for the affirmative is Karen Brown.

KAREN BROWN

Good evening everyone. Every morning hundreds of thousands of people all across Australia wake to that reassuring thud of a rolled up newspaper that has just cleared the top of the rose bushes, to land somewhere on the manicured dew covered buffalo. With sleep filled eyes we stagger out to retrieve our copy of *The Australian*, if we are a very informed reader, and we begin the day with a bowl of muesli and a good dose of history. Pages and pages of it. News stories on unfolding events, events past and predictions of events future, based on our knowledge of events past. Reports and analysis on the word spoken in the political fray, memos and documents written in the past, some never really intended for publication. The past conversations, pronouncements and answers of politicians which will shape future actions and commitments.

Publishing and broadcasting the news is a fast and deadline driven process and journalists are the very first people to admit that this so-called first draft of history is not always accurate but those who engage in the writing and in the reading of this first draft share the same desires as all those who follow them in the act of seeking, writing and reading all the subsequent drafts. It is a desire to know, a need to understand how the events of the past are connected to our daily lives. A desire to know what we can learn from past events and how those events may shape the future, because history is relevant. It shapes our lives in our daily decisions. It influences and informs our views and it helps us make sense of the world around us.

The Macquarie Dictionary tells us that history is the branch of knowledge dealing with past events and that it comes from a Greek word meaning 'learning or knowing by enquiry'. The Macquarie also very neatly defines the word relevant as 'bearing upon or connected to the matter in hand'. Tonight my team mates and I will absolutely delight in convincing you that past events are connected to all of the matters in hand and that history is relevant. We will clearly demonstrate that in our quest to understand the ever changing world in which we live, it is history that we turn to. History that remains a constant and strong source of inspiration and knowledge. It is history that defines us as individuals, as a culture and as a society. All of the traditions that we hold dear are borne of the past. Our core values have been forged in the great battles, triumphs and tragedies of our shared history as an Australian people and our character has been shaped and moulded through the

lessons learned through generations.

On Anzac Day this year record numbers of Australians turned out to Dawn Services and parades across the nation. They were there because history is relevant. Thousands more travelled to Gallipoli, retracing the steps of the Anzacs and establishing a very personal connection with this special chapter in our history. It is history that connects us to the society in which we live, in which we make decisions which shape all of our tomorrows. It is history that informs those decisions, our personal history, and our history as a State and as a nation and our collective history as part of humanity.

Tonight Ronda and Ian will expand on those arguments, exploring the importance that our society places on history and its central role in defining who we are and how we can act to be.

History is about our connections to the past but it is also contemporary and our modern language is literally littered with references to history which bear testament to its relevance in our daily life. You won't find a bank anywhere near you, giving you a mortgage without first knowing the very intimate details of your financial life and in order to do that they'll do a credit history and you won't find a doctor prepared to make a diagnosis without a fairly thorough medical case history.

Indeed history is so damn relevant that, without exception, every single pay packet that sits to the right of me is connected to history. Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Bolton, well let's face it; he's fed his life on the gravy train that is history. Juliet Ludbrook has spent countless hours, countless hours in the pursuit of history and earning extra money along the way and His Honour John McKechnie, well his Honour John McKechnie, let's face it, he spends most of his days unravelling absolutely the most minute details associated with all things past. Surrounded and immersed in past judgements in a bid to find the solutions to current legal problems.

There are many illustrations of history's relevance in our daily lives but with an eye to the timekeeper, let me share with you the following. In the past year we have seen some devastating scenes on our screens and in our newspapers. On Boxing Day 2004 there was an undersea earthquake in the Indian Ocean that generated a tsunami that hit the shores of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and India, with waves up to 30 metres high, killing 275,000 people. In recent months the US has endured one of the worst hurricane seasons on record and is still coming to terms with the massive devastation from hurricanes Katrina and Rita and earlier this month in Pakistan, up to 50,000 were killed and millions were left homeless when an earthquake of 7.6 magnitude rocked the Kashmir region near the border with India.

