



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, PO Box 1305
FREMANTLE WA 6959

Summer Edition, Jan 2024

<https://fhs.org.au>

Fremantle Post Office

Pam Harris

Fremantle was the first town in Western Australia to have an official post office, not the one we think of today but on the wreck of the Marquis of Anglesea on the South Bay side of Arthur Head. The wreck had been salvaged and refurbished as offices which were leased to the Government. On the 4 December 1829 the Lieutenant Governor appointed Captain Daniel Scott the first postmaster. Incidentally Captain Scott was also the first Chairman of the Fremantle Town Trust in 1848.

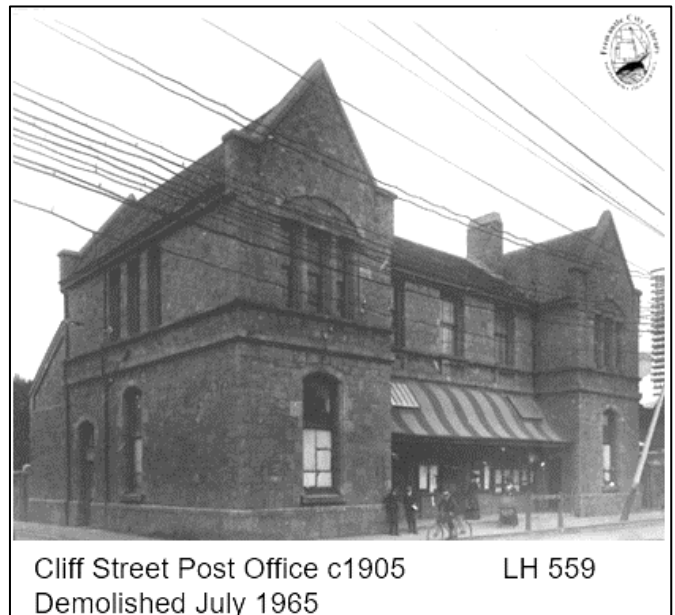
The post service was entrusted to a succession of local businessmen from 1830 to 1861, operating from a number of centrally located stores and offices.

In 1869 Fremantle and Perth became linked by a private telegraph company and the postal service then went on to become the Post and Telegraph Offices and by 1873 it was owned by the government. The continuing development of Fremantle during the 1880s and 1890s resulted in increasingly higher volumes of mail. In 1889 a purpose built post office was opened on the corner of Cliff and Croke Streets.

However, the gold rushes of 1890-1910, brought about a significant increase in population, and with the completion of the inner harbour wharf in 1897, Fremantle replaced Albany as WA's principal port. There was a need for greater infrastructure in the town, and a larger post office more conveniently positioned to the railway station, the harbour, and the commercial district, was required. The site at 13-15 Market Street was chosen.

The building we know today was recently closed in 2023 due to a ceiling collapse. The 21st Century Post office, now known as Australia Post, was opened on the corner of Adelaide and Queen Streets in 2023. The new facility has been designed to cope with the increase in parcel delivery with the advent of online shopping.

The Market Street building was designed by Hillson Beasley, Chief Architect with the Public Works Department, and was opened 27 July 1907. The builders were Atkins and Law. The first postmaster was Andrew Thomson.



A description of the building in the *Daily News* on the opening day and an extract follows:

The public entrances are through arched porches, one from Market-Street, containing the private letter boxes, and one on the corner, containing letter receivers, mail notices, etc. The public hall has a curved counter to give a large frontage and each department, such as letters, stamps telegrams etc., has its own section. Behind this, and enclosed by glassed partitions, is the mail room. The room has windows on the front, side and back, and in addition is lighted by a lantern over the centre, and as the walls above are carried on columns and girders the whole floor space is available for business; opening off the mail room are postmaster's office, strong-rooms, stairs, lavatory, and at the back is a large yard for loading mails and transacting other business.

The first floor, access to which is given by two fireproof stairs for men and women respectively, comprises telephone exchange, with retiring room, fitters room, power and battery rooms attached, telegraph operating room, and a suite of offices for staff and clerks. All rooms are amply lighted and well ventilated.

