

Descent

MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS



MARCH / AUTUMN 2026

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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.

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President's Message

PHILIPPA SHELLEY JONES

As we reflect in this issue on post-war migration and the profound reshaping of Australia's social and cultural fabric, we are reminded that institutions, like families, are shaped by moments of transition. The Society of Australian Genealogists has itself been navigating a period of change and renewal.

As previously advised, Ruth Graham will conclude her tenure as CEO of the Society by mid-year, following six years of dedicated leadership, including successfully guiding the organisation through the challenges of COVID-19. The Board continues to work closely with Ruth to ensure a smooth transition, while progressing a structured recruitment process to appoint her successor. In the meantime, we remain focused on maintaining continuity, supporting staff and building on the strong foundations established over recent years as we prepare for the Society's next chapter.

In Board news, as previously advised to members, Peter Homan was appointed as a director in January 2026 to fill the casual vacancy arising from Darryl Low Choy's resignation, holding office until the AGM in May 2026, at which he may stand for election. Peter brings valuable governance and financial expertise, as well as recent leadership of the Richmond Villa Task Group. In addition, Janette Pelosi resigned as a director in February, concluding more than 13 years of dedicated Board service, during which she provided significant governance leadership, institutional knowledge and steady oversight through periods of consolidation and change. Janette remains a Fellow of the Society and is keen to continue being part of our community, including as a proofreader for this magazine. I reiterate our sincere gratitude for her years of committed service.

Over recent months, the Board has been focused on the interconnected priorities of financial security, premises sustainability and archival stewardship. The challenges surrounding Richmond Villa and the storage and preservation of our archives are well known to members. Environmental risks, storage limitations and the need for modernised infrastructure have required careful consideration. At the same time, we remain committed to maintaining services to members.

The 379 Kent Street Library continues to operate as a welcoming research centre and has seen increased attendance in recent months. The Board recognises that our collections are the heart of the Society and, equally vital, are our people. The warmth, knowledge and professionalism of our staff, volunteer library assistants and research officers are central to the experience we offer and undoubtedly contribute to the encouraging rise in visitor numbers.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on **Wednesday 20 May 2026** and I warmly encourage all members to participate. In preparation for the AGM, members will receive a formal Notice of Meeting, financial statements and information regarding director nominations. I encourage you to read these documents carefully, attend if you can and engage with the governance of your Society.

The theme of this issue, post-war migration, reminds us that resilience and reinvention are part of the Australian story. Many of our members' families arrived here carrying uncertainty, courage and hope. Just as they did, as a Society, we also look forward with determination and confidence.

On behalf of the Board, thank you for your continued support, advocacy and commitment to the Society of Australian Genealogists.

We look forward to seeing many of you at the AGM on 20 May.

Philippa Shelley Jones
President
Society of Australian Genealogists



From the Staff Desk

RUTH GRAHAM
SAG CEO

From the staff perspective, our focus continues to be on connection, education, and bringing members together, both online and in person.

Knowledge Night—Building Community Conversations

Our **Knowledge Night** series is newly established as a regular fixture in the Society's calendar. Held every two months across 2026, these free members-only evenings provide:

- **News from SAG**, ensuring members remain informed about strategy, programs, collections and opportunities
- **News from the world of genealogy**, highlighting developments in records, archives, technology, research and publishing

- A short **feature conversation** with a guest around the question "*Which ancestor would you most like to meet, and why?*" designed to humanise research and prompt reflection on why family history matters
- A further **guest showcase**, providing a platform for officers, authors, educators, projects or services relevant to family historians, while also strengthening SAG's external relationships

Knowledge Night is designed to bring together the many strands of SAG's activities, education, archives, research groups, publications, and partnerships, into one welcoming forum. If you have not yet attended a Knowledge Night, I warmly encourage you to do so. It is one of the simplest ways to stay connected to the Society's evolving work.

2025: A Year of Momentum, Connection and Purpose

As we reflect on 2025, it is clear this was a year defined by momentum—in learning, in community engagement, and in laying strong foundations for the future of the Society of Australian Genealogists. Membership growth was steady, library visitation increased, and online participation remained strong across regional, interstate, and international audiences.

Strategic Direction: Setting the Roadmap

At the heart of this progress was the launch of our 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, which sets out our direction across education, collections, membership, digital capability, sustainability, and outreach. This roadmap has already begun shaping investment decisions, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring our programs remain relevant to both emerging and experienced family historians.

In 2025 the Society undertook an important governance milestone with the development and adoption of a new Constitution and updated By-Laws. This work modernised the Society's governing framework, ensuring it reflects contemporary governance standards, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Board and executive, and provides stronger foundations for decision-making, transparency, and accountability. The revised documents also better align the Society's governance structure with its strategic direction and the evolving needs of its members, volunteers, and programs. Their adoption marks a significant step in strengthening the organisation's long-term sustainability and ensuring that its governance arrangements remain fit for purpose as the Society continues to grow and expand its educational, archival, and community engagement activities.

Alongside these governance reforms, the Society also adopted a forward-looking budget for the 2026–2028 period designed to support long-term financial sustainability. The budget framework focuses on maintaining a balanced operating position while investing strategically in the Society's core priorities: education and training programs, the care and accessibility of its collections, and the continued development of digital services. It also recognises the importance of diversifying revenue streams through education programs, events, partnerships, memberships, and philanthropic support. Together with careful cost management and a renewed focus on fundraising and outreach, this multi-year financial plan provides a practical pathway to ensure the Society remains resilient, sustainable, and capable of delivering value to members and the wider genealogical community well into the future.

Education and Engagement at Scale

Our education and engagement program in 2025 was nothing short of remarkable. Across the year, the Society delivered 316 unique events, welcoming almost 12,000 registrants who collectively participated in more than 6,564 hours of learning through courses, research groups, workshops, talks, and conferences. From research group meetings to multi-session skills programs, this breadth reflects both the diversity of our membership and the growing demand for structured genealogical education.

A standout achievement was *Pathways to Professional Genealogy*, which supported participants exploring genealogy as a professional practice, providing clarity around standards, skills, and career pathways. We also delivered several highly successful themed events, including the excellent mini-conference *Family History: A Legacy Preserved*, led by Vice President Chris Hingerty and Director Andrew Redfern; *The Migrant's Path: Stories of Passage and Ships*, which resonated deeply with many members' own family narratives; and *Artisanal Ancestors: Tracing Family Craft Traditions*, which invited us to look differently at occupational heritage and creativity across generations.

In 2025, the Society introduced several new courses designed to meet members wherever they are on their research journey, from foundational skills through to more advanced and professional pathways, including *Creating a Family History Archive with*

WeAre.xyz and *Understanding Y-DNA*. These additions, alongside expanded Digital Skills offerings, reflect the growing demand for practical capability building while reinforcing SAG's role as Australia's leading provider of genealogical education.

Our education program was further enriched by welcoming respected broadcaster Jane Hutcheon as part of our 2025 line-up, alongside our deeply valued cohort of experienced educators and long-standing volunteers whose knowledge, generosity, and continuity remain one of the Society's greatest strengths. Our DNA Program continued to grow, providing a variety of learning opportunities guided by the Genetic Genealogy Advisory Group and the Society's DNA Learning Pathway.

We acknowledged the contributions of our dedicated education volunteers, notably Dr Yvonne Masters for her role in the updates to the Certificate in Genealogical Research assessment process and Jennie Fairs for her leadership with our Diploma in Family Historical Studies candidates.

Conversations That Matter

Our *Let's Talk About ...* community series proved enormously popular in 2025, tackling both practical research and powerful social history through sessions on Jane Austen and Family History, Irish Census Records, Forced Adoption, and War Brides. Strong attendance and engagement reflected members' appetite for thoughtful, contemporary conversations, and recordings from the entire 2025 series are now available via our Webinar Library. In 2026, we have transitioned our *Let's Talk About ...* sessions to *Knowledge Nights*, providing a better forum in which to include industry updates, and other time-sensitive information.

Friday Hang Outs continued to bring our community together each week, with heartfelt thanks to our regular volunteer hosts including Jennie Fairs, Lilian Magill, Jill Ball, John Heath, Chris Hingerty, Fleur Creed, Judy Charlton and Christine Woodlands. Patrice Connelly also continued to support us through the *Family History Connect* member-only series, impressing us with her incredible range of topics throughout the year.

Our Book Club *Meet the Author* events were another highlight, offering members the chance to engage directly with Kate Horan (*The Inheritance*), Rosalie Horner (*Waltzing Mathilde: Letters from a Little Girl*), and Téa Cooper (*The Golden Thread*), creating warm, lively conversations around storytelling, memory, and family history.

Education Manager Vanessa Cassin further elevated SAG's public profile through high-impact media appearances, including a standout DNA ethics panel recorded at the State Library of NSW for Family History Month and broadcast via ABC Big Ideas. Appearing alongside journalist Claire Aird and historian Tanya Evans, and hosted by Adria Castellucci, Vanessa contributed to a thoughtful discussion on genetic genealogy—from unexpected discoveries to privacy, data security, and law enforcement—showcasing SAG's leadership in responsible family history practice.

Collections, Research and Infrastructure

Behind the scenes, significant progress was made across collections and infrastructure. We invested in a new ScanPro (following member-led fundraising in late 2024) and additional document scanners, expanding our capacity to support research and future digitisation projects. We also acknowledge the outstanding work of Gemma Beswick and Danielle Tebb, who, in responding to the impacts of the Richmond Villa flooding, are rethinking and improving workflows in preparation for future

collection projects. Their tremendous effort and practical problem-solving in difficult circumstances have laid important groundwork for the next phase of SAG's collections work.

Operationally, 2025 marked important steps forward with staff transitioning to Office 365 and a major consolidation of our digital image files, critical groundwork for upcoming digitisation and collection management projects. Particular recognition is due to Library Services Manager Gemma Beswick, who played a pivotal role in the implementation of Office 365, acting as the Society's on-site liaison with our external IT support and ensuring a smooth and practical transition for staff. Our Premises Working Group also continued its careful planning to support the Society's long-term physical and digital needs.

Partnerships, Outreach and Community

Beyond our own walls, we met new audiences at Craft Alive in February, the Sydney Quilt Show in September, and the Western Sydney Records Centre Open Day in November. Earlier in the year, staff and Board representatives strengthened national and international relationships at Connections 2025 in Brisbane. In May, CEO Ruth Graham presented to student and professional archaeologists on *Living Connections: Using DNA from the Living to Reconstruct the Past*. This was part of the Sydney Historical Archaeology Practitioners Workshop (SHAP). The event was held at The National Centre of Indigenous Excellence with the theme 'The future of investigating the past—archaeology as a diminishing resource'.

Collaboration with University of Technology Sydney students through the Creative Innovation / Industries Innovation Project delivered fresh insights into marketing and engagement, providing actionable recommendations underpinning SAG programs. Our thanks to students: Adam Cavenor, Amber Dempsey, Eva Stojanovski, Grace Michie, Natasha Ferguson, Noah Lewis and UTS faculty lead Dr Betty O'Neill.

We also visited local libraries, welcomed many librarians on site, hosted group visits from other societies, and connected with colleagues from The Institute for Defence and Security Studies NSW through a fascinating presentation on Australian war art.

Collaboration continued with FamilySearch and advanced our important project researching the lives of fostered children, with thanks to volunteers Lorraine Brothers and Janine Fahey for their dedication.

Arrangements were maintained with the following organisation to support our key collection operations areas: Ancestry; Biographical Database of Australia; British Newspaper Archive; Findmypast; First Solutions; MyHeritage; National Library of Australia/Trove; NSW Resource Descriptions & Access (catalogues); NSW State Library; and The Genealogist.

We are also working with the following organisations in support of our Education Program and outreach: Museums of History New South Wales; Chinese Australian Historical Society; Parramatta Female Factory Friends; Family History Academy; and Victorian GUM Inc.

Stakeholders and Advocacy

The Society actively participated in external stakeholder consultations, providing valuable insights on topics affecting family historians, including the UK Ministry of Justice's storage and retention policies and various reforms in NSW cemeteries. Comprehensive feedback on these initiatives is available on our website.

SAG proactively responded to public consultations, including the UK Law Commission's 2025 consultation on burial and cremation law, highlighting a growing global concern: how to ensure dignity, sensitivity, and cultural respect in the final rites of the deceased. These issues resonate strongly with members of the Society, many of whom have English or Welsh heritage. They reflect similar concerns raised recently in Australia and build on consultation responses we have provided in NSW and Western Australia.

In addition, we also wrote to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment regarding the rezoning of land surrounding the Parramatta Female Factory, important to our role in supporting historical sites and heritage policy where possible.

Premises and Security Concerns

In the face of the distressing and unsanitary situation caused by a rough sleeper at Richmond Villa, Gemma Beswick, Danielle Tebb and Ruth Graham demonstrated professionalism and perseverance, to safeguard the Society's premises under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

This work did not occur in isolation and must also be understood in the context of the significant premises challenges faced during the year. In particular, Gemma Beswick and Danielle Tebb worked well above and beyond their normal responsibilities to manage the ongoing fallout from the water ingress at Richmond Villa. This required sustained effort to protect collections, manage disrupted workspaces, and address the many operational and logistical issues that arose as a result of the damage. Throughout the year, they navigated these pressures with professionalism and commitment, while also continuing their core responsibilities to members and the collections. Encouragingly, towards the end of the year, meaningful progress was finally made in relation to the Society's insurance claim and recovery process, providing a clearer pathway forward after what had been a long and challenging period.

Membership, Community and Volunteer Engagement

Membership is an indication of commitment to the SAG and indicates the Society's effectiveness in communicating its purpose in a way that is relevant to the community. While 2025 saw a continuing loss in membership numbers, it was less marked than in previous years with a 1.9% drop from 3294 in 2024 to 3232 (both financial and complimentary). Significantly, there was a pleasing increase in the total number of new members, with 415 joining throughout 2025, a jump of 15.5% from the 374 who joined in 2024. 50% of new monthly members admitted each month came from regional NSW and interstate.

The deaths of 13 members were advised during 2025 and have been notified to members in *Descent*. The number includes Graham Lewis, Fellow (former Director, Honorary Treasurer and webmaster), dedicated volunteer and former Board member, Joan Healy, as well as volunteers Beverley Barnett and Maureen Sharpe.

Throughout 2025, the Society's *Descent* magazine continued to play a central role in sharing research, ideas, and inspiration with members and the wider genealogical community. In 2025, the four themed issues of the magazine offered readers a creative and thought-provoking exploration of family history through a range of engaging topics. The March/Autumn issue, *Craft & Makers*, celebrated the skills, trades and creativity of our ancestors; the June/Winter issue, *Shipping & Migration*, examined journeys of movement and settlement that shaped family stories; the September/Spring issue, *Animals*, explored the roles animals have played in work, companionship and community life; and the December/Summer issue, *Professional Genealogy*, reflected on the practice, standards and evolving landscape of genealogical research. Thanks are due to Danielle Tebb for her outstanding editorial leadership throughout the year. Danielle's commitment to maintaining high standards of research and presentation, combined with the skill and creativity of the magazine's designers, Tracey Grady and Sandra Dexter, as well as our marvellous contributors, ensured that every issue of *Descent* was both visually engaging and intellectually rewarding. In 2025, the Croker Prize, awarded to Helen Dennis for *Leaving Home: Penelope Jenkin's Canadian Caper*, once again highlighted the depth of original research in our community.

The SAG Library continues to be the heart of the Society. Under the leadership of Gemma Beswick, assisted by Nicole Brown, members and visitors experienced a warm and professional welcome on every visit. During 2025, 887 visits were made to the library at 2/379 Kent Street, including non-members and visitors from interstate genealogical societies with which we share reciprocal rights. 797 of these visits were made by 7% of SAG members, an increase of almost 25% on the number of member visits in 2024.

Our wonderful volunteers completed 341 shifts, some helping library visitors, others assisting with collection maintenance projects to assist our Library Services Manager. This equates to over 2,000 hours of dedication and support, for which we remain incredibly grateful.

We were thrilled to see new groups flourish, including One Place Focus Group, Indian and South Asian Research Group, Source Citations Group, as well as an informal General Research Group, with sincere thanks to all volunteer group leads and participants.

We acknowledged the contributions of our dedicated volunteers, notably Yvonne Masters for her pivotal role in the updates to the Certificate in Genealogical Research assessment process.

We were delighted to celebrate a social media milestone late last year—10,000 Facebook followers! Thank you to everyone who joins us in exploring, preserving, and sharing family history. Your enthusiasm keeps this community thriving.

Staffing

In 2025, the Society experienced several significant staffing changes that influenced its operational capacity. Early in the year, we farewelled Karlie Frelingos from her role as Librarian and are yet to replace her or fill the previously vacated role of Archives Manager. Whilst the Society's finances benefited from the associated reductions in salary expenditure, the lack of staff in these specialist roles inevitably reduced internal capacity in two important functional areas. We were pleased to welcome Nicole Brown as Administration Officer, strengthening our frontline administrative and education support functions during a period of considerable transition. In December 2025, our Chief Executive Officer/Company Secretary, Ruth Graham, notified us of her intention to resign from her role by mid-2026, with recruitment for a replacement underway.

As a result of the staffing changes, the remaining employees have operated within a lean structure and have carried expanded responsibilities across collections, operations, and education support. While this has demonstrated the team's professionalism and deep commitment to the Society's mission, it has also placed sustained pressure on capacity. The year highlighted both the resilience of our staff and the need for a more sustainable workforce model to ensure that the Society's ambitions for collections stewardship, education delivery and member engagement are matched by appropriate resourcing where possible.

As at 31 December 2025, there were five employees, two of whom worked on a part-time basis.

Finances, Bequests and Fundraising

We can report that the Society closed the 2025 financial year with a deficit of \$81,101 (2024 surplus of \$135,085). The Society has net assets of \$3,433,024 (2024 \$3,514,125), which includes cash and other liquid financial assets of \$2,640,575 (2024 \$2,717,743).

