

**Newsletter of the Professional Historians' Association (NSW)**

**Number 236 May-June 2009**

# ***PHANFARE***

**PHA at Powerhouse Museum Textiles Collection**



**PHA NSW**



***Phanfare* is the newsletter of the Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc and a public forum for Professional History**

Published six times a year

Annual subscription: Free download from  
www.phansw.org.au Hardcopy: \$38.50

Articles, reviews, commentaries, letters and notices are welcome. Copy should be received by 6<sup>th</sup> of the first month of each issue (or telephone for late copy) Please email copy or supply on disk with hard copy attached.

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ISSN 0816-3774

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## Contents

President's Report	3
Computer Records – future?	4
Powerhouse Museum CPD Event	7
Nam Bang – war's aftermath	8
History Advisory Panel	11
What's On	12
History @ the Hero	15
A difficult story	17
NAA Sydney Consultative Forum	18

This issue was produced by the Hills District Group consisting of Ruth Banfield, Cathy Dunn, Terry Kass, Katherine Knight and Carol Liston.

There is no President's Report.

### Heritage Act Amendments

Despite intense lobbying by the historical community, including the History Council, the Royal Australian Historical Society, numerous local historical societies across the state, heritage bodies and the PHA, the revised NSW Heritage Act has now been passed.

There are deep concerns that the new Act has not included provision for a historian in the

revamped Heritage Council despite the fact that history is fundamental to the assessment of heritage, or at least, lip service is given to that concept. A changed definition of archaeological relics will make management of archaeological heritage easier at the expense of making archaeological relics more vulnerable. Items listed on Local Environmental Plans, which are controlled and managed by local government authorities, will be subject to review. In the past, the manner in which local government has managed heritage has been less than transparent or reliable. However, more recent actions by the State Government in heritage matters, overriding expert assessments and community rights and opinions provides faint hope that its oversight will be managed in the best interests of the wider community. Lastly, there is a shift in the balance of power between the Heritage Council and the Minister.

We must be even more vigilant about matters affecting heritage now.

Terry Kass

## Computer records – what future heritage?

*Digital record keeping is a challenge for historians, archivists and many others, including those vested with responsibility for preserving and maintaining government records. A recent seminar day at Parramatta Heritage Centre looked at the issue from a variety of perspectives.*



*Photo: © John Rich*

The Australian Computer Museum Society provided this photograph and story.

*In 1969 John Rich was with a party prospecting for oil out in Western Victoria around Hamilton. In those days we used huge 21 track digital tape recorders using a one inch tape to record the seismic data. They arrived on site with dozens of reels of tape but no take-up reel. So the party leader just reeled off the 2,400 foot of tape from a full reel and used it.*

Matthew Connell, curator of computing and mathematics at the Powerhouse Museum, addressed the topic Computing Heritage – the problem of digital records. He presented illustrations of computers held in the Powerhouse collection and discussed their development during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

He spoke about problems of deterioration, migration from one form of technology to another, constant changes in software and machines and his concerns about the emergence of cloud computing, where tasks are assigned to a combination of connections, software and services. He compared the stability and endurance of a 4000 year old small clay Sumerian tablet held by the museum with the transitory nature of digital record keeping.

Although Matthew has long had fears about the loss of documentation through inadequacy of digitisation and transfer, recently he has begun to reconsider this view. He is now surprised by the resources he has found through web searches and individuals passing on information about old equipment in the museum's collection – in a manner akin to the most ancient of oral traditions.

Cassandra Findlay is senior project officer, government recordkeeping, State Records. She introduced her talk Future Proof – Protecting our Digital Future – with a quote from Woody Allen – “Eternity is a very long time, especially towards the end”.

Governments are using digital recordkeeping at all levels, supported by a legal framework, including the Evidence Act, the Electronic Transactions Act and of course the Recordkeeping

Act she said. These days every government agency has a website and this is an example of government records in a digital format. For capturing information automatic digital updates can be better than human. Many agencies are also scanning their paper documents and using the scanned version as the official record. The current legal framework sees this as acceptable, which does away with the concept of “original being best” issues of authenticity for scanned records.

The National Archives in Australia and other countries had been preoccupied with preserving media, but had not been all that successful. Cassie referred to the efforts in the 1980s to recreate the 900 year old Domesday Book in the UK, only to find that a decade later it couldn't be read due to the obsolescence of the format and technology. Archives aren't museums with a conservator's skills.

It was clear by the late 1980s, early 90s, that a new way of looking at digital records by archives was needed. A new concept emerged – to focus on the record as a logical entity rather than on the physical carrier. This concept underpins all current developments. Its principles are:

- Trying to preserve record and meaning
- Accessibility – ensuring the record can be read and reused
- Authenticity – is the record reliable and trustworthy?
- Contextuality – is the record understandable in terms of its role and purpose? Is it linked to other records and retained for the proper amount of time? After all, only 5% of records make it into archives!

