

Descent

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS



DECEMBER / SUMMER 2025

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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the First Nations peoples and we pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. The Society acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which Richmond Villa stands.

Editorial Committee

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President's Message

PHILIPPA SHELLEY JONES

As we close out another remarkable year at the Society of Australian Genealogists, I am delighted to welcome you to this edition of *Descent*. This season has marked a period of renewal for our Society, highlighted most notably at our recent Launch Event on 29 November. At this event, we unveiled an ambitious and inspiring program of courses and events for 2026, the centrepiece of which will be a two-day in-person conference in early November.

I extend my gratitude to Director Andrew Redfern for his exceptional leadership in shaping this event. Special thanks also go to Vice-President Christine Hingerty and Education Manager Vanessa Cassin, whose expertise and guidance have played a pivotal role in ensuring our education offerings for the coming year are deeper, more innovative and closely aligned with the evolving world of family history research.

Many of you will have already received the Society's Festive Reading List, curated in collaboration with our dedicated group leads. These leaders have provided our research groups with a remarkable number of meetings and activities throughout 2025. Whether you choose to delve into a newly released biography, explore a regional history or study a methodological text to sharpen your research skills, I hope your selections enrich your curiosity during the holiday break. Please share your own holiday reading recommendations in our Facebook Discussion Group, as your suggestions may spark new connections and conversations within our community.

Behind the scenes, the Board of Directors has completed a budget forecast to support the first three years of the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. This plan places particular emphasis on strengthening and expanding our education program, the highlight of which is expected to be the November 2026 conference. I would like to acknowledge Honorary Treasurer Cheryl Wright for her dedicated and thorough modelling of a financial strategy designed to stabilise our position over the coming years, while continuing to invest in the Society's essential programs. To maintain stability and ensure quality experiences, there will be incremental increases in membership, education and event fees. This forward-looking approach will enable us to deliver high-quality courses, deepen our professional pathways, invest in digital capability and strengthen public engagement — especially as we approach the Society's centenary.

On the topic of the Society's financial security, a wise member recently reminded me that "If you don't ask, you don't get". So as we approach the end of the year and embrace the spirit of Christmas giving, I urge you to consider donating to the Society via <https://www.sag.org.au/Gift>. Every contribution, no matter how small, makes a meaningful difference.

I am pleased to announce that the Society's By-Laws have been updated to include a new Nominations Committee Charter. This represents a significant step towards transparent and effective governance, enhancing both the recruitment and performance management of Directors and the CEO. Members are invited to review these updated documents in the SAG Member Area on our website. This ongoing refinement reflects our commitment to modern, accountable governance that safeguards the long-term health and success of the Society.

Many of you will be wondering how we are progressing with decisions around the future use of Richmond Villa, particularly given the longstanding and exasperatingly slow remediation processes following the serious water ingress problems of 2023/2024 and associated mould issues. A Richmond Villa Task Group has recently been formed to examine the suitability of the building for sustained occupation, escalate the insurance claim and progress the remediation of the archives. We are considerably grateful to the group's member lead, Peter Homan, who has extensive executive-level expertise in the property and finance sectors. Peter has been working with the board directors and staff to frame the best way forward to not only safeguard the Society's collections but also protect the immediate health and safety of the staff and volunteers.

On behalf of the Board, I express our appreciation to outgoing Director Darryl Low-Choy. Darryl's thoughtful contributions, particularly throughout our recent strategic planning process, have helped shape a clearer and stronger focus for the Society's future. We sincerely thank him for his service and wisdom.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to our staff and volunteers. Their extraordinary commitment, boundless generosity and unwavering support of our members have been vital throughout 2025. The Society's operations rely on the collective passion and dedication of this remarkable community.

As we enter the festive season, I wish each of you rest, joy, and moments of discovery — whether in your research, your reading or your time spent with family and friends. Thank you for your support of the Society throughout the year and I look forward to all that we will achieve together in 2026.

Catherine (Kate) McKenna (1872–1936)

BY EVELIA MEDINA TAYLOR

Catherine (Kate) McKenna (1872–1936), educator and founder of Queensland's Primary Correspondence School system, was born 9 September 1872 in Warwick, Queensland, Australia. Kate was the daughter of Patrick McKenna from County Tyrone, Northern Ireland and Ellen Menton from County Roscommon, Ireland. Ellen, formerly Murray, and Patrick McKenna married in Warwick in 1867. The family settled in Allora, Queensland, upon the receipt of farming land. Kate McKenna grew up in a tight-knit family who were well regarded in the community. Kate was the third child of Patrick McKenna and Ellen's fifth child.

Young Kate attended the nearby Hendon State School, becoming a pupil teacher in 1887, marking the start of her lifelong passion for education.

Miss Kate McKenna, as she was known for most of her professional life, was officially appointed Assistant Teacher in 1891. She commenced teaching in her hometown of Allora, where she spent the first seven years of her career developing her skills.

In 1898, Miss McKenna embarked on an adventure, taking a teaching position 700 km away at the Charleville State School, a government school founded in 1884. For the first time, Kate would have experienced being away from her family and surroundings. The two years away at Charleville provided a different perspective of the world and of the value of education to regional communities.

At the time of Kate's arrival, Charleville's economy was thriving. Unfortunately, a four-year-long drought devastated Charleville, due to its dependence on grazing land for sheep and cattle. Kate McKenna returned to her beloved Allora in 1900, teaching at Allora State School for a year and then at Hendon State School until the end of 1904.

At the age of 33, Miss Kate McKenna decided to once again take a placement away from home, this time in Walkerston, near Mackay, Queensland. At the time, Walkerston was the centre of the Mackay sugar district with a population of less than 500 inhabitants and home to state school no. 353.

This second move away from Allora would have likely been driven by a desire to further her career. In 1902 a regulation was introduced that required female teachers to resign when

they married. Professional advancement for female teachers became reliant on older teachers retiring or passing away. As for head teacher roles, these were almost always reserved for men. This fact must have been acutely obvious to Kate, as her brother and close collaborator, Bernard McKenna, progressed from the same humble beginnings to become Queensland's Director of Education, albeit deservingly.

After a three-year stint in Walkerston, Miss McKenna returned to Allora, where she taught for the following 14 years.

In 1911, she was the secretary of the Allora School Committee, and in the same year trained to teach kindergarten. An account of her school days in Allora was read at her farewell: "You have endeared yourself to the little ones, and by doing so have made good as a teacher here, being able to train the little ones in such a way that they loved and admire you not only as a teacher but as a friend".

In 1922, Kate had a final teaching move to Brisbane's Central Technical College, where she inaugurated the Primary Correspondence School system for Queensland, acting as principal in certain periods. The system was greatly enabled by the improvement in the postal service, which allowed educational materials to be delivered to children all over the state, who otherwise would have not been able to receive an education.

Kate was known for her sharp mind and warm personality. She was quoted as saying: "I could almost visualise some of the pupils, and I seemed to be able to gauge their dispositions as well as their standards of ability. That second sight and supplemental sense has always remained with me. I am very happy in my work."

After a day at work, on 8 September 1936, a day short of her 64th birthday, Kate McKenna suffered a stroke and passed away.

Kate McKenna lived modestly with a few meaningful possessions. To her beloved niece Vina, she bequeathed her piano, which was at Kate's sister's home in Allora. To her siblings and her sister-in-law, she left the rest of her estate to be divided amongst them.

After a funeral at the Holy Rosary Church in Windsor, Miss Kate McKenna was laid to rest at the Nudgee Catholic Cemetery.



Kate McKenna, 1911

SAG runs a Certificate in Genealogical Research to assist members to hone their research skills and explore areas of study they may not be familiar with. The course also functions as a prerequisite to our Diploma in Family Historical Studies. One exercise is to write a biography of an ancestor between 500 and 750 words in the style of an Australian Dictionary of Biography entry. In each issue of *Descent*, we feature one such biography.

From Passion to Profession

by Ruth Graham, CEO, Society of Australian Genealogists



Every family historian begins with curiosity, the spark that drives us to discover who our ancestors were and how they lived. That spark can grow into something more, a sustained dedication to research, a desire to share knowledge, and eventually, the question, *Could I make this my profession?*

In this issue of *Descent*, we turn our attention to what our education offerings are and what it means to be a professional genealogist, a career that combines rigorous research, ethical practice, historical literacy, and a lifelong commitment to learning. Unlike medicine, law, or accountancy, genealogy is not a licensed or protected profession. There is no single governing body that confers a right to practise, nor one prescribed qualification that determines who may call themselves a genealogist. That lack of formal regulation may sound liberating, and in some ways, it is, but it also comes with a responsibility to maintain exacting standards of integrity, transparency, and evidence-based research. Professionalism in genealogy is built on reputation, consistency, and trust. It grows from the relationships we establish with clients and colleagues, from how we document and communicate our findings, and from our willingness to learn continuously.

At the Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG), we see professionalism as a mindset: a dedication to competence, curiosity, and continual improvement.

Because genealogy is not a single accredited profession, there is no “one course fits all” pathway. But there is now an abundance of educational opportunities, in Australia and internationally, that can help aspiring professionals build the necessary knowledge and skills.

At SAG, we are proud to offer a structured and progressive learning pathway through courses within our Family History Studies, Digital Skills, and DNA programs. These programs are designed for learners at every level, from enthusiastic beginners to those preparing to work professionally. Our Certificate in Genealogical Studies has been an extremely popular course, created as a stepping stone for the Diploma of Family History Studies, which itself started back in 1974.

Across Australia, other tertiary and community institutions also contribute to genealogical education. The University of New England offers both a Graduate Diploma and an Advanced Diploma in Local, Family and Applied History for those wanting professional qualifications, while the University of Tasmania's Diploma in Family History has introduced thousands of Australians to the sharing of family history stories and interpreting research. Short courses from adult education centres such as U3A continue to expand options for flexible study.

Beyond our shores, there are rich offerings in the United Kingdom and the United States. The University of Strathclyde (Scotland), the University of Limerick (Ireland), and the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (England) all provide well-respected programs. In the United States, the ProGen Study Groups, and the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) credentialling process all represent rigorous professional frameworks.

Each program has its strengths and focus, some academic, some practical, some ethical or technical, and many genealogists choose to complete more than one over time. As with any profession, the most valuable qualification is not a single certificate, but the combination of knowledge, practice, and reflection that comes from ongoing education.

Continuing Professional Development or CPD in genealogy can take many forms: attending webinars, conferences, or workshops; reading and writing for professional journals; engaging in peer

review; or developing new specialisations such as forensic genetic genealogy, adoption research, or house histories. It may also involve volunteering in archives, mentoring others, or contributing to local societies; all valuable ways to deepen your practice and give back to the community.

As in other fields, belonging to a professional association helps genealogists connect with peers, uphold standards, and access structured continuing professional development. Two major organisations serve this role internationally: the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) and the Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA).

The APG, based in the United States but with members worldwide, is dedicated to supporting those engaged in the business of genealogy. It promotes professional conduct through its *Code of Ethics and Professional Practice* and offers resources for business development, networking, mentoring, and education. Membership is open to anyone committed to ethical research and client service, and many Australian genealogists find APG membership a valuable way to connect with international colleagues and stay abreast of emerging trends, technologies, and global discussions around evidence, ethics, and data privacy.

Closer to home, AAGRA serves as the recognised professional body for genealogists and record agents in Australia and New Zealand. Founded in 1977, it maintains a public register of members who have demonstrated professional competence through experience, testing, and peer review. AAGRA members agree to abide by its *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, providing clients and institutions with confidence in the quality and integrity of their work.

SAG supports members' professional growth through a packed calendar of education and networking events, from Let's Talk About sessions to Family History Connect socials, from writing masterclasses to research groups focusing on DNA, software, or regional studies. Each of these activities contributes to professional learning and helps maintain skills in a fast-evolving discipline.

We were extremely fortunate to have Cathie Sherwood from the Family History Academy deliver the keynote address at our recent *Pathways to Professional Genealogy* online conference. Cathie shared her insights on what professionalism truly means: not only the pursuit of credentials, but the cultivation of competence, confidence, and community.

Her address was one of the highlights of a rich discussion, with speakers exploring diverse professional pathways from consultancy and archival research to education, genetic genealogy, and historical writing. The event reminded us that professionalism is as much about attitude as it is about expertise. If you missed the conference, the recording pack is still available for purchase via our website. The sessions provide honest, practical insights into what it takes to build a sustainable and ethical career in genealogy.

SAG remains committed to supporting every member's learning journey, from first-time researchers to established professionals. We are building stronger education partnerships, developing new courses to cater to needs of professionals, and expanding opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and recognition.



IN SEARCH OF ... PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGY

It's all about timing

by Jan Worthington

Professional genealogy suddenly took over my life 45 years ago. In 1981, my school-age daughter Amanda Mackevicius was part of the Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG) Young Members' Group. She is now a professional genealogist. My mother, Barbara May Worthington, was a family historian, and she and Amanda were researching together until study for the Higher School Certificate intervened. I was then asked to assist my mother.

SAG in Richmond Villa, Kent Street; the Royal Australian Historical Society in Macquarie Street; the Archives Office of NSW and the Latter-day Saints Church Library in Greenwich were the main repositories of genealogical information in the 1980s. At the time I was employed in the computer industry as a Market Support Representative when computers with only 64K of memory were replacing typewriters. Previously, I was a nurse educator at Royal North Shore Hospital. Research in the Mitchell Library was restricted to holders of a reader's ticket, and they were only issued to those with a university degree or could prove they were studying for one. My computer and teaching skills proved useful in the genealogical world, but for access to records in the Mitchell Library, these qualifications were not acceptable and my application for a reader's ticket was declined! Genealogical research was not taken seriously in some repositories in 1981; however, things change and in 1993 I was a Founding Member of the Custodians of the State Library of New South Wales Foundation, and also gave lectures on family history there.

My early efforts were not productive. To help improve my research skills, I studied for the Diploma in Family Historical Studies and sat my three-hour exam in the Library of Congress, Washington DC, under the watchful eye of FBI agent P. William (Bill) Filby, author of many American genealogical reference books. He said to me, "Don't tell them you are surrounded by the answers!"

My essay for the diploma on *Computerising Genealogy* took me to Salt Lake City, Utah in 1983 to see how members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were collecting and converting data for their microfiche and microfilm records. One person per country, with the relevant flag atop one computer, in one room, was the extent of their enterprise. The

Family History Library, as it was known then, was a one-room repository as well. On a later trip, I was given the rare honour of a three-hour visit inside the Granite Mountains Records Vault, a secure facility built into the side of a mountain near Salt Lake City to store and protect their vast collections of genealogical and historical records.

It was because of my computer experience that I was elected to the SAG board in 1983 and I went on to serve for nearly 25 years in many important roles and on many committees. Over that time I gave countless lectures on any topic to do with genealogy and family history, firstly using a whiteboard, then an overhead projector, and finally PowerPoint presentations. For 13 years I ran a monthly Computer User Group in Richmond Villa where up to 80 eager computer enthusiasts crammed into the front room to learn and share information. Some of these members went on to write genealogical

software programmes and were part of the ground breaking AGCI (Australasian Genealogical Computer Index) project. This was a simple computer indexing programme for capturing genealogical data, designed one weekend by representatives of every state and territory in Australia, and New Zealand.

I also wrote six editions of the book: *Computers for Genealogy* which quickly sold out each time it was updated, before giving the publishing rights to SAG.

In 1984, people started sending me money and asking me to carry out research, so I left the computer industry to work full time as a genealogist. I got hooked by the "thrill of the chase", the satisfaction of problem solving, and being able to find information others couldn't. This was helped by my personal access to the original hard copy records in the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and eventually being welcomed as an account customer with them.

A designated working space was essential. I set up my daughter's old bedroom as an office, with her old desk, a two-drawer filing cabinet and a computer. As the business grew, so did the space I needed. I moved from the top floor of our home to the ground floor and added a fax machine and microfiche readers, as well as an accountancy trained personal assistant, Trish. She was with me for 24 years and became an excellent researcher.

Trish also assisted me for three years when I was Chair of the SAG committee organising the 1st International Congress on

I got hooked by the "thrill of the chase", the satisfaction of problem solving, and being able to find information others couldn't.