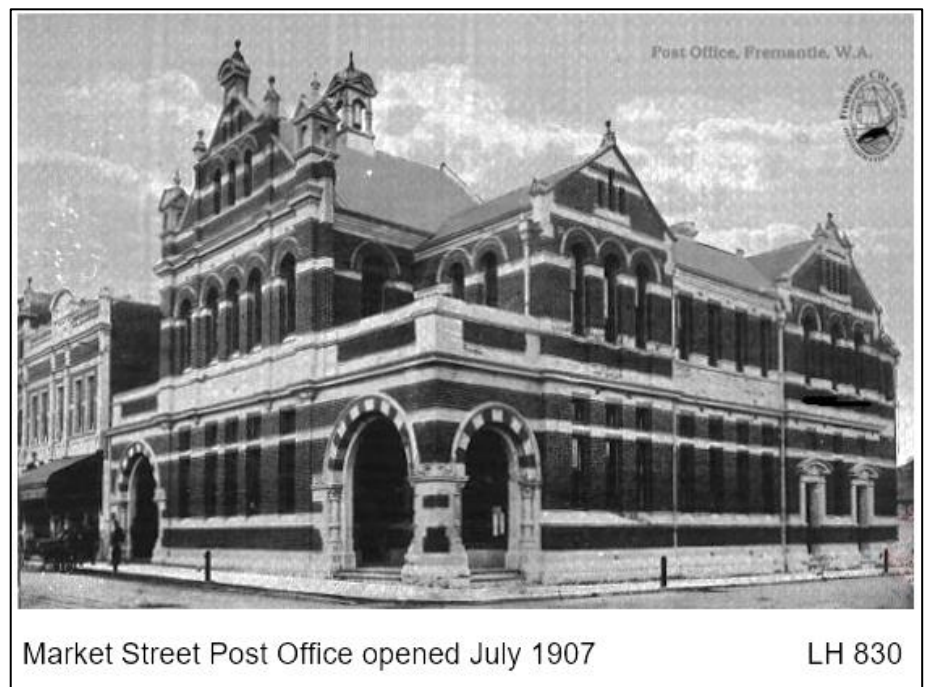
The building is designed in the Romanesque style, the treatment being severe rather than ornate as befits the character of the building and with due consideration of economy. The materials employed are brick, with dressing of cement, the internal finish being in plaster and stamped metal ceilings with tiled floors to porches and public hall, and jarrah elsewhere.¹

In 1982 the post office celebrated its 75th Anniversary and a commemorative postmark was available on the day.² Various changes were made to the building over the years including a major facelift of the interior in 1983 to celebrate the America's Cup win and also, in anticipation of the Cup Challenge in 1987³.

In 1997 the building was added to the State Register of Heritage Places. The City of Fremantle has listed the Fremantle Post Office on the Local Heritage Survey at the

highest management category Level 1a - of exceptional cultural heritage significance in its own right, with all development applications needing to be referred to the Heritage Council for approval.

The building is an iconic part of Fremantle and it is hoped that future adaptive reuse will be sympathetic to its 116 years history as a post office.



¹ The Daily News, 22nd July 1907. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article> Accessed 3 February 2024

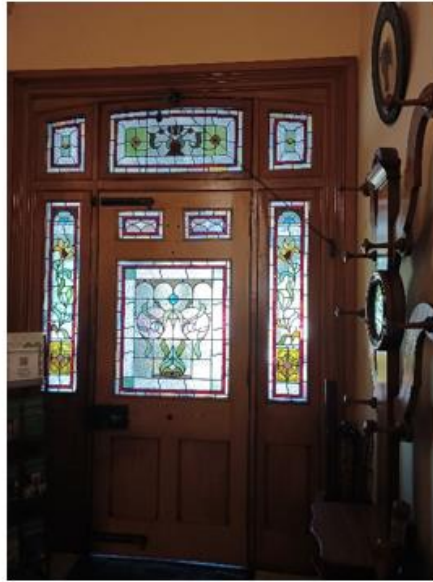
² The Fremantle Gazette 21st July 1982

³ Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Fremantle Post Office dated 1996.