Part of the development has been led by the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative that focuses not just on an archival perspective but on systems and metadata (the information around records). In fact, some key members of the audience were clearly drawn from community rather than professional archivists. Archives don't necessarily have to look the same as the original records but the information must remain, be useable and accessible. A “continuum based approach to records” is now taken.

A range of techniques has evolved in the last decade:

- Emulation – from gamers. Still in an immature state for preserving records as archives
- Normalisation – converting a digital record into an open standard format – non-proprietary that is not controlled by one commercial interest. Open Office software is highly recommended. It is not subject to licensing like pdf, for instance. Microsoft has lobbied hard for acceptance in archives and pdf (a) is now acceptable to the Australian archives community
- Encapsulation – currently used by Victorian Electronic Records Strategy - every time data is migrated, it is surrounded by metadata for storage and access

What is happening in NSW

- Incorporating XENA – XML electronic normalising for archives to provide open standard formats for archives. Currently XENA cannot recognise all formats and further work is being done to allow storage and access.

- State Records also checks the intent and meaning of a record and whether it still has the look and feel of the original after being normalised.

The digital preservation world is becoming an established discipline in Australia, Cassandra said. OAIS – Open Archival Information System model – which came out of NASA, provides a framework for policies and procedures. The UK and US are developing some of their archives preservation with commercial corporations, but with many misgivings.

In NSW there is difficulty in getting funding for digitisation of record keeping in government. However within the Future Proof strategy there is:

- The Standard on digital recordkeeping which provides minimum requirements
- monitoring of compliance with guidelines and tools for government records
- a policy on digital record preservation which applies to all preservation activities and includes:
  - preserving records that are identified as digital State archives, and
  - preserving digital State records that are required for long term retention but are not State archives.

At State Records, western Sydney, the Xena preservation process is being piloted. Xena can be downloaded for free from <http://www.sourceforge.net>. In maintaining records on line, it is very important that they be accessible and protected and make use of a widely accepted technology – open format if possible.

There is no medium for records that is impervious to deterioration so “refreshing” and “monitoring” are very important. Preservation must be guided by the current role and purpose of the record, because the future use cannot be envisaged. Access to records is less developed where the 30 year restriction applies.

Some NSW records are already being stored in a cloud system. This is not actually currently allowed by law, which is still being developed to encompass these developments. Privacy issues, among others, are not resolved with private corporations. Keyword classifications are still used, but are retreating more to behind the scenes, rather than for the user.

More information is available from <http://futureproof.records.nsw.gov.au>

A big thank you to seminar organiser Louise Preston, Parramatta City Council archivist, and Katharine Stuart, State Records, for checking and providing extra information and corrections.

Katherine Knight

## **Behind the Scenes at the Powerhouse Museum - CPD event, May 2009**

On Thursday 28th May a small group of PHA members were taken on an hour long private tour through part of the textile storage department of the Powerhouse Museum. The theme of the tour was women's textiles and we were shown a selection of 'Wagga' ('Wogga') quilts, embroidered tapestries, cushion and pillow covers, tea cosies and women's clothing from various historical periods. Also on view, stored on life-sized display mannequins, were several theatrical costumes from the movies 'Strictly Ballroom' and 'Moulin Rouge' including a red dress worn by Nicole Kidman. Items of women's underclothing and a bustle could be glimpsed in an adjacent storage area.

The tour had many highlights, starting with the quilts. The first to be viewed were the patchwork 'domestic Waggas' made by women out of cast off tailors' sample books of woollen suiting. These were made with a backing cloth in a plain colour and no internal padding. (In her article on the National Quilt Register website: <http://discover.collectionsaustralia.net/nqr/wendy.php> , Wendy Hucker describes the original or 'Traditional Waggas' as rough coverings or rugs made by men out of hessian or jute bags.) From the 'Waggas' we moved on to the more elaborate quilts, the most amazing being Aunt Clara Bate's quilt which is made up of approximately 592 squares of coloured cloth, each one hand embroidered with a different motif.

Other soft furnishings included tea cosies, some of them heavily padded and others that were more like novelty items. The latter included a life-sized representation of a koala and a knitted cover for a tea pot handle. These were followed by a selection of cushion covers and a pillow cover with an embroidered image of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Of the theatrical outfits that we saw, the highlights included some of the costumes worn by the late Annette Kellerman who became world famous as an endurance swimmer and stage and screen actress. She was also the original designer of the women's one-piece bathing suit.

Another highlight of the tour was the chance to observe some of the practical aspects of museum conservation. These ranged from the temperature and humidity controlled atmosphere in which the fabrics were kept to the specially designed portable trays which could be stacked on top of each other two to a drawer. These trays were rectangular with timber sides and a base made out of wide strips of synthetic webbing which were positioned some distance apart so that air could circulate freely around the contents of the tray. Flush fitting handles at each end of the tray appeared to be designed to make lifting and carrying easier.

