

# newsletter

## What a Great Debate!



**For the Negative** l to r: The Hon. Justice John McKechnie, historian Juliet Ludbrook and Em. Professor Geoffrey Bolton

It was wonderful to see such a large audience attend the History Council's Proclamation Week Great Debate on 20<sup>th</sup> October. The topic chosen was 'Is History Relevant?', the size of the crowd affirming that many people do indeed consider History relevant.

It might be claimed that the speakers were merely preaching to the converted, but it does no harm for even the most devoted historians to reflect on why they are doing what they do.

The affirmative team was composed of Ian Scott, President of WAGS, Dr Ronda Jamieson and Karen Brown, WA Editor of *The Australian*. They argued that History is relevant because it is all-pervasive, and every aspect of our lives is based on history, with today's media providing a kind of 'first draft' of history as it is made.

I must admit to being intrigued as to how somebody like Professor Geoffrey Bolton, always such a great advocate for History, would manage to argue for the negative team that History is Not Relevant! He was ably supported by Juliet Ludbrook and The Hon. Justice John McKechnie. Their arguments were based on the ingenious premise that the relevance of History is irrelevant. History is valued, not for its relevance, but for its storytelling!

Dr Bill Leadbetter, the adjudicator, provided an entertaining analysis of the arguments of each speaker, and concluded regretfully that the artful approach of the negative side had won the day.

## History Matters

The History Council movement is spreading rapidly throughout Australia. A History Council is now being formed in Tasmania, joining History Councils in South Australia (established not long after the History Council of WA's incorporation in 2003), Victoria and New South Wales.

The oldest, the History Council of NSW, was established ten years ago and is a member-based organisation. It is largely funded through the NSW Ministry for Arts, which supports an Executive Officer and contributes to the running of programs, while the Royal Australian Historical Society provides an office for the History Council in its Macquarie Street headquarters. The main activities of the History Council of NSW revolve around History Week, a major annual public lecture, and an indigenous history fellowship. It assists in the judging of the very generous NSW Premier's History Awards (worth over \$100,000 to the winners). As the peak body in NSW for historical organisations, it also plays a major role in advocating for history. More details can be found at [www.historycouncilnsw.org.au/](http://www.historycouncilnsw.org.au/)

The History Council of Victoria was established six years ago. Its antecedent was the History Institute of Victoria. It receives significant funding from the Victorian Ministry of Education and Training which supports an Executive Director and assists in the organisation of programs with a strong focus on promoting the study of history in schools. Details are to be found at [www.historycouncilvic.org.au](http://www.historycouncilvic.org.au)

It is worth reflecting on the significance of peak bodies advocating for history in five states of Australia. Surely it's another sign that Australia is finally out of the long trough of historical disinterest after the great bicentennial overload. The media has discovered that history attracts ratings. Television historians, history detectives and history reality shows proliferate. The History Wars continue to be played out in the major Australian newspapers, in a perverse way—on the principle that controversy attracts attention—raising public interest in history. Interest in family history and genealogy is booming. But it's not just an aging demographic with the time and inclination to search for their roots. Student numbers in university history courses have risen across the nation. We wait now for the trend to become apparent in the secondary education sector.

**Jenny Gregory**  
President

This debate was such a stimulating and enjoyable event that many of those present expressed the wish that it could be presented to a wider audience. (cont. page 3)

**Below: The Affirmative Team,** l to r: Ian Scott, Dr Ronda Jamieson and Karen Brown.



## CONTACT US

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or write to  
PO Box 1619, West Perth 6872

**Deadline for next issue:**  
**31<sup>st</sup> January 2006**

Please send contributions to the Editor, Jenny Edgecombe, at the email or postal address above.

## Meetings of the Committee

The Committee meetings held on **31<sup>st</sup> August** and **26<sup>th</sup> October** included the following business items where the Committee:

### 31<sup>st</sup> August

- Planned to develop a public awareness campaign of organisations that hold historical and archaeological collections that are not adequately housed or whose housing is threatened.
- Adopted a standard wording for the 'Welcome to Country' to be used for History Council of WA events within the Perth Metropolitan Area.
- Resolved to write to the Minister for Community Development expressing concerns about the purchase of the Goodacre collection and enquiring about proposed storage conditions and the access process for researchers.
- Decided to publicise the functions of the History Council to the members of the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) since history is a vital concern of local government.