We extend our sincere thanks to those members who have chosen to remember the Society in their wills, helping to safeguard our work for future generations. We particularly acknowledge

the late Gillian Iles, Max Rowland and Elizabeth Bowman for their generous and forward-thinking support. We are also very grateful to our donors and sustaining members for their ongoing generosity. While we remain deeply appreciative of the support received in 2025, the absence of a significant bequest during the year meant that the Society operated within an extremely constrained budget, placing pressure across all areas of activity and decision-making. This highlights how vital member and supporter contributions are to the ongoing strength of the Society of Australian Genealogists. We warmly encourage members and friends of the Society to consider supporting our future through donations, sponsorship, or by including the Society in their bequest planning. Such support plays a crucial role in ensuring that our collections, education programs, and community initiatives continue to flourish for generations of family historians to come.

A Year to Celebrate

We rounded out the year with a merry end-of-year celebration in Sydney, hearing reflections from Vice Patron Martyn Killion and warm reminiscences from long-time volunteer Library Assistant Margaret Neyle.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary volunteers, dedicated staff, and committed Directors. Their collective effort enables the Society to balance daily service delivery with strategic development, preserving the past while actively building the future.

As we move into 2026, we do so with confidence, guided by our strategic roadmap and strengthened by the connections forged throughout 2025. It has been a year of learning, collaboration, and progress, and we thank every member, supporter, partner, volunteer, and staff member for being part of this shared journey.

Details of Directors

The names of each person who has been a Director, and hence a responsible person under the ACNC Act, at any time during the year to 31 December 2025 and to the date of this report are listed below.

Changes to Directors

Kerry Farmer and Helen Hickson resigned as Directors on 10 March 2025. Following the 2025 Annual General Meeting, Philippa Shelley Jones was elected as Board President, with Christine Hingerty and Melissa Hulbert elected as Vice-Presidents. Darryl Low Choy resigned on 15 September 2025, and Peter Homan was elected to fill the casual vacancy on 23 January 2026. Janette Pelosi resigned as a Director on 16 February 2026.

Company Secretary

Ruth Graham was appointed Company Secretary during the year but in that role is not a responsible entity under the ACNC Act.

NB: The unabridged 2025 Directors' Report for the Society of Australian Genealogists, as well as the 2025 Financial Report are available on the SAG website: www.sag.org.au

Table: Details of Directors

Name	First appointed	Last elected
Kerry Farmer	14 Feb 2018	20 May 2023; Resigned 10 March 2025
Gay Hendriksen	17 March 2025	24 May 2025
Helen Hickson	13 Feb 2023	20 May 2023; Resigned 10 March 2025
Christine Hingerty	9 Dec 2024	24 May 2025
Peter Homan	23 January 2026	
Melissa Hulbert	10 Jun 2015	27 May 2024
Darryl Charles Low Choy	1 May 2021	20 May 2023; Resigned 15 September 2025
Janette Louise Pelosi	14 Jun 2012	27 May 2024; Resigned 16 February 2026
Andrew Redfern	16 Sep 2024	24 May 2025
Philippa Ann Shelley Jones	11 May 2019	27 May 2024
Dianne Snowden	13 Feb 2023	20 May 2023
Cheryl Wright	1 May 2021	20 May 2023

Wodziński, Roman: (1914–1984)

THOMAS WODZINSKI

Roman Wodziński (1914–1984), a veteran of World War II and a prominent figure in the Polish community in Canberra, was born on 14 February 1914 at Pabianice, Poland, ninth of 10 children to Józef Wodziński, a baker, and his wife Jadwiga, née Brykowska, both natives of Poland. His father passed away when he was just 10 years old, leaving his mother to manage the bakery with her older children until her death in 1946.

Wodziński completed his (Year-10 equivalent) education at a technical high school in Pabianice at the onset of the Great Depression (1930). Despite the challenging times, he continued his studies at a teacher's college and fulfilled his compulsory military service in 1935–36. Subsequently, he found employment in a local school, bank, and post office.

As tensions with Germany escalated in early 1939, Wodziński was conscripted into the Polish army as part of Poland's general mobilisation. Assigned to the 31st Infantry Regiment as a lance corporal, he was stationed on the western front and was subjected to the full force of the German assault during the first two weeks of September 1939.

Following 10 days of intense combat, Wodziński found himself in the final major engagement of the *September Campaign*—the Battle of the Bzura River, just west of Warsaw. Captured during this conflict, he was imprisoned in Oflag VIIA in southern Germany, where he remained alongside 5,000 Polish officers until the end of the war.

On 29 April 1945, the camp was liberated by the American Third Army. With Poland coming under communist rule after the war, Wodziński, like hundreds of thousands of others, chose not to return to his homeland. He spent the next four years as a refugee in a displaced persons camp in Ingolstadt, Germany.

In 1949, Wodziński convinced Australian immigration authorities that he was an acetylene welder and migrated to Australia at the relatively advanced age of 35, under the auspices of the International Refugee Organization resettlement scheme. Being a single, white northern European likely benefited him, given Australia's prevailing White Australia policy.

Arriving aboard the SS *Amarapoora* in Sydney on 20 October 1949, Wodziński worked briefly in Gundagai and Batlow before moving to nearby Canberra in early 1950. At the time Canberra was one of the fastest growing cities in Australia, thanks to the relocation of public service departments from Melbourne. The capital offered numerous job opportunities and he joined Commonwealth Hostels as a chef where he remained until his retirement in 1979.

In 1950, Wodziński married his wife Helena Getler by proxy as she was still in Poland. It was not until 1957 that the Polish authorities issued her a passport. Their only child, Thomas, was born in Canberra the following year.

Throughout his life in Canberra, Wodziński was active in numerous Polish groups. In the early 1950s, he played a pivotal role in establishing the city's first Polish social and sporting



Roman Wodziński, 1945.

organisations. He served on the board of the inaugural Polish Club in 1951 and set up its children's Saturday morning school the following year. He also joined the Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association upon its establishment in 1953, serving on the building committees for both organisations and holding numerous positions on their boards and audit committees throughout his life.

Wodziński was also involved in the radio committee, coordinating Polish language programs from the early 1950s. In 1953, he was instrumental in founding a soccer team (*Napad*) and entering it into the local competition where it achieved immediate success. From 1955–58 he served as President of the Polish Club.

After the birth of his son in 1958, he scaled back his hectic community involvement. However, in 1959, he founded the Polish Theatre Group. Wodziński was manager, actor, and co-director. He had a passion for theatre and devoted himself to its advancement in Canberra for the next 20 years.

Obtaining his Australian citizenship in 1965, Wodziński could safely visit Poland and did so on two occasions—in 1968 on his own, and again in 1979 with Helena.

Wodziński was of medium stature measuring 166cm tall. His blue eyes, affable personality, and community-mindedness endeared him to many. He died unexpectedly on 20 July 1984 and was buried in the military section of the Gungahlin Cemetery. His wife and son survived him.

Wodziński was revered within the Polish community for his humility, patriotism, and enduring contributions to the post-WWII migrant experience in Canberra. He harboured no regrets about relocating to Australia and took great pride in his citizenship and adopted country.

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.



Croker Prize for Biography 2026

THE RELATIVE I WISH I'D MET

PHILIPPA SHELLEY JONES

CONVENOR OF THE CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE

I could have sworn that we only just finished marking the 2025 entries, but it appears time has once more passed me by, because here we are again—it's time to get the creative juices flowing for this year's Croker Prize for Biography.

The competition, now in its thirteenth year, publicly recognises the generous bequest given to the Society by Colin and Loas Croker; the \$1000 first prize is funded from their bequest. All entries are published on the Society's website for 12 months and are retained by the Society as part of our manuscript collection.

The Croker Prize for Biography is an excellent way for members to record their research for posterity and for the Society's collection of biographical material to be added to for future generations of members and researchers. It doesn't matter how long you've been a member of the Society, where you are located, or how long you've been researching—just give it a go.

A competition entrant must be a financial member of the Society and submit an 800-1000 word biographical essay about one relative, based on the chosen theme for the year. The entry must be accompanied by a completed entry form, which can be found, together with the full conditions of entry, on the Society's website: www.sag.org.au Click on the Join Us button, then navigate to the **Annual Croker Prize for Biography**. Please note, to offset administration costs associated with the competition, we have introduced a nominal entry fee of \$25, to be paid with the submission of your entry.

Entries must be submitted by midnight on 31 May 2026, with the winner announced and their biography published in the September issue of *Descent*. **Please note that it is strictly forbidden to make use of AI for all or any part of your entry.**

The competition is judged by the Croker Prize Committee, consisting of myself as Convenor, Heather Garnsey and previous winners of the award, Michael Considine (2023), Maxine Elder (2024) and Helen Dennis (2025).

The committee was delighted to see another very healthy number of Croker Prize entries in 2025, with 28 family historians submitting wonderful biographies centred around the theme 'My Relative's Journey'. The popularity of the competition continues to impress (and gives us lots of marking to do!); we hope that will continue to be the case in 2026 and beyond.

So, to this year's theme:

THE RELATIVE I WISH I'D MET

Please remember:

- i. this is a biography competition—the entry must have *one* relative as its focus
- ii. reference to the theme is essential—the entry must not only make mention of the theme, but connect it to the biographical subject.

Also, a reminder to those entering to read the conditions carefully, in particular the word count specifications and the

requirement that the submission be about the entrant's relative i.e. the biography must be about *one person in your own family tree*. The writer's relationship to the subject of the biography must be clearly stated in the entry itself. The checklist on the entry form makes it easier for entrants to ensure they have met the competition's requirements. That checklist is as follows:

- ☐ My entry is between 800 and 1000 words (not including title, references and any illustration captions)
- ☐ My relationship to the subject of the biography is clearly stated in my entry.
- ☐ I have included no more than one illustration and the caption for that illustration is 10 words or less.
- ☐ I have not used any form of AI in the writing of my entry.
- ☐ I have provided references and those references do not include extra biographical material or analysis.
- ☐ I have read and agree to the Conditions of Entry for the Croker Prize for Biography.
- ☐ I declare that my entry complies with the Conditions of Entry for the Prize.

Although detailed information about the judging criteria can be found on the website, the following suggestions might also prove useful:

- i. Relevant detailed and properly formatted sources provide evidence of good genealogical research skills. Referencing guidelines are provided in the Member Area of the website. Remember that references are not included in the word count.
- ii. A good introduction helps to engage interest and set the scene; a meaningful conclusion rounds off the entry for the reader.
- iii. Good grammar and spelling boost an entry, as does evidence of a thorough proofread.
- iv. Those entries that rate highly often make good use of descriptive language, occasional humour, sensitivity, relevant historical context and a logical sequence of events.
- v. Entries without a good anchoring to the theme will receive marks at the lower end of the range.
- vi. An entry that doesn't clearly state the relationship between its subject and the author is at risk of disqualification.

Reading previous successful entries on the website will provide some insight into what makes a good entry. You could also listen (or re-listen) to a recording of the 'Let's Talk About ... Croker Prize for Biography' session held in March 2024, which covered the 'dos and don'ts' of a Croker Prize entry, also found on the Annual Croker Prize for Biography page. In the words of that year's winner, Maxine Elder: "*The 'Let's Talk About ...' session last year was really great and motivated me to enter!*"

Good luck to all. We look forward to reading about some fascinating relatives and the associated research discoveries.

Title photo (above): Denise Karis, Unsplash

In search of ... **Post-war Migration**

by Ruth Graham, CEO

There are some themes that feel both historical and immediate at the same time. Post-war migration is one of them. For many of our members, it's not distant history but lived memory, the stories of parents, grandparents, neighbours, and sometimes our own first uncertain steps onto Australian soil.

For decades following the end of WWII, Australia was (again) transformed by migration. The scale of that movement reshaped our cities, our suburbs, our industries, our culture and, of course, our family trees. Yet behind the statistics and policy frameworks sit human beings, people who had survived bombardment, displacement, rationing, occupation, or prolonged periods of instability. Many had endured what we would now recognise as trauma or post-traumatic stress, although at the time there was little language, and even less structured support, for such experiences. That was true not only for migrants arriving here, but also for Australians returning from war service.

As genealogists, we have a responsibility to hold these stories with care. Migration is not simply a line on a pedigree chart marking "arrived 1950." It represents courage, grief, hope, rupture, and reinvention. It often required the wrenching decision to leave behind family graves, familiar languages, inherited landscapes, and deeply embedded community ties for the "great southern land."

For much of this period, migration was shaped by what we now refer to as the "White Australia" policy. Although post-war schemes actively encouraged European migration, including assisted passage programs, the broader legislative framework remained restrictive and exclusionary until dismantled under the Whitlam Government in the 1970s. That reform was pivotal. It opened the way for new chapters in Australia's migration story, including for those fleeing the aftermath of the Vietnam War. When we reflect on post-war migration, we must do so with both gratitude and honesty, acknowledging opportunity alongside limitation, welcome alongside exclusion.

This issue of *Descent* explores these complexities through research, memory, and archival discovery. It also invites us to consider how migration records have become increasingly available to researchers. We owe particular thanks to the teams at the National Archives of Australia for their extensive digitisation work. The accessibility of twentieth-century passenger records, whether ship or aircraft manifests, has transformed our capacity to document the journeys of our families. These records do more than confirm dates; they restore

context. They remind us that every arrival was once an anxious departure.

Recently, at a talk by Dr Peter Hobbins of the State Library of New South Wales, I was struck by a small but significant statistic: 1962 was the first year in which more people arrived in Australia by plane than by ship. That shift symbolises a broader transition, from the long, communal voyages that defined early post-war migration to a new era of speed and modernity. It was also the year my own mother arrived.



Poster promoting an assisted passage migration scheme intended to bring British people to Australia, c1952, publisher not identified, National Library of Australia, POSTER 2024-531

My mother was a “Ten Pound Pom.” She did not begin her Australian life in a migrant hostel, but she has shared with me in extraordinary detail the process of approval, the paperwork, the medicals, the anticipation, and the voyage itself. Those memories, preserved not in official files but in lived recollection, are treasures. They are a reminder that family history lives not only in archives but in conversations across kitchen tables.

Her story also contains the kind of unsung Australian heroes who rarely make it into formal genealogies. When she arrived in late 1962, a Mr and Mrs Burn of Banksia took her in as a boarder. Their generosity provided something far more important than accommodation. They offered stability, kindness, and a substitute family at a moment when a young migrant needed reassurance and belonging. The Burns do not appear in my pedigree chart. They are not ancestors. Yet their role in my mother’s Australian story was foundational. As family historians, we might consider how often such figures sit just beyond our formal lines of descent and yet are essential to the lived narrative.

Post-war migration was not uniform. For some, the devastation of 1940s Europe drove it; for others, it was encouraged by Australian government schemes promising

opportunity and space. Some came willingly, seeking adventure. Others felt compelled by economic necessity or political upheaval. All faced challenges. Leaving a homeland deeply embedded with family ties for an unknown future requires a particular kind of resolve. It also demands resilience in the face of accent, difference, homesickness and sometimes prejudice.

When we research this period, we are not simply reconstructing travel routes. We are tracing acts of faith. We are documenting moments when individuals and families stood at the intersection of history and personal decision. That is why this theme matters so profoundly for genealogists. Migration is rarely an abstract policy; it is embodied in our relatives.

As you read this issue, I encourage you to think expansively about migration stories. Consider not only the date of arrival, but the emotional landscape. Who left behind siblings they never saw again? Who carried unspoken wartime memories? Who provided hospitality to a stranger and changed a life? Thank you again, Mr and Mrs Burn.

Contributions to *Descent*

The Society welcomes articles for publication in *Descent*. Preference is given to articles which demonstrate methods, sources and tactics which will help others with their research. Family is about sharing—so we encourage you to share your stories with your fellow family Historians.

Deadlines: Articles can be submitted at any time by emailing editor@sag.org.au.

Time sensitive items need to be received by 1 February, 1 May, 1 August and 1 November for the March, June, September and December issues respectively.

Length: 2–3 page articles—1,000–2,000 words although longer articles will be considered;
1 page articles—700–900 words;
Short articles—100–400 words.

Copyright Clearance: Copyright clearance is your responsibility and you must ensure that written and illustrative material does not breach copyright and all sources are correctly acknowledged.

Full details regarding submission lengths, images, copyright and consent can be found on our website at <https://www.sag.org.au/Our-Magazine-Descent>

Please note SAG does not pay author fees.

Next theme: Police and law enforcement

ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

by Daniel Arnold

I come from a family in which migration is not an episode but a constant feature of life. In each generation it takes a different form, shaped by war, necessity, by longing, and by choice.

My father's family had lived in Eastern Prussia for centuries, small landowners in Masuria whose world was defined by fields, seasons, and continuity. That continuity ended abruptly even before WWII, when my father lost his mother to cancer when he was only six. A second marriage brought a stepmother, before his father was killed on the Eastern Front, somewhere in what is today Lithuania, only two years later. By the time the Russian army approached from the east, what remained of the family was a fragile unit: four children and a stepmother, forced to move west in the great refugee trek that reshaped Europe.

He was 10 years old when he became a refugee, his physical home existing only as a memory. The family ended up in Flensburg, as did so many others who had nowhere else to go. Uncertainty meant that my father did not settle easily, he was only concerned with moving forward. He tried his luck in the coal mines of western Germany and later found his path in military aviation. After years in the military, he became a test pilot in Ingolstadt, where I grew up.