All too soon the tour was over and, to finish it off, we paused for a few minutes on our way out to view a display of carved toggles used by Chinese men as garment fastenings.

Margaret Blundell

## Nam Bang! – the aftermath of war

Casula Powerhouse has mounted an art exhibition reflecting on the changes to Vietnamese and Australian societies in the 34 years since the end of the Vietnam War. Nam Bang! explores the experience of the Vietnamese diaspora and those living with the aftermath of the war in Australia. It follows the return to the Powerhouse earlier in the year of the Vietnam Voices exhibition after 12 years of national touring.

Vietnam Voices had been developed by Casula Powerhouse in the mid 1990s, instigated by the experience of the former director of the Powerhouse, John Kirkman. John had been an anti-Vietnam War protester in the 1960s, when his father was a committed member of the regular army. Many issues within families of war veterans remained unresolved. Vietnam Voices became part of a process of national catharsis as the nation began to acknowledge the veterans' service and the consequences for their health and relationships.



### KELLY MANNING

#### Plaques of the day – detail

For Kelly Manning, the Vietnam War was largely an unspoken topic during her childhood, despite her father's involvement in the conflict. Growing up in an army household, Manning's strong interest in creating art was fired by her surroundings including picture books about war and various military memorabilia. Specifically, it was snippets of information that Manning drew from her father about his time in Nui Dat, Viet Nam that fuelled her furtive mind, producing ruminations that were possibly more macabre than the events her father witnessed. In Plaques of the Day Manning has revisited this make-believe world, as well as the reality of her childhood, to construct a vivid and colourful universe. The artist utilises the domestic material of household wallpaper as a springboard into her personal experience of the Vietnam War, as seen from the perspective of a veteran's child. Wallpaper acts both to absorb and protect in Manning's work.

The oppressive reality of war cannot be stopped from seeping through as seen with the helicopters covering the canvas. At the same time, the paintings act as camouflage, allowing a figure of a child to hide amongst it.

This series of paintings becomes a rich and complex entanglement of how one responds to and remembers a conflict such as Viet Nam as a child. The artist has reproduced the same images over and over again, perhaps referencing both the repetition of domestic life and the obsessive nature of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, from which her father suffered. As the Vietnam War recedes in the consciousness of our minds, it is important to recognise patterns of behaviour from one generation that repeat themselves in the next, creating a lasting effect that continues to pervade in our social understandings.

NAM BANG!  
A CASULA POWERHOUSE PROJECT

*Plaques of the day, 2008 - enamel,  
acrylic and oil on board - 28 parts: 600  
x 600 mm (each), courtesy the artist*

The voices in both exhibitions have been very varied and represent experience from all sides of the conflict. Despite the loud objections of a small number of Vietnamese Australians under the former “freedom” flag of South Vietnam, the overwhelming impression of Nam Bang! is not of political partisanship, but of the abhorrent nature of war.

Among the works on display in Nam Bang! is Ray Beattie’s 1980 painting “Image of a Dead Man”. A poignant representation of loss and absence, a soldier’s jacket with medals and a slouch hat rests across the back of a stiff wooden chair occupied only by a folded Australian flag. When first displayed at the Australian War Memorial, “Image of a Dead Man” created a furore. It did not conform to the heroic style and tradition of so many other representations of war.

Ray Beattie is a Vietnam veteran, an artist and a former art lecturer. His work is now highly regarded, but is nonetheless displayed behind a strong protective screen. “Image of a Dead Man” is on loan from the Australian War Memorial to Nam Bang!, where it can be seen until the exhibition ends on June 21.

A two day conference “Echoes of a War” associated with the Nam Bang! exhibition was held in early April. Conference and exhibition were curated by Dr. Boitran Huynh-Beattie who taught for 13 years during Vietnam’s difficult post war period before coming to Australia. The conference continued the exhibition’s investigation of the aftermath of the Vietnam War from international and intergenerational perspectives.

Speakers included author Paul Ham. He described the experiences of Australian veterans who returned home to rejection by the community and their struggles to have PTSD and their exposure to chemicals recognised. Historian Dr Greg Lockhart discussed the causes and consequences of Australia’s military strategy in Vietnam.

Dr. Keith Horsely, former health specialist with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, delivered statistics comparing the daily engagement of Australian forces in high stress conflict. Service for a year in Vietnam meant action every day, whereas service in previous World Wars involved only an active daily equivalent of about 25% per year. Dr. David Bradford, an STI (sexually transmitted infections) expert who served in Vietnam himself, described the incidence and attitudes to sexual diseases through both World Wars to the Vietnamese engagement.