Now in the days which followed all of these natural disasters there was one constant. One constant in the news coverage and in the commentary across all the nations. People looked to the past. In our struggle to comprehend the enormity of the tragedies unfolding before our eyes, we searched for the connections which only history can provide. We looked for the markers which may have predicted these devastating events, we looked to the lessons we perhaps failed to heed, we looked to the experiences of those who had gone before us and lived through similar events. We sought to make sense of the present by finding the connections with the past. It is clear that sometimes as individuals and societies we fail. We fail to learn from the past but as we go forward it is our connection with the past that is central to our decision making. As we plan for the future we use our knowledge of the past and these recent natural disasters have in fact already altered the course of the future. As I speak, architecture students are examining economic ways to reinforce mud brick buildings with bamboo poles and wire mesh, to ensure that when the next earthquake hits a Third World country, thousands of people will not be crushed and smothered by the crumbling mud brick.

The Indian Ocean tsunami warning mitigation system is expected to be fully operational by next July. Never again will those who live on the ocean's rim, be without advance warning of a deadly wall of water. And civil and Army engineers are working now to devise a new levee system capable of withstanding a category 5 hurricane system.

I really wanted to leave you tonight with a quote that would both synthesise our argument and inspire you and so of course the very first person I turn to in search of that quote - well it was obvious. I went to George W Bush, the leader of the world's most powerful nation and a man I'm thrilled to say who graduated from university with a double major in history. As you can imagine George had many inspirational things to say including, "history is moving and it will tend toward hope or toward tragedy" but in the end I settled on a quote from another American, Pulitzer Prize winning author Robert Pen Warren, who once said "history cannot give us a programme for the future but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves and of our common humanity so that we can then face the future". Make no mistake ladies and gentlemen history is relevant.

(clapping)

CHAIR Thanks Karen. We now go to the first speaker for the negative - Professor Geoffrey Bolton.

GEOFFREY BOLTON Ladies and gentlemen the face of the elephant is perfectly irrelevant to the area of his posterior yet that noble and audacious beast would be sorely diminished if it were to lack either a tail or a posterior, and this introduction will suggest the slipperiness and the ultimate irrelevance of the concept of relevance.

My learned opponent for the affirmative has made a persuasive case, nearly all of which I would agree, in the idea that history should be relevant but she has not demonstrated that history is relevant and in some ways the quests aren't relevant and possibly be misleading and possibly not get us anywhere very profitable.

Let me illustrate what I mean, if the Chair will permit me, by quoting from two works of history. One egregiously relevant, the other, well you know whenever anyone is saying "what's the use of history?" they say "it's all about Alfred and the cakes and that sort of thing". Well let me start with relevant history. I take the latest edition of *Australian Historical Studies*, the leading journal of this country. I open it and I assure you almost at random I come across the article and it's not a beguiling title, it's called "Sex in mommas and it's about the construct of femininity of the 1940s and the 1950s. Well half of us are women and some of us are even survivors of the 1940s and the 1950s and this is what I read: "The 1950s has been categorised, even stereotyped as the period of domesticity, with women sequestered in the suburban home, fulfilled with their dual roles of mother and consuming housewife. On first glance there would seem to be a reconcilable difference between the War years, the time of relevant financial and independence for women and the 1950s, the domestic evil. Numerous histories however, have indicated the destruction was never so profound as it first appears, women's work during the War was only ever for the duration and was never conceptualised as a challenge to either traditional family norms or the gender division of labour". Now this is sound stuff. I wouldn't wish to despise it - but then I come to the irrelevant story in Alfred and the cakes and I quote an author, who I will name in a little while, "then in January 8th of '78 occurred the most surprising reversal of Alfred's fortunes. It was twelfth night and the Saxons, and in those days of torment refreshed and fortified themselves by celebrating the Feast of the Church, were off their guard, engaged in pious exercises or perhaps even drunk. Down swept the ravaging foe, the whole army of Wessex, the sole guarantee of England south of the Thames was dashed into confusion. Many were killed. For the most part stole away from their homes, refugees arrived with futile appeals at the Court of France. Only a handful of attendants hid themselves out in the marshes and forests of Somerset. This was the darkest hour of Alfred's fortune".

