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Digging Up Ancestral Roots

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This issue has been produced
by Carol Liston, Terry Kass,
Katherine Knight, Nicole
Secomb, and Anna Wong.

President's Report
November 2004

As the end of the year approaches most PHA activities seem to be operating efficiently. It was particularly pleasing to see that the last *Phanfare* was produced with great expedition. As usual it was full of entertaining reports and articles. It's great to see members writing about conferences, workshops and assorted activities – some of which are PHA organised, others not. These reports help keep us all informed. If you are too busy beavering away at your latest commissioned history to attend any of these activities at least you can read about it in *Phanfare*.

Not only does the PHA need to promote itself more in the market place, but members should also take opportunities to do this. It is helpful to your career to accept speaking invitations, however mundane, as these help make you better known. As far as I know no one has taken up the offer from 2BL to speak on

Angela Cattern's 'The Burbs' on Thursday mornings. This is not a big commitment in terms of time and as it is done by phone you don't need to go to the ABC studios at Ultimo. This is a good opportunity to promote yourself, as well as to popularise history.

The PHA is fairly regularly asked for advice on commissioning historical work. Sometimes secretary Virginia Macleod deals with enquiries but often as president I do. Sometimes the person is directed to the appropriate local studies librarian or to the Mitchell Library, as they are clearly not interested in paying a professional historian for work. In giving advice to potential paying clients we always refer to the PHA website, in particular the register of historians available for work and the ACPHA recommended scale of fees. Potential commissioning bodies are informed that there is a pool of senior historians who have volunteered to give advice and if necessary to sit on selection panels. This offer has only been accepted a couple of times but it is hoped more use will be made of it in the future. In the past when the office of president was held by a member who worked in full-time employment there was little potential for a conflict of interest in undertaking this advisory role. As a consultant I find that it is a delicate balancing act. I always make it clear to those making enquiries that I can only advise them as PHA president and that any job offers must be emailed to members. We are sometimes asked to recommend a historian from the PHA register, but explain that we cannot do this.

Finally members are again reminded that the PHA will be celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2005. If you have any suggestions on how we can mark this milestone please inform a member of the executive.

Have a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Pauline Curby, President

Digging Up Estonian Roots

Going back to visit where your forebears came from has always been relatively simple for those with Anglo-Saxon roots. A trip to Britain was simply a matter of affording the time and the airfare. For those with their roots in Eastern Europe there was no simple option. The “Iron Curtain” was stronger than most tend to remember now. Having relatives overseas was a heavy burden to anyone living in the USSR. Jobs and opportunity were severely circumscribed if you had any relatives overseas. Writing to relations was certain to ensure that you would never be allowed any further than the border. Travel to see relatives was impossible until the break-up of the Soviet Union.

My parents never managed to return to their native land, Estonia, even for a visit, once it gained independence. For me, it was not until more recently, when I had more time, had improved my language skills in Estonian and had managed to make contact with various family members in Estonia, that I was able to seek my sources. Refreshing my language skills proved to be vital. I had been told by a number of people, with that arrogance typical of English speakers that many Estonians “would speak English anyway”. True, but this applied to younger ones, less than 25 years old. If older people could speak another language, it was invariably that of the conquerors, Russian. To be able to communicate in the local language was absolutely vital. No translator could have handled the amount of data that I had to juggle mentally, once I got together with relatives!

My return commenced as usual with a breathtakingly prolonged aerial odyssey through various airports and three aeroplanes, but once I got onto the plane to Tallinn, capital of Estonia, a strangely moving thing occurred. The cabin crew went through the usual routine safety checks, first in German, then in English. Then to my delight, they began to run through it in Estonian! Unheard of! In Australia, it is impossible to buy books in Estonian. The language is spoken by a small and declining number of people. It is difficult to learn it here. Suddenly, I was where everything was being done in Estonian. Once in the country, everyone spoke it (except the Russians). All advertising, all directions, most publications were in the language. I bought and read an Estonian newspaper every day. It was a foreign country but, despite never having been there before, I had a very strong feeling that I was home.

Tallinn is literally steeped in history, with Estonians, Russians, Germans, Danes, and Swedes having all been the ruling power at various times. As one of the old Hanseatic cities, Tallinn’s Town Hall, one of the oldest intact ones in Europe is celebrating its 600th anniversary this year.

Apart from visiting and meeting numerous relations, I could not ignore the imperatives of my profession. I did research. I visited museums and I paid careful attention to building styles, and fabric. Yes, a bit of busman’s holiday, but refreshing nevertheless. I travelled through much of the country, basing myself in Tallinn, the capital. My travels included Hiiumaa, a large island off the coast where my mother came from and where many family members lived as well. I went on a jaunt down to the leisure coast at Pärnu, the summer beachside resort, as well as spending a few days in Tartu, site of the university and the second largest city in the country.

Wherever I went, there seemed to be family. A few days in Tartu enabled me to get a bit a break from them. As you can imagine, I spent countless hours talking with them, learning much about them their past lives, life “veneajal” (in the Soviet period) and “iseseisevuseajal” (independence period after the collapse of the Soviet Union), and about my parents and their past lives too.

I had hoped that I might be able to drive past the places where my parents had lived. Such low expectations! My uncle knew precisely where the farm had been on the western coast of Hiiumaa where he and my mother had grown up. Nevertheless, it was a long trek through the woods to find the site, long since abandoned when compulsory collectivization took place in the late 1940s. There were no buildings left at all, and forest had reclaimed the farm. Yet, such was his memory that we did find the farm, successfully locating the house foundations. One cousin, who lives on Hiiumaa, was even able to take a stone from the house foundation back to her garden.