Regrettably, I could not attend the address by Professor Amareswar Galla, UNESCO Chair in Museums and Sustainable Heritage, whose subject was “From Halong Bay to Hoi An, a journey without an end”, though I did hear him challenge western assumptions about the “right” ways to preserve cultural heritage.

Among the highlights were addresses by two young women – one who was born in Australia and the other, in a refugee camp in Thailand as her parents were fleeing Vietnam.

Kate Mulvaney is an actress and playwright, whose work has already made a deep impression on me. She described the legacy of war by recounting the experience of her parents after her father’s service in Vietnam. After many miscarriages, Kate was born to them with Agent Orange-related cancer. With simplicity and honesty, she described their experiences and her progress through childhood and adolescence with frequent illness and hospitalisation. Her discovery in adulthood, during a long term relationship, that she is unable to bear children was another cruel sequel.

Kate has turned this experience into a play *The Seed*, with the support of Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre. *The Seed* is currently on a national tour. I have seen the play, in which she has the lead role, and appreciate how closely it parallels her family experience, where her grandfather is a former IRA member living in England. Contradiction and paradox abound – and a deep caring. Human conflict leaves an awful legacy.

But far from just a story of tragedy, Kate has become an artist of great skill whose writing and performance are profoundly enriched by her life experience and her astute observation and understanding of others. She can be as funny as she can be sorrowful and her audiences respond with great warmth.

The other young woman was Thao Nguyen, now an international lawyer working in Vietnam. I first heard Thao speak when she was still a law and commerce student at Sydney University. She co-curated a 2001 exhibition *Viet Pop!* at Liverpool Museum. Developed with the support of Asian Australian cultural development officer, Cuong Le, *Viet Pop!* was designed to encourage young Vietnamese Australians to know their own culture better and to have confidence in their heritage and creative expression.

Thao’s own art work drew from her birth in the Thai refugee camp and the story of her family’s flight and resettlement in Australia. She spoke of the benefits she had drawn from the *Viet Pop!* experience and her wish to reward her parents’ sacrifices through her own professional career.

Thao has now been in Vietnam for two years and reflected on her experience there. When expatriates began returning to Vietnam a decade ago, they were often regarded with resentment. They were seen to have avoided the suffering of those who had stayed in Vietnam and now they were coming back with money to exploit opportunities unavailable to those still there.

Gradually, that attitude has changed as local people have recognised the value of the newcomers’ financial investments and the skills and experience they bring with them. There are plenty of challenges for Thao as she gets to know her homeland and contributes to the

development of the country's legal infrastructure. Patience, diplomacy and negotiation are all part of the process, but she is inspired by the spirit of enterprise and the hunger for education.

Thao feels she has gone from being an outsider in Australia to being an outsider in Vietnam, but she is clearly growing to reconcile those experiences within herself. She is already an impressive young professional with a bright international future.

More information about Nam Bang! [www.casulapowerhouse.com](http://www.casulapowerhouse.com) or phone 9824 1121.

Katherine Knight

## **History Advisory Panel Meeting 19 February 2009**

1. The new Heritage Branch Senior Heritage Officer, Dr Olwen Beazley, who is replacing Bruce Baskerville was introduced to the Panel.
2. The Panel was asked for input into threats to historic barns of the Hawkesbury Valley.
3. Priorities for possible thematic studies were discussed most particularly a proposed theme of Rural Heritage in NSW. Matters noted included the scope of such a study and what to include and exclude and possible methodologies and sources. A possible focus on matters from the post-World War Two period was also introduced and debated.
4. A possible link between the Macquarie theme, which is the focus for current State Heritage Listings and the Macquarie 2010 Bicentennial Committee was discussed.
5. Other themes introduced as possibilities were Migration.
6. A verbal update was provided about the Australian Convict Sites World Heritage Nomination.
7. Tim Smith from the Heritage Office reported on a recent maritime excavation project involving work on the 1835 wreck of the *Hive* at Wreck Bay. Not only was evidence of the wreck excavated but the survivors' camps on the nearby shore were also investigated. There had been strong associations with the local Aboriginal people and evidence of this interaction was also found.

Terry Kass

## What's On

by *Christine de Matos*

### June/July 2009

#### Exhibitions

'*A is for Animals: an A to Z of animals in war*'. Until **22 July 2009**. Venue: **Australian War Memorial**.

'*Charles Darwin Down Under, 1836*'. Until **26 July**. Venue: **Picture Gallery, State Library NSW**.

'*Rebellion: "the ever memorable 26 January 1808"*'. Until **July 2009**. Venue: **Museum of Sydney**.

'*Citizen soldiers: The New South Wales Volunteer Rifles, 1854–85*'. Until **September 2009**. Venue: **Hyde Park Barracks Museum**.

