

The Royal West Australian Historical Society State Conference and the Federated Australian Historical Societies (FAHS) AGM, Albany WA, 10-12 September

By Bev Phelts

Yvonne Forrest, our Northern Territory FAHS representative and Bev Phelts travelled to Albany, WA in September to attend the conference and to participate in the wonderful events organised and hosted by the Albany Historical Society.

On our arrival in Perth we soon discovered that there were several exhibitions being held and we spent the afternoon successfully viewing all three of them. The Sandakan World War Two display was held in the Perth Town Hall. This exhibition contained original letters/documents, relics of the wartime camp, artifacts, photographs and accounts of the men who fought and survived the prison camp.

At the Western Australian Library, "Adventure with the Durack Dynasty" exhibition was on show with a fabulous memorabilia of art, photographs, stories, letters and diaries. During the mid 1800s, the Duracks left Queensland for the Kimberley, undertaking a journey of 5000 kilometres that took two years and four months. They left with 7250 cattle and 200 horses but over half the cattle and horses perished.



Yvonne Forrest at the Durack Exhibition

It was a pleasant surprise to discover that the "A Day in Pompeii" exhibition on display at the Western Australian Museum was still on. The display focused on the story of daily life in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii and the 10 minute 3D theatre experience showed the dramatic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79AD. The 3D mini movie showed step by step the beginning to the eventual full eruption of Vesuvius. Ten thousand residents managed to escape the catastrophe while two thousand stayed and perished. The exhibition held a wide range of treasures such as gold coins, mosaics, gladiator weaponry, frescoes, carbonised bread, furniture, household utensils, bronze and earthenware objects, jewellery and burial objects. However the most poignant of all were the body casts.



Entrance to “A Day in Pompeii”



London Court with Perth high rises in the background.

On Thursday (9th) morning we set off to Albany taking the Albany Highway but diverting at Williams and taking a more scenic route via Narrogin, Wagin, Katanning, Tambellup and rejoining the Albany Highway at Tenterden.

We stopped at Williams' Wool shed for morning tea and explored the nearby fields as the wildflowers were spectacular. The Williams Agricultural Hall built in 1898, commenced its life as an agricultural and community centre for the town. During World War Two it became the Department of Defence's centre for aircraft spotting. Residents worked a 24 hour roster keeping an eye out for foreign aircraft. The hall is now used as an art and craft centre.

Narrogin was first settled by Europeans during the 1860s with most of the employment being for shepherds and sandalwood cutters. From 1905, Narrogin became the major rail junction for the Upper Great Southern Railway Line. After World War Two, Narrogin became home to a large migrant camp. We visited Narrogin's Old Courthouse Museum. This building started out as a government school 1894-1905, then became a courthouse and in 1976 was opened as a museum. The Museum contains a lovely collection of local history memorabilia, photographs and locally produced arts and crafts.



Williams' Agricultural Hall



Narrogin's Old Courthouse Museum

Wagin was founded in 1840 and land grants issued from 1879 onwards attracted new settlers. Wagin's Heritage Village holds a variety of buildings ranging from a wattle and daub cottage, village hall, tearooms, a bank, post office, general store, shearing shed and a mud brick cottage. Most of the buildings in the village were removed from elsewhere to protect them and then restored on the premises. Besides buildings, there is a collection of restored machinery - steam/petrol engines, farming implements, ploughs, chaff cutters and a variety of old trucks, especially Fords and Bedfords. A restored mud puncher (percussion drilling rig) stands as the centrepiece in the village.



The Wagin Heritage Village



We arrived in Albany a day before the FAHS AGM and the Western Australia State History Conference were to commence. This allowed some time to explore.

Albany can lay claim to being the first white Western Australian settlement which was founded in 1826. The town developed as a maritime and agricultural hub of south west Western Australia. For many World War One soldiers, its cliffs and seas was the last sight of Australian land as they sailed off to War. Albany's renowned legacy however, is its whaling station which closed in 1978.

The Albany Historical Society had organised for all delegates to have access to its wonderful heritage buildings – and this opportunity was taken up with gusto.

Mouchemore's Cottage was built in the 1850s with most of the building materials salvaged from shipping timbers. The families who lived in the cottage worked in the maritime, whaling, water police and fishing industries. The Mouchemore's were a fishing family and who bought the cottage in 1905 and lived in it until 1998.

The Brig Amity replica which is located across from the cottage on the shore was constructed in 1976. The original Amity was built in Canada in 1816. The Brig, under the command of Edmund Lockyer, carried the first settlers to Albany arriving on 24th December 1826.