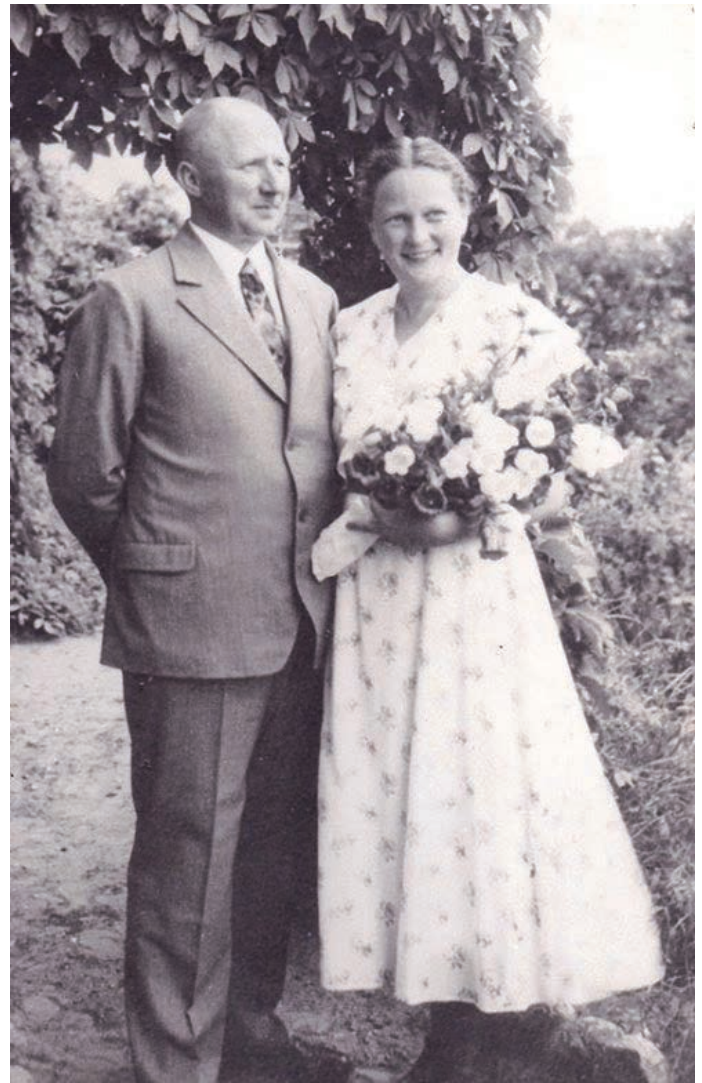
Although he rarely spoke about Eastern Prussia, it was always present: in framed maps on the wall, in photographs and in the quiet reverence for what had been lost. He never called himself a migrant, and I don't think he liked that word, but he was a survivor. His personality traits: discipline, frugality, and emotional restraint were the result of endurance. For him, dignity meant standing upright after everything had been taken.

As a father, he was not an expressive man, safety and stability mattered above all else, and although emotional closeness was harder to reach, I never doubted his seriousness about life. His personal history had taught him one crucial lesson: only the tough survive.

My mother's story, on the other hand, paints a different picture of migration. Her family were also refugees, bombed out of their home in Osnabrück during WWII, they rebuilt their lives in Eichstätt, Bavaria. They remained northern Germans at heart. No Bavarian accent ever entered their speech. Place, for them, was something to inhabit with dignity, not to dissolve into.

My maternal ancestry is a map of Europe and beyond: northern German, Dutch and Danish roots from my grandmother's side, and my grandfather whose own father turned out to be American with deep English ancestry going back many centuries. She once described herself as a "mongrel," half joking, half proud. Unlike my father's lineage, which had been geographically stable for centuries, hers was totally a mosaic from all kinds of different sources.

My mother's own migration came later, and for her it was about making a choice. In the 1990s she left Germany for Greece, first Athens and then the island of Sifnos, where she lived for many years as an artist. For her, leaving "home" was not about survival but about becoming. Greece offered



Daniel's paternal grandparents from Eastern Prussia.

light, form, and beauty that aligned with her inner world. She experienced her move as freedom, as an act of courage and opportunity. And even though she eventually returned to Germany, Greece never left her. It shaped her aesthetics, her eye, and her sense of what life could be.

Between my parents, I grew up with two truths. From my father, that place can be taken from you, and that you have to hold onto what you have. From my mother, that place can be chosen, and the right path lies in daring.

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would one day leave Germany myself.

When I migrated to Australia at the age of twenty-eight, it did not feel like an escape. It felt like the logical next step. When people ask me how I ended up down under, I usually joke that I am one of those backpackers who never make it back to the airport. In truth, I had arrived somewhere that finally made sense to me.

Australia felt like emotional oxygen. The English language, which I had always loved. The light, the space, the incredible nature, and the lack of historical heaviness. Everything about it aligned with how I understood a good life. Germany had never quite done that for me. Australia did.

I am deeply proud of my own migrant story. I arrived as a tourist and fell in love with the country and its people. I worked



Daniel's father during his jet pilot training

my way through the immigration system. I built a professional life from the ground up and became a successful business owner. I gained permanent residency and eventually became an Australian citizen. None of this was automatic. It required effort, discipline, and trust in a country that, in return, trusted me.

I remain profoundly grateful to Australia for what it gave me: opportunity, openness, and the freedom to build a life on merit rather than on inherited structure. It allowed me to shape my own future. It allowed me to create stability for my family in a way that felt natural and dignified. In a very real sense, Australia did not just host my migration; it honoured it.

Unlike my father, I was not forced to leave. Unlike my mother, I was not guided solely by aesthetics or personal freedom. I did both. I fled an environment that did not nourish me, and I chose one that did. I fled and I chose, at the same time.

Today, I see my family's migration stories not as broken lines, but as a continuous thread of adaptation. My father taught me endurance. My mother taught me courage. Australia taught me gratitude and belonging. And genealogy taught me how to hold all of it with dignity.

Daniel Arnold (53) is a German–Australian entrepreneur and hobby genealogist whose own life has been shaped by migration across three generations. Born in Germany, he came to Australia at the age of 28, where he built a migrant story from student to business owner and on to become an Australian citizen. His family's genealogy is deeply informed by his family's post-war refugee history and his own experience of migration, showing how movement, displacement, and choice shape identity across generations.



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In Search Of ... Post-War Migration

OUR CANTON DELTA GOLDMINE

by Christopher Cheng

Searching for our ancestral home is like digging for hidden treasure: we know it exists somewhere, yet the coordinates continually slip through our fingers. For many Chinese-Australians, Australian exclusion policies, combined with China's wars, famines, and revolutions, fractured intergenerational memory. Place names blurred, maps disappeared, and Mandarin pinyin often garbled village names that were half-remembered only in dialect.¹

On immigration documents, Canton stands as a placeholder for the entire Pearl River Delta rather than the city of Guangzhou itself, masking precise origins. Even when we remember specific home districts in Guangdong—*Hoi Ping*, *Chung Shan*, *Go Yiu*, or *Toi Shan*—the precise village often remains a scattered constellation of facts, waiting to be pieced together.

What we knew about our ancestors' names and where they came from was often handed down incompletely, if at all. Among Cantonese families in Australia, ancestral villages were often reduced to *hoeng¹ haa⁶* (鄉下), simply meaning "the countryside." This generic term lacked the specific geographical details needed to anchor family memories. Similarly, the Cantonese addressed their elders by relational terms that reinforced family hierarchy: "Grandpa" (爺爺 *je⁴je²*), "Dad" (老豆 *lou⁵ dau⁶*), or "Third Uncle" (三叔 *saam¹ suk¹*)—rather than given names like Tom or John.

With the passing of the migrant generation, the details that could unlock our past fades too, like a song your dad hummed but never named.

Homeward Bound: In Pursuit of Ancestors

For those privileged to make the pilgrimage, even the smallest moments of recognition are profoundly moving. Hearing your grandfather's name spoken aloud for the first time, standing at the spot where his bones are buried, or even glimpsing the bed where your father was conceived—awkward as it may seem—can evoke an irresistibly deep, poignant sense of connection. These moments reveal how a place never lived in can still feel essential to one's identity. Every additional detail adds flesh to the bone, as I was repeatedly reminded on Family History Day at the Chinese Museum in Melbourne.

On 17 August 2025, six speakers from the Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria (CAFHOV) recounted their journeys back to their ancestral villages.² Their vivid narratives allowed the audience to travel alongside them, village-hopping across the Pearl River Delta and reliving their experiences, some many decades ago. Inspired by these presentations, this piece weaves together the collective insights from that day with reflections from my own root-seeking journeys to Guangdong.

CAFHOV President Terry Young captured the sentiment perfectly: "It's hard to describe the feeling. You need to go back to know that feeling." His words resonated with all who have returned. Identifying our ancestral village was like finding the perfect lens that brings blurred family

history into sharp focus. Yet, as root-seekers like Sally Keam observed, the true treasure isn't always the destination itself. Even wandering in search of a "lost" village can uncover a rich seam of family history.³

In this way, the journey became the key that turned the Canton Delta into our goldmine—unlocking a chest of stories, ancestors, and connections we never knew existed.

The Changing Face of the Village

Returning to the village often brings surprises. The place you imagined is rarely the one you encounter. Ancestral villages rarely remain frozen in time; the place your ancestors left may bear little resemblance—emotionally or architecturally—to the one you return to.

One might expect rammed-earth houses and rice fields. Instead, overseas migration gave rise to multi-storey "remittance trophies": brick-and-concrete dream homes adorned with Western façades, European-style decorative columns, and balconies wildly optimistic about the view. The effect can be disorienting.

Villages didn't simply evolve; they were reshaped by global forces. Migration and remittances transformed the landscape physically and culturally. In many villages today, rice fields have vanished, replaced by housing, factories, or workshops. A returning descendant may mourn the loss of ancestral rice fields as the erasure of pre-migration heritage, while locals see progress.

The long arc of migration is written in these changes. Earnings from Australian Chinese market gardens and the fruit and



*The old rice fields in Longdu, Chung Shan — a moment frozen in time.
Courtesy of Douglas Chang.*



*John's moment of triumph in a Dong Hing (東興) laneway, 1978.
Courtesy of Derek Leong*

produce trade were reinvested into rural South China. In Chung Shan (中山), Nicole Ma's ancestral mansion—funded by profits from the Sincere Department Store—still bears distinctive European architectural flourishes.⁴ When it was newly built, the balcony would not have overlooked a grand street, but muddy rice paddies.

The Magic of Return

Returning is not only about recovering lost memories; it is also about forging new senses of belonging. Returnees often bring new perspectives, skills, and resources that breathe life back into villages. Some contributions are tangible—restoring homes or funding infrastructure—while others are symbolic, but no less meaningful.

Brian Laugoon and his family, for example, celebrated their homecoming to their suspected village of *Wo Lok* (和樂) by performing traditional lion dances—just as they did in Bendigo; this time at their ancestral hall in *Toi Shan* (台山).⁵ Whether through restoring ancestral homes, performing lion dances, or hosting communal meals, such acts affirm both the continuity and transformation of family legacies.

Other returns offer *dénouement*—a resolution of the past. Derek Leong recounted accompanying his father, Dr John Leong, back to *Dong Hing* (東興) village in 1978.⁶ As a village boy, John could not touch both laneway walls; decades later, returning to *Hoi Ping* (開平), he finally could do what was once unreachable. In other instances, closure arrived through a reversal of fortune: departing in debt, then returning years—or even decades—later well-dressed, hosting a feast for the entire village.

Walking in the Footsteps of Ancestors

Growing up as a newly arrived, non-English speaking immigrant family, I felt unmoored—unknown, disconnected, and unsure of where I belonged. The feeling shifted when I returned to live, study, and work in South China.

While conducting field research for my PhD in Chung Shan (中山), I met Mr MA Yin-Chiu (馬彥昭) of Sha Chung village (沙涌).⁷ He immediately recognised my paternal grandfather—a man I had never met. The irony was almost surreal: I had flown five thousand miles to my “homeland”, only to learn my grandfather was an outsider there too, living under a different

surname (鄭, Cheng) and speaking a different dialect (隆都, Longdu) among a village of MA (馬) descendants.⁸

Mr Ma went on to tell me, in Cantonese, how my grandfather, the village clog maker, once repaired his broken clogs for free, saving him from walking barefoot across hot stone slabs on his way home from school. “Pay me whenever you have the money,” my grandfather had said. In that moment, a stranger’s memory transformed an unfamiliar village of the Pearl River Delta into a place of profound personal meaning—as if the land itself had opened its arms to welcome me home.

Decades later, that schoolboy became the village historian, eventually led Nicole Ma through those same streets to uncover her family’s legacy.

Where in the World Was CHU Wah Foon?

Each visit to a village felt like lifting the lid on another treasure chest. Last March, on my first trip to Yuen Long village (沿壟) in Go Yiu (高要)—the last of my grandparents’ villages—I discovered one of our family’s longest-held assumptions was wrong.

According to family lore, my maternal great-grandfather, “CHU Wah Foon” (朱華寬)—my grandmother’s father—had gone to America.⁹ As I later learned from a village relative, like many men from Go Yiu, he had in fact migrated to Australia.

What began as a village visit became a century-old game of *Where in the World was CHU Wah Foon?* The confusion hinged on a single word. My grandmother used the shorthand *Gam¹ Saan¹* (金山), which her Hong Kong descendants assumed referred to America’s “Old Goldfields.” In fact, she was referring to Australia’s “New Goldfields.”¹⁰ One misunderstood word had sent our family history to the wrong continent for 65 years, creating a phantom ancestor and a false treasure trail in America.

Unearthing the truth felt like striking a hidden nugget of family history. Until then, for as long as I can remember, my appearance marked me as “other”, so I identified more as Chinese than Australian. What I didn’t realise then was that my Australian roots ran far deeper, and were more firmly established, than I had been led to believe. The latest breakthrough recovered a lost chapter of our family’s Australian story, possibly extending it back a full century to the 1890s.

Claiming the Treasure

Over the past two decades, journeys to my ancestral villages on both sides of my family have reshaped how I see myself. Returning felt like reopening a long-forgotten book, its pages worn by time, yet still whispering stories capable of transporting me to another world, another era.

Like the CAFHOV presenters, I have learned that returning “home” to South China is not merely about locating a place. It’s about uncovering new connections—to ancestors, stories, and landscapes we didn’t know existed. For me, it also revealed a version of myself that had been waiting all along.

Now I am no longer searching for the keys to my identity. I carry them proudly—both Cantonese and Australian.¹¹

If you have yet to return to your ancestral village, I encourage you to do so. If your elders are still with you, why not go with them—or simply sit, listen and record their stories? Gently shake the family tree and watch memories, tales, and secrets tumble out like treasures from a hidden chest. The ancestral home is a living goldmine, brimming with stories—waiting to be discovered, held, and passed forward.

1 Couchman, Sophie, and Kate Bagnall “Memory and meaning in the search for Chinese Australian families”, *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 331-346.

2 To learn more, explore the 2025 CAFHOV “Discovering My Ancestral Village” Family History Day videos on YouTube and be transported back to the “Australian villages” in the heart of the Pearl River Delta: <https://www.cafhov.com/our-stories/cafhov-family-history-day-2025/>

3 Sally Keam concluded the day with one of the most compelling insights: even without definitive records of her mother’s ancestral village, piecing together fragments can deepen one’s understanding of the past. Her experience reminds those disconnected from their Chinese origins that absence itself can be a starting point for rediscovery. <https://www.cafhov.com/our-stories/cafhov-family-history-day-2025/#9-you-might-not-find-your-ancestral-village-but-that%E2%80%99s-ok>

4 <https://www.cafhov.com/our-stories/cafhov-family-history-day-2025/#1-return-to-the-ancestral-place>

5 <https://www.cafhov.com/our-stories/cafhov-family-history-day-2025/#5-the-journey-to-find-our-ancestral-home>

6 <https://www.cafhov.com/our-stories/cafhov-family-history-day-2025/#7-take-me-home-country-roads>

7 The book that emerged from the China-Australia Heritage Corridor project is: Byrne, Denis, Ien Ang, and Phillip Mar, eds. *The China–Australia Migration Corridor: History and Heritage* (Melbourne University Press, 2023). My PhD research is documented in: Cheng, Christopher. *Australian Migrant Heritage in*

Dr Christopher Cheng (鄭藝超) knows first hand the dual pains of being disconnected from his Chinese roots, and from full belonging in his parents’ adopted country. Since 2008, he has spent over a decade studying and working in Hong Kong and southern China after completing the first part of his architectural degree in Brisbane. Outside his study, he has been wandering extensively through his ancestral villages, deepening his connection to family and heritage. In 2017, he joined the China–Australia Heritage Corridor team as a doctoral student and has been researching and publishing his field observations in academic and popular outlets, so that other “children in the diaspora” can also benefit. When he’s not researching, Christopher writes poems in Chinese, chanted in Cantonese to rhyme. Contact: MrQHeung168@gmail.com



South China: The Legacy of Diaspora-Funded Schools in Twentieth-Century Zhongshan. PhD thesis (Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, 2022).

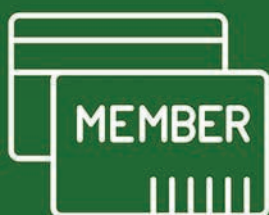
8 As a native Longdu speaker—a Hokkien or Southern Min (閩南話) variant—my grandfather was an “outsider” in a region dominated by native Cantonese speaking in the Shekki dialect.

9 I have yet to uncover the official anglicised name my great-grandfather used in Australia. Although in Hong Kong, *The South China Morning Post* once records him as “CHU Wah Fun,” I have chosen an alternative phonetic spelling that more accurately reflects his name spoken in Cantonese. I recognise, however, that his Australian “paper name” may differ from both versions.

10 Gaam Saan or Gum Saan (金山)—literally “Gold Mountain”—symbolised the promise of Cantonese Pacific goldfield destinations. Following the 1840s gold rush, Gau’ Gaam’ Saan’ (舊金山, “Old Gold Mountain”) emerged as the Cantonese name for San Francisco and, more broadly, for America itself. After the 1850s discoveries in Victoria, the Australian goldfields were named as San’ Gam’ Saan’ (新金山), or “New Gold Mountain,” extending this geography of hope into the southern Pacific.

11 For the Cantonese diaspora, returning to the Pearl River Delta is an experience of homecoming. In *Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States* (Duke University Press, 2004), Andrea Louie examines how young Chinese Americans taking part in the In Search of Roots program use these returns to renegotiate and redefine their identities.

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GALLIPOLI

The End of a Fraught Life

by Glenn Martin

“War assumes a prominent place in Australia’s awareness of history.”

—Professor Peter Stanley (*Lost Boys of Anzac*, 2014)

Very few people in my ancestral family went into military service. Gordon Fink is in my family tree, but out on a distant branch. In 1909, Gordon married Alice Mackie, one of my maternal grandmother’s cousins. Gordon and Alice’s marriage was annulled after two years; it was not a divorce. As soon as Australia entered the Great War, Gordon enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He was in the 16th Battalion and was sent to Gallipoli. He died on 2 May 1915. A tale of heroism? I believe so, but it was much more complicated than that.