'*Charles Darwin—voyages and ideas that shook the world*'. Until **23 August 2009**. Venue: **National Maritime Museum**.

'*Shooting through: Sydney by tram*'. Until **18 October**. Venue: **Museum of Sydney**.

'*Femme Fatale: the female criminal*'. Until **18 April 2010**. Venue: **Police and Justice Museum**.

'*Irish Orphan Girls*'. Until **30 October 2010**. Venue: **Hyde Park Barracks Museum**.

#### June Events

**Every Wed Walk.** 'Sydney Architectural Walk'. HHT. **Meeting venue:** Museum of Sydney **Cost:** \$25, conc/mem \$20 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.

**Every Sat Walk.** 'Sydney Architectural Walk'-Utzon. HHT. **Meeting venue:** Museum of Sydney **Cost:** \$25, conc/mem \$20 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.

**17 Talk.** 'Photographs at State Records'. State Records. **Venue:** Sydney Records Centre, The Rocks **Time:** 10.30am-12.30pm **Enquiries:** [lindsay.allen@records.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lindsay.allen@records.nsw.gov.au)

**20 Workshop.** 'Oral History Digital Workshop'. **Venue:** State Library **Time:** 9.30am-1.30pm **Enquiries:** email: [bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au).

**24 Lecture.** 'The Ben Haneman Memorial Lecture: Havelock Ellis and the emergence of sexual science', Ivan Crozier. State Library in association with the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine, NSW Branch. **Venue:** Members Room, Mitchell library **Time:** 5.30 for 6pm **Cost:** \$22, seniors \$20, Friends & ANZSHM mems \$15 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9273 1770; email: [bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au); web: <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/bookings/>.

**30-**

**3 July Conference.** 'Constructing the Past: AHA Regional Conference', University of the Sunshine Coast.

**Enquiries:** web: <http://www.theaha.org.au/conference%202009/flyer.pdf>.

## July Events

- Every Wed Walk.** 'Sydney Architectural Walk'. HHT. **Meeting venue:** Museum of Sydney **Cost:** \$25, conc/mem \$20 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.
- Every Sat Walk.** 'Sydney Architectural Walk'—Utzon. HHT. **Meeting venue:** Museum of Sydney **Cost:** \$25, conc/mem \$20 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.
- 1 Conference.** 'Network for Research in Women's History Conference: The Girl in History', University of the Sunshine Coast. **Enquiries:** ph: (07) 3346 7410; email: [m.bellanta@uq.edu.au](mailto:m.bellanta@uq.edu.au).
- 6-9 Conference.** 'XVIIth Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association of European Historians (AAEH): Europe's Expansions and Contractions', Flinders University. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.theaach.org/>.
- 6-8 Conference.** 'Literature and Politics: The 3rd annual conference of The Australasian Association for Literature', University of Sydney. **Enquiries:** web: [www.aal.asn.au/conference/](http://www.aal.asn.au/conference/).
- 8-10 Conference.** 'The Eleventh National Labour History Conference', Perth. **Enquiries:** email: [bobbie.oliver@curtin.edu.au](mailto:bobbie.oliver@curtin.edu.au); web: <http://www.asslh.org.au/perth>.
- 9-10 Conference.** 'Work, Globalisation and Democracy/Capital in Crisis: Implications for Labour and Society', University of Wollongong. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.geocities.com/peaconference/>.
- 9-12 Conference.** 'Ireland and the Irish Antipodes: One World or Worlds Apart', New Zealand. **Enquiries:** email: [brad.patterson@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:brad.patterson@vuw.ac.nz).
- 11 Walking tour.** 'Art Deco in the city'. With heritage architect Jennifer Hill. HHT. **Time:** 3.30-6pm **Cost:** \$39, mems \$29 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.
- 11-12 Conference.** '2009 Australasian Association for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Science (AAHPSSS)', Emmanuel College, The University of Queensland. **Enquiries:** Charles Wolfe, email: [c.wolfe@usyd.edu.au](mailto:c.wolfe@usyd.edu.au); web: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/aahpsss/conference-2009.html>.
- 13-14 Conference.** '2009 Melbourne Conference on China 60 Years of the People's Republic—Transformations and Challenges', University of Melbourne. **Enquiries:** email: [Conference-on-China@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Conference-on-China@unimelb.edu.au).
- 18 Workshops.** 'Long Duo -'Preservation & Care of Family Documents & Photographs' & 'The Pictures Collection at the Mitchell Library'. SAG. **Venue:** Richmond Villa 120 Kent St Sydney **Time:** 10.30am–1.30pm **Cost:** \$30, mems \$25 **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9247 3953; email: [info@sag.org.au](mailto:info@sag.org.au).
- 19 Walking tour.** 'Mansions, mysteries and murders of Newtown'. With Beatrice Scheepers. HHT. **Meeting venue:** tba **Time:** 10am-12.30pm **Bookings essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.
- 20-22 Conference.** 'The Limits of the Book', University of Queensland. **Enquiries:** Dr Chris Tiffin, email: [c.tiffin@uq.edu.au](mailto:c.tiffin@uq.edu.au) or Assoc. Professor Pat Buckridge, email: [p.buckridge@griffith.edu.au](mailto:p.buckridge@griffith.edu.au).
- 20-23 Conference.** 'Cultures of Violence and Conflict The Second Conference of the International Society for Cultural History', University of Queensland. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.arts.uq.edu.au/index.html?page=82751>.
- 25 Walking tour.** 'Echoes of the Wharf: Woolloomooloo'. With Janet Morice and Andrew Starr. HHT. **Time:** 10am-12n **Cost:** \$39, mems \$29 **Booking essential:** ph: (02) 9251 5988.