And the same author says, "This is the moment when the gleaming toys of history were fashioned for the children of every age". Now those familiar with the style will recognise Winston Churchill here and I ask you I have given you a fair extract from the developing history and the equally characteristic reference from irrelevant history. Which one would get you reading further down the page? But you may think, it's unfair to do something of Anglo Saxentric as Alfred and the cakes. Two centuries earlier, in the year six sixty nine, an apparent leader with his followers was ambushed by a much larger group who slaughtered them and cut off the head of their leader. What

possible relevance has this medieval fracas to do with us here in 2005? It happened that the victim was a grandson of the Prophet Mohammed and from that incident has arisen the division between the Shiites and the Sunnis which has such consequence in contemporary Iraq.

Now for more than 20 years, when I was actively teaching at universities, I endeavoured to persuade the decision makers that we should teach Islamic history but it was less relevant than British and European history. It was less relevant than South of East Asia. The paymasters would never put forward the means of hiring the necessary staff, and it's only then in the last few years that suddenly the Islamic world has assumed a mighty relevance -but that may be temporary.

In those distant days when I read history, the courses at the University of Western Australia were dominated by Professor Fred Alexander and we learnt about modern Europe because survivors of the First World War and the Second World War thought that by attention to the Congress of Vienna and the Treaties of Berlin and Versailles, we might learn to avoid the causes of War. Often they quoted to us that aphorism "that the trouble with history was that it was made by people who had never read any". But there were many a man and woman walking the streets of Perth today who may still in some distant part of their memory know about the Treaty of Berlin or the Congress of Vienna but what do they remember about the course. I will tell you. It is what generations of year 12 students remember about that course and that is the French Revolution and Napoleon and Hitler and the Nazis. It's the blood, it's the guts, it's the story that they want to know about. Historians are tellers of stories and the relevance of the story can never be safely gauged. So it is that I view with suspicion the attempts now made to urge that history should be subsumed into a subject with a name something like Social and Environmental Studies and that the Year 12s should be exposed only to those bits of history which are relevant. What is relevant for a contemporary 17 year old? A person to whom Bob Hawke is medieval history, Bob Menzies is ancient history and the Second World War pre history. How are they going to have their imagination stirred, their perspectives enlarged, simply by concentrating on the things about which adults argue at the moment. It is only through story telling in which the relevance or otherwise of an episode cannot be estimated that the lively mind is interested in history. I speak from experience. It is true as Karen says that I've spent my life with history but my first introduction was a copy of Dickens' 'Child's History of England' and the phrases that I remember are things like 'King Henry VIII was a blot of blood and grease on the page of English history'. Now there's more to Henry VIII than that, but much more - but that was the introduction that started me on the road which I have ever since very happily traversed, so let us not say that relevance is all. It is irrelevant. The important thing is that the historians are the storytellers of their tribe and the tribe will pick and choose what it finds relevant and what's not, according to individual taste, according to the passing fashion, according to the immediate crisis in the world around them, but none of these factors should lead us to privilege any particular part of history as being relevant. History is the seamless web, it is either all relevant or not at all.

(clapping)

CHAIR
Jamieson.

Thanks Geoff. The second speaker for the affirmative is Dr Ronda

RONDA JAMIESON History is irrelevant? only that some of it is irrelevant, so he didn't actually address what we were supposed to address tonight and I'm not going to comment further on Geoff's argument because I was so amazed that he's prepared to even lead the negative side. This great advocate and practitioner of history, who has publicly affirmed that a people without a past cannot understand the present or prepare for the future, now, tells us that his life's mission has been irrelevant. So what we hear tonight does not really matter.

What matters is what you think and even more importantly what the rest of the community thinks. I do not have to argue that history is relevant because the community testifies to its relevance every minute of every day all around the world. Just think about it.

Every day people visit places like the J S Battye library of Western Australian History to find out about their family or their community or other facets of their history. They can't all be wrong. Every week staff of the Battye library work unpaid overtime, because they so believe in what they do and want to collect and make available as much of their precious heritage as they can, so people can find the links that give meaning to their very existence.