This article traces the life of Gordon Fink before the war, particularly the demise of his relationship with Alice Mackie. Gordon’s father, Theodore Fink, played a pivotal role in the annulment proceedings; he was a powerful man—as the Chairman of Directors at the *Melbourne Herald*, he was the man who employed the influential journalist Keith Murdoch (father of Rupert Murdoch).

There are numerous records that relate to Gordon’s war service and his death at Gallipoli, just a week after the ANZAC forces landed. Gordon was part of the Gallipoli saga, part of the ANZAC legend. Newspaper reports gave accounts of Gordon’s death, and Australian military sources also provide information. The copious literature on Gallipoli and the Great War offers many perspectives on Gordon’s brief, unfortunate stint. A diary by Ellis Silas, another soldier in the 16th Battalion, supplements the literature with the rich, sobering texture of a first-hand account.

Gordon Fink’s young days

Gordon’s father, Theodore Fink, came to Australia in 1861 from Guernsey in the Channel Islands, as a six-year-old child. Theodore was a solicitor, politician and newspaper proprietor who had a prominent career in Victoria. He was a principal of the law firm Fink, Best & Hall.¹ Gordon studied law at Melbourne University, finishing his degree in 1907, but he did not seek admission to the Bar until 1913.²

It seems that Gordon was running away from his family destiny in his father’s law firm. He came up to Sydney, and there he met Alice Mackie, marrying her in 1909 at a Congregational Church.³ She had been married before, to George Isaacs, with whom she had a daughter, Minnie,⁴ but she divorced George in 1907 for desertion.⁵ After eighteen months of marriage, Gordon and Alice went to Melbourne, presumably to meet Gordon’s parents.

What happened in Melbourne was a travesty. A court case for the annulment of the marriage was launched on the grounds of Alice’s bigamy. She was alleged to still be married to George Isaacs and to have told Gordon that George had died. Alice did not appear; she was back in Sydney.⁶ The lie is revealed at State Archives, Sydney, where the package of divorce papers includes a subpoena from Fink, Best & Hall, seeking custody of the papers.⁷



Above: Gordon Fink

Right: Gordon Fink and Harry Leake



The stratagem by Gordon’s father worked; the marriage was broken up. Subsequently, Gordon joined the Victorian Field Artillery and was a lieutenant, but then he went overseas and joined the Malay States Rifles. He returned to Australia in 1913, but to Western Australia. He was farming with Carl Pirani, a solicitor friend from Melbourne, and doing some work as a solicitor.⁸

Gordon enlists

Gordon enlisted in September 1914 at Blackboy Hill (WA) with two friends: Pirani, and Harry Leake, a local farmer. They were in the 16th Battalion of the AIF.⁹ Despite his former officer rank, Gordon enlisted as a private. It is not known if he had contact with his parents or Alice.

Another recruit to the 16th Battalion was Ellis Silas, who was an artist and diarist.¹⁰ On 18 November 1914, the battalion embarked on the *Dimboola* for Melbourne. They trained at Broadmeadows camp. On 22 December they sailed on the *Ceramic* for Egypt, and trained at Heliopolis, near Cairo.¹¹

The forces that landed at Gallipoli were insufficient, given the strength of the Turkish forces, and the terrain: “It is a military axiom not to advance uphill against the enemy” (*Art of War*).¹² The plans were fuelled by optimism and British imperial bravado.¹³ The historian Hugh Thomas says that Europe had become ardently nationalist in the nineteenth century, that patriotism arose as unquestioning faith in one’s country, and “the tide of nationalism was accompanied by a general romantic disposition to believe that war was glorious”.¹⁴

In 1907, at the British Musketry School in Kent, trials with a machine gun showed that, at 600 yards (550 metres), two Maxim machine guns could wipe out a battalion (roughly 1,000 men) advancing in the open in one minute if the troops did not go to ground.¹⁵ This was an argument of mathematical certainty, an argument that made the gallantry of soldiers irrelevant. The trial was vehemently rejected by the British officers, steeped in centuries of tradition. The planners of Gallipoli simply continued this blithe faith in established ways. They did not see that war had become industrial.

Gallipoli

The attack on Gallipoli began on 25 April 1915. The first troops landed on the beach at 4:30 am. Did they land at the wrong spot? It is generally believed that they did. Regardless, they were fired upon by Turkish troops; but they were ordered to push on at all costs. Losses for the day were heavy, and the troops were not victorious; their positions on the beach precarious. The soldiers were inexperienced, bewildered by the landscape, and shocked by the death and injuries they witnessed.¹⁶

The 16th Battalion went ashore around 6:00pm, under Colonel John Monash.¹⁷ They were sent immediately to Pope's Hill, where they spent the night digging in. Details of action over the next week in the Battalion diary are rudimentary.¹⁸ Silas's diary says the 16th held Pope's Hill under constant heavy fire.¹⁹

On the evening of 2 May, the 16th Battalion was ordered to take a ridge held by the enemy: Bloody Angle, and hold it until dawn. Fink and Leake were acting as observers to Major W.O. Mansbridge, the company commander.²⁰ Mansbridge later said, "The men advanced singing 'Tipperary' and telling the Turks in very forcible language what they would do when they got to the top".²¹

Silas said: "Along the ridges and down in the gullies our shells were bursting in clusters. Rifle fire could not be heard through the din."²² He suffered from shell-shock.²³

Later in the night the troops were running short of ammunition. "Young Fink" volunteered to carry more ammunition up the ridge in the face of machine-gun fire.²⁴

Missing

All the wounded were retrieved before dawn, but Fink was not among them.²⁵ Fink was one of a large number of men reported missing, possibly captured.²⁶ In his War Record, Fink is not listed as missing until 17 May, and it was not until 15 November that he was finally recorded as "Killed In Action".²⁷ The circumstances were still being investigated on 26 October, largely at the behest of Theodore Fink.²⁸

A letter from Theodore Fink to Base Records in Melbourne, dated 19 October, stated that he had been informed by Brigadier-General Monash's wife in a letter from her husband on 12 May that his opinion was that Gordon Fink had certainly been killed in action.²⁹ Theodore says that on 1 July he received a letter from Major Mansbridge giving details of Gordon's death. Lieutenant-Colonel Pope wrote to say Gordon had died. Harry Leake wrote to Theodore on 30 July to state that Gordon had died (Leake was wounded in the same battle and was invalided to Egypt).

The authorities in Egypt seem to have known sometime between mid-June and 25 June that Gordon's body had been recognised and his pay book recovered.³⁰ Also, Theodore says the last letter he wrote to his son was returned to him in mid-October from the Dead Letter Office with the endorsement "Killed".

There is another strand to this account of the determination of Gordon's death. In the letter dated 19 October, Gordon's father stated that he made approaches to authorities in London in mid-June, after he had received an official telegram to say his son had been killed. He asked them to investigate further. The Red Cross had set up a branch to carry out investigations into the fate of missing soldiers, and they sent interviewers out to the various arenas of battle. Since the injured from Gallipoli were sent to Egypt, there were interviewers at the hospitals in Alexandria.

A report about Private Gordon Fink from the 16th Battalion is contained in the "Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing" files.³¹ It is dated 26 June 1915. The transcript reads: "Was shot through the head during a bayonet charge on a Sunday, either 2nd or 9th May [1915]. Had been acting as trench observer to Major Maxbridge [Mansbridge] of 'A' Company.



Lone Pine Memorial

Body was found some days afterwards and identified by undersigned who was in camp with him in Melbourne. Father is stated to be interested in the 'Melbourne Herald'."

The informant was Private Tom Bolton, who was then at the 17th General Hospital in Alexandria. A footnote to the report says the enquiry was initiated in London. Several questions are raised by this report. According to Major Mansbridge's account, Gordon was carrying ammunition up the ridge, which does not suggest a bayonet attack. More fundamentally, Bolton's war record says he was wounded on 30 April. He sustained a bayonet wound to his right leg and he was taken out to the hospital in Egypt. The Red Cross report says that Bolton identified Gordon's body, but Bolton was not at Gallipoli at the time. Bolton did not return to his unit until 14 July.³²

No doubt everyone was wanting certainty in this situation. Perhaps Tom Bolton had heard a story about Gordon Fink from someone else, so was passing it on in order to be of help. Bolton is correct about other particulars—the commander of the company was Major Mansbridge, and Gordon had been a trench observer for him, and Gordon's father was "interested in the 'Melbourne Herald'".

Theodore's many letters suggest he was distraught. He urges reform of the communications system so that relatives of soldiers receive "more rapid communication" about missing soldiers. However, the 16th Battalion had "a casualty list of 800 out of its original strength of 1,023 of all ranks" in two months.³³ With the troops under constant heavy fire, it was often days or weeks before dead men could be retrieved, identified and buried.³⁴ It must have been chaotic as well as horrifying.

Aftermath

Mansbridge gave a tribute to Gordon and his comrades in July 1915: "The charge of this battalion, in which young Fink took part, was one of the most glorious and most gallant of the many fine feats of arms which stand to the credit of the Australian soldiers."³⁵

But it is also true, as stated in *The Art of War*, that "soldiers when in desperate straits lose the sense of fear. If there is no help for it, they will fight hard".³⁶

However, Gordon's motivations for enlisting do not seem to be merely patriotism. The circumstances suggest that, with his marriage to Alice destroyed by his father, he felt he had nothing to live for. And, perhaps after the debacle of the annulment, Gordon needed to show himself to be brave.

The 16th Battalion served at Gallipoli until the evacuation in December.³⁷

Gordon's sister, Margery, donated £25 for the endowment of a cot in the Base Hospital, Melbourne, to be called "The Gordon Fink Cot".³⁸

Gordon's father was sent Gordon's 1914/1915 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal in the period 1920–1922.³⁹ A memorial for Gordon at Lone Pine Cemetery was ordered on 19 February 1926.⁴⁰

Alice Fink (Mackie) got married again on 25 August 1916.⁴¹ It is notable that Alice had kept the name Fink; she could have reverted to Isaacs or Mackie. It is also notable that Gordon's marriage to Alice is not mentioned in any of the public accounts of Gordon's life.

This essay was originally written for the unit "HAA107 Families and War" in the Diploma of Family History at the University of Tasmania, 2022 and was also related in Glenn Martin's book, Ordinary People, Remarkable Lives (G.P. Martin Publishing, 2025).

Glenn Martin is an author and independent researcher. He has written books on family history, reflections on experience, ethics and values, and he has produced several volumes of poetry. He has been a teacher at high schools, tertiary institutions and community colleges, a manager of community organisations, and a writer of commentary on management and employment law. He lives in Sydney, but he has also lived in far northern New South Wales, where he wrote two books on local history. He holds a Diploma of Family History from the University of Tasmania.



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3 Marriage certificate of Gordon Fink and Alice Maud Mackie, married 8 July 1909 at North Sydney, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, New South Wales, 9086/1909.

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9 "Death divides comrades", *Weekly Times*, 10 July 1915.

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13 Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli* (Macmillan, Sydney, 2001), 87; Beaumont, *Broken Nation*, quote from Tim Travers, 66–67.

14 Hugh Thomas, *An Unfinished History of the World* (Macmillan, Sydney, 3rd edition, 1995), 644.

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17 "Bringing up ammunition", *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 17 July 1915, 8. Retrieved August 15, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article132701591>

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22 16th Infantry Battalion war diary.

23 Ellis Silas, Biography, Anzac Portal.

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27 Gordon Fink, Service record.

28 Gordon Fink, Service record: letter sent from Base Records to Theodore Fink in response to a letter from him, informing Fink of enquiries being

made in Egypt, but confirming Gordon has been reported as "killed in action" on 2 May.

29 Gordon Fink, Service record, letter from Theodore Fink to Base Records.

30 Gordon Fink, Stories from the Memorial Board, A Supreme Court of Victoria and Legal Profession First World War Commemoration. PDF retrieved 28 March 2016.

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34 Gallipoli diary and sketches by Signaller Ellis Silas. An expedition in January 1919 found numerous relics of the 16th Battalion's battles—human bones, tattered pieces of uniform, the Rising Sun badge. Relics of the 16th Battalion at the Bloody Angle, Gallipoli, 1919: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/relics-of-the-16th-battalion-at-the-bloody-angle-gallipoli-1919>

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36 *The Art of War*, Chapter 11, v. 24.

37 Description of 16th Battalion, Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51456> Retrieved 14 August 2022; Frank Welsh, *Great Southern Land* (Penguin, London, 2004), 368.

38 "Endowment of cot", *Argus* (Melbourne), 8 May 1916, 8. Retrieved 16 August 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2110560>

39 Gordon Fink, Service record.

40 Gordon Fink, Service record; Memorial for Private Gordon Fink, Lone Pine, Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

41 Marriage certificate of David Thomas McLoughlin and Alice Fink, married at Randwick on 25 August 1916, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, New South Wales, 10332/1916.

IDENTIFYING ALBERT JOHN WATMAN

by Ian Torrance

The premise for this article came from one question: When was Albert John Watman born and who are his parents and relatives?

According to Poole/Watman relatives of Albert John Watman, he grew up in Sydney as an orphan with foster parents, not knowing the name of his parents or when he was born. Albert worked as a night cartman (Dunny Man) in the Singleton area of NSW, riding his horse, pulling a dray/cart loaded with 'dunny cans', both empty and full of human excreta, in the days before the sewerage was connected to homes.

In September 2020, Cassie Ward, the great-granddaughter of Albert John Watman, first made contact with me via Ancestry. In later emails, Cassie sowed the seed that Albert John Watman and Albert Watman, a six-and-a-half-year-old child admitted to the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children, were very likely the same person.

Cassie had discovered an article reporting an event which occurred on Monday 20 May 1901. The story appeared in various forms in other newspapers:

RUN OVER BY A CART

Albert Watman (21), living at Blackwattle Point, was sitting on a cartload of bricks proceeding along Denison-street, Balmain, yesterday, when the horse slipped, causing him to fall into the roadway. One of the wheels passed over his body, and it was found necessary to take him to Balmain Hospital for treatment. He was admitted to the institution by Dr. Gordon Davidson, who pronounced him to be suffering from severe internal injuries.¹

In late October 2022, I contacted Robyn Bray regarding her use of the date of birth 1 October 1881 for Albert John Watman, which other researchers had also recorded against his name, as my efforts to identify an Albert John WATMAN being born on that day or year had failed. Robyn telephoned and informed me family members had told her "Albert only knew he was born on the first day of the month, he didn't know what year, and he chose 1 October as his birthday."

Albert Ernest Wattman was born at Mudgee, NSW on Thursday, 1 August 1878.² His father is recorded as James William Wattman, an alias of Thomas Wattman, aged 30 years, and his mother Mary Keech was 21 years of age. Both of his parents were born in England, and they were married at Cobbora, NSW on 11 July 1877,³ not 7 July 1877 as appears on Albert's birth registration.

His sister Menetta [sic] Rose Wattman was born at Mudgee, NSW, on Saturday, 10 April 1880.⁴ At some point after her birth, the family moved to Sydney as they were living in Goulburn Street, Sydney when she died from 'exhaustion incident upon Diarrhoea' on Friday, 15 April 1881.⁵

A brother, William Henry Wattman was born at Little Riley Street, Surry Hills on Tuesday, 18 October 1881.⁶ Unfortunately, Thomas Wattman died at Forbes Hospital, NSW on Friday, 19 May 1882, from peritonitis of 40 days duration.⁷

Inquiries with the Benevolent Society (NSW) during November 2023 revealed that on Tuesday, 16 December

1884, six-year-old Albert Ernest Watman was admitted into the Sydney Benevolent Asylum. Apart from the dates of admission and discharge, the only other information available was that Albert was of the Church of England faith. Albert Watman was discharged from the Sydney Benevolent Asylum on Saturday, 24 January 1885 to the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children.

The Randwick Asylum records reveal that Albert was admitted to the asylum because: "Father dead Mother unable to support." He was discharged from the asylum nearly four months later to the "Boarding out Officer."⁸

The State Children Relief Dept (1881-1923) was the forerunner to the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and was established following the passage of the State Children Relief Act of 1881 which provided for the appointment of one or more Boarding-out Officers.⁹ The duties of these officers were:

- when directed by The State Children's Relief Board, "to remove any State child from an Asylum and cause him to be boarded-out" until the child reached the age of twelve; and
- when directed by the Colonial Secretary, "to remove any child from any Reformatory School and cause him to be boarded-out."

ASYLUM FOR DESTITUTE CHILDREN.									
ADMISSION.					DEPARTURES.				
No.	Name	Date	Age	Religion	No.	Date	Age	Religion	GENERAL REMARKS.
508	Albert Watman	12 May 1885	6	Angl	12	24 Jan 1885	7	Angl	Discharged to Boarding out Officer.

Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children, entry for admission and discharge.¹⁰

In accordance with the law at the time, it can be safely reasoned that Albert Watman was taken to Ormond House, in the care of the Boarding Out Officer, on 12 May 1885.

Ormond House (1884–1923) was first established as a depot in 1884 and was called Central Home. Children were taken there when they were removed from the Roman Catholic and Protestant Orphanages, the Benevolent Asylum or the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. From Ormond House they were issued with a set of clothing and boarded out (placed with foster guardians).¹¹

Now in foster care by unknown persons, and in keeping with some welfare institutions/families, it is highly probable that Albert was given the Biblical middle name of John by his foster parents.

Online searching of the Dependent Children's Registers 1883–1923, held by Museums of History NSW (MHNSW), for Albert Watman yielded little success. Although the records are well over 100 years old, it is an unfortunate 'merry-go-round' when trying to locate them as inquiries with MHNSW send the inquirer back to DOCS for further information and DOCS in turn refers the inquirer back to MHNSW as the repository of historical records. As frustrating as this

merry-go-round was, everyone I dealt with from either agency was exceptionally helpful.

Searches conducted at my request by:

- MHNSW, for any records pertaining to Albert Watman as a 'Ward of the State', which advised on 1 November 2023, "We only hold the register entry in the Child Care and Protection Index for Albert Watman, unfortunately any further records have not survived";
- Department of Communities and Justice (aka DOCS), informal request for information under section 8 of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act), regarding any information held on Albert Watman, which advised on 22 November 2023:
A search was made of the Department's records management systems to locate any information that falls within the scope of your application. No records were found.
Searches conducted included searching individually by surnames, first name, and date of birth: Albert Watman, Albert Wattman, 1 August 1878, and 1 October 1878.
- The Infants Home (Ashfield) during November and December 2023, regarding Albert Watman, which also proved negative.

