

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2015–2016**

**OFFICE BEARERS**

President: Professor Jenny Gregory AM (from March 2016)

Vice President: Associate Professor Bobbie Oliver (Labour History Society)

Secretary: vacant

Treasurer: Dr Steve Errington (RWAHS)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Louise Carson (Richard III Society)

Bridget Curran (Belmont Museum)

Nick Drew (from May 2016)

Neil Foley (RWAHS)

Geoff Moor (Canning Historical Society)

Helen Munt (Professional Historians Association WA) (from May 2016)

Bpb Reece (Fremantle History Society)

Merredith Southee (History Teachers’ Association of WA) (from May 2016)

Pamela Statham-Drew (Friends of Battye Library) (from May 2016)

Aileen Walsh (Aboriginal Heritage Action Alliance) (from June 2016)

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Calida With (until March 2016)

Sandra Curtin (from May 2016)

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT 2015–2016**

The Committee of the History Council held six regular meetings and several planning meetings in the financial year 2015-16.

**Transition:** My first meeting was on 22 March 2016. This was a transition meeting that considered where we stood as a Council and what our future path would be. It was attended by Louise Carson (Richard III Society), Bridget Curran (Belmont Museum), Steve Errington Treasurer (RWAHS), Geoff Moor, Neil Foley, Bobbie Oliver (Labour History Society), and Bob Reece (Fremantle History Society) who had all been reelected to Council at the AGM. No office bearers had been elected at the AGM and Bob Reece chaired the meeting by mutual consent. Unfortunately our past president Lise Summers was unable to attend because of ill health. I had been invited to attend as an Observer and was elected President, and Bobbie Oliver was elected Vice President.

It was decided that, based on the remit of our Constitution, the History Council should seek to increase corporate membership representation on the Committee in order to function more effectively as a peak body for history.

We were very pleased that Helen Munt (PHAWA), Merredith Southee (HTAWA), Pamela Statham Drew (FoB), Nick Drew and Aileen Walsh were willing to be co-opted (as required by our Constitution) to the History Council Committee in May 2016.

**Executive Officer:** As our Executive Officer, Calida With resigned in March 2016, one of our first tasks was to appoint a new Executive Officer. Sandra Curtis, who has a strong history and heritage background and very strong small business experience was appointed and commenced in the role on 27 May 2016. The work of the Executive Officer is limited by the availability of funding which covers approximately eight hours per week.

**A VOICE FOR HISTORY**

**Membership of Historians on Government committees**. An analysis of the most relevant government boards and committees undertaken in the 2015/16 financial year indicated that historians are well represented at WA Museum: Dr Kate Gregory is a Trustee of its Board; Merredith Southee serves on its Education Committee; Aileen Walsh, Dr Andrea Gaynor, Dr Joe Christensen and Professor Alistair Paterson are members of its Maritime Archaeology Committee; and Dr Nonja Peters is Vice Chair of its Maritime Museum Advisory Committee. I now represent the History Council on the National Archives’ Perth Consultative Forum and our nomination of Neil Foley to the State Records Advisory Committee has been accepted. There are no historians on the Library Board of WA, but we are delighted that the historians on the Friends of Battye Library Committee (led by Dr Pamela Statham Drew) have achieved remarkable results in securing funding and arranging for the digitization of many important records held by the Battye Library.

**Communications**: Unfortunately the History Council website, Facebook page and Twitter account, were not regularly updated in the 2015/16 financial year. A Communications Sub-committee was established in June 2016 to discuss a strategic approach to ensuring that on-line communication with our members and the general public is timely and up-to-date. It decided that

* email round up would be reduced to monthly, instead of weekly, and will only contain issues relevant to Western Australia. It is compiled by the Executive Officer.
* newsletters would continue to be circulated on a quarterly basis, and are being produced on a rotating basis by a Committee Member as guest editor.
* Further consideration would be given to the best means of ensuring that the website and social media accounts are regularly updated.

**ADVOCACY**

**Advocacy Paper:** In May 2015 Bobbie Oliver developed an advocacy paper summarising the History Council’s most recent advocacy issues as follows:

**Heritage:** We advocate a holistic approach to heritage, rather than separate legislation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage. Both should have equal safeguards and equal penalties when damage or destruction of sites occurs.

We have a watching brief on the current situation and have registered for email notification of the progress of both of the following bills.

* **Aboriginal Heritage Act amendments**: The controversial changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972, first introduced to the Legislative Assembly in 2014, remained on the Legislative Assembly notice paper in June 2015. As well as providing more power to the head of DAA, penalties will be increased for damaging or destroying sacred sites, but Aboriginal elders and others have expressed concern at the limited role for Aboriginal people, and that the streamlined process to be introduced will aid the mining and energy sector rather than Aboriginal heritage. Labor, the Greens, archeologists and anthropologists have been critical of the bill.
* **Draft Heritage Bill 2015:** This will result in the repeal of the Heritage Act of Western Australia 1990, and was tabled in parliament for public comment in August 2015. It does not yet represent the Government’s settled position. While there have been some concerns raised, there has been extensive consultation, and it has been generally supported by the heritage industry. However it makes no attempt to develop a holistic approach to heritage, as it does not apply to a place “which comprises only the natural environment” or “whose cultural heritage significance derives solely form its connection with Aboriginal tradition or culture”.