Excavating Ancestral Home Foundations

Then, later, when visiting another relative in the centre of Estonia, I mentioned that I had directions to the farm where my father had grown up. My protestations that it really was not necessary did not prevent us heading off that evening in search of it and finding it. It was no longer in the hands of any member of the family, but the old lady who owned the place permitted us to look around. It was here that my knowledge of Estonian really paid off. Once I had finished looking around the farm, I returned to the farmhouse to thank the old lady. Then she suddenly opened up and asked me, “Kas sa oled Heino Kass’i poeg Austraaliast?” (Are you the son of Heino Kass, from Australia?) When I answered I was, she suddenly began to talk about him, and the farm, the war, etc. She had been living nearby and remembered when he left!!

Cemeteries were also on the itinerary. My Hiiumaa relations knew where all of the members of the family were buried. My mother had never mentioned two of her younger brothers lay in Puska cemetery, near where a Russian bomb had killed them along with eight other children on the way home from school in 1944. Puska was also the site of a Russian Orthodox Church, damaged in the war and still awaiting repair,

plus the school where my mother and aunts and uncles had been educated, again in ruins.



Puska Russian Orthodox Church

My time was not only spent talking. I went to numerous museums, both of the open-air variety and those in buildings. One of the more notable of these was Malvaste on Hiiumaa where we had a large picnic with relations. Those of us who were game used the old style “suitsusaun”. This was a sauna with no chimney, only a tiny vent in the end gable, but it was not smoky at all, since the smoke stayed high under the ceiling. It meant getting very hot and very sweaty in the steam chamber before dashing outside to drench yourself with water.



Smoke Sauna

Research also absorbed my attention. I have been researching the first Estonian who came to Australia. Since he was a doctor, I went to the library at Tartu University to see if they had any data on him. They were most helpful and again my Estonian was most handy. Alas, he was not a graduate of Tartu! The library was open to all and a casual library card was available for a fee of 5 Estonian Kroon (about 50 cents).

Also at Tartu is the Eesti Ajalooarhiv (Estonian Historical Archive), one of a number of archives in Estonia. I found it a charming place to work with readers accommodated in a book lined reading room filled with leather-bound volumes – Atmosphere!! It was small but had a good deal of material. I sought data about family. They had a number of church registers (meetrikaraamatud) on microfilm so I was able to locate material about my mother's family, from the other side of the country. I already knew from their web site and databases, (<http://www.eha.ee/>) that they held material about my maternal grandmother who had worked as a dairymaid at Võisiku manor.

Probably the only novel that anyone has read about Estonia is Jaan Kross's *Keisrihull*, (The Czar's Madman) based upon the real life nobleman, Timotheus von Bock, who drew up a new democratic constitution for Russia in 1816, and despatched it to the Czar, thereby bringing about his certification as a madman. Bock's manor was Võisiku, and one hundred years later, my father was born there. It simply goes to show what a bit of research will reveal.

Not only did I locate the manorial pay books for my grandmother and other family members, but I also found the baptism papers for my father! And this was not on microfilm; I was issued with the originals! This archive also demonstrated the need for language skills. Documents that were issued in Estonian were not a problem, and I could read the directions and rules in English anyway. My high school German was good enough for the German documents that were issued but I did have trouble with the ones in Russian, though I had worked out how they wrote "Kass" in Russian and was able to search the relevant documents for that name.

I found some excellent handbooks to guide researchers into family history. The publication *Eestlaste Perekonnalo Allikad*, (Foundations of Estonian Family History, Kleio, Tartu, 2000) by Aadu Must, concentrated on the period before 1900. There is a handy summary in English at the back. It also has lots of copies of documents so you can see what to expect. I had not expected to get the surprise I did when looking into this. One of his illustrations was from the birth registers of the church of my father's parish. Not only did it have a registration of a birth from the villages where my grandparents came from but it also recorded that one of the witnesses was Julia Kass from the same village as my father. Another relative!

Voldemar Vitkin's *Suguvõsa uurimine: Praktiline Käsiraamat*, (Family Tree Research: A practical handbook, Valgus, Tallinn, 2001) give briefer outlines of the different types of records but it extended its reach well into the twentieth century, right into the Soviet period. It was also very handy. I was furiously reading them every night before I went to work in the Eesti Ajalooarhiv the next day.

Buildings drew my interest throughout the trip. Heritage consultants on holiday! Estonia is rapidly improving its economy, and many older buildings are being cleaned up and renovated. Indeed the country is the prosperous of the three Baltic countries freed from Soviet rule and seems to be doing a bit better than Russia itself. I was

amazed to the energy of the people and of Tallinn, which is undergoing a building boom. Yet, there are still many older buildings and examples of traditional techniques to see. It was not just the large and notable ones, but also the common and the vernacular. Estonia is a country where vernacular does have a meaning. The main building stone used in Tallinn and along the northern coast is paekivi, limestone. Many of the more substantial buildings in old Tallinn were built of it. Indeed, it is regarded as a national emblem, along with the swallow, and the cornflower.



From my hotel window

Elsewhere, traditional building methods were still to be seen. The basic form of building originally was to erect a log cabin style of building. In the cities, these were later clad with sawn timbers or were rendered. In Pärnu, one of the large buildings had been stripped of its cladding for renovations showing the manner of framing.



Pärnu

Roofing materials were mixed. A lot of the newer buildings were roofed with corrugated asbestos sheet. Yet, on farms, and on the islands shingles were still seen on a number of buildings. Other traditional methods are still in use. In southern Hiiumaa, many roofs are of reeds. Reed roofing produced in Hiiumaa is exported to nearby countries. We even visited the factory that cut and prepared the reeds.



Reed drying ground, Hiiumaa

History does not reside just in museums and archives in Estonia. It is still a very live topic. During the final years of the Soviet period, historians were at the forefront in revealing issues, which the Soviet authorities were anxious to keep quiet. Historians such as Mart Laar, later to become prime minister of the independent nation, revealed past opposition to Soviet rule. Some historians suffered persecution as a result. More recently, other issues have emerged. Just three days after I travelled through Lihula near the western coast, the authorities demolished a memorial stone to Estonians who had fought with German forces against the Soviets in World War Two, citing a series of legalisms to justify their actions. The response was immediate. Graves of Soviet veterans in the same cemetery were plastered with red paint and flowers laid on the site of the demolished memorial. The matter still attracts debate two months later.