Apart from name index references to Albert Watman, all records pertaining to his foster care have been destroyed.

Summary and Conclusion

Albert Ernest Wattman was born 1 August 1878 at Mudgee, NSW. His family moved to Sydney around 1880. On 16 December 1884, Albert Ernest Wattman was placed into care by his mother as his father had died and she was unable to support both him and his younger brother, William Henry Wattman.

Albert Ernest Wattman became known simply as Albert Watman from that date on. No official marriage or death records exist for Albert Ernest Wattman/Watman.

No birth records exist for Albert John Watman born 1 October 1881 and the names of his parents are missing from both his marriage and death records.

Albert John Watman only knew he was born on the first day of the month and he chose the 1 October as his birthday. He grew up in foster care in Sydney, and was a groom by occupation.

The research detailed above proves 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' (criminal standard of proof), that Albert John Watman was born Albert Ernest Wattman on 1 August 1878 at Mudgee, NSW.

Acknowledgements

Without the help of the following people, I would not have been able to put together the 'jigsaw puzzle' of Albert John Watman's early life.

My thanks go to:

Cassie Ward for "thinking outside the square" and her belief, which proved to be correct, that Albert John Watman and the destitute child, Albert Watman, were the same person.

Robyn Bray for the information received from relatives of Albert John Watman, who only knew he was born on the first day of a month. This was the vital information which subsequently linked Albert Ernest and Albert John Watman together.

Inspiration from a similar snippet of information, where a child in England knew the name of his American father and later discovered from his sixth Birthday card from his father, before all communication ceased, that they shared the same day of birth, was the key to subsequently identifying his father and reuniting them. TV series *Long Lost Family*, Series 8, Episode 1.

Giving up the eldest child by a single mother for adoption, because she was unable to financially support all her children, was also not uncommon in years gone by. Many an adopted child had a similar story, as was depicted several times in the TV series *Long Lost Family*.

Heather Garnsey and Martyn Killion, both members of the Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG), who in a private capacity created 'The look-up and retrieval service to researchers for the Sydney Benevolent Asylum Admission & Discharge Registers 1857-1900' (<https://sydneybenevolentasylum.com/index.php?page=about-us>). The indexing of The Sydney Benevolent Asylum Admission and Discharge Registers 1857-1900 linked Albert Ernest Watman to Albert Watman, who was admitted to the Randwick Asylum of Destitute Children.



Ian Torrance has been researching his family history, and that of others, for well over 25 years. His research has included travel throughout NSW, Scotland and England. During COVID he was contacted independently by two young Scottish lasses, who due to the lockdown had decided to research their respective family trees on Ancestry. Both 'claimed' a relationship to him though the Reverend James Wallace, his Great-Great Grandfather. Upon receiving their family details, and after considerable research, he was able to identify each of 'their' James Wallaces and associated family members. In 2024, after peer review by the Australian War Memorial (AWM), his offer of donating his research into his father's RAAF WWII service and that of his friend Robert Minton Baker (KIA), (both were an only child), was accepted, and he subsequently signed over ownership and copyright of his work to the AWM.

1 "Run over by a cart", *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, NSW : 1883-1930), Tuesday 21 May 1901, 7.

2 Birth of Albert Ernest Wattman, New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (16843/1878).

3 Marriage of Thomas Wattman/Mary Keech, NSW Registry BDM (2765/1877).

4 Birth of Menetta Rose Wattman, NSW Registry BDM (18774/1880).

5 Death of Menetta Rose Wattman, NSW Registry BDM (960/1881).

6 Birth of William Henry Wattman, NSW Registry BDM (3376/1881).

7 Death of Thomas Wattman, NSW Registry BDM (8034/1882).

8 'Boarding out' means fostering children in private homes and was and remains the preferred system of care for dependent children. Under the boarding out system, government agencies paid foster parents a fee - the boarding out allowance - which was usually around five shillings a week but could be more for babies or children needing extra support. <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/nsw/NE00966#>:

9 Ancestry.com, New South Wales, Australia, Registers for the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children, 1852-1915, [database-on-line] Museums of History NSW, State Archives Collection

10 State Children Relief Dept, 05-04-1881 to 01-07-2009. <https://researchdata.edu.au/agy-114-state-1992-2009/164374>

11 State Children Relief Dept, 05-04-1881 to 01-07-2009. <https://researchdata.edu.au/agy-114-state-1992-2009/164374>

THE PLYMOUTH EMIGRATION DEPOT

by Dr Liz Rushen



For much of the nineteenth century, Plymouth was one of Britain's great gateways to the world. From 1835 until just before the First World War, hundreds of thousands of emigrants passed through the Plymouth Emigration Depot on their way to Australia. For many, it was the final stop before leaving Britain forever.

A Practical Solution to a Growing Problem

In the 1830s, assisted emigration to Australia was expanding rapidly. Britain's cities were crowded, jobs were scarce, and the colonies were eager for labour. But organising the departure of large numbers of emigrants—many of them young and vulnerable—was complicated.

John Marshall, an energetic and sometimes controversial emigration agent, recognised a serious flaw in the system. Most emigrants boarded ships at Gravesend, east of London. The journey down the English Channel could be painfully slow, often taking up to two weeks as vessels battled contrary winds before rounding the Lizard—the last sight of England.

In May 1835, the *Canton*, which Marshall had chartered to carry 339 passengers to Sydney, endured exactly this ordeal. After 10 days struggling down the Channel and a further nine days sheltering in Tor Bay, the ship finally reached Plymouth. It was here that Marshall saw the clear advantages of creating a permanent depot on the south coast of England so people were spared the exhausting voyage down the Channel.

Why Plymouth?

Plymouth was no stranger to migration. In 1620, the *Mayflower* had sailed from Plymouth Sound, carrying the Pilgrim Fathers to America. Two centuries later, a new migration was underway—this time to Australia.

By the mid-1830s, the Navy had vacated its old Victualling Yard at Baltic Wharf, relocating to the larger Royal William Victualling Yard. The empty waterfront buildings presented an opportunity. Marshall secured a lease and set about converting the former government premises into accommodation for emigrants.

The location was ideal. Beneath the Royal Citadel and close to the water, it was considered healthy and well supplied with fresh water—an important detail for long sea voyages. Marshall paid for renovations himself, creating space for up to 600 emigrants at a time.

The depot was organised with surprising care. There was a communal dining hall, washing facilities and separate dormitories for married couples, single men and single women. A resident manager, William Seward, oversaw daily operations, assisted by his wife Mary as matron.

This was not simply a waiting room for departure. It was a controlled environment designed to maintain order, health and respectability before embarkation. A writer at the time reported that the food at the depot was plentiful and good, the bedding was clean and adequate, and clear rules were in place to maintain cleanliness and order.

The impact on Plymouth was significant. Local traders supplied food and equipment. Outfitting shops did brisk business. The town became the principal port for ships sailing to Australia.

A Hub of Government Emigration

In 1842, the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners (CLEC) began sending government-assisted emigrants to the depot. They preferred Marshall's supervised establishment to housing emigrants in public inns. The numbers were striking. In 1847, 26 ships departed from Plymouth. In 1848, there were 89. By 1849, 130 emigrant ships carried more than 15,000 passengers—most of them bound for Australia.

Plymouth was also well placed to receive emigrants from Ireland. Steamers arrived from Dublin and Cork, bringing people who were often fleeing poverty and, later, catastrophe.

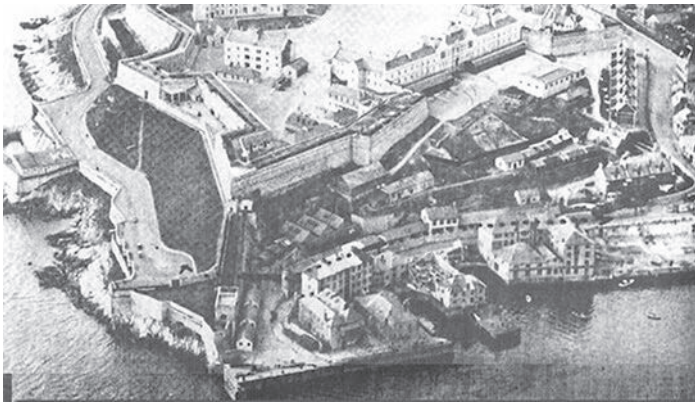
The Irish Famine Arrivals

Between 1847 and 1853, nearly £11,000 was spent transporting Irish emigrants across the Irish Sea to Plymouth. Many were escaping the Great Famine—An Gorta Mór, the Great Hunger.

Conditions aboard the steamers were frequently grim. When the Irish emigrants arrived in Plymouth, they were often exhausted, underfed and unwell. The depot provided food, shelter and medical inspection before they embarked on the much longer voyage to Australia.

Emigrants from the south-west of England usually made their own way to Plymouth, sometimes walking long distances. At the

Above: C John Wilson Carmichael, *Citadel, Plymouth, The Box, Plymouth*. Marshall's Plymouth Emigration Depot is just visible to the left of the ship. Source: *The Box, Plymouth*, <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/citadel-plymouth-147532>



depot, each person was issued with a sturdy canvas bag and basic utensils—a plate, bowl, cup and cutlery—small items that would serve them during the long weeks at sea.

Fighting Disease

Disease was a constant threat in nineteenth century migration. Cholera outbreaks caused widespread fear, and typhus had ravaged emigrant ships crossing the Atlantic.

At Plymouth, strict hygiene rules were enforced. Lieutenant Timothy Carew RN, the government emigration officer, supervised medical inspections. New arrivals were required to wash thoroughly. Clothes were cleaned and dried, and items infested with lice or fleas were baked in ovens to disinfect them.

In 1852, Carew reported that only 25 deaths had occurred at the depot during his five years in office—remarkably low given the numbers who passed through. For many emigrants, the depot may have been one of the safest and healthiest environments they experienced before departure.

Expansion—and Trouble

By the early 1850s, the depot was licensed to accommodate 650 people. It provided three regulated meals a day, segregated sleeping quarters, washing facilities and a sick bay. Officials praised its management. But Marshall had overreached. In 1851, he opened another depot in Liverpool, managed by his son. The following year, the Passenger Act 1852 led to the establishment of a government depot at Birkenhead, undercutting his Liverpool operation. Financial pressure mounted. By December 1856, Marshall faced bankruptcy.

To safeguard the Plymouth depot during his financial crisis, Marshall handed

temporary control to his clerk, Arthur Hill. Hill paid £212 for fixtures and a small lease fee, promising he would return the depot once Marshall's finances recovered. Trusting him, Marshall arranged for Hill to be officially recognised as the operator and wrote to Thomas Gill

MP, the site's owner, asking him to treat Hill as the tenant.

Soon after taking over, Hill benefited from an unexpected stroke of luck. A distressed emigrant ship put into Plymouth. By housing and feeding its passengers, Hill received nearly £700 from the government—more than three times his annual salary.

When Marshall cleared his bankruptcy in 1857, he attempted to reclaim the depot. Instead, he discovered that Hill had secured an extended lease directly from Gill and had no intention of giving it back. Marshall appealed to honour and fairness, but because there was no clear written agreement about when control would be returned or under what terms, Hill held the stronger position—and he knew it. Hill revealed that he had arranged to extend the lease directly with Thomas Gill. It quickly became clear to Marshall that Hill had no intention of giving the depot back.

The Bankruptcy Commissioners, who had closely examined Marshall's business affairs, described him as an honourable man. Unfortunately for Marshall, he had trusted the wrong person. In the end, Hill kept control of the depot.

However, Hill did not manage it as well as Marshall had. Under Marshall, the depot had focused on the welfare and comfort of emigrants. Under Hill, profit became the priority.

Decline and Closure

In 1859, the *Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal* reported deteriorating hygiene and harsh conditions. After further criticism, the depot was temporarily closed while buildings were cleaned, whitewashed and improved. Hill continued to expand the depot, eventually increasing capacity to over 1,000 emigrants. In 1883, it was suspected of

being linked to a typhus outbreak aboard the ship *Oxford*.

By 1890, however, emigration numbers had fallen, and the depot closed. The buildings were later converted into a Government Torpedo Depot before being demolished in 1934. Baltic Wharf itself suffered heavy damage during the Second World War.

Today, little remains of the site.

A Lost Landmark

For more than half a century, the Plymouth Emigration Depot was a place of hope, anxiety and transformation. Within its walls, emigrants waited, prepared and contemplated the life they were leaving behind.

John Marshall once described it as his 'large and excellent business', one he had created and managed for 20 years. In the end, he lost it. But the depot's legacy endures—in the lives built overseas by those who passed through its doors. For thousands of families in Australia and beyond, the journey began at Plymouth.

For further information on the Plymouth Emigration Depot and John Marshall's emigration work, see Liz's book, *John Marshall: Shipowner, Lloyd's reformer and emigration agent*, available from: <https://www.rushen.com.au/>



Liz Rushen has researched and written extensively on the experiences of nineteenth century migrants, and women in colonial Australia. Her other books include *Single & Free: female migration to Australia 1833-1837* and *Colonial Duchesses: The migration of Irish women to NSW before the Great Famine*.

Top: Plymouth Emigration Depot, Western Daily Mercury, 13 December 1875.

Right: Remnant of Plymouth Emigration Depot, Liz Rushen, 2014.



DIGITISED RECORDS: NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE!

We have recently uploaded several newly digitised records to our online catalogue.

NRS-5328 Ship's papers

These include digitised PDF files from the series NRS-5328 Ships' papers, 1839-1891 added to the State Archives catalogue. The series includes files of papers grouped into 86 voyages of assisted immigrant ships arriving in Sydney.

The files typically include such items as certificates of arrival, health reports, tenders, lists of immigrants leaving the ship without formal engagements, and copies of contracts between immigrants and employers.

A number of uncommon documents are included in some files, such as matrons' diaries; schoolmasters' reports which detail students' (both children and some adults) attendance and academic progress during the voyage; inventories of medicinal, food, utensils, bedding, and other provisions; as well as letters of thanks to matrons and crew from immigrants.

While individual documents naming immigrants and employers have been indexed on Ancestry.com, viewing an entire ship's file provides context and insight into the experiences of both the immigrants, and the NSW residents applying to employ them.

Search for a ship's name, or browse the files at your leisure: <https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/primo-explore/search?vid=61SRA&query=lsr01,exact,NRS-5328>



NRS-4481-3-[7/16134]-St35089



The Ned Kelly Papers

On 26 October 1878, the Kelly Gang (Joseph Byrne, Stephen Hart, and brothers Daniel and Edward 'Ned' Kelly) were declared outlaws after they shot and killed three policemen in Stringybark Creek, Victoria. An almost two-year-long manhunt followed, with the colonies of NSW and Victoria uniting to offer a £4000 reward for the capture of the Kelly Gang - dead or alive. The Kelly Gang successfully evaded the police until a shootout at Glenrowan Inn,

Victoria, resulted in Ned's capture and the death of his three gang members.

Two special bundles documenting the capture on Ned Kelly and his gang have now been digitised and made available online.

Search the files:
<https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/>

Judge Advocate's Bench proceedings, 1788-1821

The proceedings of the Judge Advocate's Bench have been digitised and are available to view via the State Archives catalogue.

The original NSW courts were created under the authority of a Royal Commission and Royal Letters Patent given to Governor Phillip. These were the Criminal Court, Civil Court, Court of Appeal, and Magistrate's Court, which dealt with minor criminal offences, and civil cases where the amount involved did not exceed £10.

The proceedings are also indexed in the Bench of Magistrates Index 1788-1820 for criminal and civil cases heard between 19 February 1788 and 25 November 1820.

Browse the files: https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/primo-explore/search?query=any,contains,NRS-3397&tab=default_tab&search_scope=Everything&vid=61SRA&lang=en_US&offset=0

Search the index: <https://mhns.w.au/indexes/courts-lower/bench-of-magistrates-index/>

SAVE THE DATE: SEARCHING EARLY COLONIAL RECORDS 1788-1856 SEMINAR

29 May 2026,
Western Sydney Records Centre

We will be hosting a one-day history seminar at the Western Sydney Records Centre titled: Searching Early Colonial Records 1788-1856.

The day will feature talks and case studies from noted historians on topics including female convicts, land records, shipping, and the records of the Colonial Secretary.

This is an event you will not want to miss!

Keep an eye out on our website for more information:
<https://mhns.w.au/whats-on/>



NRS-4481-3-[7/16083]-St25396

2026 STATE ARCHIVES WEBINAR PROGRAM

The 'Old Register': Illuminating Early Colonial NSW

Online, 27 March 2026

Join us for a webinar led by Dr Carol Liston AO, Adjunct Associate Professor in History at Western Sydney University, which will explore the 'Old Register' and what it can tell us about early colonial NSW.

The Registers of Assignments and Other Legal Instruments, otherwise known as the 'Old Register', are an invaluable resource! In the very early years of the colony there was no authorised place to register land transfers and transactions after the initial grant of land. This quickly led to a large number of land disputes. In response, Governor King ordered in 1802 that no assignment would be legal unless it was drawn up and registered at the Judge Advocate's Office, and the first volume of the 'Old Register' was created. These nine volumes contain records of assignments dating from 1794 to 1824. Along with information on land transactions, the volumes also record other domestic legal matters such as affidavits, agreements, appointments of guardians and even marriage agreements and separations.

Register online: <https://mhns.w.au/whats-on/events/the-old-register-illuminating-early-colonial-nsw/>

REBEL HEART: LOVE LETTERS AND OTHER DECLARATIONS

State Library of Victoria, February—end 2026

Rebel Heart: Love letters and other declarations feature original letters from the notorious bushranger Andrew George Scott (otherwise known as 'Captain Moonlite' which provide insight into Scott's friendship and deep affection for fellow gang member James 'Jim' Nesbitt, who is believed by many to have been Scott's lover.

This exhibition is a tribute to defiant expressions of the heart, celebrating true stories of the rebels of romance from the past to the present and a rare opportunity to view original NSW State Archives material in Melbourne!

Find out more: <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/rebel-heart>

TEACHING ENGLISH TO POST-WWII MIGRANTS

In 1947, the Australian Commonwealth Government signed an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation to bring those who had been displaced during WWII from Europe to Australia, many of whom did not speak or write English.