MEETING REPORTS

Christmas celebrations – 19 November Samson House

When Michael and Mary Samson built their home on the corner of Ord and Ellen Streets in 1889, they probably never imagined it would remain a home to their family for more than 100 years. Their son Fred, was a keen gardener; he helped to plant the magnificent pair of Norfolk Island Pines at the entrance when he was still a boy. He designed and landscaped the large block during the 1920s-40s, planting numerous beds of vegetables and flowers. It is Fred we have to thank for the beautiful setting of our 2023 Christmas party.



Photos taken in and around Samson House

K. McNulty

The National Trust provided three very knowledgeable guides to walk us through the house and answer all our questions. The stables building has recently undergone major conservation work and its adaptive reuse as a community space includes a new kitchen and modern toilets with a ramp to facilitate access. It is available for hire to community groups.

The afternoon concluded with a delicious afternoon tea provided by society members.

Humble beginnings: Fremantle History Centre – 30 January Walyalup Civic Centre

Betty McGeever worked at Fremantle Library for 40 years, 30 of those as City Librarian, so is well qualified to talk about the Fremantle History Centre, from when John Birch began collecting material on a shelf in his office in 1959, to the purpose-built extension that served as the City's repository for historic material up until 2017. We grumbled about the old map and filing cabinets, the over-filled shelves and compactuses, the curved wall against which it was so difficult to align furniture. But isn't it so true that you don't appreciate what you have until it's gone?

This talk was part of a public engagement program undertaken by the Fremantle Council to determine whether the community actually valued the history centre and if they did, where they would like it to be located.

Betty would possibly have made as successful a career as a barrister as she did running a library. She put forward a very good case: statistics to show how well-used it was; the

extraordinary range of people who came in with an equally extraordinary diversity of information needs – authors, television producers, students, family historians, real estate agents, and so on; the dangers of relying on unreferenced online material and the difficulty of finding exactly what you want there.

Betty described the wonderful collaborative projects undertaken with local businesses and organisations such as the Port Authority, to record their histories, the connection often resulting in valuable donations to the collection. She described the accessibility and convenience of a history centre right in the middle of Fremantle, with two librarians available to spend as long as it took to find the information the customer was looking for.

A lot of us are working very hard alongside Betty to argue the case to Council that the community does indeed value the Fremantle History Centre. If the unthinkable happens and it is not reinstated in the Walyalup Civic Centre it certainly won't be for lack of trying.

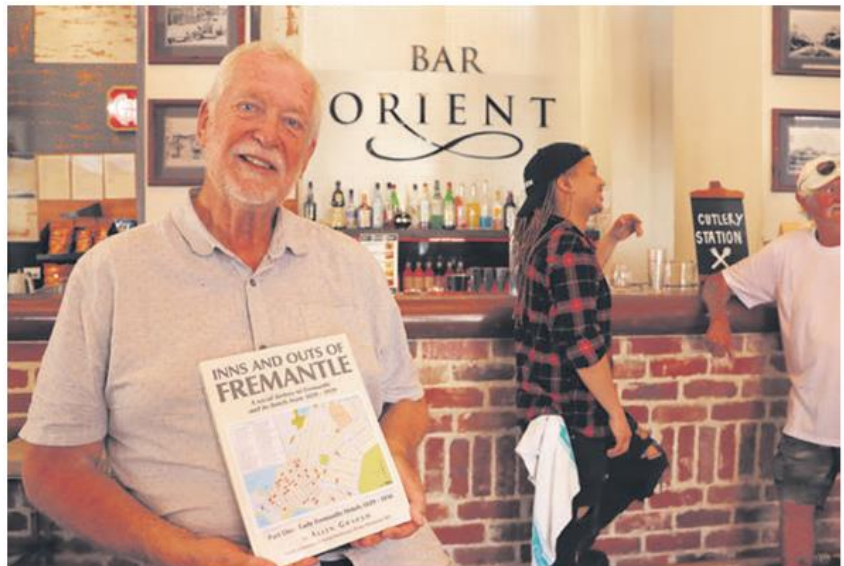


COMING EVENTS

Inns and Outs of Fremantle: A Social History of Fremantle and its Hotels from 1829-1929. Part One 1829-1856.