My departure was marked by the usual sadness of such occasions, as many relations came to see off. One, whom I had not been able to meet before, had even travelled across half the nation just so she could have dinner with me before I went. It was a bit of shock to see how much overweight my luggage was, stuffed with the famous Kalev chocolates from Tallinn, and all the books, and CDs I was carrying. I had not bought most of them. Relatives had given them to me. They are all expecting me back again in few years time. Next time I will be much better prepared.

Terry Kass



A chance for us all to catch up in person

The PHA Christmas Party

@

History House

5pm 15 December

\$20 per head

Please RSVP by December 10 by return
email to allow for catering

A Capitol Review

Lisa Murray *The Capital Theatre Restoration*, City of Sydney, Sydney 2003

Lisa Murray's account of a prominent preservation case of the nineteen seventies, eighties and nineties is more than a history of the physical restoration of the Capitol Theatre. It begins with a history of the site from its swampy origins and use as a cattle- and then a hay-market through its transformations into a City Council-owned building re-modelled in 1928 as a picture palace featuring live and cinematic entertainments. The success of the venue was in part due to the 'atmospheric' décor whose twinkling stars, foliage, sculptures etc suggested an Italian garden. Programs consisted of rich and varied live-entertainments accompanied by the latest movies. The Great Depression, however, reduced the Capitol to a mere movie house, which it remained for another four decades as the building's interiors and fabric declined.

The core of the book covers three aspects: the waxing and waning of campaigns to preserve the Capitol, the place of those campaigns in the politics of Sydney's urban heritage and the behind-the-scenes negotiations during the physical restoration of the building. Indeed the analysis of the politics of preservation is the major focus of the writing, as the fight between those who would conserve and those who would develop the site waxed and waned, until its successful finale – the opening of the newly restored lyric theatre under the watchful eye of Alderman Frank Sartor. Murray teases out the agendas and the alliances, drawing on City Council records as her main source supported by interviews with key players. Occasionally Murray's pro-conservation point of view is permitted to emerge, especially in the interpretative explanations she offers where the significances of certain political positions, activities or events may not be obvious to the reader. But this is no disadvantage, for she reveals complexities and contradictions, carefully avoiding a simplistic black-and white version of events. Indeed Murray's presentation of the manoeuvrings entices the reader onwards through the saga.

The absence of an introductory overview – be it in the form of a chapter or just a paragraph or two – made for a jarring introduction to what is in every other way a well-written book. I had also expected some explicit comment on the heritage frameworks and laws, recently instituted in the period in question. An alternative might have been some explicit reference to the conservation versus restoration debates, which connect with ideas of authenticity in heritage. Debated by John Ruskin and William Morris since the nineteenth century, this issue had been discussed in Australia since the early twentieth century, and was being keenly debated by heritage architects in the 70s, 80s and 90s, as today. It's true that Murray's book is not the place for an extended diversion into these debates, but for me, the heritage frameworks needed a little more presence.

Aesthetically the book is delightful. Space is handled confidently. Pink and black/grey, together white with space are combined to create compartments on the page. These contain definitions, quotes, many wonderful historic photographs, snippets of useful information, with the whole making for a sophisticated and pleasing design. The footnotes for each page fit neatly into this scheme, a great boon to those who want to follow up on the detailed research. The ceiling-coffer motif creates a visual theme through the book giving a light, decorative unity.

The font, however, creates some problems, being on the small side. The legibility of the type is further reduced by the use of a faint, soft grey. The footnotes and photograph captions, which are smaller again, are irritatingly tiny and frankly very difficult to read. Without this fault, the design would have provided a lively and interesting visual experience for readers.

Though the back cover identifies the work as a 'booklet,' this is a modest description for what is, in fact, a substantial piece of research and an engaging narrative. It is a work well worth reading for the insights it gives, through the lens of a single case study, into urban issues and particularly into the tension between development and preservation in Sydney in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

Susan McClean

Some items from the meeting of the Management Committee of the History Council, 5 November 2004

The Management Committee endorsed a comprehensive planning document that specified long-term goals, strategies, programs and policies.

An analysis of History Week 2004 showed that over 200 events were organized – roughly half in Sydney and half in the rest of the state. The History Council is trying to boost the number of events next year that might involve indigenous communities and people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

History Week will be held from 17-25 September 2005. The theme is TRANSFORM. This theme draws attention to the changing practices of history as well as the dramatic changes to environment and society that have taken place during our recorded history. It encourages participants to reflect upon the changing meanings of their histories, and the transformation of individuals and communities as well as their impact upon the social and physical world around them.

About 70 people attended the Premier's History Awards function in Bathurst where a successful forum was held on the topic 'Whose Region?'

The History Council is suggesting to individuals and organizations associated with it that they contact ABC Television with a view to encouraging them to continue with another series of the program *Rewind* that features some of the detective work undertaken by historians.

The History Council is keeping a watching brief on several matters including access, help arrangements and fee structures related to land title searches.

The History Council is currently seeking nominations from individuals or corporate members for places on the Management Committee in 2005.

Armistice Fatalities: Australian Personnel who died on 11 November 1918

More than 330 000 Australians served overseas in World War I. Of these, 61 919 died, about 152 000 were wounded and over 4 000 were taken prisoner.

Remembrance Day is the day Australians remember those who have died in war. At 11 am on 11 November, we observe a silent tribute to the sacrifice made by men and women who died or suffered in wars and conflicts in the past 100 years.



Seventeen members of the First AIF died on 11 November 1918, the day the Armistice ending World War I was signed. They came from all states of Australia: eight enlisted in NSW, three in Western Australia, two each in Tasmania and Victoria, and one apiece in South Australia and Queensland. There was no pattern to their deaths. Some died of wounds, others of illness. Most were single but some were married. Their ranks ranged from Private to Sergeant. Several had previously been wounded in action. One had been decorated for bravery. Like all other Australian service personnel who died during the war, their names are listed on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.