The Commonwealth Education Office originally ran and controlled the teaching of English and 'Australian Culture' in camps in Europe, on board ship to Australia and in the camps on arrival. After settling in the community, the tuition of migrants in English continued through post placement continuation classes, correspondence courses and radio lessons. Although various State Government Education Departments

cooperated with the Commonwealth Government in these endeavours, it wasn't until 1951 that the NSW Migrant Education Service was established.

The NSW Migrant Education Service took over the practical side of running classes in reception and holding centres, the continuation classes in schools, hostels, clubs and factories by providing teachers and school classrooms. By 1955 there were 4,300 people enrolled in the program.

Read more online:
<https://mhns.w.au/guides/teaching-english-post-wwii-migrants/>

More upcoming webinars:

24 April: The Reinterment of Devonshire Street Cemetery

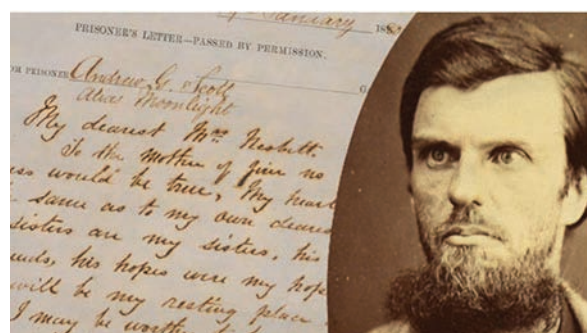
15 May: On the Bench: Records of the Lower Courts of NSW

9 June: 'Confused heaps' and 'systemic order': Keeping records in 19th century NSW

26 June: Designing Your Local: Hotel Plans in the NSW State Archives Collection

Learn more:

<https://mhns.w.au/whats-on/?tag=Webinar>



NRS-906-1-[4/825]-4/825.2
NRS-2138 [3/6043] No. 2170 p.132

NAME	NATIONALITY	Date of Admission to each Grade						Date of leaving School	Occupation entered upon (if any)
		First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth		
Hut 27	Latvian							2.12.47	Sydney
Hut 27	Ukrainian							13.1.48	To Parkes
Hut 33	Ukrainian							13.1.48	To Parkes
Hut 33	Ukrainian							13.1.48	Sydney
G. 142	Latvian							26.1.48	To Greta
G. 142	Hungarian							26.1.48	Double entry of 142
G. Hut 28	Hungarian							1.1.48	Sydney
G. Hut 26	Yugoslavian							13.1.48	To Greta

NRS-3931 [1/9681]
Admission Register—Parkes Migrant School

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE TO COLLECTION ENEWS

Join our mailing list here to be the first to find out about our latest news, exhibitions, events and special offers:

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

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.

MHNSW

Collections eNews

History.
Not as you
know it.

The latest events and information about Museums of History NSW collections, incorporating State Archives, Museums and the Caroline Simpson Library.

OUR SAG COMMUNITY

BY DANIELLE TEBB

We congratulate the following members of the Society who successfully completed the Diploma of Family Historical Studies in 2025:

Judith Charlton, VIC:

What is in a Name? The lives of Marcelle de Lange, her mother Concetta McDonnell and her daughter Theresa Nicachi

Kathleen Hackett, NSW:

City Girls: Two Irish Orphans in Sydney

Amy Mackintosh, VIC:

Nervous History: The family of Christina Wilhelmina Marks (née Schütt)

Louise Millar-Hoffman, VIC:

Incidental Colonials: Explored through the intermarried Morrison and Tool families of colonial New South Wales

Belinda Tiffen, NSW:

Women of substance: Three Generations of the Butterfield-Easterby Family

We congratulate the following members of the Society who successfully completed the Certificate of Genealogical Studies in 2025:

Shannah Bartle, SA

Sharon Bennetts, VIC

Simon Cotterell, NSW

Ian Crambrook, SA

Sharyn Graff, QLD

Kim Gregory, NSW

Peter Homan, NSW

Sharon Leigh-Hazell, NSW

Heather Lemaire, NSW

Selina Lucarini, SA

Allyson Luders, ACT

Anne O'Leary, NSW

Edward Raymond Randall, NSW

Michael Damien Rathborne, VIC

Danielle Robinson, SA

Melissa Scott, SA

Lynette Joy Smith, VIC

Nancy Rosana Szmandiuk, NSW

Carol Turner, VIC

Arlene White, QLD

Kristin Wilson, NSW

If you would like to enrol in our August 2026 or February 2027 intake for the Certificate of Genealogical Research, or want to find out more about our other online and in-person courses, visit:

www.sag.org.au/StudyOnlineWithUs

The Board is grateful to everyone who has assisted the Society in a voluntary capacity during 2025, either in the Library, on committees, with indexing, specialised advice, data entry or miscellaneous projects. Both Board and staff offer an additional thank you for the patience of the volunteers who normally work out of Richmond Villa.

This list does not include Directors or other honorary office bearers whose names already appear in the journal, unless they carry out additional volunteer work. Members who have assisted in more than one area are listed under their primary area of volunteering.

Library

Roger Benson
Geoff Bovard
Judy Day
Vicki Eldridge
Janet Howe
Tony Jackson
Doug Jenkins
Jackie Kelly
Colin Kilduff
Judy Meyer
David Morris
Robert Nash
Margaret Neyle
Robyn O'Keeffe
Sharon Reece
Cathey Shepherd
Hilary Walker
Ken Webber

MIDAS & Archives

MaryEd Hartnell
Christine Marcroft
Jill Roberts
Ann Rowntree
Norma Smith
Judith White
Alison Wilson
Alison Wolf

Education Leads & Helpers

Thistle Anderson
Jill Ball
Kathryn Barrett
Leisa Byrne
Gail Bryant
Sally Byant
Elizabeth Capelin
Patrice Connolly

Fleur Creed
Larry & Colleen Czarnik
Dale Fogarty
Michelle Goldsmith
Kathleen Hackett
Vicki Hails
John Heath
Lyn Hudson-Williamson
Melissa Hulbert
Suzanne Hyde
Alan St John Jones
Danielle Lautrec
Lorraine Luks
Jeff Madsen
Lilian Magill
Kristine Newton
Michelle Patient
Diana Pecar
Sandy Pullen
Linda Radulovitch

Andrew Redfern
Sharon Shelley
Helene Shepherd
Sally Skulte
Dianne Snowden
Marianne Spencer Young
Maureen Trotter
Annesley Watson
Sharon Lee-ann Watson
Pauline Weeks
Veronica Williams
Christine Woodlands

Committees: Certificate and Diploma, Descent, Croker and others

Lorraine Brothers
Christine Cavanagh
Louise Coakley

Michael Considine
Rachel Croucher
Sandra Dexter
Nyree Dietrich
Maxine Elder
Jennie Fairs
Kerry Farmer
Heather Garnsey
Tracey Grady
Chris Hingerty
Chris Kavanagh
Lesley Kuhn
Daryl Low Choy
Yvonne Masters
Janette Pelosi
Greg Ross
Christine Sanderson
Charlotte Schaefer
Philippa Shelley Jones

Deaths

The following deaths of members and former members were notified to the Society between November 2025 and January 2026.

We extend our sympathies to the family and friends of them all.

Photo: Chris Lawson, Unsplash

Beverley (Bev) Ann Barnett

North Epping
21 November 2025

Diane Flynn

Cromer
5 October 2025

Shirley Frappell

Cobram, Vic
19 November 2025

Victoria Mail

Abbotsford
8 December 2025

G. Rex Meyer

Pennant Hills
21 December 2025

Noela Muriel Schaeper

Hurstville
26 July 2025

Maureen Sharpe

Glebe
27 October 2025

Alan George Stewart

Wamberal
18 October 2023

Judith Waterer

Fairlight
4 January 2026

by Heather Garnsey

I first became fascinated with Elizabeth Fulloon when I was 11 years old. Who wouldn't be intrigued by stories of an ancestor losing the family jewels in a gunpowder factory explosion and then being tragically widowed while emigrating to NSW? Apparently the Governor took pity, and made her Superintendent of the Parramatta Female Factory so she could support her fatherless children. Then tragedy struck again when her second husband was found drowned in the Parramatta River. But at least she found happiness a third time when she married a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. And despite all that adversity, one of her sons even married a Māori princess!

I can't have reached 12 by the time I realised most of the above wasn't completely true, but it took another 40 years to uncover Elizabeth's real story. Research took me back to her Huguenot origins where I found her family—the Azires—were indeed involved in gunpowder manufacturing in Kent, but that was 100 years before Elizabeth was born. At 21 she married a London schoolteacher, John Fulloon, and over the next 15 years gave birth to seven children. Somehow—and we still don't know how—in 1823 she came to the attention of Robert Peel, the Home Secretary, when he was asked by Lord Bathurst to find a woman to take over running the Parramatta Female Factory on the other side of the world. Peel described Elizabeth as "particularly well qualified" even though she didn't have experience running either a gaol nor a factory, both prerequisites for the role.

She accepted the position and embarked in November 1823 on the convict ship *Brothers* with her by now intemperate husband and five surviving children. John clashed badly with other passengers before dying at sea, while one of the daughters wailed incessantly in her cabin at being forced to leave behind her London sweetheart. What jolly shipboard companions the Fulloons must have been for those five long months.

Elizabeth's years at the Female Factory were difficult. Inmate numbers steadily increased and the work was relentless. She organised convict assignments, provided asylum for pregnant women and those with young children, oversaw a hospital and managed a penitentiary containing some of the colony's worst female prisoners. She had to see they were all fed, clothed and housed, as well as ensuring they earned their keep through spinning and needlework. She did all this with only begrudging support from the man she replaced as Superintendent, William Tuckwell, and ex-convict William Smith, the Master Manufacturer.

By December 1826 she had found a second husband, Robert Raine. Convinced of future security at the age of 46 she announced her intention to retire from the Factory, but the authorities did not let her leave until October 1827. Just as she was handing over to her replacement, Ann Gordon, the inmates rioted in protest at their rations being cut, breaking out of the Factory and swarming into Parramatta. The press unfairly implied Elizabeth was to blame for the unrest, but official records show her Board of Management, with the approval of the Governor, were behind the reduction in rations. Elizabeth was simply carrying out orders.

The stories I read as a child glossed over these Factory years, instead highlighting her later time running a girls' school in O'Connell Street, Sydney with her daughters. They record Raine's drowning in 1828 but fail to mention that he had allegedly been murdered. Or that he and Elizabeth had been living apart and she had taken him to court for assault. The March 1832 newspaper announcement of her third marriage to the widowed Lieutenant Colonel William John Speed was certainly mentioned and you might readily conclude that she finally found marital happiness in her 50s. Except there was another newspaper notice announcing their separation five months later. It didn't take long to uncover Speed's former life as a convict transported

for bigamy in 1809, or his three previous marriages. That was certainly left out of the family stories. He died penniless in the Sydney Benevolent Asylum four years before Elizabeth died, after which her children quarrelled over the few assets she left behind. The three daughters married and both sons settled in New Zealand (hence the Māori princess story).

Unravelling was an obvious title for her biography, given the need to untangle so many family myths in order to tell her full story, especially her time running the Female Factory. How many other families left a settled existence in London so the wife could become the main breadwinner in NSW? Elizabeth may have resented the increasing bureaucracy she faced at the Factory but it generated a fabulous array of letters, circulars and reports which today are largely preserved in the Colonial Secretary's Papers at State Archives. They give us an insight into the daily operation of this important colonial institution, but as importantly they also capture the experiences of many of the women—both convict and free—who went through the Factory.

I don't remember if young Heather ever thought Elizabeth's story was worthy of a book. But five decades later I had little doubt her real life story deserved to be told and *Unravelling* is the result.

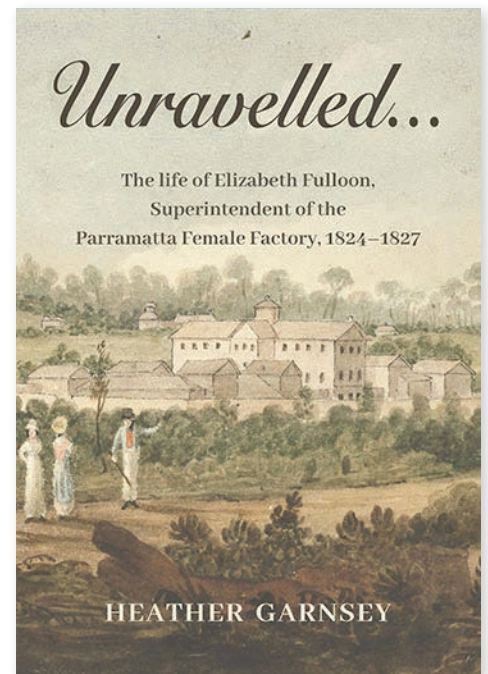
Heather retired from her role as Executive Officer at the SAG in February 2020 after 35 years, grateful for having the time to finally devote to researching and writing Elizabeth Fulloon's biography. Heather is an Honorary Member and Fellow, was joint recipient of the AFFHO Award for Meritorious Service to Family History in 2015, and was awarded an OAM for her service to family history in 2024.

Unravelling ... The life of Elizabeth Fulloon, Superintendent of the Parramatta Female Factory, 1824–1827

Published by IngramSpark 2025, 344 pages, colour illustrations, indexed, with extensive bibliography and references.
ISBN 978-1-7643365-0-5 SAG ref: 46/FUL/3.

The SAG bookshop 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>

Heather will be talking about *Unravelling* at our online SAG Book Club/Meet the Author meeting on Wednesday 13 May from 7.30pm AEST.
Free for SAG members.
Register at: <https://www.sag.org.au/event-6562535>



The Fight Continues For Recognition of the Parramatta Female Factory

On 22 February 2026, the Parramatta Female Factory Friends (Friends) released a media statement expressing deep disappointment at the outcome of the UNESCO World Heritage nomination process for the Parramatta Female Factory and Institutions Precinct (PFFIP), located at 1–5 Fleet Street, North Parramatta.

For genealogists, social historians and descendants of convict women, this is more than a bureaucratic setback. It represents a missed opportunity to secure international recognition for one of the most significant sites in Australia's history of women's forced migration, institutionalisation, labour, punishment and survival.

A site of national and international significance

The Parramatta Female Factory operated from 1821 and was the primary site to which convict women were sent on arrival in New South Wales. It functioned variously as a place of assignment, punishment, labour and maternity care. Over time, the broader precinct evolved into a complex institutional landscape that included child removal, orphan schools, asylums and state care facilities.

The site retains substantial and highly significant heritage fabric. Surviving elements include:

- Convict-era buildings
- The 3rd Class Sleeping Quarters and Penitentiary (c.1823)
- Sandstone perimeter walls (1818–1838)
- Legible convict yards
- The nearby Roman Catholic Orphan School (c.1840)

Despite modifications over two centuries, the precinct remains one of the most tangible and evocative landscapes of women's incarceration and institutional control in Australia.

Concerns were reportedly raised during UNESCO's assessment regarding whether the site met the threshold of "Outstanding Universal Value," particularly given changes to the built fabric over time. However, the Friends and many supporters argue that the layered history of the site: convict women, child removal, institutional labour, punishment, maternity and survival, is precisely what makes it internationally significant.

For family historians, this layered narrative resonates deeply. Many researchers have ancestors who passed through the Parramatta Female Factory, as convicts,

as children separated from mothers, or as later institutional inmates. The site is not an abstract monument; it is a lived archive.

A missed opportunity in the world heritage context

The precinct is already protected under the Heritage Act 1977 (NSW) and listed on the National Heritage List under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth). Yet, as the Friends point out, these protections do not guarantee unified governance, adequate funding or immunity from development pressure.

There is also a broader national context. Australia's existing Australian Convict Sites World Heritage listing includes eleven sites across several states, recognising the global significance of Britain's convict transportation system. However, the Parramatta Female Factory, arguably a key site for understanding the female convict experience, is not included in that listing.

The Friends have called for consideration of a serial extension approach to the existing Australian Convict Sites World Heritage property, where supported by evidence and government commitment. Such an approach would align the Parramatta Female Factory more directly with the broader narrative of transportation and penal reform.

Governance, Funding and Custodianship

The media statement highlights ongoing concerns about fragmented governance and under-resourcing. The precinct encompasses multiple land parcels and administrative responsibilities, which can result in piecemeal planning and erosion of heritage values.

The Friends have called on the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to:

1. Reinvigorate the World Heritage pathway.
2. Establish a single, transparent governance model for the entire precinct.
3. Provide dedicated multi-year funding for conservation, research access, interpretation and education infrastructure.
4. Fund a permanent, immersive museum and interpretation program on site.
5. Commit to World Heritage-grade heritage impact standards and genuine community consultation for any rezoning or development proposals.



Photo: Gus Pelosi, 2023

Of particular importance to researchers is the call for enhanced research access and high-quality interpretation. The Parramatta Female Factory is not simply a heritage asset; it is a site of ongoing historical inquiry and descendant engagement.

Why this matters to family historians

For members of the genealogical community, the Parramatta Female Factory is foundational. It sits at the intersection of transportation, gender, labour history, institutional records, and the lived experiences of women who shaped colonial Australia under conditions of constraint and resilience.

Many descendants first encounter their female convict ancestors in assignment registers, punishment records or musters, often terse, administrative notations. Standing within the surviving yards and quarters of the Parramatta Female Factory transforms those entries into lived reality.

Recognition at the highest international level would not merely confer prestige. It would affirm that the stories of convict women, institutionalised children and marginalised families are central to Australia's identity and of global historical significance.

Looking Forward

Despite the setback, the Friends made clear they are "determined to continue the fight for recognition." The committee and membership remain committed to advocating for renewed pathways to international recognition and stronger custodial and funding commitments.

For the genealogical community, this is a moment to remain engaged. Advocacy for sites such as the Parramatta Female Factory is not separate from research; it is part of preserving the physical contexts that give meaning to our archival discoveries.

As researchers, descendants and custodians of family stories, we understand that heritage is not static. It requires stewardship, interpretation and, at times, determined advocacy.

The outcome of this nomination process may be disappointing. But the history embedded in the sandstone walls endures, and so too does the resolve of those who seek to ensure it is recognised, protected and honoured.