**Wanjoo Lounge, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
155 High Street, Fremantle 6160
Tuesday 27 February 5.00 pm**

The history of hotel keeping in Fremantle began when the first British colonists arrived to establish a settlement at the Swan River in 1829. Within six months of arrival they had opened four hotels with many more to follow, and Allen's recently published book traces the history of those early hotels and how they shaped the culture and appearance of Fremantle today.



Allen Graham at his book launch, Orient Hotel on 05.11.2023
Photo provided by Allen

Allen Graham is a lifelong resident of Fremantle, born and raised here in Beaconsfield. Around 1985 he became interested in Fremantle hotels and their background, and started collecting material with thoughts of one day producing a coffee table book with a little history to accompany the pictures. However, the material accumulated over time and was clearly not going to be contained within a single volume.

This is the first in a trilogy of books that records the first hundred years of hotel-keeping in Fremantle from 1829 to 1929. Allen will describe the hotel trade here with reference to his newly published book, covering the 1829 to 1856 period, but it is not merely the story of Fremantle's hotels. Allen has included much historical background, describing the lives of the people and events at that time; it provides a chronicle of Fremantle's history during this period.

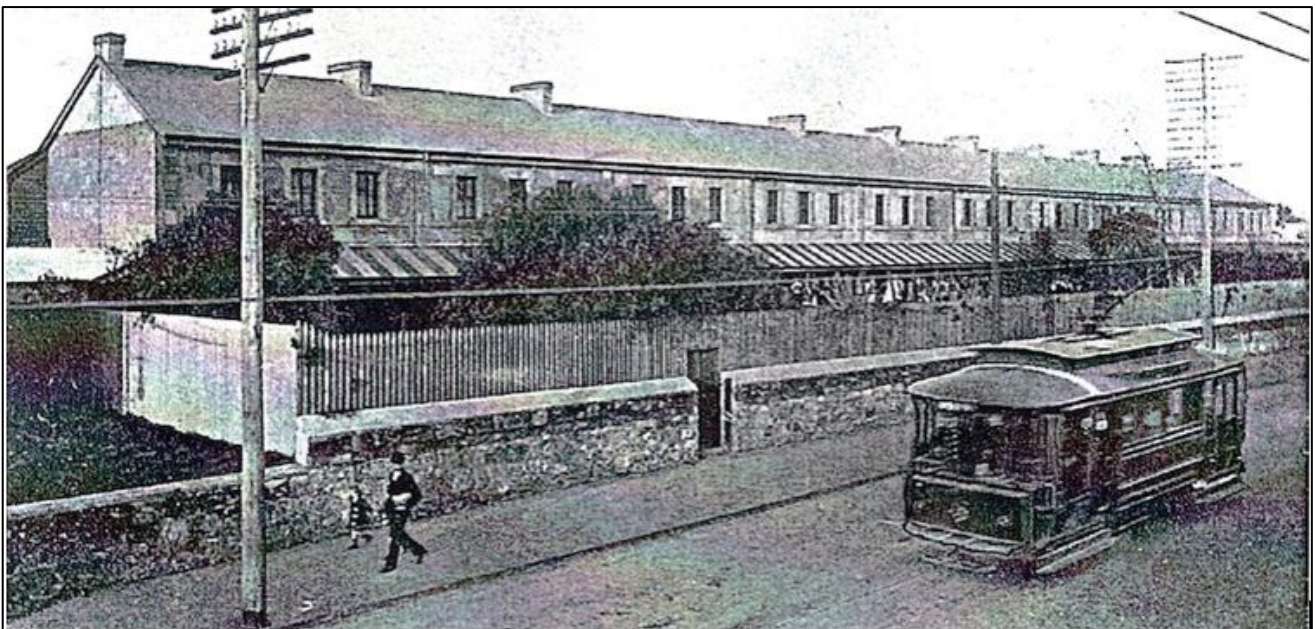
Pensioner Guards: A forgotten history?