The World War I service records held by the National Archives of Australia can provide extremely valuable information for family history researchers whose relatives had military service. The following brief histories of five Australians who died on 11 November 1918 provide examples of the types of information that can be found on a service record. The histories were compiled using details taken only from the war service records of these men.

Private Edward Wareham Eames (service number 6907) was born and raised in Sydney. He enlisted on 15 March 1917, two months before his nineteenth birthday. At the time he was an unmarried carpenter living with his father Walter. His mother was listed as deceased. A hernia scar on the left side of his body and a scar on the inside of his right leg just below the knee were his only distinguishing physical characteristics.

He left Australia on 16 June 1917 with the 20th reinforcements of the 18th Battalion and arrived in England on 25 August. The following day he was appointed Acting Corporal. He held this rank for four months before reverting to Private on 27 December when he embarked for active duty. He disembarked in France on 28 December and joined his unit in Belgium on New Year's Day 1918. During the course of the next three-and-a-half months his unit moved south into France. On 14 April he was wounded in action but remained on duty and was treated at the front. He remained on active duty until early August when he was hospitalised for six weeks with dysentery. He rejoined his unit on 28 September but was severely wounded on 4 October suffering a gunshot wound to the groin. He was initially evacuated to the 58th Casualty Clearing Station and then two days later was transferred to the 2nd Australian General Hospital at Boulogne. He died on 11 November 1918, five-and-a-half weeks after being wounded.

Sapper William Sandiland Howden (service number 9549) was born in White Kirk, Scotland on 29 May 1887. His parents remained in Scotland although he and his sister had since settled in Australia. His sister lived with her husband in Kurri Kurri, while he lived and worked as a coalminer near Wollongong. He initially attempted to enlist in early 1915 but was rejected for having poor teeth. Despite his dental problems, he successfully enlisted on 23 November 1917. Because of his mining background he served with the engineers in the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company.

He embarked from Melbourne on 28 February 1918 and arrived at Liverpool on 20 April 1918. After spending four months in England, he eventually joined his unit in France on 11 September 1918. On 29 September he was wounded in action. A report from the No. 9 General Hospital in France provides an account of what happened next:

The above-named soldier was admitted to this hospital on 1.10.18 suffering from the effects of shell wounds leg, right, and compound fracture of leg, left. His right leg was amputated and a transfusion of blood was given on the 3.10.18 but he died from general infection and exhaustion on 11.11.18. He was buried in St Sever Cemetery Rouen on the 12.11.18. Grave No. 9362.

Not all the service personnel who died that day received fatal wounds. Several died of illness. In some cases they were early victims of the 'Spanish Flu', the influenza pandemic that accounted for millions of lives in 1918 and 1919.

Private Joseph Louis Delley (service number 5575) was an unmarried 21-year-old farmer born in Bundaberg, Queensland. He enlisted in Brisbane on 16 March 1916, having previously been rejected nine times as he suffered from the tropical skin disease filariasis.

He left Australia on 7 September 1916 with the 15th reinforcements of the 26th Battalion. He disembarked in England on 2 November and embarked for France in mid-December. He continued to suffer from filariasis and was hospitalised several times in 1917 and 1918. On 27 October 1918 he was admitted to hospital with severe pneumonia and he died at 6pm on 11 November. The official cause of death was

influenza septicaemia. The *Last Post* was played at his funeral and his coffin was draped with the Union Jack. Among the mourners present were an aunt and uncle who lived in Bournemouth and another aunt and uncle who lived in Lancashire. His mother was sent his belongings – three coins, a prayer book, a pocket book and some letters.

Private Robert Boss (service number 2871) was an unmarried labourer from New South Wales who enlisted at Bathurst on 10 August 1916, a month before his twentieth birthday. He embarked on 25 October 1916 with the 7th reinforcements of the 54th Battalion and arrived in England three days after Christmas. He spent almost six months in England, first with the 14th Training Battalion and then on temporary assignment with the Australian Army Postal Corps. In June 1917 he proceeded to France. He was gassed on 16 October and hospitalised for over a month. Following several more months with his unit at the front, he was granted two weeks' leave on 18 February 1918, which was spent in England. He rejoined his unit in March but was hospitalised in April with bronchitis. Upon his release he returned to the front. On 11 October, just a month before his death, he transferred to the 56th Battalion. On 8 November he was hospitalised with influenza and three days later he died of pneumonia.

The highest ranking and most decorated Australian who died on 11 November was Military Medal recipient Sergeant John Page (service number 2135). Born near Quirindi in New South Wales, he enlisted on 13 April 1916. He was an unmarried 28-year-old contractor who nominated his father Peter as his next of kin. On 24 August he embarked with the 3rd reinforcements of the 34th Battalion. He disembarked in England in October and proceeded to France in November. He was appointed Lance Corporal in January 1917, the first of a series of promotions.

On 6 May 1917 he was admitted to hospital suffering a gunshot wound to the groin. He spent several weeks in hospital but rejoined his unit on 15 June and five days later was appointed temporary Corporal. On 15 July, while serving in Belgium, he was wounded for a second time when he suffered a gunshot wound to the neck. He was admitted to hospital in England and shortly after reverted to the rank of Lance Corporal. On 27 October he rejoined his unit, who were now located in France, and in mid-November he was promoted to Corporal. In early December he was promoted to Sergeant. During January-February 1918 he spent six weeks at Brigade School before rejoining his unit on 23 February.

For his actions in early March he was awarded the Military Medal. His citation reads as follows:

For devoted service on night of 4-5/3/18 during raid on enemy trenches in vicinity of Warneton. With his party he was temporarily held up by superior numbers of the enemy in the trench leading to his final objective but by his personal courage and determined fighting he eventually cleared the way for the advance. His gallant efforts were of the highest value, and relieved a critical situation for his party.

On 31 August, while serving in France, he was wounded for a third time. He was admitted to hospital in England suffering a gunshot wound to his right arm. He was released from hospital on 16 September and on 22 October 1918 he married 20-year-old domestic servant Elsie Hawkins. The wedding took place in the parish church of

her hometown of Harefield, Middlesex. On 31 October he was hospitalised with influenza and he died on 11 November, just three weeks after the wedding.