EDUCATION@SAG

BY VANESSA CASSIN
EDUCATION MANAGER

This may be the first education column in *Descent* for 2026, however, by the time you're reading this our education and events program has been in full swing for almost three months and what a three months it has been!

At the end of November 2025, the SAG held a very well attended online launch for our 2026 program. Even through the computer screen, the sense of enthusiasm for our ambitious schedule of courses and events was palpable. I am pleased to report that some of the new or adapted initiatives have already been successfully implemented.

The revised Genealogy Research Methods course presented by Danielle Lautrec attracted a large number of registrations and attendees are already well into their exploration of techniques to improve their research methodologies.

Our new Making the Most of Ancestry Level 1 course presented by Director Andrew Redfern and staff member Gemma Beswick sold out quickly and the first cohort has completed the three sessions. The positive comments about things people had learned they could do on the platform after just one session were a wonderful reminder that we are often only using a fraction of the tool that sites such as Ancestry.com provide. As there is a substantial waiting list for this program, we are already looking at further dates for future cohorts.

One of our newer education volunteers, Jane Hutcheon, has also returned in 2026 with a new program—SAG Life Story Essentials. This program draws on Jane's extensive experience as a journalist to help participants capture, shape, and share the life stories that matter most—whether they are their own, or the stories of loved ones. In this program Jane focuses on helping attendees build their confidence in capturing these stories using easy oral history techniques. You can read more about the program in the article Jane has kindly provided on pages 34-35.

Another one of our valued volunteers, Yvonne Masters, proposed, developed and delivered two fantastic new additions to our long-standing Certificate and Diploma program. The short bootcamp style programs (Study Ready and Diploma Ready) were designed to assist prospective students to brush up on skills they may not have used since their school or university days, allowing them to confidently tackle the assessments/tasks that make up the Certificate and Diploma program. The positive feedback from both these programs has also been a wonderful endorsement of Yvonne's proposal to develop them for the SAG. At this stage we hope to repeat both boot camps in the second half of 2026.

Two brilliant collaborative programs commenced in 2026.

Firstly, our writing masterclass program facilitated by Dr Betty O'Neill and Louise Miller-Hoffmann is well underway with a small group of writers working hard across the year to craft stories to be published by SAG in an anthology. The theme for the stories is **Twists In the Tree: Exploring the Revealed, the Resilient and the Radicals**

Our second, highly successful, collaboration was with Family History Academy, a Queensland based genealogical education business owned by SAG member Cathie Sherwood. Our inaugural Past in Practice Intensive was held at the NSW State Archives (part of the Museums of History NSW organisation). This program brought together over 30 professional genealogists, those working in associated industries, and experienced family historians for three days of lectures and hands-on research at the NSW State Archives facility in Kingswood. We were delighted to welcome attendees from almost every State and Territory in Australia, plus one attendee from New Zealand. The buzz in the room throughout the program was so exciting and many attendees made important discoveries using the original records held onsite.

Many of the programs that have already been completed this year will be run again in 2027. We still have lots of new and well-loved events, such as our large variety of special interest groups, running each week.

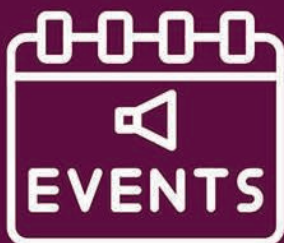
While this column has focussed on highlighting the Societies exciting start to 2026, as always, remember to keep checking our website at www.sag.org.au/events regularly for new events as we are always on the lookout for new topics and speakers to help our members progress their research.

I would like to acknowledge all the people and organisations who have presented at an event between November 2025 and January 2026, the vast majority on a voluntary basis. Those assisting since the end of January 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 (on page 33) are purely accidental.

Last word

A special mention to volunteers Shannah Bartle, Christine Hingerty and Barbara McAlary who have been busy behind the scenes recording content for our new *DNA Basics* series that will be part of SAG's soon-to-be-released *SAG On Demand* video library.

Free SAG Events



SAG offers a range of free events for members. Our 'Friday Hangouts' remain a popular fixture, and on the last Monday of each month we present 'Let's Talk About...' featuring a panel of speakers discussing a specific topic. Additionally, we run a variety of 'Meet the Author' and 'Book Club' sessions throughout the year.

Event	Names
Presenters: <i>Webinars, Book Club, Let's Talk About ..., Knowledge Night</i>	Kathryn Barrett, Judith Charlton, Patrice Connelly, Andy Gibson—Suffolk Family History Society, Robyn Gibson—Tasmanian Family History Society, Vicki Hails, Julie Hind, Sarah Hewitt—NZ Society of Genealogists, Peter Homan, Melissa Hulbert, Jane Hutcheon, Danielle Lautrec, Rachel Watson, Veronica Williams, Christine Woodlands.
Presenters and Assistants: <i>Courses</i>	Judith Charlton, Jennie Fairs, John Heath, Jane Hutcheon, Danielle Lautrec, Yvonne Masters, Louise Miller-Hoffmann, Dr Betty O'Neill, Andrew Redfern, Donna Ruthford.
Conferences	Tonia Barton—Investigative Genetic Genealogist, Hinting for Truth, Jennifer Bates—Koorie Family History Service, Simon Bligh—Worthington Clark, Rachel Croucher—Australasian Association of Genealogy & Record Agents (AAGRA), Danielle Lautrec, Dr Hilda Maclean—Local Heritage Specialist Logan City Council, Angela Phippen—2025 State Library of NSW Visiting Fellow, Cassandra Seaborn—NSW Trustee & Guardian, Cathie Sherwood—Family History Academy.
Presenters: <i>Family History Connect</i>	Patrice Connelly, Christine Hingerty
Presenters and Leads: Groups	Gemma Beswick, Dr Karen Brooks, Gail Bryant, Sybil Cameron, Elizabeth Capelin, Judith Charlton, Rachel Croucher, Larry Czarnik, Chris Fleet—Map Curator National Library of Scotland, Elizabeth Gordon, Kathleen Hackett, Lyn Hudson-Williamson, Melissa Hulbert, Suzanne Hyde, Danielle Lautrec, Lorraine Luks, Brian MacLachlan, Bronwyn MacLeod, Deborah Martin, Yvonne Masters, Thomas Nelson—FamilySearch, Kristine Newton, Diana Pecar, Sandy Pullen, Emily Purser, Linda Radulovitch, Andrew Redfern, Michael Rumpff and the Genealogical Society of Victoria International Settlers Group, Sharon Shelley, Helene Shepherd, Sally Skulte, Mark St Leon, Maureen Trotter, Annesley Watson, Sharon Watson, Pauline Weeks, Jo Wenden, Veronica Williams, Christine Woodlands,
DNA One on One Action Planning session volunteers	Judith Charlton, Julie Hind, Christine Hingerty, Melissa Hulbert.

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DNA CORNER

BY CHRISTINE WOODLANDS

Testing a documentary family reconstruction using autosomal DNA: The William Webb Wagg case study

Autosomal DNA is now widely used in family history research, yet its role is often misunderstood. It does not replace documentary research, nor does it usually establish precise parent–child relationships beyond recent generations. Its real strength lies in testing documentary hypotheses — particularly where direct historical records are incomplete, indirect, or geographically fragmented.

Recent developments at AncestryDNA, together with the dramatic growth of its database, have changed the practical landscape of autosomal analysis. Shared-match tools and clustering features now allow researchers to observe genetic groupings across large numbers of testers without always needing detailed chromosome mapping or segment analysis.

These developments have prompted renewed discussion within the genealogical community. Have improved clustering tools reduced the need for chromosome mapping? When does segment analysis materially increase confidence? And at what point does additional analytical depth add little to what is already clear?

This article addresses those questions through a case study: the investigation of William Webb Wagg. It demonstrates a structured approach to using autosomal DNA as an independent test of a family reconstruction derived from historical records. The focus is methodological — examining how patterns observed across multiple descendant lines

can confirm or challenge a proposed documentary framework.

Case study overview

The investigation concerns William Webb Wagg, my second great-grandfather, an English-born man transported to Australia following conviction in the mid-nineteenth century. Extensive documentary research led me to identify him as one of several siblings born to William Wegg and Mary Ann Clark of Norwich, England. This documentary reconstruction formed a carefully developed working hypothesis, grounded in traditional records, which I subsequently tested against DNA evidence. He was the only member of that sibling group transported to Australia; his parents and siblings remained in England or predeceased him. His forced transportation resulted in the absence of any direct Australian records linking him to that parental family.

As a result, the biological connection between William and his proposed siblings had to be assessed indirectly through autosomal DNA shared by their descendants several generations later. Y-DNA testing was explored but did not provide evidence capable of resolving or excluding the proposed relationship, leaving autosomal analysis as the most informative genetic tool available. The question was not whether every expected relationship could be individually demonstrated, but whether the combined documentary and genetic evidence pointed consistently to a single coherent explanation.

A detailed narrative account of the investigation — including documentary extracts and extended shared-match analysis — is available on the author's Webb Wagg family blog. The full investigation, arranged in sequence, can be accessed here:

<https://webbwagg.blogspot.com/p/the-william-webb-wagg-investigation.html>

The specific post detailing the autosomal DNA analysis discussed in this article is available here:

<https://webbwagg.blogspot.com/2026/01/the-william-webb-wagg-investigation-5.html>

Autosomal DNA: Scope and limitations

Autosomal DNA is inherited from all ancestral lines and is generally most informative within approximately four to

eight generations, depending on database size and inheritance patterns. At these distances, individual shared centimorgan (cM) values vary considerably and overlap across several possible relationship categories. A single cM figure, viewed in isolation, cannot establish a specific genealogical relationship.

Interpretation instead depends on recognising recurring patterns of shared DNA across multiple testers — and especially across multiple independent descendant lines. Autosomal evidence is most reliable when used to assess whether observed genetic behaviour aligns with a reconstructed documentary family. While DNA can help generate hypotheses, doing so at this generational depth is more vulnerable to error unless supported by documentary context.

Shared matches as evidence in context

A shared match occurs when two individuals both match the same third tester. On its own, that does not define the relationship. However, when descendants from one documented family repeatedly share matches with descendants from another proposed family, a pattern begins to emerge.

When this pattern is observed across multiple independent lines, it forms what we refer to as shared-match clusters. These clusters matter because they make coincidence less likely and increase confidence that the shared DNA traces back to a common ancestral source.

Methodological approach

In this case, autosomal DNA was assessed using three complementary considerations:

- expected centimorgan ranges, interpreted cautiously and never in isolation;
- shared-match clustering across the proposed family branches; and
- repetition across multiple independent descendant lines, rather than reliance on a single tester.

Interpretation also took into account reporting thresholds at AncestryDNA. Shared-match visibility depends on minimum reporting limits, so the absence of a visible shared match does not necessarily mean the absence of a biological relationship. This is particularly relevant at fourth-cousin distance and beyond, where inheritance variability and reporting



William Webb Wagg and his wife Sarah Turner, c1903. Webb Wagg family collection.



William Webb Wagg (left) with his adult sons, grandchildren, and extended family member at Berrys Bay, Sydney Harbour, 1903. Webb Wagg family collection.

thresholds make consistent detectability across all descendants less likely.¹

In total, the analysis drew on 32 tested descendants of William Webb Wagg — representing all six of his children who reached adulthood — and 13 tested descendants from the proposed sibling lines, all within the AncestryDNA database. This breadth of testing allowed patterns to be assessed across many independent lines, rather than relying on isolated comparisons.

Observed patterns

Documentary research identified William Webb Wagg as one of several children born to William Wegg and Mary Ann Clark in Norwich, Norfolk. Of this sibling group, only the Sarah Ann Wegg and Susannah Wegg lines could be traced with sufficient continuity to the present day and represented by tested descendants.

Across independent Australian descendants of William Webb Wagg — representing all six of his children who reached adulthood — autosomal DNA is repeatedly observed with descendants of the Sarah Ann Wegg and Susannah Wegg lines. These shared matches recur across distinct branches rather than being confined to a single lineage.

Observed centimorgan values fall within ranges consistent with predominantly fourth- and fifth-cousin relationships. As expected at this generational distance, sharing patterns are uneven. Not all descendants share detectable DNA, and the amount shared varies from one comparison to another. This

variability reflects the natural recombination of autosomal DNA and the gradual loss of detectable segments over successive generations, rather than any inconsistency in the reconstructed family structure.

Absence of evidence and alternative explanations

No shared-match clusters consistently align with alternative sibling groups or unrelated families. Where shared DNA is observed, it aligns specifically with the Sarah Ann Wegg and Susannah Wegg branches identified through documentary research.

The absence of matches from other sibling lines reflects several factors: testing distribution, incomplete family trees, reporting thresholds, expected generational DNA loss, and in some cases the absence of living descendants available for testing. Importantly, no observed genetic patterns contradict the documentary reconstruction or indicate a competing parental explanation.

Convergence of evidence

Taken together, the documentary and autosomal DNA evidence align. The genetic data neither introduces a competing family structure nor contradicts the historical reconstruction. Instead, they provide an independent test of the proposed sibling relationships.

The observed shared-match behaviour is consistent with the hypothesis that William Webb Wagg was one of the children of William Wegg and Mary Ann Clark of Norwich, separated from his siblings geographically by transportation, rather than by parentage.

Conclusion

This case study illustrates the value of autosomal DNA when used as a corroborative tool within a clearly defined documentary framework. At greater generational distances, individual matches are rarely decisive. Confidence instead emerges from repeated patterns observed

across independent descendant lines. In this investigation, shared-match clustering — supported by the scale of the AncestryDNA database — was sufficient to test the reconstructed documentary hypothesis. Chromosome mapping was not required to resolve the evidentiary question in this instance.

This does not diminish the usefulness of segment-based analysis in other contexts. Rather, it suggests that the level of analytical depth should match the question being asked. Once the evidence is behaving consistently across multiple lines, further technical analysis may add little additional clarity.

Autosomal DNA is most effective when used strategically — not as a replacement for documentary research, and not through unnecessary layers of analysis, but as a practical tool for testing whether a reconstructed family structure behaves as expected under genetic scrutiny.

Methodological note

In this study, autosomal DNA was used to evaluate a documentary reconstruction rather than to generate a hypothesis independently. Individual centimorgan values were not interpreted in isolation. Emphasis was placed on recurring shared-match patterns across multiple descendant lines and on whether those patterns were consistent with expected inheritance at the relevant generational distance.

The effectiveness of this approach was supported by the scale of the AncestryDNA database and the availability of shared-match and clustering tools, which allow pattern observation across a large number of testers. While chromosome browsers can provide additional resolution in certain cases, the database size and shared-match functionality available here were sufficient to address the question under investigation.

The analysis also accounted for reporting thresholds and the uneven inheritance of autosomal DNA beyond second- and third-cousin distance. Conclusions were based on cumulative patterns rather than on any single DNA result.

		Susannah	Sarah Ann		
			Bernadette	Terry	Karen
William	Relationship	2xGGC	3xGGC	3xGGC	
Sarah Jane	Alison	3XGGC	n/a	n/a	47
Charles	Jessica	4XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Helen	2XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Bee	3XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
Christopher	Robert	2XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
	John	2XGGC	18	8	25
	Ann	2XGGC	n/a	n/a	37
	Barry	2XGGC	12	-	-
Albert	Ella	4XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Beverley	2XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
William	Christine	2XGGC	-	-	12
	Marita	GGC	-	-	19
	Carol	GGC	-	14	14
Minnie	Janice	GGC	-	20	9
	Linda	2XGGC	18	21	-
Minnie	Heidi	2XGGC	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Maree	3XGGF	n/a	20	20
	Aharon	2XGGC	n/a	51	n/a
	Robert	2XGGC	n/a	50	24
Minnie	Janice	GGC	n/a	n/a	n/a

Illustrative cluster diagram showing shared-match relationships among descendants of William Webb Wagg and his sister Sarah Ann. The diagram represents patterns of autosomal DNA sharing and is not a literal reproduction of testing platform output.

1 At AncestryDNA, shared matches are displayed by default only where the shared individual matches both testers at approximately 20 cM or above. Matches in the approximate range of 7–20 cM may be visible only when a tester's full match list is accessible. The AncestryDNA ProTools Enhanced Shared Matching tool does not alter these reporting thresholds, but facilitates identification and analysis of lower-level shared matches where such access exists. Matches below approximately 7 cM are not routinely reported, although occasional lower-level matches may be observable in specific circumstances.

DNA CORNER

BY CHRISTINE WOODLANDS

Disclosure and AI in genetic genealogy: One researcher's perspective

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in family history research — particularly in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of DNA evidence — has expanded rapidly in recent years. Within genetic genealogy circles, this has prompted discussion and varying expectations about whether, when, and how such use should be disclosed in genealogical work. Much of that discussion has focused on rules and labels, rather than on the more fundamental question of what disclosure is intended to achieve.

This article sets out my own thoughts and approach to disclosure in the context of DNA-based genealogical research, shaped by my experience as an enthusiastic amateur family historian and genetic genealogist. It does not propose standards or prescriptions for others, but reflects on how disclosure might be applied sensibly and proportionately when AI tools are used to support genealogical research. A longer, informal reflection on this topic was first published on my blog and forms the background to the discussion presented here.¹

Disclosure in context

Acknowledging assistance in research and writing is not new in family history. Genealogists have long recognised the contributions of editors, librarians, research assistants, and specialist advisers whose support has helped shape a piece of work, without treating those contributors as authors. Such acknowledgements have generally been understood as part of accepted genealogical practice rather than a formal requirement — an established way of recognising assistance while affirming that ultimate responsibility rests with the author.

The underlying principle is intellectual responsibility: the individual who frames the research question, selects and evaluates evidence, interprets findings, and draws conclusions remains accountable for the work.

My thinking about AI sits within this established tradition. When used as a research, drafting, organisational, or editorial aid — rather than as a substitute for research judgement — AI occupies a role similar to other forms of non-authorial assistance on which family historians have long relied.

Professional background and perspective

My approach to disclosure is informed by formal academic training in accounting and law, as well as by long experience working in large, rules-based administrative environments where decisions must be explained, justified, and be capable of withstanding external scrutiny. In such contexts, concepts drawn from governance practice — including materiality, transparency, and accountability — shape how information is communicated and assessed.