### 26<sup>th</sup> October

(Please note that the minutes of this meeting will not be ratified until the Committee meeting of December 20<sup>th</sup>)

- It was reported that Dr Bobbie Oliver has agreed to take up the position of Secretary.
- President and Vice-President met with Alastair Bryant, Director-General of Department of Culture & the Arts to discuss role and future funding of the History Council.
- Wrote to the Heritage Council of WA accepting their offer to be represented on the Heritage Tourism Reference Group.
- Wrote to the Chairperson of the Curriculum Council expressing concern that the new History Course of Study currently being considered for implementation, as part of the Western Australian post compulsory school curriculum, will no longer include Australian history as a compulsory element. Provided an offer of assistance.
- The History Council is continuing to develop links and relationships with major organisations and government departments that have an interest in history.

## Like to send this Newsletter to your members?:

Corporate members are welcome to onpass the electronic version of the History Council newsletter to their own members, or to refer them to the History Council Newsletters on the website at [www.historycouncilwa.org.au](http://www.historycouncilwa.org.au)

## Join in History Council Activities

History Council activities are expanding and two of the Sub-Committees would appreciate some extra assistance. You do not have to be a History Council committee member to join us.

The Communications Sub-Committee needs people who are willing to be regular reporters for their organisation's current and future activities, write short articles or help with newsletter production.

The Membership Sub-Committee would appreciate assistance in the areas developing and maintaining membership.

Contact us via the addresses on page 1 if you can help.

## Meet the Secretary Bobbie Oliver



*In our continuing series on members of the History Council of WA Committee, we introduce the Secretary, Dr Bobbie Oliver.*

Bobbie lectures in Australian History and cultural heritage at Curtin University; her research interests include WA labour and industrial history and heritage.

From 2000 to 2005, she was Chief Investigator of two ARC-funded projects to collect and research the history of the Midland Government Railway Workshops.

Bobbie is Vice President of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth Branch, and is a regular contributor to the Biennial National Labour History Conference. The latest of her numerous published histories is *Unity is Strength*, a history of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia 1899-1999 (2003).

## Lee-Steere Essay Competition Winner

Phillip Twiss, winner of the 2005 Lee Steere Essay Competition, was presented with a cheque and certificate by the RWAHS president, Professor Reg Appleyard. The presentation was held at the Society's AGM, on 21 September 2005. During the course of the evening the successful entrant read his winning essay which was entitled:

*Western Australia, World War One and the Conscription Referenda of 1916 and 1917: In search of a rationale for the overwhelming support from the West.*

## Western Australian Premier's Book Awards 2005: Closing Date

*Entries for the 2005 Awards close on Friday 6 January 2006.*

Entries are called for the 2005 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. Books/scripts that have been published or produced in 2005 are eligible.

There are several categories, and from all entries, judges will also choose the winner of the West Australian History Award.

Those works that make a major contribution to the understanding of Western Australia's past will be eligible for this award.

Prize-money of \$7,500 is awarded to winners in each category and all category winners, and the winner of the West Australian History Award, will be eligible to win the Premier's Prize of \$20,000.

The West Australian History Award is sponsored by the Department of Culture and the Arts.

Shortlisted books will be announced in late April 2006 and the winners in late May 2006.

### **Further information:**

For Guidelines and the official Entry Form, see:

<http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/pba.html> or contact:

Western Australian Premier's Book Awards  
State Library of Western Australia  
Alexander Library Building  
Perth Cultural Centre  
Perth, Western Australia, 6000  
Tel: (08) 9427 3330  
Fax: (08) 9427 3336  
Email:  
[julie.ham@liswa.wa.gov.au](mailto:julie.ham@liswa.wa.gov.au)

## History OF WA Council

### End of Year Sundowner Invitation

**Where: The University Club,  
University of WA**

**When: Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> December  
Time: 5.30 -7.00pm**

You are invited to join the Committee of the History Council for the End of Year Sundowner.



Nibbles supplied. Cash bar.

## Historical Records Rescue Consortium

Lotterywest has made one of the largest grants in its history to fund the **Historical Records Rescue Consortium (HRRC) Project** - one of the most ambitious undertakings of its type ever seen in Australia. The Historical Records Rescue Consortium draws its membership from the executives of nine historical and genealogical associations, and is coordinating a massive rescue to save some of the most endangered and historically significant material held in the J S Battye Library of West Australian History.

In September, Premier Dr Geoff Gallop formally launched the project and presented the Lotterywest cheque for \$3 million to the President of the Consortium, historian Associate Professor Pamela Statham Drew.

The grant will enable a specialist team to be formed to mount the rescue which will see 700,000 pages of newspapers microfilmed, 75,000 photographic negatives digitised and 150 unique films copied onto a stable polyester film base.

The project is a unique partnership between the community, Lotterywest and the State Library. For more information see the HRRC website at:

<http://www.fobl.org.au/hrrc/>

## The Great Debate (cont from page 1)

The History Council is making arrangements to prepare a transcript of proceedings. The event was also recorded by the ABC and it is anticipated that this will be broadcast at a later date.