Family History and Genealogy held at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre in 1988. This was held over four days and featured many topics and lecturers, both local and international, as well as social events and a market of stalls. Attracting over 1,000 delegates, it was a huge success for SAG.

During my many trips to America over the years, I met and mingled with early prominent fellow genealogists, including John Sitner, founder and former president of Ancestry/Ancestry.com and many early members of the Association of Professional Genealogists. I attended overseas meetings, spoke at overseas conferences in America and New Zealand. Together with Perry McIntyre, I led and mentored large groups of budding family historians on regular SAG group tours to the much larger FamilySearch centre which opened in 1985. I was awarded the Association of Professional Genealogists Achievement Award in 2012 in Birmingham, Alabama, USA by over 1,000 of my peers as “a member with a record of exceptional professional achievement and contribution to the field of genealogy through individual excellence and ethical behaviour in published research, public presentations, innovative organisation leadership, writing and editing, or successful business achievement by creating valuable products or services”.

At the very beginning of my professional career, I registered my company with ASIC and found an excellent accountant, whom I still have to this day, as well as a commercial lawyer. From the beginning, I was advised to charge an hourly fee that would cover all expenses and a wage. At least five billable hours of research and reporting a day was necessary, otherwise it was considered a hobby. Sometimes this involved working seven days a week. When I got more work than I could handle, I would increase my fees and employ more staff. This did not deter my company's growth prospects.

As well as donating and volunteering for everything I could over the years, I slowly built up a successful genealogical business, Worthington Clark Pty Ltd, until 2013, when I sold my business to work on other genealogical projects. By that time I had a broad range of services both billable and charitable and was employing 15 people.

It's the simple things that make a successful career in genealogy, like having procedures in place to save time such as client log sheets and genealogical charts, either in hard or soft copy. Invest in a good computer. Ask for a deposit every time you get a new client. Tell them your billable hours and what your time covers. Don't exceed those hours before sending a report, unless it is a special case when you are prepared to donate your time. Enclose an invoice every time you send a report. Diversify and learn to recognise opportunities early regarding the changes that constantly occur in any career or business; in my case, from tracing ancestry to searching for the missing living for whatever reason, probate and forensic genealogy, reunification of families and adoption, resolving identity and other issues through DNA, thus diversifying your client base.

Early advertising of my genealogical business was in the telephone book Yellow Pages, as well as various Australian and international journals and magazines. I volunteered my

services as a prize to raise funds for charities such as the Cancer Council, schools in Africa, a Sunlight Soap competition in the newspaper. I was an employed researcher for the UK TV programme *Who Do You Think You Are?*, and appeared in one episode. One of my client cases provided a feature story for the ABC 7.30 Report in which I took part.

A well-constructed website is still important but now avenues like social media, LinkedIn, and other sites can keep you up to date regularly with what is happening in the genealogical world. Become a member of the Australia and New Zealand Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists.

You may be wondering why I have shared with you a little about my genealogical career. It is to show you that it takes a lot of consistent hard work over time, by giving an honest, prompt, consistent, ethical service to clients, as well as face-to-face interaction with all aspects of the genealogical industry. Become successful! Balance your time to pursue your personal as well as your business goals. Take it seriously! Don't be afraid to trial new ideas.

I am rewarded by many inspiring people I have met and the friends I have made along the way; some of whom I either mentored or were clients, as well as those I have worked closely with over the years.

It is the best career I have ever had!

Janet (Jan) Worthington, professional genealogist and family historian is now retired from client work after a 40-year career researching and writing historical nonfiction, family histories, biographies, memoirs, and articles for publication. She was the Independent Publisher Book Awards winning author 2012 and 2017 for European Historical Nonfiction. She is a specialist in probate genealogy, adoptions and locating missing people. She received the Association of Professional Genealogists Professional Achievement Award in 2012, was



Chair of the SAG Computer User Group 1984–1997 and was the SAG Convenor of the 1st International Congress on Genealogy & Heraldry in Sydney, 1988. She was a SAG Board member and Vice President 1984–2009; made a Fellow of the Society of Australian Genealogists in 1994; Chair of the Certificate and Diploma Committee 2010–2018; made a SAG Honorary Member in 2013 and was President of Worthington Family History Society 2004–2019.

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The Life & Times of a Family History Librarian

by Michelle Goldsmith

As I approach the end of my paid work life, it seems timely to reflect on my time as a family history librarian. While it has not been without its challenges, it has been a wonderful journey. At the root of it has been my commitment as a librarian to information literacy — to encourage and teach people how to discover, interpret, implement and share the information discovered in their family history journey. The following may provide some assistance to those considering employment in this direction.

Education ... what is it good for?

Professional genealogy assistance is a growing field. However, it involves more than knowing how to search on Ancestry or interpret DNA results. New records, technology and methodologies are being released/developed at a fast rate. Continuing education is vital, and it can come in many forms.

At this stage, there is no professional educational standard for becoming a genealogist/family historian in Australia. However, there are different ways to gain experience in many of the skills required. For me personally, I had completed my library degree when I commenced working as a reference librarian with responsibilities in family and local history. Whilst my library degree introduced me to the world of research and citations, it had nothing to do with family history. I undertook the Graduate Diploma in Local, Family and Applied History via the University of New England. This assumed an existing level of family history knowledge, which thankfully I had already gained on the job and via my own research. Importantly, it also gave me more confidence with researching local and social history, vital to any family historian.

I found the University of Tasmania's Associate Diploma in Family Studies very interesting, and suited to those starting their family history journey. It covered a range of topics and allowed students to be very hands on with presenting their own research. There was also a very active forum that encouraged students to share their experiences and brickwalls.

The Society of Australian Genealogist's Certificate of Genealogical Research opened my eyes to many aspects of research that I had not considered, such as deep diving into census records and the research presentation skills required by a professional genealogist. As the subjects are constantly under review to ensure relevance, it is worth undertaking it to develop in-depth family history research skills.

The SAG Diploma of Family Historical Studies was an amazing experience that utilised my previously gained

knowledge and research skills. It encouraged a deeper appreciation for writing family history considering the context of times in which my ancestors lived. I recommend it to everyone!

If these seem too daunting — or expensive — remember the amazing array of free/low-cost webinars/events available, not only by SAG, but also through the Museums of History NSW, your local and state libraries as well as the National Library. Your local family history group is another amazing source of talks and information. Look at the equivalent organisations overseas: Future Learn offers free family history courses for beginners, including ones organised by the University of Strathclyde (which also runs a program designed to assist the professional genealogist — at a cost). The pay-for-view databases, as well as FamilySearch, also have blogs, wikis, free courses and more.

Another source of continuing education are the family history magazines such as *Family Tree* and *Who do you think you are?* Not only do they have interesting, relatable research stories, they showcase more sources of data. Check with your local library to see if they hold them in hard copy or online via the Libby app.

The customer comes first ... most of the time

A family history librarian in a public library is different from a professional genealogist. Whilst some councils may charge a fee for research, most do not. Ultimately, we are there to assist people, direct their research, encourage and help interpret — but we cannot undertake detailed searching. Frankly, we just don't have the time.

As the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". Teaching and encouraging a person to research for themselves results in a more enthusiastic family historian. I knew of a customer who had been asking for articles from post Trove *Sydney Morning Herald*s for years. Staff would complain about the time it took to locate the articles but still copied them for him.

Once I discovered this, I showed him how to create an account and access the newspaper online via the State Library of NSW portal. The next day I discovered an email, time coded 11.45pm, thanking (and cursing!) me profusely for showing him how to access the newspaper himself. It had made his research faster and more enjoyable. He gained the skills to undertake his research when and how he wished. Information is power!

Customers are the reason libraries exist. It is fair to say that people vary in temperament. Luckily, the majority of people interested in family history are genuinely seeking assistance and are only too grateful for any help you can provide.

Of course, some customers are just too difficult to help. Real life examples include people who:

- Insisted they found everything about an ancestor by googling and became incredibly angry at the suggestion that perhaps they should confirm the information.
- Insisted a book must have been written about their ancestor — because they were just so interesting — and that we were deliberately hiding it from them.
- Chose to believe what the psychic told them.

While such customers are not open to alternative research suggestions, it is still important, when possible, to acknowledge their viewpoint and wish them well in their endeavours. You never know when they may change their minds and need your assistance.

Confession time: There is one type of customer who causes my normally pleasant customer service demeanour to disappear immediately. These are the people who seek assistance to confirm Indigenous ancestry, not because they want to discover and rejoice in a connection to the traditional owners of this country, but because they believe it will result in financial benefit. I choose not to provide personal assistance in these cases but rather, refer them to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. I am sure they deal with the query in the most appropriate manner.

Assisting customers with their research can also be emotional. The discovery that birth dates don't align with marriage dates, that war records indicated grandad was hospitalised with a sexual disease, or that additional siblings exist can be daunting at any time, but particularly when made in a public place. This is even a bigger challenge with the discoveries made by DNA. You need to be prepared to deal with the customer's reactions and be mindful of not making the situation worse. Knowing where to suggest customers might seek assistance in these stressful times is a must. Having said that, when it is good news and you help break down a wall, it is amazing to be able to share that joy with the person!

Finally, let go of the ego

Ego has no role in family history. No one is an expert. You may have more experience in a particular area of research, or knowing where and how to search, but you can't know everything. Admitting you don't know is never a problem, but pretending you do will not end well. Look to the family history community for assistance — everyone is happy to share their knowledge and experience. Just remember to pay it forward!

During my family history career, I have had to challenge myself in ways that I never expected. I have had to develop and present sessions in person or online, organise events with external speakers and speak at local family history group meetings. I have had to gain the ability to quickly follow another person's family history to direct their research. I have met some wonderful, supportive people (hello, Hounds!), from newbies to experienced researchers.

Many of my favourite library customers are people I initially assisted with a query and who then excitedly returned to the library just to discuss or show what their continued private research had uncovered. Throughout it all, I have been able to maintain my interest in and love of family history research. I can certainly say it has been a great ride!

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AGM 2026

The 93rd Annual General meeting of the Society of Australian Genealogists will be held on Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 7.00pm, AEST.

Further details regarding registration and attendance will be provided to members closer to the date.

In accordance with the Society's Constitution, nominations for election to the Board must be lodged with the Company Secretary no more than four months and no less than two months before the AGM. For 2026, nominations will therefore be accepted from Tuesday 20 January 2026 until Friday 20 March 2026 (inclusive).

Members considering standing for election, or those wishing to learn more about the nomination process, are warmly encouraged to contact the Company Secretary at ceo@sag.org.au



Michelle Goldsmith is a family history librarian who enjoys encouraging and assisting newbies with their family history research as well as discovering more about her own. She credits listening to the stories of her older relatives with sending her down the family history rabbit hole, but wishes she had asked them many more questions!

My Journey to become a Professional Genealogist

by Judy Purkiss

I did not plan to be a genealogist. I fell into it. I found I was excellent at the research and detecting side of it and then followed up with formal qualifications and accreditation.

"Falling into genealogy" all began with my sister's birthday. She won't want me to disclose her age, so I'll just say it was a milestone one! I'd been contemplating what to buy her as she didn't really need anything; however, during her university years, she'd made a small family tree for one of her assignments and I recalled her saying that what she had collected was "in a box". With an idea forming to collate it into a book for her, I asked her if I could borrow the box of documents.

I purchased a family tree software program so I could easily build family tree charts without having to draw boxes manually or create them in Microsoft Word and off I went, inputting the information she had collected. As I went through the documents, I'd find information that I thought, "there must be more to that" or "I need the proof of that date or fact" and off I'd go searching for articles or other documentation. Thankfully, I'd borrowed the box of information 12 months prior to the significant birthday, and I used that time to gather more information. With the deadline of her birthday, the book was printed, given, and loved. It was a winner and I was hooked!

So, I kept going, researching further into both sides of the family, and presented the information in additional books for family. Then friends asked for research and so it rolled on. With everyone expressing great satisfaction, and as it was something I enjoyed, I thought it was time to obtain formal qualifications.

At the time, the only Australian option I could locate was through the Society of the Australian Genealogists (SAG). I enrolled in the Certificate in Genealogical Research, which I completed in 2012–13. The Certificate course was suitable for people who had already been researching their family for several years. It didn't "teach you" as such, it was designed to build on the research, analysis and writing skills that you had already developed, though it also gave plenty of links to websites and/or books to further your learning. The assessments ensured you did have the knowledge and ability, and the final stage of the certificate course was an examination.

Once I passed, I started taking on small paid commissions while still working in my main "other" job. At this stage I applied for an ABN and traded under my own name. It was a few years before professional genealogy became my sole pursuit and I'm fortunate to work in a field I really enjoy.

Having lost a child myself, well before my genealogy journey, it was important to me that every child be recorded and therefore remembered. So many times, I'd see family trees on commercial websites with children listed from a census document, and there would be gaps between children. Yes, that can happen; however, it could also mean that a child may have been born and then died in the years between the censuses. In this situation, I'd also be checking parish records, BMD registries, headstones, death notices, obituaries, newspaper articles, anything that might have more information on the family. In summary, I'd leave "no stone unturned", and that is where my strength in genealogy lay, in "the research".

In 2015, I decided to complete SAG's Diploma in Family Historical Studies. This started with a 20,000-word thesis over a 12-month period. The thesis had to pass a strict criterion of what was to be included, layout, citations and so on. Writing the thesis was an amazing experience. This was followed by an examination and, as I was in Western Australia, I sat the examination under supervision in my local library.

For my thesis, I chose to write about my great-grandfather, Niels Andersen. Part of my synopsis was to record the family legends that have been passed down and show which parts of each legend could be proved.

Niels Andersen was born in Denmark. There was the family legend that he jumped ship to be in Australia, possibly twice, having been unsuccessful the first time. Some versions of the legend have him running to the sawmills in Jarrahdale, Western Australia, and some stories say he followed the railway line from Rockingham to Jarrahdale. There were also stories that he was a sailor around Australia and others that he was a lighterman.

Through shipping lists, naturalisation records, newspaper articles, and police court records, it was proven that Niels jumped ship in Western Australia and did hightail it to Jarrahdale where he worked in the sawmills until he gained permission to stay in Australia. Research revealed that there was a railway from Rockingham to Jarrahdale at the time he jumped ship. The line was for transporting timber from the sawmills to the ships. Therefore, it is plausible he could have followed the railway line, though not proven.

Crew lists record him working around the Australian coast, and later, electoral rolls and newspaper articles record him as a lighterman on the Swan River. In fact, one stated that Niels was one of the last lightermen on the Swan!

His story was interesting and heartbreaking. Imagine for a moment, being on a ship, getting into port and receiving a letter from your six-year-old daughter that says, "My Dear

Dada, when are you coming over to see me, dear mama died and went to heaven last Thursday ...". That was one of the letters located when interviewing relatives. The death certificate and newspaper articles record her death as being from an overdose of anaesthetic by an unregistered dentist. For Niels, this event likely triggered the change from working as a sailor on ships to being a lighterman on the Swan, and closer to home.

I passed the diploma in 2016 with a firm belief that family legends like this should be researched to locate the facts and then preserved.

My thesis is available at SAG, the State Library of Western Australia and has been uploaded to the National edeposit service (NED) to meet Commonwealth and state legal deposit laws. For my book, this means that access can be requested at any state library in Australia for viewing in a reading room at the library. Privacy settings can be set when uploading to NED to allow different viewing or privacy options.¹

Passing the diploma also meant that I could be on the Society of Australian Genealogists website as a researcher. I chose to do this and then set up expanding my genealogy business as follows:

- **ABN (Australian Business Number)²**

I already had this and decided to continue to trade in my own name; however, I could have applied for a business name if I preferred.

- **Marketing/Advertising**

Initially I created a Facebook Business page and a Google MyBusiness listing, deciding a website could come later if needed.

- **Accounts**

The following were set up:

- » Accounting package (monthly subscription) to do my own bookkeeping
- » Bank account – for income and expenses
- » PayPal account – for overseas customers or anyone else wanting to pay by credit card, although there are alternatives for credit card payments

- **Client Letter/Agreement and Terms & Conditions**

- **Applied for a Researchers Card for the State Records Office of WA**

(The process has since changed, and this is no longer needed).

While there are alternative options for setting up a business, this is the process I followed and I have adjusted elements over time to suit growth.