For two years some very busy people from the community dedicated hours and hours of voluntary time to the historical records rescue consortium, to persuade Lotterywest to provide 3 million dollars to preserve the most at risk photographic images, films and newspapers in the Battye Library. Lotterywest demanded proof that the state-wide community wanted their money spent that way. That proof was obtained. Would the Lotterywest Board have approved that grant if they considered history was not relevant? Would consortium members have given so much time unless they passionately believed history was relevant? Over the past six years, the Battye Library has attracted private, corporate and Government donations, grants and sponsorship totalling \$5.5 million. That is a huge vote of confidence in the relevance of our history.

I could spend hours telling you about experiences while working in the Battye Library, where people have confirmed time and time again that it is a special place that has relevance to them but we only have time for a couple of examples. The 18 year old who squealed with joy and delight when told that the grandfather she had never met had been interviewed and his 18 hours of tape were in the Battye Library. Alice, who was in tears, as she clutched the transcript of her oral history and said, "that is the story of my life. It is going to be in the Battye Library forever and I am absolutely thrilled". Bill, who shared his story in hospital, in tremendous pain, determined that his story be told and be there for all time. Bill had a white father and indigenous mother and had been torn between two groups. Twelve thousand hours of oral histories from people who considered that they would find their history meaningful is in the Battye Library. It would be a betrayal of these people if we were even to contemplate a conclusion that their history is not relevant and is not worth the telling.

In 1981 Geoff Bolton was responsible for the Friends of Battye Library being formed and has worked hard on it ever since. Today he tells us that all of that effort was to look good on his CV. He's actually being a hypocrite and showing signs of early senility. Are you now suggesting Geoff that the Battye Library should be closed?

After devastating bushfires around Australia how often have we seen someone standing in the ruins of their home in great distress saying, "I can rebuild my house but I can't replace my photographs". If history is not relevant why do we have a State Records Office so we can chase the story of Government? Is anyone suggesting we should close it? Is Geoff? Do we close the Western Australian Museum including the Fremantle Maritime Museum and country branches, because so much of their activity is history based? There are 71 archives listed for Western Australia including Murdoch University where Geoff is Chancellor. Shame on you Geoff for wasting precious university money to maintain this irrelevant institution. Our archives cover the medical profession, aviation, transport, military history, schools, universities, banks, religious groups. Yet there are historical societies all around the State, the thousands who belong to the Genealogical Society and public libraries with local studies collection. They clearly believe history is relevant and so do I and I'm completely confident - so do you and so does the community.

(clapping)

CHAIR

Thanks Ronda. The second speaker for the negative is Juliet Ludbrook.

JULIET LUDBROOK

Thank you Ronda. Just a couple of points before I begin. I just want to point out to Karen that I'm okay, we spend many hours working in history but the amount of money that we get for it is somewhat less than you might expect. Also the fact that we learn from history as in the recent catastrophes, well all I can say is why haven't we learnt those lessons earlier? And as for the \$5.5 million grant for the Library what about the other areas of history that other people seem to feel are not relevant.

So is history relevant? On consulting the dictionary as one does on these occasions I was interested to see that the word following 'history' was histrionics. Of course the word history shares its etymology with the word story and storytelling and the stage are inextricably linked. This triggered in my mind the Shakespearean quotation "all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players". The infant, the whining school boy, the lover, the soldier, the justice followed by the last two. This in turn led me to wonder how relevant is history to man or woman though Shakespeare presents a very male version of things. During those different stages of their lives, in other words history is relevant to whom?