These summaries are indicative of the wealth of information held on service records. All five records also contained basic physical descriptions – height, weight, complexion, and hair and eye colour. The information is not only useful in its own right but the dates, places, units and hospitals mentioned can facilitate further research in newspapers, letters, books, diaries and unit histories.

The service records of Australians who served in World War I are one of the National Archives' greatest treasures. In 2003 the Archives began a project to ensure the future preservation of these records. We are creating a digital copy of each record and making these available for public access on our website. Some records will not be accessible during this important undertaking.

Information on the services provided by National Archives of Australia and the relevant contact details are listed below.

How to find records about a family member

Information about records can be found by searching the RecordSearch and PhotoSearch databases, both of which are available online at the National Archives' website (www.naa.gov.au).

To find records on a family member, your first step would be to enter a surname as a keyword search in the RecordSearch search screen. Viewing the records is free, but charges apply for ordering copies.

Online service record request forms are available (see <http://shop.naa.gov.au/servicerecord.php>).

Need help?

If you would like more help in locating records, contact the National Archives reference service at ref@naa.gov.au. You can also contact the Archives' reference service by telephone or fax on the following numbers:

Tel: Within Australia: 1300 886 881

Overseas: 61 2 6212 3900

Fax: Within Australia: 1300 886 882

Overseas: 61 2 6212 3999

The Western Front: Contemporary Art From Western Sydney campaign program is under way and heralds a large format multi venue exhibition at different Western Sydney locations in mid 2005.

To provide background to the exhibition, Katherine Knight was commissioned to research and write a catalogue essay, which is reproduced here with Blacktown Arts Centre's permission.

Western Front – an historical context

Thirty years ago “Western Front: Contemporary Art from Western Sydney” would have been seen as an oxymoron – hilarious in its absurdity – to people outside the region. Even 15 years ago, researchers for the Australia Council observed that federal and state arts funding personnel considered western Sydney “a problem” and “a cultural desert”.¹ Metropolitan media consistently reinforced this view.

On the Western Front – in the region itself – the perception was different. People fought the stigma associated with the term “westie”.² Even in 2004, the switchboard “went nuclear” when outraged western suburbanites sprang to the defence of Mark Latham. He was described on air to commentator Mike Carlton as “a westie, a Campbelltown sort of person”, and therefore entirely unsuited to be prime minister’.³

What gave rise to the region’s sense of being under siege – “not good enough” – and why did community cultural development come to have such a high profile in arts planning for the region?

The area now defined as Greater Western Sydney was semi-rural in character until well into the 1950s. Art historian Christopher Dean describes the period of art in the region prior to 1965 as Utopia.⁴ Artists were attracted to the region by distance from Sydney and rural environments. Artists like Norman Lindsay at North Springwood, Margo and Gerald Lewers at Emu Plains and sculptor Tom Bass at Minto were free to pursue their art undisturbed. The Windsor Group of artists, who made weekend visits to the region between 1935 and 1945, were recording a bucolic past.

Change began with urgent accommodation needs of the post war population explosion, inner city slum clearance and new migrants. The NSW Housing Commission began building thousands of homes in the region.⁵ Simultaneously, private development of cheap homes surged.⁶

¹ C Chesterman, J Schwager, *Arts Development in Western Sydney*, Australia Council, March, 1990, Chap. 5, p.3.

² Diane Powell, *Out West – Perceptions of Sydney’s Western Suburbs*, Allen and Unwin, 1993, p.2

³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Role makes the man, Mike Carlton, March 6-7, 2004, p.26.

⁴ Christopher Dean, *On Western Sydney Contemporary Art*, address to Western Front forum, August 6, 2004.

⁵ Powell, op. cit., pp.62-63.

⁶ Powell, *ibid.*, p.52.

The Housing Commission operated emergency housing settlements, including one near Liverpool. Corrugated iron and weatherboard huts provided primitive accommodation for thousands of people.⁷ Writers Diane Powell⁸ and Christopher Keating⁹ conclude it was the associated social dislocation and media “moral outrage” at subsequent instances of vice and crime that gave rise to the derogatory term “westie”.

By 1966 Blacktown’s population had increased almost four times in 12 years to 111,488.¹⁰ Large parts of the community were desperately poor and heavily dependent on pensions or the dole.¹¹ Few community services were available.

Art with meaning to these people had little association with expressions of the Utopian era. Art historian Sandy Kirby writes that The Encouragement of Art Movement began in the factories of wartime Sydney. These working class and radical origins became the foundation of the later community arts movement¹² – subsequently community cultural development. Residents like Pat Parker, who became the region and Blacktown Council’s first community arts officer in 1977,¹³ had such connections.

Pat recalls the origins of Blacktown Art and Craft Group in 1969:

*It all started with Pam Green. I had met her briefly through the Blacktown branch of the Communist Party, the Union of Australian Women, the Labor Party and a variety of other political organisations which were active in Blacktown long before I came here as a young wife and mother in 1958.*¹⁴

For Dean, this period from 1965 to 1990, was now Dystopia.¹⁵ In 1984, Campbelltown’s first community arts officer Graeme Dunstan successfully employed two visual artists in a radical transformation of a regular New Year’s Eve fracas at Minto. Burning abandoned cars became a street carnival with monsters, masks, processional pieces and a spectacular bonfire.¹⁶

In the following year South West Metro Arts employed visual artists at Bankstown. They worked with women from many cultural backgrounds, drawing on traditional skills to create a contemporary project called Women’s Power and Glory Boxes.¹⁷

By late 1987, “a group of professional multi-disciplined artists, performers and craftspeople using computers, modern transport and drawing on government funding and corporate support” was launched as Circus Solaris. Based at Wedderburn, it was an endorsed

⁷ Christopher Keating, *On the Frontier – A Social History of Liverpool*, Hale and Iremonger, 1996, p.185.