## Upcoming Conferences

- 'The Talk about Town: Urban Lives and Oral Sources in 20th Century Australia'*, 27-28 August 2009, State Library of Victoria and Melbourne Museum. **Enquiries:** web: <http://arts.monash.edu.au/public-history-institute/conferences/2009-talkabout/index.php>
- 'ACHS Conference: Catholics in Australian Public Life since 1788'*, 12 September 2009, Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.australiancatholichistoricalsociety.com.au/>
- 'Social Democratic Parties and Business: An Historical Analysis'*, Business and Labour History Group, 28 September 2009, University of Sydney. **Enquiries:** email: [g.gallop@econ.usyd.edu.au](mailto:g.gallop@econ.usyd.edu.au) or [g.patmore@econ.usyd.edu.au](mailto:g.patmore@econ.usyd.edu.au).
- 'Health and Medicine at the Frontier: Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine Biennial Conference'*, 28 September-2 October 2009, Perth. **Enquiries:** email: [L.Layman@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:L.Layman@murdoch.edu.au) or [crienafz@inet.net.au](mailto:crienafz@inet.net.au).
- 'Dragon Tails: Re-interpreting Chinese-Australian Heritage'*, 9-11 October 2009, Sovereign Hill Museums Association, Ballarat, Victoria. **Enquiries:** email: [enquiries.dragontails@gmail.com](mailto:enquiries.dragontails@gmail.com).
- 'Seventh International Conference on the Book'*, 16-18 October 2009, University of Edinburgh. **Enquiries:** <http://book-conference.com>
- 'Internationalising Media History—From Australia to the World'*, 23-25 November 2009, University of Sydney. **Enquiries:** Dr Penny O'Donnell, email: [Penny.ODonnell@usyd.edu.au](mailto:Penny.ODonnell@usyd.edu.au).
- 'Independence and Decolonization'*, 15-17 April 2010, The Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. **Enquiries:** Professor Susan Deans-Smith, email: [sdsmith@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:sdsmith@mail.utexas.edu).
- '21st International Congress of Historical Sciences' (CISH/ICHS)*, 22-28 August 2010, Amsterdam. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.ichs2010.org/>.

## Call for Papers

- 'Centre and Periphery: New Zealand Historical Association Conference'*, 27-29 November 2009, Massey University, New Zealand. Abstracts of 250 words due by **30 June 2009**. **Enquiries:** Dr Christopher van der Krogt, email: [C.J.vanderKrogt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:C.J.vanderKrogt@massey.ac.nz).
- '"Lands and Peoples in History and Law": Australian and New Zealand Law and History Society Conference'*, 11-13 December 2009, Wellington. 1-2 paragraph abstract plus half page CV due by **30 June 2009**. **Enquiries:** Dr Grant Morris, email: [grant.morris@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:grant.morris@vuw.ac.nz).
- 'Gender and occupations and interventions in the Asia Pacific, 1945-2009'*, 10-11 December 2009, University of Wollongong. 200 word proposals and 1-2 page CV due by **17 July 2009**. Some sponsored positions for postgraduates and ECRs will be available. **Enquiries:** Rowena Ward, email: [roward@uow.edu.au](mailto:roward@uow.edu.au); or Christine de Matos, email: [cdm@uow.edu.au](mailto:cdm@uow.edu.au).
- 'Isolated Cases? 100 years of Australian medical research'*, 21 February 2010, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney. 200 word abstract and 100 word bio due by **31 July 2009**. **Enquiries:** web: <http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/museum/>

To contribute to What's On, send details of your event to [cdm@uow.edu.au](mailto:cdm@uow.edu.au).

Note: 'What's On' on the web temporarily unavailable due to new ACPHA site.

## When Should We Commemorate Australia Day?

### *HISTORY @ the HERO*

Thanks to some excellent introductory notes prepared by convenor Ron Ringer, PHA's inaugural HISTORY@theHERO discussion group got off to a great start. The event, followed by dinner, was held at the Hero of Waterloo Hotel in The Rocks. About a dozen members attended and the atmosphere was lively and informal.