The infant is only concerned with a good burp, love and cuddle. To him or her, history means not a whit. The whining school boy? the 'me' scented creature for whom history is synonymous with dinosaurs and little else. Or later at puberty, when it is suggested that anyone ever in the whole history of the world has ever had to cope with such angst as they do, is irrelevant, no impossible. The lover, the hunter, after the being of his or her desire, but love is blind and lovers' cannot see. And then the soldier, a quotation again. This time from Bernard Shaw "I never expect the soldier to think" harsh words in today's world. Some ominous young men following orders. And the Justice I will let the Justice speak for himself. All the wise saws and moral instances. And the sixth stage, the lean and slithered pantaloons, the stage where men and women do reflect upon their past, even settle down to writing autobiographies and 'whistle in their sound'. The satisfaction for themselves. What irrelevance to others? And finally sans teeth, sans eyes sans faith, sans everything, including memory, wherein resides their history.

But returning to the child. Sadly too many people, too many children spell history B O R I N G. I found that on the internet. Officially of course up until Year 11 it is spelt S O S E, Studies of Society and Environment, not history at all. And by Year 12 though WA figures are higher than in the rest of Australia, still only 15.43% of the Year 12 population study history. For the history to be relevant you must have some knowledge of it.

As an educator of museums in the area of Social History I'm engaged in communicating my interest in the past and its relevancy to the present. However I often wonder whether I or my colleagues ever succeed. They certainly enjoy the stories - that applies to most of us including Shakespeare, whoever he really was, he never let historical facts get in the way of a good story. When working with children it is not until you tell the story and tell it well that eyes make full contact and the body language speaks full attention. The truth is that the story could probably be about anything.

My own interest in history was sparked by just such a tale of bloody bodies being carried in dripping bloody sacks - something to do with the Indian Mutiny and the Black Hole of Calcutta I think. In my childhood, history was largely learned through copying large chunks of text off the blackboard and into exercise books. Anyone can be forgiven for doubting history's relevancy in those days. But let me see, because I am running out of time, without the stories we tell in museums. I remember the first Museums' Conference I ever attended. One of the presenters provided a brown paper bag for each delegate and said, "place the bags over your head". This, he told us, was how his community feels the gay community, while visiting museums, they saw nothing that related to them and thus they felt invisible. History is irrelevant to those who are narrated out of it, be it women and children, indigenous people, other minority groups, the poor. Where are the rag dolls that were loved to death with a hundred stories to tell? Where is the precious porcelain doll that was only played with on Sundays, yet it's determined to get the showcase representing toys of that particular period. Who's story is being told? Is that story relevant to me? Perhaps that is the reason why so many people feel compelled to record their own stories. An interest in oral history grows.

Of course it would be ridiculous to expect any museum, like any book, to tell the whole story, yet even what we have is perceived as largely irrelevant by many politicians and bureaucrats. If it were not so, small museums would not have to struggle to exist. If it were not so, funding would be available to save heritage buildings. If it were not so, a State that can only be proud of its sporting heritage would not be without a fully functioning sports museum adequately documenting its past

and presenting its achievement. If it were not so, the Museum of Childhood, acknowledged as a leader in its field in many areas of museumology, let alone the delight and inspiration of children and educators, would not be packed away homeless and its very existence in jeopardy. If it were not so, our own State Museum would be up and running with a suitable building to house and display our magnificent State collection, not packed away somewhere on the outskirts of Perth. And so saying this mere player somewhere between the Justice and the lean and slither pantaloons stage exists.

(clapping)

CHAIR

Thanks Juliet. The third speaker for the affirmative is Ian Scott.

IAN SCOTT

Good evening. History is relevant. History is all around us. It's all pervading and is part of our conscious and unconscious psyche. It's here tonight. It's here with us in this auditorium. History defines who we are as individuals for we are all a product of our ancestry in many different ways. Do we not acknowledge that the family memories and traditions that have been observed and passed down through generations contribute to our sense of relationship and belonging? That we take notice, some or all of the circumstances of place, of time, education, economics, experience, family grouping and the interaction of family personalities. Do we not observe with sadness, members of the community who are experiencing the emptiness and loss of self esteem due to that pattern of family memories, stories and tradition being disrupted or lost. History is relevant.