I authored articles for various family history magazines telling different stories I had uncovered through researching my own family. When I look back now, I can see the progression in writing style and improvements in referencing, with later articles containing full citations so a reader can find the documents I located. This is an extremely important part



Firefighters' Memorial, King's Park, Western Australia

of family history research, not only being able to record the citations, but also being able to identify if they are primary or secondary sources, then drawing conclusions based on all the documents, with the knowledge that some documents are more accurate than others.

Around this time the University of Tasmania offered a Diploma of Family History.³ As I already had a diploma from SAG, I didn't feel I needed to do another diploma, however there were a couple of units that were of interest as they covered areas that I hadn't had a lot of exposure to, such as analysing photos to identify the period in which the photo was taken, and recording the history of family heirlooms. I enrolled in and completed a couple of individual units and found them an interesting and effective way to expand my knowledge.

DNA, a newer genealogical tool, was the next frontier to be tackled, so I went to several workshops, and spent time reading and analysing results to gain an understanding of how it works.⁴ Initially I worked collaboratively with others on some unexpected test results to find answers, before moving on to analysing test results by myself.

To gain accreditation, I decided to look at the professional associations. I located the Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA) and put in an application to be both an AAGRA Accredited Record Agent and an AAGRA Accredited Genealogist.⁵ I sent through everything required and my application was approved in September 2016; I was now accredited by a professional association and had the added benefit of further exposure via a profile page on their website.

About a year after I was accepted, I joined the AAGRA committee and a year or two after that I volunteered to guide the process of having the AAGRA website updated, and I have been managing the content on their website and social media account ever since. I am also AAGRA's representative on the NAA WA Consultative Forum.

For me, some of the highlights of working as a genealogist have been:

- Research for the Department of Fire & Emergency Services in WA regarding firefighters who had fallen in the line of duty so they could be nominated for

inclusion onto the firefighters memorial in Kings Park.

- Breaking down brick walls — finding the documents and/or providing the analysis to solve the mystery.
- Giving clients insight into their ancestors' lives, it is not just about names, dates and places, it is also about the era they lived in, the challenges they faced, the circumstances that related to decisions made and the progress and triumphs they experienced.
- Preserving my own family's history by writing and lodging the books with the State Library of WA and uploading copies through the NED service.
- The feedback. While it's not a necessity to receive feedback, when you hear the "wows", "Now I understand ..." or "Oh, it's in my blood/family", it is wonderful to know that you've assisted people in understanding their ancestors and their own family history.

In summary, I believe the steps that have enabled me to become a successful professional genealogist were enjoying and having excellent research skills, customer service skills, business skills, genealogy qualifications and last but not least, accreditation.

- 1 Judy Purkiss, *A lighterman on the Swan River*, Niels Andersen, published Australia, 2015.
- 2 Business Services & Tax Register, ABN Registration/Renewal, www.applyfor-abn.com.au/abn-application
- 3 University of Tasmania, Diploma of Family History, www.utas.edu.au/courses/arts-soc/courses/r2h-diploma-of-family-history
- 4 Dana Leeds, Leeds Method, www.danaleeds.com/the-leeds-method/
- 5 Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents Inc. www.aagra.asn.au/join-aagra/



Judy Purkiss is a professional genealogist in Western Australia. She is an AAGRA Accredited Record Agent, an AAGRA Accredited Genealogist and is on the SAG Researcher Register. Judy has completed a Diploma in Family Historical Studies and a Diploma in Business Management. Her expertise is in "the research" and with over a decade of professional experience she has acquired the skills to locate and cross-reference records and provide meaningful reports to clients. Judy lives in Western Australia and can personally attend repositories in the Perth metro area and surrounds. Email: judy@jpkurkiss.com.au

Facebook: Judy Purkiss – Genealogist, www.facebook.com/judypurkissfamilyhistorian

Judy with some of her published books.

Digital inclusion benefits genealogists of all abilities

by Rachel Croucher

This article first appeared in *Association of Professional Genealogists Quarterly* (September 2021), 10–15 and is reprinted with kind permission.

Please note there will have been technology changes since the article was written.

The digital inclusion movement seeks to remedy accessibility issues by working with affected communities to address issues of opportunity, access, knowledge, and skill in relation to using technology—particularly the internet.¹ Digital inclusion is the key to workforce participation for people with disability in our technology-based society, particularly since COVID-19 has forced many of us to work remotely.

I live with disability and benefit from access to a range of technologies that enable me to operate a genealogy business efficiently, but my path to success was not an easy one. I credit the digital inclusion movement for the advances in technology that empowered me to adapt to a rapidly evolving digital environment and turn my goal of a career in genealogy into a reality.²

The Impact of Digital Exclusion: My Journey

Digital exclusion is a problem that affects many of us with disability. It occurs when an individual or group experiences continuing unequal access and capacity to use information and communications technologies essential to fully participate in society.³ The impact of digital exclusion on the workforce participation of people with disability is significant, and the importance of digital and assistive technologies as a remedy cannot be understated.

I became a wheelchair user after a spinal cord injury in 2004. I lost complete function in both my lower limbs, but thankfully only partial loss in my upper limbs and hands. Since then, my impaired mobility has often excluded me from meaningful workforce participation. By mid-2005, I had finished my post-injury rehabilitation and had recently received a bachelor's degree with majors in German and European Studies and a minor in Anthropology. I studied abroad for a year in Lithuania and my résumé included several volunteer positions and internships. I accepted that my workplace options were limited by my newly acquired disability but remained optimistic about finding entry level employment. I wasn't picky—I just wanted something more than to sit at home all day.

I engaged the assistance of a government-funded employment agency designed to help people with a disability find work and keep a job. The accessibility and technological divide for

someone with my needs was unfortunately too great back then, so I was unsuccessful. After 12 months of being rejected for more than 20 jobs and only getting one interview—for a casual data entry position in a building across town with large steps in the foyer and no accessible toilet—I closed my file with the agency to explore other options. My optimism and confidence dwindled from the constant rejections, reaching an exceptionally low point. I struggled to accept that I had the intellectual capacity for each job I applied for but remained excluded from the workforce because businesses were unable (or unwilling) to accommodate my needs.

Because I no longer had the dexterity to type with a keyboard, I quickly developed proficiency at “typing” documents in Dragon NaturallySpeaking, a speech recognition software tool. Ironically, my use of speech recognition software posed one of the biggest hurdles to my employment in the mid-2000s. Most of the positions I applied for were entry-level, so my desk would have been in an open-plan office. Many interviewers expressed concern that existing employees who did not use speech recognition would be disturbed by the sound of me talking at my computer all day. One interviewer even acknowledged I was the best-suited candidate for the role, but their workplace computer systems were not compatible with NaturallySpeaking which was then relatively new speech recognition software.

Digital jobs were far from the norm, and I did not have sufficient marketable skills to start a business, so I decided to look for meaningful volunteer work instead. Although my confidence was low, I reminded myself that not only did I have a degree in German, but I had enhanced my fluency by spending one year at high school in Germany on a Rotary Youth Exchange in 1998. Moreover, I was proficient in Dragon's German speech-recognition software because I used it daily to keep in touch with my friends and host families from Germany with whom I am still close.

I had no idea my next step would change my life. Although I do not have Jewish heritage, I've been interested in World War II-era German and Eastern European history and Jewish culture since reading child-Holocaust-survivor Esther Hautzig's memoir *The Endless Steppe* when I was 12.⁴ When I discovered in late 2006 that the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in Melbourne had an extensive archival



Rachel Croucher with Ursula Flicker OAM, Rachel's supervisor and mentor at the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre

collection in almost every European language, I emailed my résumé to the museum's volunteer coordinator, who introduced me to Ursula Flicker—a no-nonsense Polish-born Holocaust survivor who founded the archival collection in 1984.⁵ Ursula was impressed by my language skills and offered to teach me the art of translation. She would become my mentor and friend over many years, and I value the memories of my time in the archives to this day.

Thanks to speech recognition software and the museum's willingness to accommodate my needs, I visited the archives once a week after doing the bulk of translation from home. I remained in the archives for eight years and translated more than seven hundred artefacts across 102 collections from German into English. I continued to struggle to find paid employment, so in 2009 I enrolled in a master's degree program in history specialising in Holocaust and genocide studies. I intended to get my Ph.D. and carve a niche for myself in academia, but little did I know there was a technological revolution around the corner that would redirect the course of my life.

Importance of Assistive Technology to my Business

Recent advances in assistive technology help me to perform tasks that I have been excluded from doing effectively because of my disability. The proliferation of commercially available assistive technology over the last decade has levelled the employment playing field for those of us with disability and provided me with the tools to run my own business. Assistive technology can be defined as:

A product that enables a person with a disability to perform a task in a computing environment that they would otherwise find difficult or impossible to do. Assistive technology can be hardware or software, although it is generally used to refer to software-based accessibility products and features in popular computing and mobile devices.⁶

These technologies are essential to efficient client communication and continuing professional development in the Information Age. My eight-year-old nephew is already quite a history buff, and I thoroughly enjoy his enthusiasm and the opportunity to look at the past through a child's

eyes. During one conversation a couple of years ago, he was shocked to learn I did not have an iPad when I was his age. His eyes widened before exclaiming, "WHAT? No iPads in the olden days?!" (I'm 41.) I leaned closer and replied in a hushed tone, "Not just iPads, mate, your mummy and I didn't even have the internet." He stared at me blankly in response—a world without the internet was utterly inconceivable to him. A world without FaceTime with my nephew and his sister, my bold and adventurous six-year-old niece, is inconceivable to me now as well.

The same technologies that kept me socially connected to family and friends as my home (Melbourne, Australia) suffered frequent pandemic lockdowns have also helped me grow my business in the middle of an economic crisis. However, it took a global social movement and lots of science to get to this point.

Speech Recognition Technology: From Thomas Edison to Dragon

The history of speech recognition software goes as far back as 1879 when Thomas Edison invented the first dictation machine, but it would take another 118 years for Dragon Systems to release the world's first continuous speech recogniser for commercial use.⁷ Speech recognition technology was not commonplace when I first used it in 2004, but it is now part of our everyday lives with virtual assistants on our smartphones (Google Assistant and Siri) and smart speakers in our homes (Nest, Homepod, and Echo).

I have written previously about the moment my cousin Maureen introduced me to the art of genealogy when I was about 11 or 12.⁸ I can still remember her rolling out a yellowing, multi-page family tree chart held together at the edges with dried sticky tape. This was pre-internet, so her research was the result of trawling through local courthouse ledgers and historical society libraries, handwritten postal correspondence with the National Archives in Australia and its equivalent in the United Kingdom, and much more, all to make sense of our shared Punjabi (Indian) and English heritage.

I am just as capable of conducting this kind of research. Still, because my ability to physically put pen to paper is impaired, without Dragon NaturallySpeaking I would not be able to transform my research into a suitable format for my clients. Report writing, manuscript preparation, and chart creation are essential skills for any genealogist, so I would not be able to provide bespoke reports and charts for my clients without speech recognition software. As well as that, a simple Dragon plug-in allows me to use Family Tree Maker software to create personalised charts with consistent citations in multiple formats. These technologies enable me to do with a computer mouse in 2021 what my cousin did by hand in the 1980s and 1990s.

Speech recognition software not only allows me to create client-specific reports and charts; this medium of communication also means that I can store my work digitally. This compact storage method allows me to transport multiple resources at once with ease.

I prefer turning the pages of a "real" book as much as anyone else, but when it comes to lugging around my resources and notes for archival visits, client meetings, and university

lectures, I am grateful for the ability to store Word documents, PDF files, and more, in my wallet.

Video Conferencing: Professional Development and the Zoom Revolution

Although navigating COVID-19 has brought challenges, the unprecedented rise of Zoom as an acceptable medium of professional communication has saved me significant time on travel and increased my productivity. The widespread use of videoconferencing software has allowed me to grow and diversify my client load and enabled participation in more professional development activities than ever before.

Many wheelchair users and others with invisible conditions will understand my frustration that I cannot just get up and get out the door even if I wake early with a clear mind. My morning routine is complex and time-consuming, but experience has taught me to manage my energy, not just my time. I now use my morning hours to catch up on the latest releases in my podcast playlist—a mishmash of genealogy, true crime, media, politics, pop culture, comedy, and law. Also, because I do not drive, I rely on wheelchair-accessible taxi services that are not renowned for their punctuality. These factors do not prevent me from accessing the community entirely, but do they limit how much I can get done in a day.

The “Zoom Revolution” of 2020 removed accessibility barriers in ways I could never have imagined. Zoom Video Communications had 10 million meeting participants in December 2019. However, within one month of COVID-19, being declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020, that number had skyrocketed to 300 million daily meeting participants worldwide.⁹ There are understandably many negative connotations associated with the pandemic, so we don’t often hear about the opportunities and positive developments it brought us. In particular, because COVID-19 has led individuals and businesses across the globe to adopt Zoom to connect with employees and customers when working from different locations, a new world of professional development opportunities has opened up for me.

When I was preparing to go professional in 2016, I learned that Australia did not have an accreditation scheme for genealogists, so I sought out membership in the Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA) as a form of credential instead. I reasoned that because membership is conditional on providing documentary evidence of competence as a genealogist for peer review (including research files and a family history manuscript), joining would give credibility to my claim to have the requisite knowledge and skills to undertake genealogical research. I was admitted in 2017 and initially felt nervous at being surrounded by so many “real” genealogists, but thanks to the understanding and support of my colleagues, I built sufficient skills and confidence to be elected vice president only two years later. Australia is a big country with a low population density, and our membership comprises genealogists and record agents in every state and territory. Before the pandemic, we used phone conferencing, but since adopting Zoom in early 2020, we have been able to save money and



On the left is the first semester of my Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne (2005), whereas my Master's Degree in History from Monash University (2013) and Diploma of Family History from the University of Tasmania (2019) both fit into the USB flash drive on the right.

engage in “face-to-face” committee meetings for the first time in the organisation’s 44-year history.

Not only did Zoom allow me to strengthen existing professional relationships, it also opened up a variety of professional development opportunities that geography and my impaired mobility had previously prevented me from accessing. The Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG) runs an extensive program of lectures, workshops, tours, and group meetings that are open to everyone. However, my ability to attend on-site events is limited because the organisation is located in Sydney. However, since the beginning of the pandemic, SAG delivers all events online via Zoom and GoToMeeting. I jumped at the opportunity to attend an April 2021 presentation by professional genealogist and fellow Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) member Cathie Sherwood titled “Finding British Ancestors in India.”¹⁰ I do not have British family members who were in India, but my great-grandfather Nuttah Singh was a Sikh hawker from the Punjab region who fought for the British Indian Army. He left Punjab in about 1896 and lived in South Africa until 1902, after which he used his status as a British subject to circumvent the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cth) No. 17, 1901—otherwise known as the White Australia Policy—aimed at preventing non-whites from entering the new Commonwealth nation.¹¹ I do not speak or read Punjabi or Hindi, so I have struggled to find a starting point for my research into Nuttah’s life in his homeland. Cathie’s presentation outlined several online records about British India and tips about extracting as much data from them as

possible. I may not have found answers; however, I finally have insight into the operation of various civil departments across the Indian subcontinent when my great-grandfather still lived there.

The Australia and New Zealand Chapter of APG was resurrected in September 2020. Chapter Representative Shauna Hicks organises and convenes the chapter's meetings and oversees the membership. I recently had the opportunity to speak with Shauna, who kindly shared her lived experience of disability and use of assistive technology with me. Shauna is profoundly deaf and says people have no idea what it is like not to be able to hear. She has a cochlear implant and hearing aid, with lip-reading being something she does automatically. Shauna benefits from closed captions on webinars because she cannot otherwise pick up the accents, and sometimes captions are the only way she can understand what is being said. Importantly, because there is no visual clue to Shauna's disability, she often encounters people who think she is rude and stupid if she does not respond or says something odd in response. Lockdown and having to wear a mask must have been stressful for Shauna because she has "no idea what is being said by anyone." Her preferred communication methods are email and Zoom these days. She states, "Zoom is a real lifesaver as I have more chance of understanding people than I did previously on Skype."

The chapter meets by Zoom on the fourth Thursday of the month. Meetings are recorded and available to members who cannot attend.¹² These meetings provide a fantastic opportunity for APG's Australian members to grow their skills and networks, share referrals, and enhance the chapter's connectedness to other chapters worldwide.