⁸ Powell, op. cit., p.51.

⁹ Keating, op. cit., p.186.

¹⁰ Alan Sharpe, *Pictorial History Blacktown & District*, Kingsclear Books, 2000, p.133.

¹¹ Shane Weaver, *Blacktown*, Bantam, 2004, p.11.

¹² Vivienne Binns, gen. edit., *Community and the Arts: History, Theory and Practice – Australian Perspectives*, Pluto Press, 1992, p.28.

¹³ *Blacktown Advocate*, Busy Pat – New arts boss straight to work, May 25, 1977, p.3.

¹⁴ Pat Parker, *Potted History of Blacktown Art and Craft Group* (unpublished paper), for the group’s 25th birthday, as at May 2, 2001.

¹⁵ Dean, op. cit.

¹⁶ *Artswest*, Artistry – Conflict to Accord, Graeme Dunstan, Artswest Foundation/Cumberland Press, Vol 5, No 2, March 1985, p.3.

¹⁷ *Artswest*, Finish of a time WARP after a year’s work, Artswest Foundation/Cumberland Press, Vol 5, No 4, May 1985, p.2.

Bicentennial activity.¹⁸ Dystopia was encouraging new and hybrid art forms expressing local characteristics and responding to needs.

According to Dean's assessment, 1990 marked the emergence of a new and confident phase in western Sydney's art – Exchange and Cross-Pollination¹⁹ – between the periphery and the centre of Sydney. Events in that year support his contention. On the Western Front, tactics had become less defensive.

Susan Conroy was appointed community arts officer by Liverpool Council in January. Within two years, her role was mutating into cultural planner with involvement in the broad sweep of local government planning – a first in the region. The Australia Council released its report Arts Development in Western Sydney with significant new funding proposed.²⁰

In September, The Pemulwuy Dilemma – The Voice of Koori Art in the Sydney Region exhibition opened at Penrith Regional Gallery. For the first time in 150 years a Darug message stick was sent and Darug language heard in public.²¹ Contemporary indigenous artists included several trained at Garage Graphix, Mount Druitt.²²

In November, Alan Moir's Herald cartoon *Eastern Creek Raceway*, showed track features as the desperately needed facilities at Liverpool Hospital. For the first time, Moir's cartoon reflected western Sydney attitudes and not the dominant Sydney view of issues.²³

In December, after a two year gestation in Penrith, Street Level artists run initiative was launched in Blacktown. The opening exhibition – a selection of HSC art – included a work by Simone Natour suggesting a devastating self-image and crucifixion.²⁴ The new venue carried a related theme. A vandalised pinball parlour, it reinforced the sense of victimisation and angry helplessness among local young people, but Street Level was already negotiating change.

Within four years, the refurbished 1950s Casula Powerhouse was launched as the region's largest arts centre. Works by leading Australian visual artists ensured wonderfully resolved connections with past and present. Architects Tonkin Zulaikha won the national RAIA President's Award in 1996 for their "sympathetic adaptation of an industrial structure".²⁵

Now "Western Front: Contemporary Art from Western Sydney" announces transition from defence to attack. If you see only cultural desert, kindly adjust your perceptions. The winds of change have formed a western front – and they're flavoured by local cheek.

Katherine Knight

¹⁸ *Artswest*, Modern adventure in old-style celebration, Artswest Foundation/Cumberland Press, Vol 7, No 10, Nov, 1987, p.1.

¹⁹ Dean, op. cit.

²⁰ Chesterman, Schwager, op. cit., March 1990.

²¹ Gay Hendriksen, *Wingari Exhibition Opening – address*, Parramatta Heritage Centre, June 24, 2004.

²² The Pemulwuy Dilemma – The Voice of Koori Art in the Sydney Region, catalogue, The Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Gallery, Sept/Oct, 1990, pp.16-23.

²³ *Artswest*, Healing begins as recognition dawns, Artswest Foundation, December 1990, p.1.

²⁴ *Artswest*, ibid., p.3.

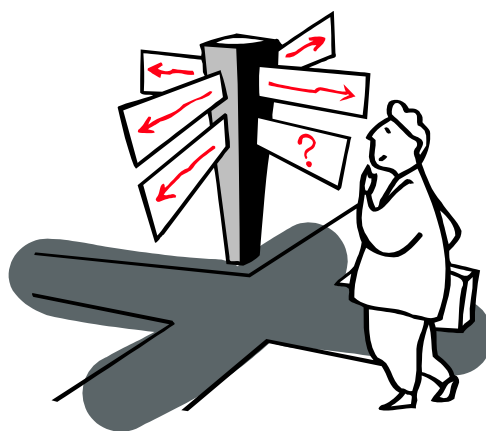
²⁵ *SMH*, Full Frontal, Anne Susskind, November 16, 1996, p.17s.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INTERNET WORKSHOP

About a dozen PHA members attended the Internet Usage for Historians workshop on Saturday November 23. It was conducted by Dr Heather Goodall at the UTS campus on Broadway. We had varying degrees of familiarity with usage, sites and other issues but Heather was able to assist all of us in accessing particular sites, alerting us to potentially useful sites and in refining searches. Internet usage is now a regular tool for all historians, for basic library and archival research, for general local and international queries, and for understanding the way in which the presentation of historical work has changed for this highly visual medium. Understanding the presentation of history on internet sites is a helpful tool for professional historians who are often isolated from one another and not necessarily acquainted with shifts in historical thinking. Those who are avoiding upgrading their skills in this area do so at their peril. Heather is an excellent teacher, well able to pitch discussion to the various levels of skill in the room. Lunch arrived punctually and the leftovers were distributed amongst hungry UTS students.

Margo Beasley



The Historic Houses Trust has moved to

The Mint

10 Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW2000

Telephone: 02 8239 2288

Email: info@hht.net.au

Cold Christmas Fare

I was always unconvinced that our grandmothers and great grandmothers were as enthusiastic about hot festive cooking as so many accounts of the traditional Australian Christmas suggested. An investigation of old cookery books suggests there were plenty of more sensible options that suited a hot climate and the remote locations of settlement where there was no corner shop to dash out for those last minute ingredients. This was a time of wood fuel stoves and no refrigeration.