How is it that some people undertake research to study previous patterns of disease in ancestors? Our family history holds key information about our past and clues to our future, including health. To many it's an advantage to have that awareness in their daily routine. Throughout the ages, history has been used to determine inheritance of property, titles and international boundaries have been and are determined on the events and the records of history. Are we to say that all the great writings, drawings, paintings and stories passed down through the ages are not relevant? They are living history and are the very foundation and inspiration of our civilisation. It has been said that to know where you are going, you need to know where you have been. Consciously or unconsciously we draw on this heritage and inspiration in our daily activities, no matter the level of involvement. Inspirational encouragement and motivation are tools used throughout life by us all. In using these tools we draw on precedence and history of what has been before.

In the family where reference is made to previous behaviours, activities and achievements, of parents, of grandparents, siblings, right across the whole range of activities. Out in the community where politicians of all parties exhort support for whatever their latest project, using what has existed before and what is currently there to indicate further improvement. In sport, where the coach of the individual team constantly uses tradition and history as a means of motivation to achieve results. Can we truthfully say to the elderly supporters of the former South Melbourne Football Club, ecstatic with the Sydney AFL Premiership, after 72 years, that their history is not relevant. That their undying lifelong support is not relevant. That is history itself.

Religions all around the world depend on and use the invocation of history to justify and reinforce their message. In peace and war, the study of history is a significant part of the training of officers and NCOs who make appropriate use of military history in the teaching of strategy, tactics, logistics and administration and they use history to foster unit pride to give today's soldiers an understanding of the past. And as George S Patton, the well known World War II American General said, "to be a successful soldier you must know history".

I was very interested to hear the reference and the story by Geoffrey when he talked about altering the case. It was rather an interesting coincidence because at national level politicians often use history as a rallying point and whilst I was researching along this line, and at the same time having a cup of tea with a nice piece of cake, I fell across a very interesting quotation by a gentleman called Winston S Churchill. In June 1940, Winston Churchill evoked the power and relevance in history when he spoke to the beleaguered population of wartime Britain and he said, "let us therefore brace

ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and it's Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say this is their finest hour". Doesn't this show the relevance and the importance of history?

In conclusion I would like to share part of the speech that was made September 1998 by John D Lombardy, the Chancellor and Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in USA and I would like you to listen to this because I think this sums up our entire case. "Our lives are short and the challenges great. By the time we are old and wise our opportunity for decision has passed us by. Only through our reading of the past can we become wise enough, soon enough to choose well the things we must do. The better our understanding of the past, the better prepared we enter the future". Ladies and gentlemen history is relevant.

(clapping)

JOHN McKECHNIE I have been privileged to listen to a very forthright debate by an affirmative team making some very real and valid points. Unfortunately that didn't happen tonight. The affirmative team is a little bit like the Sultan of Zanzibar and if you don't know to whom I'm referring that proves our point that history is totally irrelevant. The Sultan of Zanzibar, in a moment of probably madness, decided that he would defy the British Empire on the 27th August 1896 and at 9 a.m, on the 27th August the British declared War on him and the War was over 38 minutes later, which means it goes down in history as the shortest War ever. The British annihilated the Sultan of Zanzibar's troops and were completely victorious. I'd like you to think of the negative team tonight as British.

I wondered why it was that I was invited to join them in the panel. After all I'm not known as an historian, my children think I'm a piece of living history and I'm not known as a wit, although sometimes people have been kind enough to describe half that quality, but I have worked out why - because in my past life before I became a Judge I gained a reputation of responding to shallow and superficial arguments and so they chose me.

And so we come to our opponents. Karen Brown. What a lovely story she opened with. The birds twittering around, the paper coming in, you getting your days and years in history and what happens to that history ladies and gentlemen the very next morning - it's lining the budgie cage. So much for relevance. She said that news is the first draft of history. Well only a journalist could think that. You might as well say that Man was God's first draft and he kept on going till he created women. And while I'm talking about women, my opponents have talked about history. What about her story? What about all the people who are left out of the very select views of history? As Juliet said, the marginalised - the groups. Where are they in our history? How many times do you read about women in history? Or appertaining to other groups. Never. So what else did she say? She gave this lovely story about Anzac Day, she's good at stories actually. Now that is our point. People are not interested in history. History isn't relevant. It's the stories that are relevant. They will listen to the stories. There are people who will tell you that the Siege of Troy and the great wooden horse were true. Even though when you think about it the story starts with Helen who was said to be one of the daughters of Zeus. There's a bit of a clue. So Karen is an extraordinary good storyteller. That is our point. That is what history is. It is not relevant. What people like, as Geoffrey said, are the stories. Historians are the triumph storytellers.