Rachel M. Croucher is a highly credentialed genealogist and record agent with 20 years of experience in the practice of history.

As a genealogist, she specialises in managing research projects to compile family histories and genealogies for clients.

In contrast, as a record agent, she has extensive experience researching specific records and the holdings of specific archives.

Rachel has been vice president of the Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents since 2020. She is also co-convenor of the Indian and South Asian Special Interest Group at the Society of Australian Genealogists, a volunteer marker for the SAG Certificate in Genealogical Research, a judge of the Nick Vine Hall Award hosted by the Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations, and a passionate mentor for beginner genealogists in the Writing Your Family Story course taught at the Genealogical Society of Victoria. Rachel also consulted on the SBS documentary series *The Secret DNA of Us*.

Remembering Our Disabled Ancestors

The most significant benefit of digital inclusion to genealogy is that the lived experience of researchers with disability improves how we remember our disabled ancestors.

I could never have imagined my lived experience of spinal cord injury would help me solve the mystery surrounding the death of my great-great-grandmother's brother, James Brady, in 1919.

Mary Annie Brady was born in 1859 in Buckland, Victoria. She was the second of nine children of William Brady and Margaret Mary Dunphy, both of whom fled famine-era Ireland before meeting and marrying shortly after arriving in the colony of New South Wales in 1853. They spent five weeks travelling via stagecoach from Sydney to the rugged terrain of Buckland Valley in Victoria's High Country region.

As I began reconstructing Mary Annie's family life, I noted her brother James died several decades before his eight siblings. I did a search of old newspapers using the National Library of Australia's Trove database and found James's obituary.¹³ It announced that his death occurred on 16 January 1919 and was "the result of a fall [James] received from a horse on November 23rd of last year."¹⁴

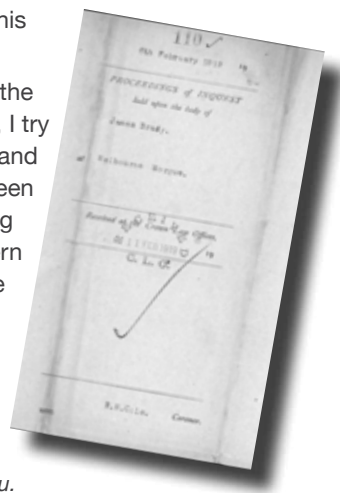
Perplexed by the two-month gap between James's injury and death, I downloaded a copy of his inquest from the Public Record Office Victoria's online collection. My jaw dropped reading the medical examiner's deposition:

There was a history of a fall from a horse at Eurobin near Bright about 12 weeks ago ... When I saw him first on Dec 24th 1918 he was completely paralysed from the level of the umbilicus down ... Also the arms were partly paralysed ... There were some bedsores... He had been previously x-rayed & lumbar punctured to get evidence of fracture of dislocation of the spine... There was no such evidence¹⁵

Although James's physician was puzzled, I did not need a textbook to tell me his cause of death was from complications of an undetected spinal cord injury. Moreover, perhaps the most surreal part of this coincidence is that not only was James paralysed from the waist down, but his arms were only partially paralysed. These impairments indicate he had a cervical spinal cord injury at the same level as me.¹⁶ It is rare, but not impossible, for a person to damage their spinal cord without a fracture to the vertebral column, and cord damage in the absence of a fracture is now detected using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology. Tragically for James and his loved ones, however, MRI technology was not invented until 1977, so there were no scientific means available for his medical team to diagnose and treat his underlying condition.¹⁷

I was too surprised to be distressed the day I downloaded that inquest. Now, I try not to overthink how much physical and emotional pain James would have been in, for my sanity. Instead, his suffering is a reminder to be grateful for modern medical technology and the assistive technology that enabled me to tell his story.

The 1919 coronial inquest into the death of James Brady is free to download from Public Record Office Victoria's online collection at <https://prov.vic.gov.au>.



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- 2 "Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance", www.digitalinclusion.org.au Also "National Digital Inclusion Alliance", www.digitalinclusion.org
- 3 Amit Schejter, Orit Rivka Ben Harush, and Noam Tirosh, "Re-theorizing the 'Digital Divide': Identifying Dimensions of Social Exclusion in Contemporary Media Technologies," *FACE Conference: European Media Policy 2015: New Contexts, New Approaches*, 2015.
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- 9 Kimberley Mlitz, "Zoom Video Communications Daily Meeting Participants Worldwide from 2019 to 2020 (in Millions)," *Statista*, 30 July 2021, www.statista.com/statistics/1253972/zoom-daily-meeting-participants-global/#statisticContainer. Also, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020," World Health Organization, https://www.fedcourt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/119516/Tab82.pdf
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- 11 Rachel Croucher, "I wasn't prepared for the emotional impact of tracing my ancestry," *SBS Online*, <https://www.sbs.com.au/voices/article/i-wasnt-prepared-for-the-emotional-impact-of-tracing-my-ancestry/w8p5e5534>, accessed: 20 October 2021. Also, Chad Cooper, "The Immigration Debate in Australia: From Federation to World War One," 16 July 2012, Parliament of Australia, www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/ImmigrationDebate
- 12 "Australia and New Zealand Chapter," Association of Professional Genealogists, www.apgen.org/cpages/chapters-australia.
- 13 "Trove," National Library of Australia, <https://trove.nla.gov.au>
- 14 James Brady death notice, "Births, Marriages, Deaths," *Advocate* (Melbourne, Australia), 8 February 1919, 21, column 1.
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- 16 "American Spinal Cord Injury Association (ASIA) Impairment Scale," *Physiopedia*, [www.physio-pedia.com/American_Spinal_Cord_Injury_Association_\(ASIA\)_Impairment_Scale](http://www.physio-pedia.com/American_Spinal_Cord_Injury_Association_(ASIA)_Impairment_Scale)
- 17 "The Invention of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)," *International Electrotechnical Commission*, 16 March 2021, www.iec.ch/blog/invention-magnetic-resonance-imaging-mri

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

I benefit from a range of assistive technology designed for different types of disabilities. I do not have a vision impairment or dyslexia. Still, screen readers and text-to-speech software help me maintain my focus longer by enabling me to listen to large chunks of text without straining my eyes. Some of my favoured examples of assistive technology include:

Wireless Trackball Mouse: A wireless trackball mouse has customisable buttons and a scroll ring that can be used with either hand. This device is ideal for accommodating my impaired function and assisting others who have difficulty using a mouse to access a computer. It can be paired through Bluetooth or connected via a USB nano receiver. The trackball consists of a ball housed in a socket containing sensors to detect rotation of the ball about two axes—like an upside-down mouse, but with the ball sticking out more. Users roll the ball with their thumb, fingers, or the palm of their hand to move the mouse pointer.

PCEye Plus: This device is an eye tracker for standard tablets, desktops, and Windows laptops. It replaces the standard keyboard and mouse, allowing users to navigate and control devices with their eyes. It facilitates access to software programs for communication and computer functions such as accessing the internet and Skype, and allows users to create spreadsheets and documents using only their eye movements. I do not have an eye tracker, but this technology deserves mention for the way it enables meaningful workforce participation for people with profound physical disabilities—some of whom I am lucky to count as colleagues and friends. We should also never forget that eye tracker technology allowed Stephen Hawking to transform humanity's understanding of the universe with only a cheek muscle.

Smartpen: This is a small device that records everything a user hears, says, and writes, and links audio recordings to written notes. To hear playback of recorded audio, the pen is tapped lightly on written notes. I bring a Smartpen to face-to-face meetings with multiple participants to make copies of relevant handwritten notes made by other participants.

NaturalReader 14: NaturalReader is text-to-speech (TTS) software designed to assist people with visual needs or reading and spelling difficulties. It can be downloaded to a computer or smartphone and reads any text aloud using natural-sounding voices. It can also convert written text into audio files that can be saved and immediately uploaded from my mobile phone to my Dropbox. The paid version allows you to take a picture of printed books to listen to later. I find this latter function particularly helpful for trips to archives and libraries and for making copies of clients' pre-existing research that I asked them to bring to face-to-face meetings. I can save myself the inconvenience of scooting between client and photocopier and ensure that all relevant texts and research files are stored in one place from the beginning of a research project. In addition to my business, I am studying for a postgraduate degree with a hefty reading load, so this is great for reading academic texts on days my strained student eyes need a break from textbooks. Some of my fellow students who speak English as a second language use TTS software to enhance speaking and listening proficiency to develop better reading fluency. I sometimes use TTS software in German for the same purpose.

Mapping lives: Teaching genealogy skills in social worker education

by Helen Hickson

Learning the basics of genealogy is an essential skill not only for the hobbyist or professional family history researcher. Fields such as social work, nursing, history, anthropology and law often require practitioners to research and interpret family histories of a client or family. This article reflects on the intersection of teaching genealogy and family history research skills to social work students and practitioners.

The social work curriculum is dense, with a strong focus on practice and explanatory theories that guide students to understand what to do and how to approach their work as beginning social workers.

Genograms are a visual map of a client's family history and relationships, typically spanning at least three generations. Unlike a basic family tree, genograms use standardised symbols to represent gender, marital status, and significant life events and helps social workers to understand and assess relationship and family dynamics.

In social work education, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory¹ underpins the use of ecomaps and the importance of understanding an individual in the context of their environment.

When we teach social workers about working with individuals and families, we use a range of tools that help to keep track of who is in the family, the risk and protective factors and the status of relationships, such as which relationships are strong and positive and which relationships are fractured or severed. Social work students will often learn the basics of developing a genogram to identify the key people in the family and map out these relationships. These genograms will show the complexity of family information and will often include gaps where people don't know their family or extended family members. Lines and circles are used in a genogram to indicate the strength of relationships, connections, or to tell the story of family estrangement. Ecomaps are used to depict the social connections with an individual or family and external systems, such as school, friends, workplace, church, healthcare providers. Similarly, genograms use circles to describe support systems and lines to identify sources of support or stress.

Genograms can overlook the cultural diversity of an individual and family, such as Aboriginal heritage or other cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This omission can be significant when trying to understand identity, belonging, and intergenerational trauma.

Why do social workers use genograms and ecomaps?

Genograms and ecomaps facilitate meaningful conversations about an individual and family and the connections between family members. While some clients may find visual representation of family dynamics confronting, others may find them reassuring and helpful in identifying sources of support that are available within the family and community.

For example, during a third-year social work class, students practised mapping genograms as part of an introductory intake conversation. There was 30 minutes allocated to this exercise and students sat together and drew the genogram on a piece of paper, using agreed symbols to represent key factors such as gender, marital status, whether living or deceased, and lines to depict the strength of relationships between family members. At the end of the session, I asked students to reflect on their experience of asking the questions and being the person who provided their family story. Students described the value of asking questions to learn about family connections, history and interactions. One student spoke about the tangible value for her to see her family mapped visually and how this helped her to recognise patterns and alliances she hadn't previously considered.

When do social workers use genograms and ecomaps?

Social workers often begin building rapport with clients by exploring family history and family stories. One way for a social worker to build a relationship with a new client is to listen to their story about who is in their family, which relationships are stressful, and which are supportive. Mapping family structures, either handwritten on paper or using software, places the client at the centre of the genogram or ecomap. Over time, it is useful for social workers to revisit the genogram and ecomaps as the information can change as new people move into the family, old stories are revealed, and relationships change.

Exploring gaps in information

Social workers frequently work with clients who have gaps in their family history. These gaps could be from estrangement, adoption or out-of-home care. For Indigenous Australians, this may include experiences related to the Stolen Generations. Approaching these histories with sensitivity and trauma-informed practice is essential.



Dr Helen Hickson is a social worker, researcher and academic at Central Queensland University in Australia with over 20 years' experience in teaching in higher education. She has a long-standing interest in rural communities, finding them fascinating places that are rich with stories of interesting people, historical events, scandals and celebrations. Helen has been writing for 15 years, including academic, fiction and non-fiction writing and researching her family history to uncover the stories from the past. She completed the Society's Certificate of Genealogical Research in 2022 and is a diploma supervisor and assessor.

Teaching strategies

Educating social workers emphasises critical thinking, ethical practice and understanding the context for the individual and their family. These principles align closely with genealogical research and are embedded in classroom activities, assignments, and reflective exercises, and scaffolded across their university education and field practice experience.

Social workers need to know the basic skills of family history research, similar to those used by genealogists. These skills include:

- developing clear questions to guide the research
- accessing and interpreting primary documents, with attention to privacy and access limitations such as who can access documents for people who are living or deceased
- understanding the strengths and limitations of digital tools such as Ancestry.com and similar platforms.

Ethical considerations when working with sensitive histories

Researching and documenting family history involves ethical considerations particularly around consent, confidentiality and cultural safety. Genograms and ecomaps should include clear information about who contributed information, when it was collected and who will have access. Family stories and memories are narrated and there can be multiple versions of events and different perspectives about what happened and why, they can include information about individuals who are named but have not consented to have their story shared or the opportunity to correct any facts that they disagree with.

For individuals and families who are looking to solve gaps in their family tree, there are options such as different types of DNA testing to search for evidence of biological connections. DNA tests can confirm or refute biological relationships but the implications can extend beyond the person providing a sample. These findings can affect family members emotionally and ethically, especially when unexpected results challenge long-held beliefs or reveal hidden stories.

Connections to professional genealogy

While social workers are not typically trained as genealogists, the skills they use in constructing genograms and ecomaps and exploring family histories share significant overlap with professional genealogy. Social workers in roles such as child

protection, adoption and out-of-home care often engage in tasks that require genealogical skills, such as tracing family origins or facilitating family reunification. In research, probate or heritage services, these skills become even more central.

Social workers and genealogists share similar skills and rely on knowledge such as:

- **Critical thinking skills:** Social workers ask structured questions to understand family dynamics and genealogists use similar methods to trace lineage and verify relationships through records.
- **Ethical considerations:** Issues such as consent, confidentiality and cultural sensitivity are central for both professions. For example, when working with Indigenous clients or those affected by the Stolen Generation, social workers must navigate complex histories with care and sensitivity, similarly genealogists must demonstrate care when handling sensitive ancestral information.
- **Construction of the narrative:** Both professions aim to construct narratives of personal and family relationships. For social workers, this supports therapeutic or care planning and for genealogists, it contributes to historical preservation and identity formation.
- **Education and professional development:** For genealogists, this is about teaching and learning how to conduct family history research and similarly, social workers will often teach individuals and families how to research and understand their own history, record and detail the facts and stories.
- **Using archival documents and digital tools:** Social workers increasingly use platforms like Ancestry.com (or similar) and government archival records to answer questions about client histories, especially in families involving adoption, out-of-home care or estranged families. These are the same tools that professional genealogists use to build family trees and confirm historical information.

This intersection opens opportunities for collaboration between genealogists and social workers, particularly in areas like family tracing and cultural reconnection. Family history societies can offer valuable resources and access to professional development opportunities to support this shared work.

- 1 Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press, 1979.

HOW I BECAME A GENEALOGIST by Kaye Vernon

I began researching family history prior to 1988, when a lot of people started investigating their family trees, hoping to find convicts before the bicentennial celebrations. At that stage, there were very few records available, and many of them were only available on microfilm. To find anything, you had to go through hundreds of reels, but I nonetheless became hooked on genealogy.

Several years later, Billie Jacobsen, who was the wife of one of my relatives (Kevin Jacobsen, Col Joy's brother) and I organised a family history reunion for 300 people. We met people we didn't know existed, and produced a book called *What's in a Name: Jacobsen, Buckley and Wildsoet Family*.

In the early 2000s, Billie and I produced a booklet called *The Teapot Genies Family Tree Checklist* and hosted a TV program on genealogy research for Banana TV, my husband's internet company at the time. These episodes are still available on teapotgenealogy.com

We produced further books after indexing nearly one million lines of data from original documents from the state archives in both NSW and Victoria, as well as Good Samaritan Convent records.

More recently, my genealogical research has focussed on DNA and I have had great success in finding clients' ancestors, relatives, and biological parents. Some of these clients have become friends, others more like family, and some, we discovered, actually are family.