On a recent country visit I discovered a wonderful cookery calendar - a pudding for every day of the year. It was published by that stalwart of practical cooking, the Country Women's Association. The calendar that I saw - still in daily use in a remote country kitchen - probably dates to the late 1920s or early 1930s. It is a companion volume to "A Calendar of luncheon and tea dishes including soups, savouries, salads and what to do with cold meat: a recipe for each day of the year," compiled by Dorothy C. Hammond and published by the Country Women's Association of NSW in 1932 (Mitchell Library Q641.5994/18).

So this festive season, avoid the over indulgence of traditional fare and try some of the following recipes.

24 December (Christmas Eve)

Apricot Jelly (also known as 100 in the Shade Apricot Jelly)

(contributed by Mrs George Killen of Burren Junction)

Soak 1 cup of good fresh dried apricot in two cups of boiling water. Cover and let steam a while. Then put on the stove and simmer until clear with sugar to taste. Mix 1 tablespoon arrowroot in half cup water, pour into fruit. Shake gently to mix and mould carefully. Properly done, this is as clear as gelatine.

25 December (Christmas Day)

Australian Christmas Pudding

(contributed by Mrs Percy Stacy of Singleton)

Put 1 1/2 pints of milk, 1 1/2 squares of chocolate or 3 tablespoons of cocoa in saucepan and bring to boil, add 4 dessertspoons of gelatine (Davis) and stir until dissolved; add small cup of sugar and stir. Remove from fire and when thickened add essence vanilla, 1/2 cup prepared dates, 1/2 cup raisins, few figs (if liked) and shredded almonds, 1/4 cup muscatels. Turn into mould, which has been rinsed in cold water. When set, turn out and decorate with holly and serve with whipped cream.

For those who wanted a hot pudding, the reader was referred to 29 November and a selection of Christmas Plum Pudding recipes.

26 December (Boxing Day)

Pan Pacific Fruit Salad

(contributed by Miss Macdonald and Miss Yeo, Delegates to the Pan Pacific Women's Conference)

1 pineapple, 1 papaia or small papaw, 3 bananas, 1 dozen passionfruit, 1 slice watermelon. Prepare fruits. Cut pineapple, papaia and melon into cubes, slice bananas and scoop out passionfruit. Place fruits alternately in a salad bowl and sprinkle lightly with fine sugar. Allow to stand half an hour in a cool place. Serve with cream or custard. Other fruits may be added.

31 December (New Years Eve)

Cold Diplomat Pudding

(contributed by Mrs AP Ross, Glen Innes)

Make a custard of 1 1/2 cups of milk, 1/4 lb sugar and yolks of 3 eggs. Stand aside and when cold add 3 dessertspoons of gelatine dissolved in 1/2 cup of milk. Mix in 1/4 cup of sherry and 3/4 cup whipped cream. Line a mould with lemon jelly, and when set garnish with cherries, almonds and angelica, then pour about half the mixture in carefully and on this place a layer of sponge cake, which has been sprinkled with sherry, and chopped fruit then put in the rest of the mixture.

Festive Greetings - Carol Liston

“A sensible Australian Christmas”

The Australian Women's Weekly published a special supplement, Pageant of Australian Cooking (1788 – 1963), in its magazine, November 4, 1963. It offered adaptations of recipes from the colony's earliest Christmas celebrations and produced some interesting commentary.

“The famous Australian writer, Henry Lawson (1867-1922) was one of the staunchest advocates of cold fare for Christmas, and even predicted a time when hot roasts and puddings would disappear from our festive board . . .

Everything cold except the vegetables, the hose playing on the verandah and vines outside, the men dressed in sensible pyjama-like suits, and the women and girls fresh and cool and jolly, instead of being hot and cross and looking like boiled carrots, and feeling like boiled rags . . .” (page 8)

“Some of the dishes enjoyed by our forefathers would get a dubious reception today – and still others would be beyond the resources of the 1963 housewife.

“Wild life, for example, was not only plentiful, but legally unprotected. Black swans, parrots, cockatoos, flying foxes, possums and goannas all went into the pot. So did the koala, on occasion. In the 1890s, ‘Gundaroo Bullock’ was the name given to baked koala. And ‘Grabben Gullen Pie’ was a hollowed out pumpkin filled with possum meat and roasted.” (page 4)

Recipes (page 3) included (*note: 1 oz = 30 grams, 1 lb = 450 grams, 1 inch = 25 mm*):

Settlers' Christmas Pudding

Christmas Pudding: 1 lb raisins, 1lb sultanas, 1/4 lb currants, 1/2 lb dates, 1/2 lb mixed peel, 3/4 lb butter, 1/2 lb brown sugar, 4 eggs, 8 oz breadcrumbs (white), 8 oz (2 cups)

plain flour, 1/4 level teaspoon salt, 4 level teaspoons mixed spice, 2 level teaspoons nutmeg, 1/2 level teaspoon bicarb soda, 1/2 cup brandy.

Wash, dry and chop fruits. Cream butter and brown sugar together. Add eggs one at a time beating well after each addition. Stir in breadcrumbs, prepared fruits and sifted dry ingredients. Lastly, stir in spirits. Mix well, place in a scalded and flavoured pudding cloth; tie securely with string. Place in a large vessel of fast boiling water, or in a steamer over boiling water. Steam for 7 hours. Hang to store. On day of serving, steam another 2 hours.

Rum Butter: 1 lb butter, 2 lb sugar (castor), 2 glasses rum, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 1 teaspoon nutmeg.

Cream butter and add sugar gradually. Add rum, cinnamon, nutmeg. Make a smooth round and freeze. Cut into slices and serve with piping hot pudding.