**Wanjoo Lounge, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
155 High Street, Fremantle 6160
Tuesday 26 March 5.00 pm**

During the convict era of Western Australia's history, 1850 to 1868 nearly 10,000 prisoners were transported to Western Australia. To guard the prisoners on the long journey the Government employed the Pensioner Guards. This group consisted of soldiers who had served in China, the Crimea, South Africa, India, Persia and Afghanistan and had been pensioned off after their military service. They were promised land and were encouraged to bring their families with them. In all they numbered 2,500 and made up a significant proportion of the population of what was at the time a small and struggling colony.

Their stories are largely forgotten now but signs of their presence are still to be seen. The old (1850) wall in front of what is now the site of the new Police Complex on South Terrace is one example. This was formerly the site of the Fremantle Pensioner Guard Barracks. It has been in the news of late as part of it is to be demolished during construction of the new police station.

Maeve Harvey will talk to us about the lives of some of these men and their families who lived in and around Fremantle and formed a separate and discreet group within society, being neither free settlers nor convicts.



Pensioner Barracks South Terrace c.1906

In Defence of Fremantle

**Wanjoo Lounge, Ground Floor, Walyalup Civic Centre
155 High Street, Fremantle 6160
Tuesday 23 April 5.00 pm**

The British laid elaborate plans to defend Fremantle even before Stirling arrived in 1829. His advance-guard, led by Captain Charles Fremantle, made perhaps the earliest of preparations. By the end of the first year, a fort had been erected on what is now Pakenham Street. More followed.

From its earliest colonial days, Fremantle has played an integral role in the military defence of Western Australia. Using the tools of both archaeology and history, Dr Shane Burke will introduce guests to key defence installations in Fremantle and nearby coastal suburbs — some now forgotten — including colonial forts, coastal lookouts and World War II gun emplacements.

Drinks and nibbles will be served at each event around 5.00 pm, before the talk at 5.30 pm.



FREMANTLE HISTORY CENTRE



Presently on display in the Fremantle History Centre is a selection of photographs highlighting various sporting activities Fremantle locals were taking part in from the 1890s through to the late 1950s. There are some wonderful line-ups from the Ladies Hockey Club, Fremantle Rowing Club, Ladies Cycling Club, Port Swimming Club, and many more. Images have all been sourced from the collection.

A selection of sports related objects from the City's Civic collection, including a jacket from the Melbourne Olympics (1956), is also on display.

Donated photographs



Swan River looking from East to North Fremantle n.d.

Last month the Fremantle History Society was lucky enough to receive a donation of two beautiful photographs of the Swan River. They have been taken with care so that, laid side by side, they provide a panoramic view across the river from East Fremantle to North. The kind donor did not know the location or the date, but that they had been taken by her great

grandfather, Harry Bennett, who, from 1898 to 1912, lived in a house called 'Wakefield' on Preston Point Road. The WA Post Office Directories show that he lived right next door to Mrs Daniel Mulcahy in 1909-1912, so there's a clue. It certainly looks as though it could be Preston Point Road.

From the *West Australian* 29.07.1948 p. 13:

Harry Bennett arrived in WA in 1892. He became workshops manager for the Fremantle Harbour Works in 1896 and was closely associated with the development of the harbour under C.Y. O'Connor. In 1903 he took charge of the slipway and of the dredging for the Swan River improvements. He was appointed works manager in 1903 and later supervised the inspection and maintenance of all Fremantle Harbour Trust machinery. He also acted as engineer superintendent for the State Steamship Service. He retired in 1935 having served with the Government for 43 years. He was also formerly a member of the East Fremantle Council and the Fremantle Tramway and Electric Light Board.

The photographs have now been safely deposited with the Fremantle History Centre.