Kaye Vernon is a genealogist, researcher and speaker. She has extensive experience in interpreting

DNA results, tracing family trees, and discovering family histories. Kaye is passionate about sharing her knowledge and experience in family history, running workshops for individuals and small groups, and has travelled extensively to talk on family history topics, such as how to start your family tree, simplifying your DNA, and finding gems in the State Archives.

Percy the Penguin

by Jennifer Oswald-Sealy

Ed: Due to the overwhelming interest in and member support of our previous themed animal issue of *Descent*, I've included another article in this issue — and who knows, there may be more popping up in future issues.

Percy the Emperor Penguin has lived with our family since 1917. The story was told that Sir Ernest Shackleton, the great explorer, had presented the penguin to Ludlow Richard Oswald-Sealy (1874–1945) in recognition of his assistance in sponsoring the 1914–1917 Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Ludlow's daughter Joan (1904–1987) had many letters, telegrams and a draft of one of Shackleton's speeches left to her by her father. She claimed that Shackleton had brought the penguin back as a present for her.

As the family historian it was time to find out the truth.

Antarctic exploration in Shackleton's time was largely privately sponsored and after appeals to the British public in 1914, the funds were finally raised. The Trans-Antarctic Expedition would require two ships, the *Endurance* and the *Aurora*. The fate of the *Endurance* is well known and various excellent books have been written about it.¹

Penguins provided a valuable supplement to the provisions of the explorers and when caught they were butchered and eagerly eaten, and the skins retained for future taxidermy. As there are no Emperor penguins on Elephant Island or South Georgia, it seems likely that our penguin would have been killed by the Ross Sea party, who Shackleton returned to rescue in 1917.² I needed to examine the original documents, but Joan had donated them to the National Library of Australia in 1985, where they make up MS no. 8171 — the papers of L. R. Oswald-Sealy. According to the librarian, the papers had been bequeathed to Oswald-Sealy by Charles Burchmore.³ I was able to get copies of all the items and they gave me many clues to the connection between Shackleton and Percy. Most of the telegrams in the collection were to Charles Burchmore, none were to Ludlow Oswald-Sealy.



In 1917 Charles Burchmore was the owner of the Steyne Hotel in Manly. According to family stories, Ludlow Oswald-Sealy was the licensee, but research hasn't confirmed this. He was certainly working in the hotel at this time, however, perhaps as the manager, as a family photograph shows them together.

Once war broke out, the world focus moved away from supporting explorations like Shackleton's and it became very difficult for him to raise enough money to return to the Ross Sea to rescue the remainder of his party. One particularly interesting telegram from Sir

Ernest in Wellington, New Zealand of 5 December 1916 asks Burchmore to lend him £500 without security, as he needs to pay off the men from the rescued Elephant Island party. He says he is going south next week to rescue the Ross Sea party and is financially strained. Burchmore subsequently sends Shackleton the money.

Another telegram dated 20 February 1917 asks Burchmore whether he would like any "Antarctic curios". The war in Europe was continuing and Sir Ernest was coming to Sydney to give a speech in Martin Place for the New South Wales Recruiting Committee on 20 March 1917. A handwritten draft of this speech is part of the collection. Charles Burchmore was his liaison for the organisation of this event. Sir Ernest was certainly indebted to the wealthy Charles Burchmore, whom he regarded as a friend.

Another letter in the collection, dated 7 December 1916, is from E. H. Shackleton to L. Tripp Esq. of Wellington, New



Jennifer Oswald-Sealy has been researching her family history and that of her husband since 1992. She loves finding primary sources and has travelled extensively to further her research.

A shock DNA revelation in 2022, finding out her biological father was not the father who raised her, caused her a great deal of anguish, but she has now come to terms with the knowledge and finds pleasure in researching her new family.

Zealand. Leonard Tripp was a solicitor and wealthy landowner with a station called *Orari* in the South Island, as well as homes in Wellington where his law firm was based. He was a benefactor and personal friend of Shackleton. He helped not only by making personal donations but also in organising Shackleton's affairs and in reminding him of his obligations with regard to people who had given him large sums of money. Tripp assisted Shackleton in raising £5,000 to pay the men of the Elephant Island party.⁴

In a letter dated 29 March 1917, Tripp discusses with Shackleton the organisation of the distribution of penguins to various benefactors and institutions, stressing that those who had lent him money should have priority in receiving them.⁵ Although Charles Burchmore is not mentioned by name in any of the Shackleton/Tripp correspondence held by the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington,⁶ it is very likely that as an important benefactor and friend of Sir Ernest, he would have received a penguin from the batch of 20 mentioned in the letter.

Between 1914 and 1917 L. R. Oswald-Sealy was struggling financially. He had been declared bankrupt in the High Court of Justice, Ireland on 24 November 1908⁷, prompting his migration to Australia in 1909, in an attempt to resurrect the fortune he had initially inherited. Since his arrival he had tried several business ventures without success, likely causing his wife and daughter to return to Ireland, where they were supported by family members. In 1917 his son Cyril was withdrawn from Sydney Grammar School and sent to work as his wage was needed to supplement the family income. Oswald-Sealy was definitely not in a position to donate funds to help Sir Ernest, however, as both Shackleton and Oswald-Sealy were Irish and both born in 1874, it is highly likely they would have met when Shackleton came to Sydney through their mutual friend, Charles Burchmore.

In conclusion, it is likely that during Sir Ernest Shackleton's visit to Sydney in 1917, the penguin was given to Mr Burchmore in appreciation of his financial assistance to Sir Ernest. Perhaps it initially sat in the Steyne Hotel. Charles Burchmore died in 1920 and bequeathed his Antarctic memorabilia to L. R. Oswald-Sealy. Presumably, it was at this time that the penguin was also acquired by the Oswald-

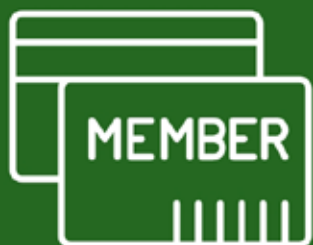


*From left: L R. Oswald-Sealy, C.J. Burchmore, and friend.
In album "mainly people" belonging to L.DeC. Oswald-Sealy*

Sealy family, or perhaps Charles specified that the penguin be given to Ludlow's daughter Joan when she returned from Ireland. We will never know, but Percy the penguin certainly has an important place in our family history and sits proudly in the foyer of our home, receiving admiring and interested comments from all our visitors.

- 1 *South With Endurance Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition 1914-1917 The Photographs of Frank Hurley* (Viking, 2001).
- 2 Email from Jonathan Shackleton to Jennifer Oswald-Sealy 1 February 2002.
- 3 Email from Valerie Helson, Manuscripts Librarian, Australian Collections and Reader Services, National Library of Australia to Jennifer Oswald-Sealy 13 January 2002.
- 4 Email from Anne Wood, Information and Research Librarian, Chapman Tripp, Barristers and Solicitors, Wellington, New Zealand 13 September 2002.
- 5 Letter no. 187 of Shackleton/Tripp correspondence held by Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
- 6 Manuscripts Section, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
- 7 *Irish Times*, 1 December 1908, p. 7, Legal Notices.

Are you new to SAG?



Come along to one of our quarterly new member inductions and hear about the variety of resources and opportunities we offer. What is MIDAS? How do I submit a research request to the library? What educational offerings do you have? All will be explained.



The doomed SS Columbine. Photo courtesy Ralph McLean.¹

THE MORLEYS: The South African SS Columbine vs U-boat 198

by Des Lambley

At 2000 hours on 16 June 1944, the German U-boat 198 commanded by Burkhard Heusinger von Waldegg torpedoed the armed merchantman, the SS *Columbine*, 50 kilometres west-northwest of Cape Columbine, South Africa. Twenty-one crew and two passengers died, and 29 of the crew survived. The ship's engineer, Mr D. J. Molony, later in the year testified at a Marine Board of Inquiry in London that at noon the day after the sinking, Lieutenant Commander Morley and his wife, Doctor Hilta Pfister, passed their one lifejacket to him and then jumped out of the lifeboat. They waved a farewell and disappeared, choosing to drown together.

Some days later, their nine-year-old son Tom was called in by the headmaster of his boarding school in England and told that he was now an orphan. My friend Tom had migrated to Australia in the 1960s and had asked whether I could undertake some military history research about his family, "because my mother and father drowned when their ship was torpedoed during the war".² Over the next few months, a fantastic story resulted.

This episode illustrates the tragic human impact from global events. From a genealogical perspective, it tells of the trauma and dismemberment of one family. From a military history perspective, its focus on a single encounter spotlights its human impact. And while this event was a blip in the war's outcome, it effectively destroyed and displaced the Morley family.

Emotions play out not only among those directly involved but reverberate to extended families, and permeate across societies and generations. These stories can become lost if they're not recorded, condemning us to a cycle of repeating the same mistakes. Such traumatic stories may have been suppressed at the time in the interests of public morale and

to minimise intelligence gathering by the enemy, but it also means that scant primary documentation remains decades later, and much must be assumed. Speculative reconstruction of these stories adds colour and completeness to the personal impact of war.

This article focuses on Tom's father, Stephen Charles Morley, and his mother, Dr Hilta Ines Christina Morley (nee Pfister). Stephen was born in California and returned with his parents to their home in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England in May 1905. As a young man, Stephen trained as a marine engineer and served in the Merchant Marine with the Liverpool-based Elder Dempster Line, running mail and passengers to and from West Africa until about 1935. He had qualified as second mate in 1922 and first mate in 1926.³

Stephen married Hilta Pfister in 1933 in Wolverhampton, England. Their only child, Tom, was born at Cheltenham in 1934. By 1941, Stephen Morley was a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy based at the Nigerian Naval Defence Force headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria.⁴

No records have been found about his transfer to the Royal Navy or of his work at Lagos, and most of the family history for the period from about 1935 until June 1944 is a blank. On several occasions, Dr Pfister is seen to have lived in Lagos with her husband, but their home address was actually at 4 Oriel Terrace, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, England.

Tom's mother, Hilta Ines Christina Pfister, was born in Naples in 1898 to a Swiss family who emigrated to Perth, Australia in 1906. Her father, Dr George Arnold Pfister, was a teacher with the Western Australia Education Department. Hilta graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with first-class honours from the University of Western Australia in 1920. She sailed from Fremantle in March 1920 with her mother and sister

for England, where she had enrolled as a medical student at Edinburgh University.⁵ She graduated with first-class honours and an M.B., Ch.B. in 1925. Dr Pfister later became a lecturer in physiology at the University of Birmingham, a medical officer at St Alfege's Hospital, Greenwich, and a senior house surgeon at a maternity hospital in Edinburgh. She added to her academic career by gaining a D.P.H. in London in 1931.⁶

Lieutenant Commander Morley and his wife departed Lagos for England via Cape Town in June 1944 as the only passengers on board the SS

Columbine, a 3,268-ton cargo ship transporting timber from

Luanda. The *Columbine* was an unescorted

vessel with a crew of 50, predominantly South African, with 33-year-

old Norwegian, Arne Reidar Simensen,

as her master. The ship had been built in

America in 1921 and had had four different

owners and four different names during her service.

She was seized by the Union Government of South Africa

when the war began, and renamed *Columbine*. Small defensive guns

were mounted at the stem and stern, and four specialist gunners

manned these guns.

It was wintertime and a moonless night at 8pm on 16 June 1944, when she was steaming south for Cape Town at 9 knots. About 50 kilometres west-northwest of the Cape Columbine Lighthouse, she was hit by a torpedo on the port side, aft of the engine room. At the change of watch, the *Columbine's* captain was on the bridge and blew five whistle blasts, the signal to abandon ship. Captain Simensen was not seen again. Four lifeboats were launched in a heavy swell and a fresh offshore wind. One lifeboat overturned during the launching, and all its occupants were thrown into the sea. It was the Morley's boat, and they were in the water for about an hour before it was righted. They remained waterlogged, wet and cold.

Columbine's cargo of timber caught fire after a second torpedo hit the ship. She sank 20 minutes later at 32.44S, 17.22E.

The Portuguese merchantman, the SS *Angola*, was seen four kilometres off the port bow when the attack commenced and altered course to pass the *Columbine* on the starboard side. She did not attempt to assist the survivors.

The *Columbine's* master, 17 crew members, the two passengers (Lieutenant Commander Morley and his wife) and three gunners were lost. A South African naval craft later picked up some survivors. Others made it back to land near the Cape Columbine Lighthouse. Mrs Morley, who was suffering from chronic rheumatism, is reported to have assisted in keeping up the spirits of the survivors during the

cold night. By noon the next day, 14 of those in the lifeboat (deathboat) had died from exposure. In giving evidence before a Marine Board of Inquiry held later in London, the ship's engineer, Mr Molony, said Mrs Morley was seen to speak to her husband. She then took off her lifejacket and gave it to him (Molony). Mrs Morley and her husband both stood up and leapt overboard, waving farewells. They were lost at sea. The others were too weak to stop them. A memorial was subsequently installed as a wall tablet in St Luke's Church,

Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, "To the Glory of God and in memory of Stephen Charles Morley, Lt.

Commander, Nigerian Marine and his wife Hilta Christine

Morley M.B. C.H.B. who as the result of enemy action

at sea gave their lives that others might live, 7 June

1944. They were lovely and pleasant in their

lives and in their death they were not divided".⁷

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission also memorialised the Morleys.

Orphaned at nine, Tom was still angry and emotional 70 years later that he had not been able to experience life with his parents. He was raised by a favourite aunt and uncle in England, and when he migrated to Australia in the 1970s, he spent much

time with another beloved uncle who was a soldier settler at Griffith in New South Wales.

The *Columbine's* nemesis, the U-boat, had been built at Bremen in 1941 and carried out her active service from April 1943 until August 1944. Her sea orders were to patrol the Southern Atlantic. Under Kapitan Burkhard Heusinger von Waldegg, she had sunk 11 ships totalling 60,000 tons. She, in turn, was sunk on 12 August 1944 near the Seychelles at 3.35S, 52.49E, by depth charges from the British frigate HMS *Findhorn* and the Indian sloop HMIS *Godavari*.⁸ The U-boat's crew of 65 and one prisoner of war were lost.⁹

The sinking of the *Columbine* and the U-boat caused sacred places to be set apart in the depths of the oceans. Their position in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans are memorials, "...consecrated by the feelings they evoke. Sensations of sadness, sorrow and anguish together with thoughts of courage, bravery and duty undergird the thousands of [such] memorials scattered across [the world]".¹⁰ That these memorial locations are in places where relations and comrades were never likely to visit adds further sadness.

The *Columbine* drama was a two-day fragment during some six years of war where millions died and millions more grieved for them. Twenty-nine were saved, and 89 lives were lost from these vessels, but all of them left grieving families. Blame becomes a casualty of war, casually and perhaps flippantly called collateral damage and is then forgotten. Each of the



Lieutenant Commander Steven Charles Morley and Dr Hilta Ines Christina Pfister.
Photos courtesy (the late) Tom Morley.

warring nations attempted to kill as many of the others as they could or destroy their real property. In war at sea, there is much rust and many human bones on the bottom of the oceans as a consequence.

Theoretically, scope exists to apportion blame to victims as well as to the principal perpetrators, their governments. Dingwall and Hillier said, “Blame is a central part of human relationships”.¹¹ This poignant story about U-boat 198 and the SS *Columbine* allows us to consider the difficulties in attributing blame. Parker pointed out the difficulty exists “when those results are largely or entirely beyond the actor’s control”, and conceptually, it is not good sense to blame a person for the consequences which, in fact, flow from another’s conduct if they themselves are within the theoretical risk zone of the conduct.¹² So, blame can be shared even when one places oneself at risk. Blame can be seen as individual or systemic, when it is diluted across the social canvas that contributed to the event. In the complexities of war, it is not only the lowest echelon that bears the blame.

Each of the 89 victims might have chosen not to do what they did, which led to their death. For the submarine kapitan, he was obliged by orders to sink shipping. To refuse those German naval orders would have had dire consequences for him. The captain of the *Columbine* might have chosen not to be a mariner, but that was his preferred commercial profession. Similarly, the crews were mariners; it was their occupation, and they would have all understood and accepted the risks. The submarine might have stopped to rescue or assist the survivors, but that was a command call, and a lack of space might have dictated that decision. It is noted that the captain of another torpedoed Allied vessel was a prisoner of war when U-boat 198 was later sunk with all hands. The captain of the nearby SS *Angola* might have stopped to rescue the survivors, but chose not to. To stop would have placed her at risk of being sunk too, so the responsibility was to rapidly evacuate the immediate area to preserve the ship and her crew. The *Angola* turned seaward after the torpedo hit, away from the submarine, landward of the *Columbine*.