The debate was followed by refreshments in the foyer of the Alexander Library, and many of those attending took the opportunity to meet with friends old and new. Once again the History Council's Events Working Party did a splendid job in organising a smoothly run evening in addition to obtaining such high calibre speakers for the debate.

Events like this one do a great deal to raise awareness of the importance of History - one of the primary objectives of the History Council.

## Affiliated Societies Conference Fremantle: A Place of Contact.

The State conference of Historical Societies affiliated with the RWAHS was hosted by the Fremantle Historical Society 16-18 September.

The conference was well-attended, with more than 120 delegates and other visitors representing some 30 affiliated societies.

The theme chosen was *Fremantle: A Place of Contact*. After the Mayor of Fremantle, Peter Tagliaferri, welcomed the guests on Friday evening, members of the Fremantle Historical Society entertained the company with an historical perspective provided through excerpts taken from the works of J.B. O'Reilly, T. Winton and E. Ciccostoto.

Professor Reg Appleyard, President of the RWAHS, opened the conference on the Saturday, inviting Ms Marie Thorn to give a Nyungar welcome to the participants.

The program included: Paul Arthur from Murdoch on 'Voices of the West End' and Len Collard, with 'A Nyungar Interpretive History of the country of the southern suburbs'. Michelle Morrison presented a paper on health & sanitation related to the Black Plague in Fremantle, and Sally May's paper dealt with the fishing industry in Fremantle. Kris Bizzaca's paper on Contact through Community and Heritage completed the agenda.

Professor Geoffrey Bolton, the keynote speaker at the dinner held at the Fremantle Town Hall on the Saturday night, chose as his subject the importance of local contact.

## Walks of Perth

Despite inclement weather a series of Proclamation Day Heritage Walks took place on 21, 24 and 28 October. They were organised by *Celebrate WA*, as part of the West End Festival. The tours, which were booked out, involved two sessions led by Ruth Marchant James and Ron Bodycoat. The walks commenced at the Barracks Arch and included the history of heritage sites and buildings along the Terrace. They finished at the newly refurbished Perth Town Hall, where the participants were provided with a most welcome afternoon tea.

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

You can support the work of the History Council in its pledge to make history a vital part of community life in Western Australia by becoming a member.

### Membership Application

You can support the work of the History Council in its pledge to make history a vital part of community life in Western Australia by becoming a member.

Prefix First Surname

Organisation

Address

Postcode

Work Tel Home Tel

Email

Are you/your organisation Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Yes  No

Please state the number of members in your organisation \_\_\_\_\_

I/we would like the following type of membership:

- Corporate Large organisations \$200 pa  
(including government agencies and universities)
- Corporate Medium organisations \$100 pa
- Corporate Professional organisations \$50 pa
- Corporate Small organisations \$30 pa
- Individual \$20 pa
- Individual Concession \$10 pa
- Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Method of Payment

I have enclosed a  cheque  money order

**Make a copy of this form, complete and return it with payment to**  
History Council of Western Australia Inc, PO Box 1619, West Perth 6872

## Members' Events

### HISTORY COUNCIL OF WA GENERAL MEETING

The History Council is calling for agenda items for a general meeting in March 2006 (date to be announced).

### END OF YEAR SUNDOWNER

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> December

Details: page three this issue

### THE ROYAL WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Public Talk — History in the City program.

Wed 7 December 2.00pm to 3.30pm.

Elizabeth Millett: *"Onions and Sage" A reminiscence of Prof. Sir Walter Murdoch by his grand daughter.*

### Citiplace Conference Room

situated at the top of the escalator on Perth Railway Station.

Donation of \$5.00 at the door. Includes afternoon tea.

### Enquiries to:

RWAHS. tel: 9386 3841

### Further Details:

<http://www.histwest.git.com.au/ind ex.htm>

### National Archives of Australia, Perth Office:

### Seminars

#### 22 February 2006:

Getting the most out of RecordSearch — how to use NAA's database to find the records you're looking for. Includes tour of building.

#### 17 May 2006:

Seminar on records about the Dutch in the NAA collection with examples from WA (to tie in with the Australia on the Map 1606-2006 celebrations). Includes tour of building.

All seminars will be presented in the Seminar Room at the Perth NAA office, 384 Berwick Street, East Victoria Park, WA 6101. Seminars begin at 10.00am sharp. Numbers are limited so booking is essential. Please contact 08 9470 7500 to reserve your place.

**STOP PRESS:** Congratulations to Em. Prof. Geoffrey Bolton for his shortlisting as WA Australian of the Year!!!