The following is the submission from the Fremantle History Society prepared in response to Fremantle Council's public engagement program regarding the future of the Fremantle History Centre. The submission details our position on the importance of history and the History Centre to Fremantle's future, and thus, the necessity of the History Centre being positioned in a central, very visible location, ideally within the Walyalup Civic Centre.

Fremantle History Centre

The City of Fremantle should aim to develop a shared sense of identity and civic pride within the community by reinforcing everyone's sense of belonging. The Fremantle History Centre could help this come about by promoting opportunities for Fremantle's diverse communities to become more deeply involved in their shared histories and heritage.

Stimulate interest and engagement

Locating the Fremantle History Centre in a prominent and easily accessible public space on the Walyalup Civic Centre's ground floor, with user-friendly technology which opens up its unique local history collection, is crucial to achieving this goal. The History Centre must become a focal point for community engagement and involvement in learning about Fremantle's diverse history and heritage; it should be a place where every community member, including the underrepresented, will feel welcome and motivated to participate.

The History Centre should be located where it is as easy for as many people as possible to learn about and appreciate what we have inherited from the past. Fremantle's heritage provides tangible links between the past and present, is part of the fabric of our everyday lives and is central to our sense of identity.

Reaching a wider audience raises the community's awareness of the many ways that places valued as part of Fremantle's heritage embody the knowledge, beliefs, skills, traditions and investment of successive generations. This has the potential to connect more people with these places and generate a sense of shared identity and community.

History is often dismissed as being about the past and having little relevance to the present, other than perhaps as an attractive backdrop to people's lives. The new Fremantle History Centre, if designed as a focal point for the community, could challenge these perceptions by demonstrating that history can be engaging, thought-provoking and relevant, allowing people to view Fremantle's history in new ways that have a positive impact on their perceptions and feelings about the city.

Fremantle's history underpins its character

Fremantle's development was the outcome of evolution and change as successive generations adapted their inherited surroundings to suit a changing world and support the regeneration needed to remain a thriving centre of trade. These changes sometimes transformed the city and explain why the layers of Fremantle's history are often described in terms of its periods of development and regeneration.

Fremantle's heritage buildings and their settings retain evidence of its historic success as a prosperous port-city and serves as a reminder that part of the city's success was its attractive, compact, relatively densely populated and walkable urban centre. It provided diverse facilities, local services and places to work, which people could access by foot or public transport for most day-to-day needs. In many ways that's now recognised as sustainable design. People still find these defining characteristics attractive, not only as reminders of the past, but because they fulfil expectations of what a successful urban centre should be.

Making the past part of Fremantle's future

Cities such as Fremantle are more likely to be successful when they retain and promote the distinctive characteristics of their different places, giving equal attention to the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. It requires Fremantle's growth to be managed in ways that are informed by its history.

While Fremantle must understand the challenges from competing centres, it should also appreciate its advantages and resist the temptation to mindlessly mimic them and lose the very character that made it uniquely attractive. It should build on its inherited strengths to offer something different: a lively, walkable city centre with real character and a mix of attractive urban qualities not found in anonymous town centres. That means deepening our understanding of the inherent value of Fremantle's diverse and multi-layered character and using that knowledge to inform change.

Enhance awareness of history's enduring relevance

In many parts of Fremantle there are strong links between the past and the present. Its heritage is central to the city's distinctiveness, and it remains relevant because of the ways it is linked to the city's social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing. Achieving the interdependent benefits linked to this vision depends on a broad-based consensus and a long-term commitment to it, not only from the state government and the City of Fremantle but also from the people who know and understand the area intimately; building owners, businesses and institutions, and the people who live and work here.

Tension between conservation and other public policies usually arises from a perceived need to endanger heritage values to achieve other important outcomes. Such tensions are best reconciled by pursuing them in mutually supportive ways through informed dialogue, mutual understanding and respect. Stakeholders need to appreciate the value of Fremantle's multi-layered character and use that knowledge to inform change collaboratively.

The importance of the Fremantle History Centre

Knowledge is a prerequisite for successfully managing change. From knowledge flows understanding and from understanding flows informed decision-making and intelligent actions. It is here that the Fremantle History Centre has a vital role to play in helping bring communities together by highlighting our historic surroundings in ways that explain and celebrate the many diverse influences that created the city's distinctive character.