The two passengers, Morley and his wife, would also have known the risks of sea travel but were either ordered or chose to return to England at that time. They also decided to end their lives together, the ultimate consequence of leaping overboard from their lifeboat. This decision was made after some 16 hours in the lifeboat. What prompted them to do this will never be known because others in the boat were subsequently rescued. However, Dr Morley had diagnosed her condition and was close to death from exposure.

When war is personalised, it fuels hate. Blame avoidance strategies also play their part. Even if Kapitan von Waldegg had considered the moral risk, he was ordered to sink enemy ships in his patrol area. There are many intangibles about where the centrality of the blame rests, if any at all, or whether it was shared. Families in Germany, England, Norway and South Africa grieved their loss, and Tom, an innocent young child, was left an orphan.

The discipline of history broadly accepts that without humankind, there is no history. We must learn from history and recognise that mistakes of the past are signposts for the future. While these ideals cannot bring comfort to the late Tom Morley for the loss of his mother and father, the story ought to generate feelings of empathy, compassion and a revulsion of war. The SS *Columbine* versus U-boat 198 was an unequal battle with a predictable outcome.

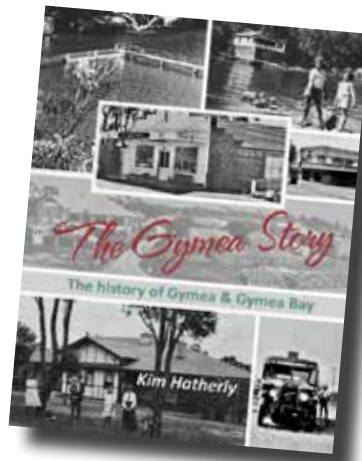
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Dr Des Lambley has several interdisciplinary degrees, is a Vietnam Veteran, and worked as a senior policy and researcher with the New South Wales Public Service for most of his life.

Telling Gymea's Story

by Kim Hatherly



To the casual observer, the localities of Gymea and Gymea Bay, nestled at the geographical heart of the Sutherland Shire, could be overlooked as modern — and, by inference, fairly uninteresting — post-war Sydney suburbs. Thirty years ago, curious about their genesis, I began exploring the twin communities' history through a genealogical lens, identifying and researching the families who pioneered my home area.

Interviews with longtime residents, early electoral rolls, written memoirs unearthed from a drawer in the library's Local Studies room and articles in old historical society journals combined to set me up with my first list of names and events to trace.

Pre-internet, early research was conducted at libraries and archives from hard copy and microfilmed records, through contacts made from Genealogical Research Directory entries (via snail mail correspondence) and at the then NSW Land Titles Office, searching through bulky leatherbound volumes of indexes and Certificates of Title. As technology advanced and with the digitisation of records, access to images and information became faster and more streamlined. Then came Trove — and an avalanche of newly available material was at my fingertips to confirm, correct and colour what I'd uncovered thus far.

It was soon apparent that the first settlers arrived at Gymea and Gymea Bay much earlier than most current residents might imagine. Despite its isolation — today's Sutherland Shire is surrounded on three sides by waterways — bushland was being cleared for Gymea's first vineyards and orchards within a year of access opening up with the Illawarra railway's extension to Sutherland, three kilometres away, in 1885.

One of the earliest vineyards was developed by Italian immigrant Sabatino Marieni and his Irish-born wife Mary, who moved with their toddler son to remote Gymea from harbourside Pyrmont during the 1890s Depression. This little lad, gifted both academically and on the sporting field, grew up to be the renowned editor-in-chief of Smith's Newspapers, Frank Marien, responsible for the popular *Smith's Weekly*. At his sudden death aged 45, Marien's glowing obituary was written by poet and journalist Kenneth Slessor.

Mary Mason, Australia's (and possibly the world's) first female film industry executive, whose place in cinema history is only now being recognised and appreciated by international film historians, took up nine acres at Gymea Bay and built the appropriately-named *Grandview*, with its gun barrel views down

Port Hacking, in 1912. During the silent era, Mary and her husband Clement Mason, imported carefully selected British and European moving pictures for distribution to cinemas and travelling picture showmen around Australia. At her

death in 1951, Mary's substantial estate was bequeathed to the building fund for the proposed Sutherland District Hospital.

Specially recruited from London in 1897 for Sydney's Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Nicholas Sparks wrote the book — literally — on training methods for Sydney firefighters and introduced physical and written exams for them to pass. The popular, highly respected leader and his wife Emma escaped the pressures of the job staying at the weekenders they built at Gymea Bay, overlooking North West Arm, during WWI. Albert Charles Willis, Welsh-born coal miner-turned-trade unionist and politician, built his weekend getaway atop the escarpment nearby in the 1920s. When the first Gymea Bay School opened a decade later, Willis was quick to donate items for its early supplies.

Dutch-born Jan (Johannes) Brinkman, founding professor of oboe at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and teacher and mentor of Joseph Post and Charles Mackerras, had toured Australia with visiting orchestras, including that which accompanied Melba's 1909 concert tour, before settling here and taking up his post at the "Con". His Gymea home, where he resided from the end of WWI, lay a stone's throw from one of Sydney's last remaining steam tram lines, which then linked beachside Cronulla with the railhead at Sutherland.

Uncovering notable early residents, along with their lower profile but no less interesting neighbours, laid the foundation for my study of a developing community as it evolved from remote bushland, through the nineteenth century rural outpost still called "Sutherland", into the blossoming twentieth century suburbs of Gymea and Gymea Bay. Observing the interactions of arriving families — their friendships, marriages and business partnerships, and their collaborations in establishing social, educational, sporting, and faith organisations — proved a rewarding approach to crafting a local history. The most interesting discoveries about the growing community often arose out of this traditional, family history-grounded investigation. After all, what is a community if not a group of families whose lives have intersected for a time?

The Gymea Story: the history of Gymea and Gymea Bay is the result of all those years of research. The book contains extended biographical sketches of more than 60 early families, and contributions to the community by hundreds more are noted in the text. Copies of the book are available directly from Kim for \$35 + postage & handling. Full ordering details are available at <https://thegyameastory.weebly.com> The SAG bookshop also has copies available for purchase in our library at 2/379 Kent Street during library hours, or online at any time: <https://socaustgen.square.site>

Kim Hatherly joined the Society in 1985 and as well as investigating her own family history, has enjoyed helping many friends tackle theirs. She particularly relishes the challenges posed by stubborn ancestors determined to remain elusive, and uncovering unexpected forebears with surprising stories (her own and other people's). Kim is also the proud holder of the 2017 SAG Croker Prize for Biography.

Congratulations Kim

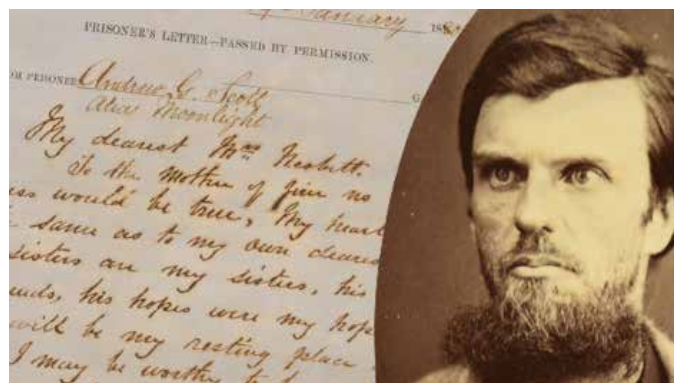
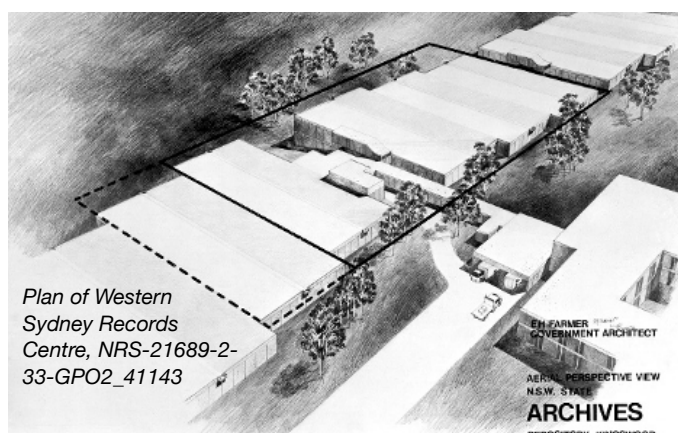
WESTERN SYDNEY RECORDS CENTRE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS!

The first stage of the State Archives and Government Records Repository at Kingswood was officially opened by then Minister for Culture, Sport and Recreation, the Hon. Lindley John Forbes Barraclough, on 28 November 1975.

Today the storage facilities at the Western Sydney Records Centre have expanded to six stages, including the (updated) original cells, alongside award-winning modern structures. Records stored onsite include a diverse range of material and formats, such as correspondence, volumes, photographs, maps, posters, film, video and digital files. In physical terms, the site currently holds 470 kilometres of records of which more than 90 linear kilometres are state archives, increasing by around 2 kilometres every year.

We celebrated the 50th birthday of the site last month by hosting an Open Day with drop-in tours, history talks, and community stalls as well as family activities.

Learn about the history of the site here: www.mhnsw.au/articles/western-sydney-records-centre-50th-anniversary



NRS-906-1-[4/825]-4/825.2, NRS-13538 [10/27511] No. 372

CAPTAIN MOONLITE'S LETTERS DIGITISED

Cultured, charming and dangerous, Andrew George Scott (c.1842–1880), known as Captain Moonlite, was an Irish-born bushranger. Awaiting execution at Darlinghurst Gaol in 1880, he wrote many letters which were never sent by authorities and are now preserved in the State Archives Collection.

Written to a number of recipients, most of the letters describe Scott's friendship and deep affection for fellow gang member James "Jim" Nesbitt. Nesbitt, who had died in a gun battle with police the year before, is believed by many to have been Scott's lover. One of the most poignant letters is the one Scott penned to Jim's mother.

"As to my dearest Jim I have felt that the love and friendship, true, pure, real friendship that blessed our union demands that I should defend his name to the last."

Read the letters now: https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1ebnd11/ADLIB_RNSW11196018

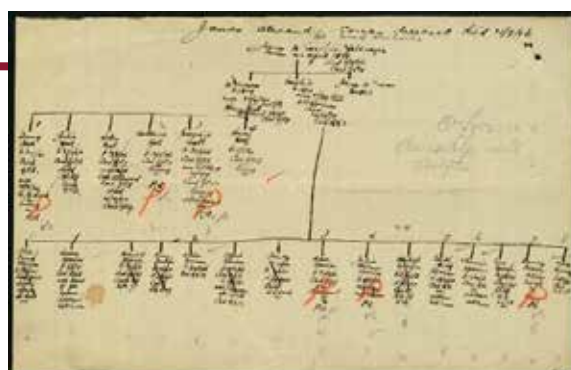
INTESTATE ESTATES INDEX, 1821–1913

Although less common than our other estate records, such as probate packets or deceased estate files, our intestate estate index can be a goldmine for the family historian! These files deal with the administration of estates for people who died intestate (i.e. with no will). Without a will to determine who would inherit the estate, and no obvious next-of-kin, the Curator of Intestate Estates would have to investigate and track down those entitled to the estate.

When James Alexander Cowan died intestate on 21 September 1896, he left behind an estate worth over £300. With no wife or children to inherit, the Curator of Intestate Estates was authorised to manage and administer his estate. Several claims were received from surviving nieces and nephews in England, between which the estate would be divided equally. A family tree within the intestate estate file, provides a visual aid to how each of the claimant's is related to the deceased.

Please note that these files are **closed to public access for 100 years**.

Search the index now: <https://mhnsw.au/indexes/intestates/intestate-estates-index/>



NRS-2138 [3/6043] No. 2170 p.132

NEW ADDITIONS TO IMMIGRATION INDEX

The latest addition to our *Selected Immigration Records Index* includes digitised records from series NRS-5273 Immigration Receipts for Passage Certificates and Refunds, 1884–1887.

Assisted immigrants were those who came to NSW through schemes in which all or part of their fares were paid by the NSW Government. The receipts in this series, which were issued by Clerks of Petty Sessions and forwarded to Immigration Agents, had to be completed before the refund of deposits to persons nominating immigrants. They include the name of the depositor and the type(s) of document being delivered, certificate number, deposit receipt number, the person delivered to, and the date delivered.

Search this index by first name, surname or ship of arrival: <https://mhnsw.au/indexes/immigration-and-shipping/selected-immigration-records/>

STATE ARCHIVES READING ROOM

We're going cashless in 2026

In 2026 the State Archives Reading Room will be going cashless!

This means when we reopen in the new year, all transactions will be electronic via credit or debit card only.

MHNSW does not apply surcharges to these payments. Please note we do not accept cheques.

HOLIDAY CLOSURE DATES

Our closure and reopening dates for the holiday period are:

**State Archives Reading Room,
Western Sydney Records Centre**

Last day of operation for 2025:

Wednesday 24 December 2025

Open from: Tuesday 13 January 2026

We look forward to sharing our collections with you for the remainder of the year, and again in the next.



NRS-22489-1-10-CN005396



Exhibition: Unearthed

MUSEUM OF SYDNEY

Opens 5 December 2025

Even the most ordinary object has many stories to tell, depending on how you look at it.

Between 1983 and 1991, archaeologists excavated one of the most contested blocks of land in Sydney — the site of Australia's first Government House. They unearthed around 140,000 objects that had lain hidden beneath the city's streets for almost 140 years.

Unearthed displays a fascinating selection of objects excavated from the site, from remains of the first printing press in Australia, to wine bottles transformed into tools by First Nations toolmakers, and elaborately decorated crockery hidden in a privy. The exhibition explores the tangible and intangible histories embodied in the finds and sheds light on the people who lived and worked at the house, and those whose lives were impacted by decisions made within its walls.

Unearthed also presents the people and stories behind the archaeological digs, from the first excavation in 1983–84, which found remains of the house, to later digs that uncovered foundations of the governor's guardhouse.

Learn more at:

<https://mhnsw.au/whats-on/exhibitions/unearthed/>

Subscribe online to Collection eNews

Be the first to find out about our latest news, exhibitions, events and special offers.

To stay up to date with the NSW State Archives Collection, Caroline Simpson Library Collection and Museums Collection at Museums of History NSW simply select **Collections** as one of the options you'd like to hear about.

Join our mailing list at:

<https://pages.wordfly.com/sydneylivingmuseums/pages/Subscribe/>



OUR SAG COMMUNITY

Out & About COMPILED BY DANIELLE TEBB

SAG staff supported colleague and education manager, Vanessa Cassin when she was invited to participate in a panel discussion alongside journalist Claire Aird and historian Tanya Evans: **Whose DNA is it Anyway? Ethics in genetic genealogy at the State Library of NSW** on the evening of Wednesday 20 August. Moderated by Adria Castellucci, the discussion was about privacy, data ownership and DNA testing. It was recorded and will be available via ABC radio at a date yet to be advised. As they say, watch this space.

The Story of the Painting of an Australian WWI Nurse by Australian War Artist Fred Leist in 1919 by Carrol Miller was attended by a couple of SAG staff during our lunch break on Tuesday 26 August at the Anzac Memorial, Sydney. The portrait was long lost, found in a discarded rubbish bin, recovered and restored, and the lecture traced the research conducted to identify the Australian nurse featured in the portrait. Carrol has since availed herself of the SAG Library to further her research into the family of the nurse to trace the path of the portrait from the UK to Australia.

The lecture concluded with the launch of the **Ursula Davidson Library** — part of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, NSW (RUSI NSW) housed in the Anzac Memorial — and a tour of the rooms. While small, the library has an excellent range of military histories, with volunteers on hand to assist researchers. A research guide and form are also available to help navigate the resources available.