When should we commemorate Australia Day?

Ron offered four different perspectives to kick off.

discussion and introduced them with a fifth – his own. As one who arrived from the UK 30 years ago, he acknowledged feeling “a little uncomfortable about celebrating a date that conveyed so many mixed messages . . . This land of contradiction, bounty and dearth. An uneasy coexistence between the weak and the strong”.

Statements from the Australia Day Council of NSW website provided Ron's first perspective. Among them, “Although it has often been criticised, it remains the most inclusive celebration of a national day in Australia, expressing the national diversity which has become such an important part of the Australian national character.”

His second came from Patrick Dodson, who called for a national conversation about whether January 26 is the best date for Australia Day when he accepted this year's award as Australian of the Year. Although the idea was promptly rejected by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Professor Dodson believes that such a conversation is important to the process of reconciliation.

The next perspective came from Thomas Keneally's acceptance speech of the 1997 Australian of the Year award. Ron suggested that Keneally was trying to placate all parties, by promoting remembrance, celebration and reflection.

His final perspective came from the website of the Sydney based Jews Against the Occupation. It reflects on the fact that Israel and Australia are “built on an historical experience of dispossession” and asks “what is there to celebrate?”. It cites examples of Aboriginal resistance to loss of land, miners' resistance to British control of goldfields and successful opposition to WW I conscription and the brutal carnage in Europe. Perhaps the cause of celebration might be “these kinds of cases where people refused to accept the denial of their rights and were prepared to struggle for universal equality and justice”.

“It's time we got over our mythologies and fessed up,” Ron said. “For anyone living outside NSW, Australia Day has little significance. Let's make the date of Federation Australia Day and find other ways to remember the past.”

Then discussion was open to everyone. One, who was approaching 60, expressed conflicted feelings. It was a “nothing day” until about 20 years ago. Then she spoke at a naturalisation ceremony and was surprised at the strength of her own emotion. The Cronulla riots of December 2005, she said, introduced a sadly jingoistic note into expressions of patriotism.

Another described the Aboriginal welcome to country which is now part of local Australia Day celebrations. Some described the prominence of Australian flags and their “misuse by yobs”. “Yobs

have a sense of national pride, which the day is intended to provide,” came the rejoinder. For one of British background there was no equivalent sense of British nationalism.

“There is so much mythology in Australian folklore, it’s time to blow it apart!”, said Ron.

A participant of Irish Catholic descent, recalled the response to Australia Day commemorations in the country town of her childhood. Dirt poor and bitter about the English, the attitude to celebration was equivocal.

Recent enthusiasm for Australia Day began with Bicentennial celebrations in 1988, one pointed out. Another referred to the transfer of official celebrations to Parramatta in 1984, in preparation for the Bicentenary focus in Sydney. Thousands of people of diverse cultural background poured into Parramatta Park, holding Australian flags, their children in flag hats. Did they find any sense of belonging? The mayor had said, “It was a tremendous day. I’ve never seen so many people in Parramatta at the one time before.”<sup>1</sup>

Ron asked, “How do you accommodate indigenous people who are totally opposed?” Someone currently working with indigenous people at La Perouse replied that their response is still one of thankfulness for the apology. Perhaps it’s the way in which the day is celebrated, observed another.

“Why is it not discussed in the mainstream? Is it too difficult?”, Ron asked. “When we have ANZAC Day and icons to celebrate . . . ?

“We weren’t perpetrators of a crime in WW I. You can’t say ‘yay’ we attempted genocide,” came a response.

Discussion continued about past and present forms of celebration in different parts of Australia, which days were celebrated – Anniversary Day, Wattle Day, Empire Day, Queen’s Birthday, Guy Fawkes Day, Proclamation Day, Melbourne Cup Day. How do we engender a sense of inclusion, is there any sense of caring for country? Is there any difference from Boxing Day?

Should we celebrate an Australia Day? Should it be on January 26, the same day as Indian independence? We celebrate our colonisation, not our independence. Suggestions that the whole mythology of Australia Day creates a threat to multiculturalism. Questions about funding private schools – Catholic, Protestant, Muslim – is this divisive?

Are these the dying gasps of colonialism? Similar discussion is probably happening in many countries today. Thirty years ago, no-one much cared in Australia.

Yes, it was animated. Ron ended the discussion expressing pleasure that so much of it had been about ideas.

Now he asks, “ When are we doing the next one? We should keep the momentum. Personally, I think we should have a crack at the Anzac myth/legend and try to get to the bottom of things”.

I would like to suggest the possibility of occasional future moderators from outside PHA, depending on the nature of the topic. Everyone felt the need to have a wide cultural perspective. We invite your participation.