(NB – for Knight family use, I learned to cook and reheat the pudding in the cloth within a basin and to store the pudding for at least six months. Also to make only 1/3 of the quantity of rum butter, reduce the sugar in the rum butter by half and to substitute brandy for rum.)

Governor Phillip's Rum Pie

Pastry: 6 oz (1 1/2 cups) flour, 3 oz (3 tablespoons) butter, 2 tablespoons hot water, 1 teaspoon sugar.

Sift flour and rub in butter. Dissolve sugar in hot water before adding to flour mixture. Mix to a soft dough and chill for 15-20 minutes. Roll out and line 8 inch pie dish. Cook in hot over for 15 minutes. Allow to cool before filling.

Rum Cream Filling: 3 egg yolks, 1 tablespoon soft butter, 1/2 cup sugar, 1 dessertspoon gelatine, 1/4 cup cold water, 1/2 pint cream, 1/4 cup dark rum.

Beat egg yolks, butter, gradually add sugar and beat until frothy.

In saucepan soften gelatine in water and bring to boil over low heat; slowly pour into egg mixture beating well all the time. Whip cream until stiff and fold into egg mixture, then gently fold in rum. Refrigerate until stiff enough to form peaks when dropped from spoon, then heap into crust and chill 3-4 hours. Decorate with chocolate.

Katherine Knight

PORT PHILLIP HERALD

<http://portphillipherald.archivepublisher.com/>

The *Port Phillip Herald* was one of the earliest newspapers published in the then township of Melbourne soon after it was founded in the colony of Victoria in the early 19th century. It became the precursor of the mighty Herald and Weekly Times newspaper empire, now part of The News Corporation.

1840-1880 ARCHIVES The Paper of Record website contains all 57,000 pages of the Port Phillip Herald published between 1840 and 1880. But NOTE - it's not perfect! Some of the original papers were poorly printed, or have not been looked after as well as they should, and some pages can be hard to read even when you zoom in. A few pages are torn and patched, some have handwritten notes re the costs of advertising. Nevertheless, it's the genuine article. And it's now online, and searchable by keyword, making this archive a unique resource.

<http://portphillipherald.archivepublisher.com/>

STATE RECORDS STATUTORY REVIEW

As you are aware, State Records has been undertaking a statutory review of the State Records Act 1998. We are pleased to announce that the report on the review has been tabled in Parliament and is now available on State Records website at <http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/about/ReviewReport.htm>.

Following recommendations made in the Report, a Bill to amend the State Records Act is currently before NSW Parliament. The text of this bill is at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/NSWBills.nsf/0/9C8CA2AABED26BA8CA256F16002ED716>. The text of the second reading speech can be found in Hansard for Friday 24th September at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hanstrans.nsf/v3ByKey/LA20040924>.

The proposed amendments to the Act include:

- ☐ extending the limitation period on prosecutions for unauthorised disposal of State records from the current 6-month period to up to 2 years
- ☐ transferring the guidelines for normal administrative practice in Schedule 1 of the Act to the regulation.
- ☐ making explicit the presumption in favour of making records more than 30 years old open to public access.
- ☐ that a State record that is more than 30 years old, and not the subject of an access direction, is open to public access within 14 days (currently one month) of an initial application to access the record unless a decision is made by a public office to give a Closed to Public Access direction within this time.
- ☐ introducing an internal review mechanism for access directions that mirrors the review mechanism in section 28(4) for still in use determinations.
- ☐ enabling private records to be excluded from the operation of the Act without exempting State records that should remain covered, and
- ☐ making a small number of minor amendments to clarify certain existing provisions and facilitate operations.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We will be in touch again once the bill has been assented to.

Rowena Loo

Executive Officer

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A CHRISTMAS MISCELLANY

The Attorney-General has proposed uniform defamation laws under which it would be possible to defame the dead. If this recommendation were to be implemented, it has the potential to silence a good deal of serious historical and biographical scholarship.

Submissions on the proposals were due on 31 October. Submissions were made by the Australian Historical Association, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and Dr Bridget Griffen-Foley.

Bridget will keep the PHA informed about developments in this matter.

Western Australian History - A Shared Journey

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Website News

The UTS Centre for Public History website will be discontinued soon- so collect any information you want now!

<http://www.publichistory.uts.edu.au/resources/index.html> resources

<http://www.publichistory.uts.edu.au/makinghistories/index.html> making histories

Don't forget to visit your own PHANSW website (updates) <http://www.phansw.org.au/>

Any other suggestions for web site news please send to phanfare@phansw.org.au

Author-Historian Sought

Between 1950 and 1975, 50,000 people spent 130,000 years making cars at Victoria Park in South Sydney. This factory – the only one in NSW where the complete car was ever made - employed up to 7000 people at a time, coped well with their 35 languages and was a major supporter of prisoner rehabilitation and other social initiatives.

At least the same number of people were directly employed in Sydney - building the factory, designing and making the specialised machine tools and manufacturing the components that were consumed at the rate of 6000 for each car, one of which was despatched every 4 minutes - without a computer in sight.

The site was originally on the Waterloo Swamp and was used for Sydney's second and third water supply systems before being used for wool-washing, fell-mongering and tanning operations. From 1907 it was a racecourse from which Australia's first powered aircraft flight took place in 1909. A totalisator building (still standing) was built in 1917 and horse racing continued until the early 1950s.

IEAUST have dedicated a plaque to the site under their Historic Engineering Marker programme. This plaque is mounted in Nuffield Park, which was recently officially opened within the site, now a major housing development. An oral history project has been completed under the guidance of IEAUST with funding from RAHS.

The BMC-Leyland Australia Heritage Group was formed in 1998 with a membership of 150 ex-employees who have collected a wide range of photos, oral and written history and other memorabilia of and from the plant.

The Group now intends to have a book published about the plant and its social and technical significance and are seeking an author-historian to:

- Assist them in the development of a detailed book plan to be used for fund raising; and
- Write the book's main text - probably about 25,000 to 30,000 words - and edit about 8 technical attachments, which will probably be drafted by ex-employees.

For further details contact:

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