The **2025 NSW & ACT State Conference** was held from Friday 12 to Sunday 14 September at Fairy Meadow, Wollongong and our Administration Officer, Nicole Brown was thrilled to join CEO Ruth Graham in attending the event. She ably assisted Ruth in manning the SAG table, promoting our extensive educational offerings to all who came over to say hello. Nicole was able to meet many members she had only seen before on screen and thoroughly enjoyed the two-day event.

SAG staff, membership manager Danielle Tebb and CEO Ruth Graham attended the **2025 Quilt NSW Exhibition** at the Grand Pavilion, Rosehill Gardens Racecourse from Thursday 18 to Saturday 20 September. Over the three days we were supported

by volunteers Chris H, Deborah M, Deborah McD, Helen O, Jane H, Jane W, Jennifer R, Jo W, Margaret M, Rachel L, Robyn O and Trish P. We signed up 80 new contacts, many of whom have subsequently taken out membership and joined events.

We were thrilled with the response, which was largely due to the engaging support offered by our volunteers, some of whom enjoyed themselves so much they worked a double shift! Good company, surrounded by beautiful quilts, no wonder it was a resounding success!

Education Manager, Vanessa Cassin, Administration Officer Nicole Brown and myself spent a day off attending **Great Migration: Irish Immigration Records and Government Schemes in NSW** at the State Archives on Friday 17 October, supporting fellow SAG members Drs Richard Reid, Perry McIntyre and Damian Gleeson. There was a great turnout on the day, capably supported by State Archives staff. The topics expanded our knowledge of Irish migration and we benefitted from the combined years of knowledge and research. It was a very worthwhile day and I'm sure many of us went home and explored some of the resources mentioned.

On the evening of Thursday 23 October, Sally Byatt (Co Lead of SAG's Caribbean & South American Interest Group) and Education Manager Vanessa Cassin were delighted to attend the launch party for the **Caribbean Echoes Podcast** series, held at the Abercrombie Hotel in Sydney.

The series of five podcasts forms Season 7 of the History Lab podcast published by Impact Studios, the media production unit of the University of Technology Sydney. The content of the Caribbean Echoes series was developed by SAG member, author, historian and producer Sienna Brown (www.siennabrown.com.au) in collaboration with Dr Ben Etherington from Western Sydney University.

Vanessa was privileged to assist Sienna with the background research into the family history of cabaret singer Nellie Small who is the subject of episode 3 of the podcast and was excited to be invited to record a small section about the research she undertook as part of the podcast episode. You can listen to the fabulous Caribbean Echoes podcasts at <https://impactstudios.edu.au/podcast/history-lab/> or on any of your favourite podcast apps.

The launch was a wonderful evening full of Caribbean music and a dynamic panel session facilitated by Dr Etherington and featuring Sienna, Jamaican-Australian actress Zahra Newman, who voiced Nellie on the podcast, and acclaimed playwright Alana Valentine who first brought Nellie to Sienna's attention through her cabaret production "Send for Nellie". Amongst so many talented people, the many thanks Vanessa and, by extension, SAG received for the research contributions was humbling.

If you would like to find out more about the wonderful individuals featured in the podcast episodes, Sienna will be the guest presenter at our Caribbean & South American Research Group meeting on 18 April 2026.



Moombooldool Comfort Fund

by Colin Semmler



In response to the excellent article by Philippa Garnsey on the Wagga Soldiers' Comfort Fund in the March 2025 edition of *Descent*, I have submitted a photo of the Moombooldool Comfort Fund, of which my grandmother, Elizabeth Semmler, was a member. Moombooldool is between Barellan and Ardlethan on the Temora-Griffith Road.

Back L to R: Miss Adina Albert, Miss May Flagg, Miss Ruby Dunn, Mrs Alice Kelly with baby Mabel, Miss Kelly, Mrs Elizabeth Semmler, Mrs Lilly Barrow.

Front L to R: Miss Grace McVicker, Mrs Mary McVicker, Miss Nora O'Shaughnessy, Mrs Florence Charlesworth, Mrs Mary Flagg, Mrs Stella Thomas, Miss Emily Priest, Miss Lizzie Noble standing at end.

Trying to tackle those difficult research problems?



SAG has a fantastic range of online, volunteer led research interest groups, bringing together members with common focus areas.

Whether you're interested in a particular software package, a geographic area, genetic genealogy or writing, peruse the groups page on our website to discover what groups we have and when they meet:

www.sag.org.au/Research-and-Software-Groups



A First Fleet Reunion by Linda Waters

Group photo from the reunion, courtesy of Linda Waters.

The March issue of Descent contained a brief notice about an upcoming reunion of the First Fleet Bellett, Garth and Gough families in Hobart on page 15. Linda Waters has kindly provided an update on their highly successful reunion.

In October this year, 160 cousins gathered in Hobart to celebrate their First Fleet ancestors Edward Garth, Susannah Gough and Jacob Bellett, as well as Jacob's wife Ann Harper, who was transported on the Second Fleet. Both families were part of Norfolk Island's first settlement and, after 20 years, were moved to Hobart. The families were forever connected when three children from each family married.

Our activities for the week centred around learning more about life in Hobart and its surrounds. We visited the sites of land grants, churches and cemeteries. We also socialised and met our cousins on the same line and from the wider family. The main event at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania featured family photos and a wall of family trees.

Many organisations contributed to the week. Ann Ricketts from the Sandy Bay Historical Society did a guided walk, the Tasmanian Family History Society provided a tour of their extensive resources, the Sorrell Historical Society opened their doors just for our group, Tasmanian Libraries ran a session on how to research and took us into the archives to view some family treasures, and Neil Renaud from the Huguenot Society of Australia told us about Jacob Bellett's family tree and Huguenot history.

We also solved a 200-year-old mystery on what happened to Mary Ann Garth, eldest daughter of Edward and Susannah, who arrived in Hobart with her parents before disappearing from the records. How the mystery was solved is recorded in two blog posts:

<https://garthbellett.wordpress.com/2025/10/16/mystery-solved-mary-ann-garth-part-1/>

<https://garthbellett.wordpress.com/2025/10/17/mystery-solved-mary-ann-garth-part-2/>

David Boon also gave us details on using DNA to solve more family mysteries.

SAG Christmas & New Year Holiday Break

Our Family History Research Centre & Library at 2/379 Kent Street will close for the year from 4pm Thursday 18 December 2025 and reopen 10am Tuesday 13 January 2026.

The SAG office will close from 4pm Friday 19 December 2025 and reopen 9am Tuesday 6 January 2026.

We will respond to any phone messages left during this period when we return to the office.

Obituary

Graham Philip Lewis

31 July 1941 – 23 August 2025



Graham Lewis, Fellow, former Director, Honorary Treasurer and webmaster, died on 23 August 2025 at the age of 84. An actuary with a long professional association with AMP, the Society greatly benefitted from both his financial acumen and his interest in IT.

Graham joined the Society in 1974 and was on the management committee of the Australian Biographical and Genealogical Record project (ABGR) from 1983. He served on the SAG Board from 1998–2007 and after becoming Honorary Treasurer in 2001 was instrumental in guiding the Board through its decision to take on a mortgage for the purchase of new premises at 379 Kent Street.

He also took a keen interest in developing the Society's online and digital presence. Graham implemented several iterations of the website, establishing e-commerce facilities, uploading searchable datasets, collection catalogues and "how to" guides. A monthly electronic newsletter, SAG-E, begun in March 2001, continues to this day. By 2007 the website was recording 22,000 visits per month and was one of the first chosen by the National Library of Australia for permanent electronic preservation.

Graham combined his interest in IT and the Society's ongoing need to generate income when he took on the transfer of the Rookwood Cemetery transcription microfiche into a searchable CD-ROM, which introduced this important resource to a new audience in 2002. Other cemetery CDs followed, along with four volumes of the *Australasian Genealogical Computer Index*. With Rex Toomey providing programming expertise and ably assisted in the later projects by Alison Wolf, Graham's stewardship ensured these CDs were of a consistently high standard, while generating a significant income stream for the Society.

Graham was awarded a Fellowship in recognition of his service to the Society in 2003, and together with his wife Isabel was a long-time Benefactor. Among those gathered at his funeral were SAG members, Ku-ring-gai Historical Society representatives, former AMP colleagues and residents of the Lindfield area, where he lived for many years and was keenly involved in the preservation of its local heritage. Family and friends spoke of his dedication, integrity, and keen sense of humour, all of which he amply demonstrated during his years as an active SAG member.

Heather Garnsey

Deaths

The deaths of the following members and former members were notified to the Society between August and October 2025. We extend our sympathies to the family and friends of them all.

Lesley Bramble

Randwick
August 2025

Graham Philip Lewis*

Lindfield
23 August 2025

Jo Harris OAM

Wahroonga
30 August 2025

Judith Anne Malone

Toongabbie
30 August 2025

David John Haskins

Vermont, Vic
31 January 2021

* An obituary for Graham appears above.



EDUCATION@SAG

BY VANESSA CASSIN, EDUCATION MANAGER

As we hurtle towards the end of 2025, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the members and friends of the SAG a joyful and safe festive season. May you all enjoy good company, relaxation and lots of family history discoveries over the holiday period.

At this time of year, it's natural to reflect on the past 12 months and evaluate our achievements. The Society has enjoyed a varied program of events and courses. As always there have been highs and lows but overall, our education and events program has once again proved popular with members.

It is important to remember that we could not present the number of events that we do without a significant amount of work from a large group of volunteers. To the many volunteers who have supported the delivery of our education and events program, both publicly and behind the scenes, throughout 2025 I sincerely thank you for your contributions.

By the time this issue of *Descent* reaches you, our program for 2026 will have been unveiled at our launch event held on 29 November. Together with the Society's ever-expanding number of research interest groups, our core courses, programs and free member events will all be returning in 2026, although some may look a little different! In addition to this we are excited to be adding some new webinars and events, such as a 12-month writing masterclass, a three-part course on capturing life stories, a multi-part course on getting the most out of the Ancestry platform and new webinars focussing on mitochondrial DNA and chromosome analysis.

Our very popular program of virtual conferences will continue with events focussing on post-war migration, sharing stories, English and Scottish research, and tactics for breaking down brick walls.

Many of you have missed the atmosphere and comradery of attending in-person events since the COVID pandemic. I am therefore very excited to let you know that in 2026 the SAG will be presenting an in-person conference in Sydney on 5 and 6 November. The theme will be all things related to convicts. You don't need to have a convict ancestor to benefit from attending this event, don't forget that the military, government employees, businesses, landowners and free settlers all had regular interactions with convicts and the convict system.

This conference will not be your only chance to experience in-person events – New Zealand genealogist and educator Fiona Brooker will be joining us in person in July to present a two-day workshop focussed on organising all aspects of your research, and for advanced researchers we will be presenting a multi-day intensive course in collaboration with Family History Academy at the Museums of History of History NSW (and we hope to run another one later in the year at the National Archives in Canberra).

As always, remember to regularly check our website at www.sag.org.au/events for new events as we are always on the lookout for new topics and speakers to help our members progress their research.

Thank you

I would like to acknowledge all the people and organisations who have presented at an event between

August and October, the vast majority on a voluntary basis. Those assisting since the end of October will be acknowledged in the next issue of *Descent*. We could not bring our busy schedule of events to members without their contributions. Any omissions from this list are purely accidental.

Presenters: Webinars, Book Club, Let's Talk About, Get Online Week

Helen Baggott, Katherine Barrett, Susannah Fullerton OAM, Cassie and Shaun Gilmartin, Vicki Hails, Rosalie Horner, Melissa Hulbert, Gillian Kelly OAM, Danielle Lautrec, Adjunct Associate Professor Carol Liston AO, Jeffrey Madsen, Andrew Redfern, Zoë Reid – Keeper Public Services & Collections, National Archives of Ireland, Christine Woodlands

Presenters & Assistants: Courses

Fiona Brooker, Judith Charlton, Jennie Fairs, John Heath, Jane Hutcheon, Danielle Lautrec, Jeffrey Madsen, Dr Betty O'Neill, Andrew Redfern, Donna Ruthford

Tours

Geoffrey Bovard

Conferences

Tonia Barton – Hunting for Truth, Jennifer Bates – Koorie Family History Service, Simon Bligh – Worthington Clark, Genealogy & Asset Research, Rachel Croucher – Vice-President AAGRA/Origins Research Network, Ruth Graham, Gay Hendriksen, Christine Hingerty, Associate Professor Maja Krtalić, Danielle Lautrec – Generations Genealogy, Dr Hilda Maclean – Logan City Council, Angela Phippen – Visiting Fellow, State Library of NSW, Andrew Redfern, Cassandra Seaborn – NSW Trustee & Guardian, Cathie Sherwood – Family History Academy, Mike Slucutt – Bristol & Avon Family History Society

Presenters: Family History Connect

Gemma Beswick, Patrice Connelly, Fleur Creed, Yvonne Masters, Andrew Redfern

Presenters & Leads: Groups

Gemma Beswick, Sharon Brennan, Gail Bryant, Sally Byatt, Elizabeth Capelin, Judith Charlton, Beverley Collis-Bird, Rachel Croucher, Larry Czarnik, Linda Evans, Dr Alice Garner, Cassie and Shaun Gilmartin, Elizabeth Gordon, Kathleen Hackett, Julie Kennedy, Danielle Lautrec, Lorraine Luks, Brian MacLachlan, Dr Hilda Maclean, Lilian Magill, Deborah Martin, Yvonne Masters, Jane Nelson – Chief Executive Officer of the Oddfellows, Kristine Newton, Diana Pecar, Sandy Pullen, Emily Purser, Linda Radulovitch, Andrew Redfern, Jan Richardson, Sharon Shelley, Helene Shepherd, Sally Skulte, Melinda Toomey, Maureen Trotter, Annesley Watson, Sharion Watson, Veronica Williams, Christine Woodlands

DNA One-on-One Action Planning session volunteers

Christine Hingerty, Melissa Hulbert, Barbara McAlary

Last but by no means least – the members who took turns in the chair hosting our weekly **Friday Hangout** sessions throughout the year: Jill B, Fleur C, Judith C, Patrice C, Jennie F, Christine H, John H, Carole M, Lillian M, Yvonne M, Christine W. Thank you for your bravery in hosting these sessions when you know you have an hour to fill in and often have no idea if anyone else is going to speak once you do the introduction!

DNA CORNER

BY CHRISTINE WOODLANDS

Ancestry Pro Tools: Beyond the DNA features

I recently ran two sold-out sessions for the Society on Ancestry Pro Tools — one in October and one in November. I was joined by Kathryn Barrett and Vicki Hails, who added valuable perspectives to the discussion as we guided members through the various features. Many attendees commented that they hadn't realised just how many practical, non-DNA tools were included in the Pro Tools add-on subscription and appreciated the chance to explore them in a focussed session.

If you missed out, we'll be offering the Pro Tools session four times in 2026, so keep an eye on the SAG Events page.

Most people first encounter Pro Tools through its DNA additions — Enhanced Shared Matching and DNA Clusters — both of which I've covered in previous articles (September 2024 and September 2025). This time, I want to highlight everything other than DNA, because these features can be genuinely helpful for every family historian, whether they've taken an AncestryDNA test or not.

Before we dive in, I want to make a broader point. All family historians should now be using DNA evidence as part of their research toolkit. DNA is as vital as any other category of evidence when it comes to ensuring that the tree you are building reflects your biological family lines. It helps confirm that your documentary research aligns with your biological ancestry — and occasionally reveals that it does not.

For those of us with unexpected parentage in our family trees, DNA evidence allows us to research both:

- our biological line, and
- our known family, the one discovered through traditional (non-DNA) research.

Both lines matter and both deserve to be understood and preserved.

What are the other Pro Tools?

Think of Pro Tools as giving your tree a clean-up, a health check, and some new ways to visualise your research. It doesn't change how you gather information, but it can certainly change how you manage and understand it.

Tree Checker is an excellent place to start. It looks for the kinds of issues that often go unnoticed — duplicated profiles, conflicting dates, missing connections and data that doesn't quite add up. Trees including at least 50 people even receive an overall quality score. For a public tree, you should be aiming for a score of at least 9.5. This helps ensure that the information you are sharing with others is as accurate as possible and reduces the likelihood of incorrect details being copied into other users' trees. Several participants in the recent workshops discovered long-standing issues they hadn't realised were in their tree.