And finally, just dealing with Karen, finally you talked about the tsunami the warning station and the levees that are now going to be built. Well if we'd learnt anything from history we would have built them before this part of the history. What a thing, arrogating for history what is probably for science.

Now Ronda, I have to be very quick, Ronda - well - she started off well. I thought she made some good points so I made a note for myself, I must update my medication. She amazed me. Three million dollars for some old photographs. What could you do with \$3 million and something that's really relevant today, but no we spend them on some old photographs and who will look at them!

Presumably the same people who are going to sit down and listen to 12,000 hours of oral history. And finally Ian. Well Ian was lovely. He said that history is being used to determine the inheritance and titles and country borders. Well I suppose that is partly true, speaking as a Judge, fraud and forgery have also been used. Ladies and gentlemen our points are very simple and they have been made, I think you will agree, very well by my two team members. History is so selective that it is effectively meaningless and not relevant and people are interested in storytellers which is why you have enjoyed tonight because everybody, except me, have been telling you stories. That's what we like. It's the story that's relevant. Not the history.

(clapping)

CHAIR Thanks John. Thanks to all our speakers. I am now have to handover to the adjudicator, Dr Bill Leadbetter and I really don't envy him the task.

BILL LEADBETTER Chair, ladies and gentlemen. I don't envy me my task either and the reason I don't envy me my task is because I've listened to six very accomplished speakers, talking about something which is very dear to me. Of course I'm a safe person to be an adjudicator because I'm an ancient historian and as everybody knows, ancient history is a synonym in contemporary society for irrelevance. Everytime a politician wants to say that something doesn't matter anymore they tend to say, "oh that's ancient history now".

We began this debate with a very clear statement from the affirmative that we are surrounded by history. That, and I suspect that it is because this topic is close to the first speaker for the affirmative's heart. It is the media which is our first provider of history. The media, if you like, is our first draft of history. It's a very powerful statement that every day we open the newspapers and we take in our daily hit of history. And this set the tone for the affirmatives case. The affirmative was basically arguing that history is fundamental because it forms who we are. It is relevant to us in every part of our lives.

We had a number of examples being given in this first speech. I found it interesting that Anzac Day was one of them and the importance of the Anzac legend particularly because of the recent suggestion that Anzac Cove be recreated on Mornington Peninsula, Which seems to me to be profoundly ahistorical, but there we are. Perhaps we will call it Anzacland. But also those other histories that we can't escape. Our medical history, our credit history. We are all, say the affirmative, the products of our history. We live within our history, we define ourselves through our history and we actually understand what we do historically. As such, we have a very firm understanding of what it was that the affirmative was saying - - that history is relevant because it is a fundamental tool by which we define and understand ourselves as individuals and as a community.

And the negative's response I think was a very interesting one, because it slid between what was history and what was relevant. Professor Bolton began by questioning the notion of relevance, contrasting an article on gender and gender history in the 40s and 50s with the story of King Alfred and what I found quite interesting about this, this was almost picked up by the affirmative in the first piece, was that one of the phrases that was used by the author in describing Alfred was - darkest hour. A phrase which was then perhaps glossed as finest hour in 1940 and this was a story, which was immediately relevant in fact to the author and to its community. The community that received it.

I guess the issues about what kinds of histories are relevant at various times is something that those of us who struggle to get particular kinds of histories taught in universities, have to fight all the time and some of the comments about the subsuming of history into society and environment education and the question of post compulsory education, began I think to me, to start making a few real hits. If history is so relevant, why is it that it is actually taking such a backward step or series of backward steps within the formal education system. Why is it that what was once called History is now called, in Western Australia, Society Environment and in other States the Studies of

Society and Environment and in NSW Human Society in it's Environment? Why is it that, in the current TEE course we have three post compulsory History courses but when the courses of studies are introduced we will have one? Why is it? Those sorts of hits were pretty valid.