**WA History in the WA History Curriculum:** In May 2015 Merredith Southee provided a report on the changes that the School Curriculum and Standards Authority plan to make to the WA History Curriculum in 2017. HTAWA is concerned that aspects of the modified Years 7–10 History course have been developed without full consideration of the historical narrative, the inclusion of Australia's engagement with Asia, the philosophy of the Australian Curriculum, and that WA’s colonial past will no longer be studied in the secondary curriculum, instead being confined to Years 4, 5 and 6. The History Council has written to the Minister for Education, voicing these concerns and making recommendations.

**Rottnest (Wadjemup):** Meetings were held with interested parties regarding the heritage listing of Rottnest Island and the lack of historical or heritage representation on the Rottnest Island Board, with follow up to be undertaken in the 2016-17 financial year.

**SROWA Digitisation of files:** We have written to SROWA expressing concern at the implementation of a scale of fees for digitization of records and asking specific questions relating to the service. We have been advised that the six-month trial was to be reviewed in late July. The decision whether the service will continue to be offered is to be determined by the SRO’s operational requirements and the level of resources available in 2016-17.

**Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages:** The Registry plans to make ‘plain paper’ copies of registration events, marked ‘not for official purposes’, available at a reduced cost of $20 each in addition to any other regulated fees. This applies to Open Era Access Birth records (100 years or older), Open Era Access Marriage Records (75 years or older), and Death records (1841-1983). We have concerns about this and have followed up an earlier letter to the Hon Michael Mischin MLC, Attorney General, with letters to the Hon. Michelle Roberts MLA, Shadow Minister for Culture and the Arts; Mr John Quigley MLA, Shadow Attorney General; Hon. Lynn McLaren MLC, Member for South Metropolitan Region; and Hon. Terry Redman, Leader of the National Party of Australia (WA),

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**Strategic Plan 2015-19.** This was developed following the award of a LotteryWest grant in 2014. To assess our progress against the indicators in the Strategic Plan, the Committee has been working its way through its four key themes: A Voice for History, Advocacy, Sustainability and Events.

**Finance:** The History Council is very grateful for the financial assistance it received from the WA History Foundation between 2003 and 2014. Without external funding such as this, sustainability is extremely difficult to achieve. The Council relied on accumulated funds to sustain its activities in the financial year 2015-16.

**Incorporated Associations Act 2015:** In May 2015 Rob O’Connor QC kindly gave the Committee a presentation on the new Act. This affects all incorporated associations which must be compliant by 2018. A Constitution Sub-committee was set up to consider, advise and implement the changes necessary to our existing Constitution.

**HC Archives:** The History Council was established in 2003, following several years of planning and community consultation. Its archives are substantial and are currently being stored at Samson House in Fremantle, courtesy of the National Trust. The State Library has expressed interest in adding the History Council of WA Archives to their collections. Considerable work needs to be done in sorting the archives before they can be deposited.

**Develop membership base**

Considerable work has gone into updating our membership register. There has been a significant loss of members over the last few years and members who have allowed their membership to lapse have been contacted to encourage them to re-subscribe. From a low base of 22 reported in the minutes of the 2014-15 AGM, by June 2016 membership had increased to 69, including 22 corporate members. This is still considerably lower than in earlier years and much work is required to encourage members to rejoin. We have been particularly committed to increasing our corporate membership to enable us to fulfill our role as a peak body.

**EVENTS**

**AGM and Address:** The 2015 AGM was held on 7 October 2015 at the HIVE, Curtin University. Following the AGM, the History Council Address was given by Dr Mike “Mack” McCarthy, Curator of Maritime Archaeology at WA Maritime Museum, on ‘Making the inaccessible accessible: 3D imaging of the “Sydney” and “Kormoran”’.

**Connections: proposed State Heritage & History Conference**: In June 2015, Callum Crofton from the Heritage Council of WA gave the Committee a presentation on the proposed conference to be held 11–12 May 2017. Details are still being finalized, but the event aims to demonstrate connectivity between history, heritage and museums. It is likely that the History Council will host a session on New Directions in History.

I thank all members of the Committee and our Executive Officer for their enthusiasm and hard work for which I have been particularly grateful since I took on the role of President in March. Their commitment as well as the support of members is essential for our continuing work as the peak body representing history in Western Australia. I particularly thank Dr Steve Errington, who is retiring as our Treasurer, for his excellent contribution over several years.

The Council was established to advance the practice and place of history at all levels and in all settings and to advocate historical interests on behalf of the whole community. These important aims continue to guide our activities.

Professor Jenny Gregory AM

President