Smart Filters let you quickly narrow your view. You can filter by place, surname, life event, date range or lines of descent. For anyone with ancestors scattered across different regions — for

example Cornwall, the Shoalhaven, County Cavan or the Victorian goldfields — this brings instant clarity and helps you focus on exactly the part of the tree you need.

Tree Mapper is a feature that plots ancestral locations on a map. I haven't yet found a strong use for it in my own research, but I'm continuing to explore its possibilities. For some researchers — particularly those tracing convicts, migrants or families who moved frequently across regional Australia — it may offer a useful way to visualise movement and settlement patterns.

Tree Insights offers small but engaging snapshots drawn from your tree, such as the five most common surnames, the five oldest people, the women with the most children, and the youngest married couples. These summaries can highlight interesting patterns in your family's history, but they can also reveal errors you may not have spotted — particularly unusual ages, implausible dates or unexpected clusters. These insights also make it easy to engage relatives who appreciate the stories and key takeaways without needing to delve into detailed spreadsheets.

Finally, **Charts and Reports** make it easy to produce clear pedigree charts, fan charts, descendency charts and family group sheets. Many researchers now use these for reunions, family books and handouts for relatives who prefer paper-based summaries.

Why these tools matter

Not everyone uses the DNA components of Pro Tools — but all genealogists want trees that are accurate, tidy and easy to share. The non-DNA tools support exactly that: better tree maintenance, clearer organisation and a stronger foundation for both documentary and DNA-based research.

For me personally, my Ancestry tree is part of the legacy I will leave behind. It will be here long after I am, so I want it to be well researched, well documented and able to support every part of my work — especially my DNA research. Much of this is reflected in my blogs, where I share the stories uncovered through my traditional research and the discoveries revealed through DNA. Together, they form a record I hope future generations will value.

WANT TO EXPLORE FURTHER?

This article is just a short overview. You'll find a step-by-step guide to all the non-DNA Pro Tools features on my blog, Mossie's Musings:

<https://mossiesmusings.blogspot.com/2025/10/ancestry-pro-tools-guide-features.html>

And if you'd like to explore Pro Tools hands-on, join us at one of the four sessions running next year through SAG. I look forward to seeing you there.



SHOW & TELL: Turning Family History into Captivating Slide Shows

by Jane Hutchison

We family history buffs love slide presentations.

We'd be lost without them. Yet so many of us slip into the habit of delivering lectures rather than embracing the convivial art of sharing stories. A good story, well told, connects people across generations in a way that names, dates and charts rarely can.

Why do family historians lean so heavily on slides? The answer is simple: slides carry our treasures. Old photographs, maps, certificates, ship manifests, even cherished cablegrams or letters; these are the images that instantly lure an audience into the past.

But slides on their own aren't enough. Without a story, slides can become a flick-fest of images with no glue to hold them together. Storytelling is that glue.

Another area family historians often struggle with is storytelling structure. Structure is another word for scaffolding. When you nail the structure (or plot) of a story, you carry the audience with you. Without structure, facts, images, dates, genealogical proof etc., splatter all over the shop, like La Tomatina (the annual Spanish tomato-throwing festival).

Think about the stories that have stuck with you: books you re-read, films you return to, episodes of a TV show that made you laugh and cry. They all use "scaffolding". Even the much-loved children's animation *Bluey*, which burst onto our screens in 2017, relies on a rock-solid structure. Each episode is only seven minutes long, yet within that time a character changes, grows, or learns something. *Bluey*'s success lies not just in its humour and charm but in the storytelling architecture. The lesson for family historians? If you want your audience to follow you, whether through a war diary, a migration tale, or a collection of memories, structure is your best friend.

Show & Tell in Action

This is where the Society of Australian Genealogists' new *Show & Tell* series comes in. The hands-on four-part course invites participants to bring along a story they've already researched. Together we work on developing that story into a predictable framework — much like the storyboard process in film-making.

Some people balk at the idea of fitting their unique stories into a framework. But as *Bluey* proves, predictability doesn't mean boring. It means accessible. The framework frees you to focus on the richness of the material rather than worrying about where to begin or end.

The first enthusiastic cohort of *Show & Tell* proudly presented their stories live on Zoom on Tuesday 7 October 2025.

What kinds of stories did they share?

- How I discovered about my biological father.
- The mysterious Victorian couple who started a marriage agency.
- A visionary pioneering female cricketer from the 1930s.
- Navigating life with Albinism.

Each story was only five minutes long, but in that short time the audience was transported across continents and decades.

The 5-Minute Challenge

It would be fair to say that most of the cohort found the five-minute deadline challenging. We managed to fall between 4 minutes 45 seconds and almost ten minutes.

There was discussion about the potential to expand the length of slide shows. But I stand firm: the discipline of brevity makes these presentations *more* riveting, not less. In a world where attention is limited and information bountiful, we need to keep our stories on point.

Think of the TED Talk model: 18 minutes to deliver an "idea worth spreading". Think of a haiku: 17 syllables to distil an entire mood. Or think of *Bluey* again: seven minutes to make a child, or grandparent, sit-up or tear-up.

Constraints sharpen creativity. They force us to decide: what details matter the most? What will stay with the listener? And when these switches are activated, this builds our empathy.

Visual Magic

There was also some beautiful artistic work on display in the final session. Some participants used certificates, clippings with maps, and modern, vivid colour.

Here's a collection of the thumbnail images from our first cohort:

Looking Ahead

My hope is that in future we can turn SAG Show & Tell into an *in-person* show. Imagine an event where family historians gather to share their five-minute gems — not unlike a mini-film festival.

I look forward to seeing more of your beautiful stories turned into slide shows next year. If you've ever wondered how to turn your research into something your family; or a room full of people, will remember, this is your chance.



Go to our events page at <https://www.sag.org.au/event-6455466> to register your interest in the next Show & Tell series beginning 28 April 2026.

5 TOP TIPS FOR SLIDE SHOW STORIES

(with thanks to our 2025 cohort)

Start with a Hook

Open with a strong image or anecdote that immediately draws your audience in.

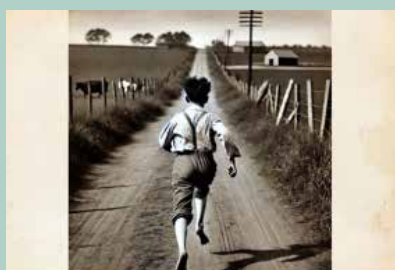
Example:
Instead of
“My great-grandfather was born in 1894,” begin with a photo of him and a line like,
“Let me introduce myself. I am William James Smith — but you can call me Billy — everyone does.” (Courtesy Chris H.)



One Idea Per Slide

Each slide should carry one clear idea, emotion, or turning point. Avoid overloading slides with text or multiple images competing for attention. Think of slides as visual beats or events in your story.

Example: “Young Fred bolted. He was a wiry little fella. They couldn't see him for dust, and none of the family saw him again for 14 years.” (Courtesy Fleur C.)



Let Images Do the Work

Use photos, maps, letters, or artefacts rather than lengthy blocks of text.

Add just a *few words* (captions, dates, names) to orient the audience. Ask yourself, *if the audience sees this for just two seconds, what will they take away?* (Slide: Jane H.)



Use Structure as Scaffolding

When we talk about structure, we don't mean something complicated. We just mean giving your story a shape that helps people follow along. Think of it as scaffolding: without it, the pieces flop all over the place. With it, your story stands tall.

Beginning – set the scene. Who? Where? When?

Middle – something happens: a challenge, a journey, a decision.

End – resolution, transformation, or reflection.

Example:

- *Fact only*: “My grandmother arrived in Sydney in 1926.”
- *Structured*: “At 17 she left her parents in Glasgow (beginning). The voyage took six weeks in rough seas (middle). She stepped onto Circular Quay in 1926, never to return to Scotland (end).”

Even the simplest story becomes more memorable when it has a beginning, middle and end.

Include Meaning, Not Just Facts

Don't close with “And that's my story”. Instead, share why it matters: What does your ancestor's journey say about resilience? What did you learn? What connects their story to us today? Audiences remember how you made them feel more than the data. This is particularly important if the story ends with bad/sad news.



Digital Clean-up Days: Ending the Year with a Tidy Tech Toolkit

As family historians, we're excellent at organising our ancestors' lives — but our own digital spaces can quickly become cluttered with scans, screenshots, research notes, and half-finished projects. The end of the year is the perfect moment to pause, tidy up, and set ourselves up for a confident and organised 2026.

A **Digital Clean-up Day** is simply a short, focussed session where you pick one manageable task and finish it. These small “micro-tidies” build powerful habits, helping keep your research smooth, secure, and enjoyable.

Tidy the everyday spaces

Start with the areas that accumulate clutter without you noticing:

- Clear your **Downloads** folder, moving those files you want to keep to a more relevant folder.
- Copy all your USB key files onto your computer and sort the files.
- Rename stray files you meant to fix months ago.
- Clean your desktop — fewer icons make for a calmer workspace.

These small tasks create instant clarity and make it easier to find the things you genuinely use.

Review your research year

This is also a good time to reflect on your learning and progress:

- File notes, handouts, and worksheets from the courses, workshops, or webinars you attended during the year.
- Consolidate notes from notebooks, PDFs, emails, and loose files. You could even use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to transcribe your handwritten notes and then discard the paper clutter.
- Organise research projects into clearly labelled folders. And don't be afraid to delete files or folders that you know you will never look at again.
- Back up your tree, DNA notes, and project files. Don't forget backing up your GEDCOM file.

A quick review helps you see what you've achieved—and what's ready for attention in 2026.

Plan and futureproof your 2026 digitisation goals

Many genealogists have a list of “one day I'll digitise...” items that never quite get started.

Make 2026 the year you complete them:

- VHS tapes, camcorder footage, family DVDs, audio cassettes or reel-to-reel interviews
- Old computer files trapped on CDs, Zip disks, or USB drives

- Computer files in older formats that are becoming obsolete. For example, Microsoft Publisher is being discontinued in 2026 so now is the time to convert these files to another format.

- Fragile documents that deserve careful scanning

List what you have, estimate what needs professional conversion, and set realistic goals — whether quarterly or monthly. Future you will thank you.

This is also a good time to review:

- File-naming conventions
- Cloud-sync settings
- High-quality rescans where needed
- Long-term digital preservation habits

Small improvements now will protect your family history for decades.

TRY THIS: Use AI as a thinking partner

If you're unsure where to begin, or you keep reorganising the same folders without gaining clarity, try something new: **talk to your AI assistant about it.**

Describe your problem:

“I've got photos in five places.”

“My DNA notes are scattered.”

“I can never find my probate scans.”

and ask how it might be approached.

The ideas you get back may not be the approach you ultimately choose, but the *conversation itself* can help clarify what you actually need. Sometimes hearing alternatives helps you solidify your own strategy.

A simple habit with big impact

Digital clutter builds gradually. By making Digital Clean-up Days part of your routine — whether monthly, quarterly, or just at year's end, you keep your workspace tidy, your projects manageable, and your research enjoyable.

A little work now leads to a smoother start in 2026, and more time doing what family historians love: discovering, preserving, and sharing the stories that matter.



LIBRARY NEWS



BY GEMMA BESWICK, LIBRARY SERVICES MANAGER

This is a selection of books, pamphlets and other format items accessioned from April to October 2025. The information provided is the title of the record, library classification number, format and donor's name. All items are in our Family History Research Centre & Library at 2/379 Kent Street unless otherwise noted. Consult the Library Catalogue at www.sag.org.au and click on the "Using our Collections" button to locate full details of the items included in this list.

AUSTRALIA

Australia's ancient Aboriginal past: a global perspective by Murray Johnson. (2020). A3/4/8 (Book) [Donated by Mark St Leon].

Hell ship: the true story of the plague ship Ticonderoga, one of the most calamitous voyages in Australian history by Michael Veitch. (2020). A3/20/153 (Book).

Jim Fogarty presents the wonder of Wirths by Jim Fogarty [Variant title: *Wonder of Wirths*] (2005). A3/32/38 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The house of Wunderlich by Susan Bures. (1987). A3/49/13 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The lost boys: the untold stories of the under-age Anzac soldiers who fought in the First World War by Paul Byrnes. (2020). A3/71/93 (Book) [Donated by Trevor Howie].

All the way to the USA: Australian WWII war brides by Robyn Arrowsmith. [Variant title: *All the way to the United States of America*]. (2013). A5/90/126 (Book) [Donated by the author].

The book of the Bairds: from Kirkconnel and Cumnock, Scotland by Kerrin Cook. (2008). A6/BAI/6 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Bridging the gap: the history of the Bainbridge family in Australia by Leonard E. Bainbridge. (1996). A6/BAI/7 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Charles Boydell, 1808–1869 and Camyr Allyn, Allyn River, Gresford by Jack Sullivan. (1999). A6/BOY/6 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

A family memoir by John Broinowski. (1993). A6/BRO/35 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Broster descendants in Australia compiled by Max Duffield. (c1988). A6/BRO/36 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Burleys of Tregony by Graeme Burley. (2003). A6/BUR/14 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Memoirs of John Joseph Carroll by John Joseph Carroll. (1983). A6/CAR/Pam.9 (Pamphlet) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Thomas and Isabella Carey of Crown Court Liquorpond Street, London by Marguerita Carey. (2021). A6/CAR/21 (Book) [Donated by the author].

John Croaker: convict embezzler by John Booker and Russell Craig. (2000). A6/CRO/18 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Dawkins dossiers: the history of the Dawkins family from Bermondsey to Ballarat and beyond by J.A. Ingle. (1992). A6/DAW/8 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Free settlers and convicts in early Australia: a short history of the Taylors and the Dents 1663–2010 by Warren Dent. (2010). A6/DEN/8 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

A family of Australian "Evans" (1820–1997) by Kim Evans. (1998). A6/EVA/8 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

A man is his friends by Chris Goy. (1979). A6/GOY/2 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Gotch and Atkins families commemorative edition by Kevin and Lorraine Callinan. (2002). A6/GOT/1 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Hays of Mount Breckan 1879–1909 by Anthony Laube. (1982). A6/HAY/9 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The life and times of our Hennessys in Australia 1822–1922 by Margaret Woods. (2005). A6/HEN/16 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Hodge memorandum from the Hodge family records compiled by Roma E.M. Seehausen. (1983). A6/HOD/5 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Dearly Beloved: The saga of five pioneering families by Anthony Hordern Bull III. (2004). A6/HOR/8 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Leaving Hojer: The Horn Family's Remarkable Migration from Denmark to Australia. (2023). A6/HOR/9 (Book) [Donated by Ian Thom].

Thomas and Eliza Little: Irish pioneers in India and Western Australia 1797–1877 by Stephen Lally. (2022). A6/LIT/4 (Book).

The boundary and beyond: the story of the Raby and Rabey families edited by Graham Peter Rabey. (1995). A6/RAB/1 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Shorrock Family Tree compiled by Beryl D. Eccles. (2007). A6/SHO/7 (Book) [Donated by Jane Wood.].

Simons on the Macleay: pioneer settlers on the Macleay and Nambucca rivers of New South Wales 1855 to 1950 by Dick Adams. (2011). A6/SIM/7 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Simeon Saga: Saints & sinners by June Roughley. (2001). A6/SIM/8 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Slapp family tree compiled by Doris Slapp, Denis Slapp, Denise Slapp and Cheryl Slapp. (2003). A6/SLA/2 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

NEW SOUTH WALES

Irish Bigamy: new insights into colonial New South Wales by Damian John Gleeson. (2025). B3/30/27 (Book).

The corngrinder: a hundred years of corn milling on the Lane Cove River by Beverley Johnson. (1994). B4.066/10/2 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Magnificent Minnaville by Jean A. Gray. (1988). B4.749/20/Pam.1 (Pamphlet) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

Donald Thomas Esplin, Sydney architect: his life and work by Robert Irving and Noel Irving. (2008). B5/35/22 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

TASMANIA

Thomas Bock: convict, engraver, society, portraitist. (1991). D3/32/1 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

The Bidencope Story by Irene Schaffer. (2004). D3/60/9 (Book) [Donated by Jo Harris OAM].

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