Katherine Knight

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<sup>1</sup> *The Parramatta Advertiser*, Rain did not dampen spirits, 1/2/1984, p.1

## **A difficult story**

The Prime Minister's apology to the Stolen Generations on February 13, 2008, was symbolic of breaking a barrier of denial within the wider Australian community. The gradual emergence of personal accounts of the anguish and abuse so long ignored and denied is a recognised part of healing and reconciliation.

Those charged with the task of bringing these stories to public attention can find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. To tell the stories exposes those who suffered to painful scrutiny and a loss of privacy. Not to tell the stories leaves the victims to suffer in silence in a society unaware of their travails and at risk of perpetrating further damage.

*Marella – The Hidden Mission* opened in mid April at Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest. It is an exhibition of art works created by Aboriginal artists who experienced at least part of their childhood in state run institutions. The legacy of forced removal from their families is still too painful for many to contemplate. Their treatment by white authorities has left horrendous scars.

Another key component of the exhibition is a display of the few personal photographs and letters some managed to retain. Worn documents offer haunting insight to the loss of family and cultural connections. For the indigenous co-curator of the exhibition, Zona Wilkinson, official disregard for the lives of these children was evidenced even by the paucity of archives held in State Records when children were transferred from one state institution to another.

Marella itself was a privately run home for Aboriginal children, which operated for many years at Kellyville and later, briefly, at St Clair, near Penrith. Marella was operated largely outside the supervision of government. The exhibition and catalogue are witness to some of its austere practices and the implications of powers abused. There are simple accounts of heart rending experience and poignant photographs of Marella children.

There were happier times, too, when work was done, or in school holidays, when the children had time to play unsupervised or to go boating on the dam. The artworks themselves are vivid with images of the different missions, where the artists grew up, their few memories of the "old people", before they were taken from their families, their dreams of cultural continuity and their haunting fears and recollections of being taken by "the welfare".

The official opening was conducted with her usual warmth and dignity by NSW Governor, Professor Marie Bashir. Anticipation surrounding the event was palpable.

"I had no idea there would be this many people here," one woman was saying to another as she entered. Just this degree of public acknowledgement can bring both comfort and grief. Often, such an occasion may also lead to more discoveries of connections with lost relatives or country.

Even writing this story has been a challenging experience. Many of the exhibition's revelations are still very raw for participants and I am grateful to Zona for advice on my early drafts. Illustration was out of the question. Description can feel like intrusion and voyeurism;

a byline like a claim of ownership. An absence of reporting, on the other hand, can be interpreted as continuing denial.

Reflecting the change in government policy, the search for healing is assisted by the supplementary exhibition *In Living Memory*, assembled by State Records and currently on tour through NSW. For many families and individuals, the opportunity to pore over documents and photographs is the chance to find another possible link with the past and with each other.

Both exhibitions continue at Penrith until June 28 and then will tour separately. Marella – the hidden Mission will be at Moree Plains Gallery later this year and Cowra Regional Art Gallery early next year Penrith Regional Gallery is at 86 River Rd, Emu Plains 2750. Phone 02 4735 1100, [www.penrithregionalgallery.org](http://www.penrithregionalgallery.org), open daily 10am to 5pm. Entry free.

Katherine Knight

## **National Archives of Australia Sydney Consultative Forum Meeting 31 March 2009**

1. Recent transfers to NAA have included major deposits of ABC radio audio tapes plus 1200 metres of Telstra plans.
2. Re-arrangement of archive storage at Chester Hill has involved the shifting of those archives identified as being of Permanent value into air-conditioned storage space.
3. Digitisation on demand has been increasing. Sydney now offers this service.
4. On 24 March 2009, Senator John Faulkner's speech highlighted changes to the Freedom of Information Act and the Australian Archives Act. One notable change has been the reduction of the embargo period for Cabinet records from 30 years to 20 years. In order to prevent NAA being overwhelmed by the workload of assessing these documents prior to release, release will be phased in over the next few years, so that 2 years of cabinet papers will be released annually until the release programme comes into alignment.
5. The 'Letters of a Nation' project had been initiated to find key letters that demonstrate the development of Australia.
6. The Fremantle Immigration Index has been extended to earlier years so that it now ranges from 1921 to 1950.
7. The NAA has commenced its own Facebook page.
8. A new monthly email newsletter, [news@archives](mailto:news@archives), commenced last year with news items, a quiz (with prizes), news of coming events, etc.
9. The retiring Director of the Sydney Office of the NAA, Michael Hoy, whose retirement took effect on 1 April 2009, was farewelled by the Forum with best wishes for his retirement.

Terry Kass

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*Phanfare*: [phanfare@phansw.org.au](mailto:phanfare@phansw.org.au)

Editorial Collectives: See list at front of *Phanfare*

Other PHA publications: Ruth Banfield

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*Publications*

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ISSN 0616 3774