And of course I'm very much, I must confess, partial to the notion of historian as a storyteller. But I was wondering how, what Professor Bolton had said, had seriously negated what Karen Brown said. What was it that the negative had said that really knocked the affirmative for six.

So, we then came to the development of the affirmatives case and here the affirmative argued thoroughly consistently, that people use history, that history matters to people, that genealogy is important to people. The family photographs, oral histories are important to people. When houses burn down they know they can replace their houses but they can't replace the photographs. That there is some significant public support for history. This was a matter, I must say, which was subsequently taken up in the negatives rebuttal. But the affirmative I think again, continued to make some hits about the importance of history at least on a personal, personal level. However, the negatives' response was to say, they didn't really attack that notion of the personal at all. They went for the social level. I wasn't sure, I must confess, about the use of Shakespeare's 'Ages of Man'. Principally because what you can interpret one way you can reverse. You can do it another way. However here we had the development of the notion of history as having no especial public standing. That for the people who matter, for the people who count, history as a practice and history as an institution, history as a way of thinking and history as a provider of context is in fact largely irrelevant.

And a number of points were made about the states of public collections in Western Australia which was a very powerful set of statements, none the least because they're true. That we do have museums, significant public museums, which are packed away in storage. So there we are. The negative responded by perhaps conceding a little bit that personal stories and personal information, personal histories are of course terrible important to people but when it comes to issues of public concern, when it comes to issues of public importance, history is not really terribly important.

And finally the affirmative finished their case by a very strong, restatement. A very strong restatement of the importance of history as something which underpins everything that we do and that history itself provides here, there, everywhere within the context if you like of the 'Seven Ages of Man', all sorts of images and all sorts of stories which could then be used by sporting coaches, by Generals in War, Patton was quoted, in rhetoric and construction of speeches and so on, that history, there was a very strong resurgence of it, the absolute escapability of history. It has to be relevant. You can't get away from it and that in the end was what the affirmative was saying absolutely strongly.

The negative began the conclusion of their case with the Sultan of Zanzibar and the 38 minute war which I thought was interesting, but we've been going for slightly longer. I guess a series of pertinent observations, particularly about the people who are left out of historical stories. What the negative were trying to bring together at this point was an assertion, and this was a very strong assertion, that it's not history that's terribly important. It's not the systematic study of the past. It's not the systematic study, the organised study, the use of sources, the use of resources in order to construct scholarly narratives. It's stories that are very important and that, in the end, was what the negative came down with, that what we construct ourselves with, is not history but stories and that was how the negative finished. That it's history is irrelevant because it's not history that we use. It's stories that we use.

Now if the affirmative had at any point picked up on the negative's distinction between histories and stories, there would be a strong case. The negative, quite astutely, from the very beginning rode a very clear distinction between scholarly activity and story. Between private construction of self and public uses of history and public histories. And so it is with much regret, as a practising historian, on the balance of the argument. I have to award the vote to the negative.

(clapping)

CHAIR Thanks Bill and thank you to all the debaters. I think we had a very scintillating evening and it was fantastic. I would now like you to continue the debate outside and we'd all like a chance to do that with our speakers I'm sure. I'll hand over to Margaret now who's going to tell you about the arrangements and thank all the speakers and thank you all for coming.

(clapping)

MARGARET HAMILTON I'm rather superfluous at this moment because I was going to thank you all for coming and for my choice of the debating team. I'm so glad I got involved in this junket and really and truly it has been a most enjoyable evening. Thank you all very much and I'd like on the behalf of the History Council to give you a little something. There you are - if you don't mind divvying that up.

(presents gifts to debaters)

(clapping)

MARGARET HAMILTON Yes we hope that you will join us outside for such food and drink as there is. A wonderful turnout. I hope there's a nibble for everybody.