The Brig Amity replica



Mouchemore's Cottage

The Residency Museum was constructed during the 1850s as a Commissariat for the convict hiring depot. In 1873, it became the Government Residency and in 1975 was opened as a museum. The Museum addresses a range of historical time periods beginning from the indigenous inhabitants through the two World Wars until the present.

The Earl of Spencer is one of the oldest taverns in Western Australia, and has been beautifully restored to its original charm.



The Residency Museum



The Earl of Spencer Tavern

The Albany Historical Society's office is on the same grounds as the Patrick Taylor Cottage Museum. The cottage, constructed in 1832, is the oldest dwelling in Western Australia. The Society has done a wonderful job restoring the gardens and the cottage which contains many original furnishings.

The Albany Convict Gaol opened in 1852 as a convict hiring depot. It has been completely restored and holds artifacts related to the Gaol and Albany's colonial history. Most intriguing are the human stories of some of the inmates and that of the Gaol's ghosts.



The Patrick Taylor Cottage Museum



The Albany Convict Gaol

St John's Church is the oldest church to be consecrated in Western Australia. Construction commenced in 1841 and went through many stages. The Rectory was built in 1850 and the upper floor added in 1875.



St John's Church



St John's Rectory

The Farmers Market and the Boatshed Market which are held every weekend are a mini food fests. Local farmers sell a range of great quality, seasonal products they have grown themselves. Vegetables, fruits, farmed meats, fish, seafood, oils, eggs, preserves, flowers, bread, yoghurt, cheese, milk and cream. Samples were freely given. Consequently, our food booty consisted of sheep and goats cheese, yabbie pies, honey, jams, chocolate truffles and farmers traditional cake. Not mentioning names, but one of our conference delegates was seen indulging in a dozen local oysters for breakfast!



The Farmers Markets



An original gas light erected in 1851

Attractions out of town offer a scenic coastal drive. Albany's Whaling Station closed in 1978 but is now a museum. The Museum holds an original whaling ship, sealers hut, oil storage tanks, processing factory, boiler and pump houses.

However, the most photographed site was at the coastal lookout on the journey down. A group of tourists, including us, had spotted a whale frolicing around in the water.



The Whaling Station



Salmon Holes – one of the many lookouts

Just outside the town centre is the Princess Royal Fortress on Mt Adelaide. The Fortress operated between 1893 and 1956 and is now a museum. The Albany Historical Society and the Museum arranged for us to watch a cannon be discharged. Although the ammunition was only a bag of flour, nonetheless it still made an awesome explosion.



The Princess Royal Fortress cannon



Princess Royal Fortress guard house

On Thursday (9th) we were welcomed at a reception held in the Eclipse Building. Besides old fishing gear, the building holds a light that was constructed in Birmingham in 1922 and used on the Eclipse Islands in 1926.

The following day, the FAHS AGM was held at Albany's Historical Society offices. Yvonne Forrest will report on the AGM in the next newsletter.



FAHS Executive Committee

From left: Helen Henderson (WA), Esther Davies (ACT), Joan Hunt (VIC), Ian Jack, (NSW), Lennie McCall (WA), President Don Garden (VIC), Yvonne Forrest (NT), David Carment (NSW), Albany Representatives & Ruth Kerr (QLD)

Photograph courtesy John Davies, FAH Secretariat

On Saturday (11th) the Conference was held in the Wesley Uniting Church and next door in the Albert Hall, lunch and refreshments were taken.

The Conference covered a variety of topics ranging on the use of the internet to promote historical societies; Albany's history, development and future; to an open forum on matters pertinent to the advancement of historical societies. The Conference attracted around 150 attendees and the successful organisation of it, would have been monumental. I am sure the committee would have breathed a sigh of relief when it was all over.



Left: Albert Hall and the Wesley Uniting Church (built 1890)



Inside Albert Hall

The Conference ended with a scrumptious dinner at the Albany Bowling Club.



left: FAHS delegates, Ian Jack, David Carment and FAHS President, Don Garden



FAHS delegates, Helen Henderson & Lennie McCall

Before departing Albany on Sunday, some of us caught up for dinner and to say goodbye.



From left:
Yvonne Forrest, Lennie McCall (WA), Bob Nicholson (WA), Margaret Medcalfe (WA), Lorraine Nicholson (WA), Ruth Kerr (QLD), Don and Wendy Garden (VIC)

Congratulations to Dr Wendy Garden

Whilst in Albany, Wendy was informed by the University of Melbourne that she had been awarded her PhD!

Finally, a trip to the south west of WA would not have been complete without wildflower hunting. So on the return journey to Perth we diverted along the way to admire some of the beautiful spectacles.



Wildflowers at Tunney



Wildflowers on the coast