Treasures from the British Newspaper Archive (a treasure trove in the Northern Hemisphere)

Heather Campbell

The British Newspaper Archive is an online newspaper archive, similar to the Australian National Library's Trove newspapers. It was created by a partnership between Findmypast and the British Library. For more than ten years these organisations have been working to digitise a vast newspaper collection making it available for online search.



The British Newspaper Archives website at [Home](#) | [Search the archive](#) | [British Newspaper Archive](#) invites you to 'explore millions of digitised newspaper pages', in fact currently '73,262,912 pages, dating from the 1700s'. New pages are being added constantly and at the time of writing the site lists 129,505 pages added in the last 7 days from a tempting selection of sources – *Thetford and Watton Times*, *Market Harborough Advertiser* and *Midland Mail*, *Cumbernauld News* and *Eastbourne Herald*.

Thanks to technology, we here in WA can search these archives for a modest fee. If any of your antecedents hailed from the British Isles, it can be quite surprising and enlightening to key in a relative's name and see what comes up (or what they were up to)! The newspapers on this site also quote copy from the newspapers of the Empire. From the *Bombay Gazette*, published in Maharashtra, India on 16 November 1831, we find an article from the *Fremantle Observer* of July 30 of that year, describing Fremantle at the time:

The plains adjoining Fremantle now begin to present a vast and interesting field for the Botanist. We have seen several collections of flowers, which every amateur of the science must admire, and are pleasing even to the uninitiated.

The preparations at Perth for receiving the Stock of the Agriculturists is rapidly progressing.

The Road which has been formed across the Swamp at Fremantle is as pleasing to the eye as it is useful to the inhabitants. We have noticed its progress with great satisfaction and have, with equal pleasure, heard the completion of the task highly commended. This expression has not emanated from the many who are interested in the undertaking, but from the observation of the disinterested few, whose opinion is worthy of consideration.

The gardens at Fremantle and in the neighbourhood are very forward and realized in every instance the high expectations which the most sanguine hopes of the industrious could have anticipated.

We have heard of Fairies dancing on the sand, but Pony racing on the beach is a novelty to us.

Well we know about ponies racing at South Beach, but fairies dancing on the sand – hmmm!



FLatSea Memorial Project

Members attending Fremantle Studies' Day 2022 would recall James Paratore's presentation about Western Australian fishermen and women lost at sea and his request for any information to contribute towards building the digital memorial (see Spring 2022 edition of newsletter).

Just over a year later the WA Fishers Lost at Sea (FLatSea) Memorial Association is pleased to announce it has officially launched.

Throughout the pioneering and development of Western Australia's fishing industry, hundreds of fishermen and women have lost their lives in the course of their particularly dangerous work, and the FLatSea Memorial Project has been created to recognise and honour those people and to provide a place where their stories may be told. There are over 150 stories already published along with plenty of other information, including a memorial trail of monuments up and down the West Coast of Australia.

The FLatSea website is now live, please take a look at <https://www.fisherslostatsea.org/>
If you would like to get involved in any way please visit the above website.

The Facebook page can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/fisherslostatsea>

For information on how to become a member: <https://www.fisherslostatsea.org/get-involved/join>

For information about how to donate: <https://www.fisherslostatsea.org/get-involved/donate>

If you can contribute in any way, including researching or providing information about a tragedy, head to: <https://www.fisherslostatsea.org/contact>



Then and now....



Teachers and pupils Cantonment Hill 1899

FHC 1796

Cantonment Hill 2023

K. McNulty

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Ordinary meetings are generally held on the 4th Tuesday (or Sunday) of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter. Be sure to check details as meeting days and times may vary.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday February 27, 5.00-7.00 pm

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Wanjoo Room, Walyalup Civic Centre
151 High Street, Fremantle 6160

Tuesday March 26, 5.00-7.00 pm

Pensioner guards – A forgotten history?

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