Against this background, I regard disclosure not as an end in itself, but as a practical means of helping others understand what influenced a decision or conclusion — and what did not. The critical question, therefore, is not whether a particular tool was used, but whether its use materially shaped the analysis, interpretation, or conclusions reached. Applied to genealogical research and analysis, this suggests that disclosure should be proportionate to impact rather than automatic or symbolic.

Family historians have always adapted to new tools. Fifty years ago, few would have felt the need to disclose a move from manual calculation to electronic calculators, nor more recently the use of the World Wide Web to access digitised records. Each development transformed efficiency and access, yet responsibility for evaluating evidence and forming conclusions remained with the researcher. AI sits within this longer history of methodological change: it is a tool — albeit a powerful one — whose influence must be assessed in context.

AI on a continuum of assistance

AI tools now support family historians in a wide range of practical ways, including assisting with research tasks such as information retrieval and preliminary synthesis, structuring complex narratives, clarifying phrasing, summarising material, generating draft text for refinement, and assisting in the development of charts, tables, diagrams, and other visual representations that help clarify evidence and improve readability. These uses sit on a continuum with other long-accepted forms of editorial and technical assistance. I include the illustrative image below, generated using AI, not as evidence but as a visual metaphor for my working environment — where paper records, working notes, analytical charts and digital tools sit side by side.



Traditional sources, working charts, and digital tools now sit side by side in genealogical practice. Image generated using AI

Some commentators draw a distinction between so-called “mechanical” AI tools—such as basic automation or formatting assistance—and “generative” tools capable of producing new content or synthesising information.

Generative AI refers to models designed to create new data outputs such as text, images, or other artefacts by learning patterns from large datasets, whereas mechanical AI typically automates repetitive or rule-based tasks without generating novel content.

While that distinction may be descriptively useful, I consider the more relevant question to be whether the tool materially affected

the analysis, interpretation, or conclusions presented. In my view, disclosure is best anchored not to the category of tool used, but to the extent of its impact on substantive reasoning.

Concern arises when discussion shifts directly to disclosure requirements without first clarifying what disclosure is intended to achieve. Is it meant to signal authorship, to indicate substantive influence, or to guard against the uncritical acceptance of AI-assisted output? Without addressing these underlying questions, disclosure risks becoming performative rather than informative.

Intellectual responsibility and transparency

In my view, the core obligation of the family historian is intellectual responsibility. If an AI tool materially contributes to research design, evidentiary assessment, or interpretive conclusions, then acknowledging its role can enhance transparency and help others understand how the work was produced.

Where AI is used solely to support drafting, organisation, or presentation — without shaping substantive analysis or conclusions — formal disclosure may add little value. In such cases, the safeguard lies in the researcher's continuing responsibility for accuracy, interpretation, and judgement.

A practical disclosure position

As an enthusiastic amateur family historian, rather than a professional researcher working for payment, I have adopted a pragmatic approach to disclosure. Drawing on both my genealogical practice and my professional training, I view disclosure as something that should be proportionate to impact rather than automatic.

In practice, I would disclose the use of AI when it has materially influenced analysis, interpretation, or conclusions. Where AI is used only to support research processes, organisation, or communication — without influencing how evidence is weighed

or conclusions are framed — I treat it no differently from other forms of assistance that do not alter the intellectual content of the work.

For me, this approach keeps disclosure aligned with its original purpose: enabling others to evaluate the research itself, rather than being distracted by the tools used to present it.

Conclusion

AI tools are becoming part of the everyday workflow of family historians, much as earlier generations adapted to digitised records, online databases, and large-scale DNA testing. The central issue is not the presence of new tools, but the continued accountability of the researcher for the thinking that underpins their work.

From my perspective as an enthusiastic amateur family historian and genetic genealogist, meaningful disclosure is less about listing tools and more about preserving trust through intellectual responsibility. That principle — rather than the technology itself — is what ultimately sustains confidence in genealogical research.

Author Note

Christine Woodlands is an enthusiastic amateur family historian and genetic genealogist based in Sydney. She holds a Master of Commerce and a Graduate Diploma in Taxation from the University of New South Wales. She regularly presents on autosomal DNA methodology for family history audiences and maintains blogs documenting case studies and reflections on genealogical practice.

1 Christine Woodlands, "Disclosure, AI, and the question we should actually be asking," *Mossie's Musings*, January 2026. <https://mossiesmusings.blogspot.com/2026/01/disclosure-ai-and-question-we-should.html>

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Life Story Essentials workshop

by Jane Hutcheon

Archival research helps family historians discover what happened in the past, but I'd argue that *rescuing* family stories before they are lost—living research—comes a very close second. We can do this with family around us using oral history skills and a process which is a bit like a recipe.

Professional oral history is a recognised research discipline. It is most often conducted within universities, archives, museums, libraries, and cultural institutions. Its purpose is usually evidence rather than narrative. But oral history isn't a single practice. There are different traditions, purposes, and ethics at work and understanding those differences matters, especially for people who want to tell life stories within the family history ecosystem.

After many years searching for the right tools, I introduced SAG members to the MEMENTOS life story toolkit in the Life Stories Essential workshop which kicked off in February 2026 (A book about the toolkit is currently being edited and will be available later this year).

MEMENTOS is a three-part process that delivers:

- a detailed timeline of your family member or subject
- an oral history-style voice recording
- a text transcript of the interview

The toolkit proposes conducting three to four sessions with your subject. Once obtaining their approval and their enthusiasm, subjects can help with providing images or scans while sharing their stories so that the eventual transcript can be elevated into a narrative: a newsletter-style article, a family history slide-show, a booklet or a similar printed product.

As always, conducting workshops with the SAG membership makes for joyful times. The cohort bring their enthusiasm and their problems to the sessions which, as an educator, helps me sharpen my processes and find more relevant outcomes.

During our first session, one of the members shared that over summer, two older members of her family—which she had intended to record stories with—had died. This highlights the need to be focused about pinning down our participants and not letting time run away from us. We have to approach this as a mission as much as a highly enjoyable task; one that will benefit families for generations to come.

Why Family Life Stories Need a Different Approach

When families set out to record a life story, they are usually not trying to create an archive for scholars fifty years into the future. They are trying to understand and, perhaps, capture the essence of a person, whether in the immediate family or further up the tree. These seekers want coherence, insight, emotional truth, and a sense of shape and time.

They want answers to questions like:

- What kind of life was that compared to now?
- What did you do for fun back then?
- What mattered to this person?
- What was it like to live during WW2?
- What was hard, what was joyful, what endured?
- Describe the journey you took to get here.

These are not archival questions. They are narrative ones and sometimes they touch on psychology and anthropology. This is where my approach differs from traditional oral history.

A Journalistic Oral History Method

My background is journalism, not academic history. Journalism, as I was taught it, is also concerned with truth, evidence, and ethics — but it has a different organising principle: meaning. Journalists conduct interviews not to archive everything that is said, but to understand what matters most. We listen for turning points, patterns, contradictions, moments of agency and constraint. We ask follow-up questions. We interrupt gently. We probe. We rephrase. We circle back. Most importantly, we accept that raw material is not the same as a story.

In life-story work, oral history is not the end point. It is the beginning. The interview is a collaborative act of discovery. It is not a passive exchange or a multiple-choice question.

An interview is structured, but not rigid. A life story can be chronological, but not trapped by chronology. It allows memory to wander—and then brings it home. I am not trying to extract a comprehensive record of everything that happened to my subject over a lifetime. I am trying to uncover how a person understands their own life. That distinction is crucial.

At the Society of Australian Genealogists, we get the chance to meet people at history shows and chat with them about their interest in family history. I love meeting these people! Some of them tell you instantly that they have “finished” their family histories already. Maybe they just don't want to get involved in a conversation. But it's curious that a subject as capacious as a family history could ever be thought of as complete.

Memory as Meaning

Professional oral history treats memory as a source to be handled carefully. Family history life story process treats memory as a meaning-making process. What people remember, and how they remember it, tells us something essential. The gaps matter. The emphases matter. The times matter. The stories people return to, the metaphors they use,



Left: Mikhail Nilov, Pexels



Right: Anna Shvets, Pexels

the episodes that surface unprompted: these are clues to identity, values, and self-understanding.

A life story is not a court transcript. It is not a database. It is an act of sense-making. That does not mean inventing or embellishing. It means shaping material responsibly so that a life can be understood rather than merely documented. The hidden bonus is an upwelling of empathy for those who preceded us.

Structure Is Not Distortion

My process involves four stages, which I've combined into a handy three-part workshop series:

1. Timeline—establishing a factual scaffold.
2. Recording—recording voice, memory, perspective.
3. Shaping—refining content, adding images if required.
4. Sharing—creating the finished narrative (or leaving it as a transcript).

Why This Matters Now

We are living through a moment of massive memory loss—not because people do not care about the past, but because the tools for preserving it are overwhelming. Families have photographs, recordings, messages, documents scattered

across platforms and devices. The result is abundance without meaning or curation.

At the same time, people are living longer, with more complex lives that cross borders, cultures, and social change. Many are aware, sometimes urgently, that stories will be lost if they are not captured now.

Although it's a good start, recording the stories is not enough. Without interpretation, reflection, and structure, most recorded life material will never be read, shared, or understood. A journalistic oral history approach offers families a way forward: rigorous but humane, structured but flexible, truthful without being paralysed by completeness.

A Final Word

Oral history matters because stories matter. Capturing a human voice-print is priceless. Professional oral history preserves the record. Life-story work preserves meaning. My aim is not to replace one with the other, but to recognise that families need a different tool, one that honours memory while shaping it into something that can be carried forward.

I'm delighted to be sharing the MEMENTOS toolkit with the Life Story Essentials workshop. I am deeply passionate about this practice so that we don't lose the stories of people we love.

SAG is running another series of Life Story Essentials over three sessions, starting Tuesday 28 April, 7:00-9:00pm.

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Photo: DS Stories, Pexels



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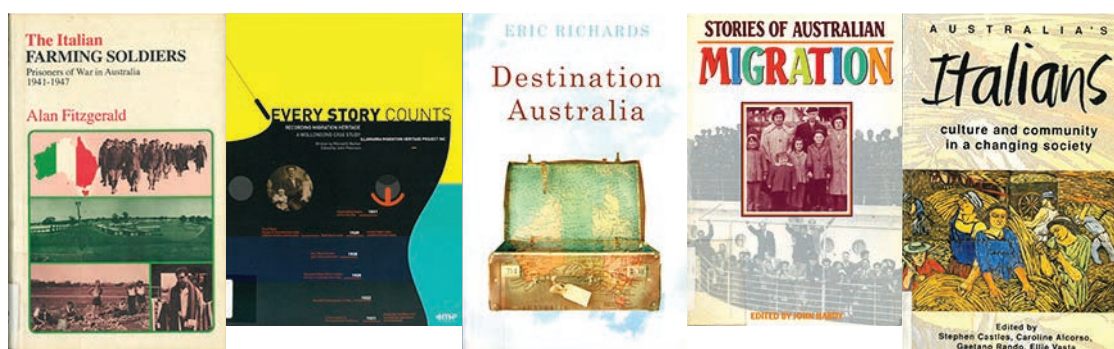


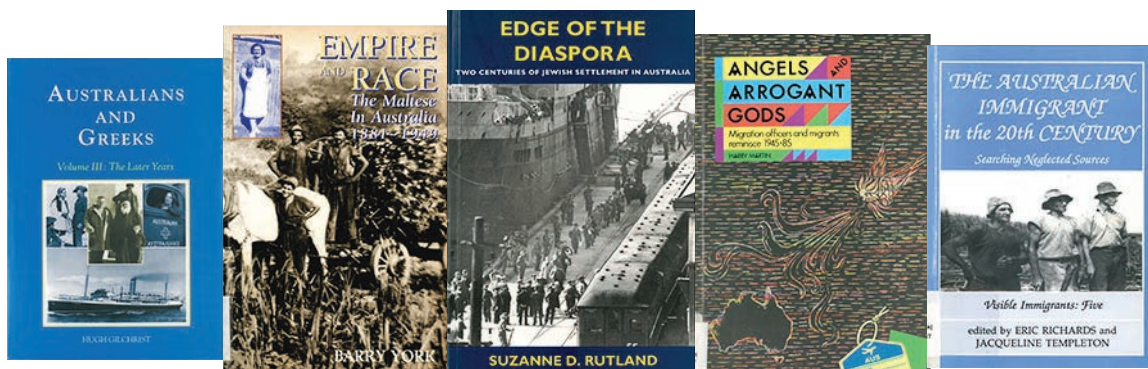
BY GEMMA BESWICK
LIBRARY SERVICES MANAGER

In the decades following the end of World War II, Australia experienced one of the most significant waves of migration in its history, reshaping families, communities, and the nation itself. For genealogists, tracing ancestors who arrived during this transformative period can be both rewarding and complex, as records span multiple countries, agencies, and migration schemes. In this issue we highlight library resources that celebrate the resilience, cultural heritage, and enduring contributions of post-war migrants and their descendants.

Australia:

- *Good British stock: child and youth migration to Australia* by Barry Coldrey. A2/11/26 (Book)
- *Chinese-Australian journeys: records on travel, migration and settlement, 1860-1975* by Paul Jones. A2/11/28 (Book)
- *Australia, a land of immigrants* by Beryl and Michael Cigler. A3/1/162 (Book)
- *Chinese migration and settlement in Australia* by C. Y. Choi. A3/20/3 (Book)
- *Australia's immigrants, 1788-1978* by Geoffrey Sherington. A3/20/15 (Book)
- *The Czechs in Australia* by Michael Cigler. A3/20/19 (Book)
- *The Spanish in Australia* by Al Grassby. A3/20/20 (Book)
- *There goes the neighbourhood: Australia's migrant experience* by Michael Dugan and Josef Szwarc. Y/A3/20/22 (Book)
- *The Poles in Australia* by Marian Kaluski. A3/20/25 (Book)
- *The Germans in Australia* by Ian Harmstorf and Michael Cigler. A3/20/26 (Book)
- *The Lebanese in Australia* by Andrew Batrouney and Trevor Batrouney. A3/20/27 (Book)
- *The Hungarians in Australia* by Egon F. Kunz. A3/20/28 (Book)
- *The Scandinavians in Australia* by Olavi Koivukangas and John Stanley Martin. A3/20/32 (Book)
- *The Americans in Australia* by Ray Aitchison. A3/20/33 (Book)
- *The Jews in Australia* by W. D. Rubinstein. A3/20/34 (Book)
- *The Afghans in Australia* by Michael Cigler. A3/20/35 (Book)
- *The Baltic peoples in Australia* by Betty Birsks, Antanas Birsks, Aldis L. Putnins and Inno Salasoo. A3/20/37 (Book)
- *The Maltese in Australia* by Barry York. A3/20/38 (Book)
- *The Dutch in Australia* by Edward Duyker. A3/20/39 (Book)
- *The Scottish in Australia* by Malcolm D. Prentis. A3/20/41 (Book)
- *The Italians in Australia* by Gianfranco Cresciani. A3/20/42 (Book)
- *The Welsh, Irish, Scots and English in Australia: a demographic profile with statistical appendix* by David Lucas. A3/20/44 (Book)
- *Stories of Australian migration* edited by John Hardy. A3/20/46 (Book)
- *Austrians and Australia* by Marlene J. Norst and Johanna McBride. A3/20/47 (Book)
- *The Australian people: an encyclopedia of the nation, its people and their origins* edited by James Tupp. A3/20/49 (Book)
- *Anzano: the home of my ancestors* by Rosa Melino. A3/20/51 (Book)
- *The Australian immigrant in the 20th century: searching neglected sources* edited by Eric Richards and Jacqueline Templeton. A3/20/53e (Book)
- *Growing up with Barnardo's* by Allan Moore; edited by Joan Clarke. A3/20/57 (Book)
- *Empire and race: the Maltese in Australia, 1881-1949* by Barry York. A3/20/58 (Book)
- *Southern Europeans in Australia* by Charles A. Price. A3/20/60 (Book)
- *The Belgians in Australia* by K. A. Lodewycks. A3/20/61 (Book)
- *Of the star and the key: Mauritius, Mauritians and Australia* by Edward Duyker. A3/20/62 (Book)
- *A peculiar people: the Australians in Paraguay* by Gavin Souter. A3/20/63 (Book)
- *Australians and Greeks vol. I: the early years* by Hugh Gilchrist. A3/20/64 (Book)
- *Australians and Greeks vol. II: the middle years* by Hugh Gilchrist. A3/20/64b (Book)
- *Australians and Greeks vol. III: the later years* by Hugh Gilchrist. A3/20/64c (Book)
- *Blood and gold: Hungarians in Australia* by Egon F. Kunz. A3/20/66 (Book)
- *Asians in Australia: the dynamics of migration and settlement* edited by Christine Inglis, S. Gunasekaran, Gerard Sullivan & Chung-Tong Wu. A3/20/67 (Book)
- *Images of home* by Effy Alexakis and Leonard Janiszewski. A3/20/77 (Book)





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BOOK REVIEW

Academy for Young Ladies: Sarah and Thomas Bell, Matron and Keeper at the Parramatta Factory 1836-1843

by Sue Bell, IngramSpark (2023). 170 pages. ISBN: 978-0-645777-0-2
SAG ref: A6/BEL/10

Review by Pauline Weeks

In the *Academy for Young Ladies* Sue Bell offers far more than a family history. Anchored in meticulous research and supported by extensive references, the book presents a detailed study of the Parramatta Female Factory during a pivotal period in its operation. While the narrative follows the experiences of her paternal great-great-grandparents, Sarah and Thomas Bell, it simultaneously provides valuable statistical and historical context about female convicts transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land.

Bell clearly explains the assignment system imposed upon female convicts, tracing the problems that developed over time and examining the vagaries of bureaucracy which influenced the running of the Factory. The classification system within the institution is carefully outlined, with detailed attention given to the treatment of each "class," the women's labour, discipline, food rations, and the placement of children in orphanages. Through this lens, the book reveals both the structure and the strain of a system struggling under growing numbers and shifting regulations.

The book is visually enriched by sepia and wash drawings depicting Parramatta and surrounds that have been preserved in the author's Bell family for over 160 years. The highly relevant sketches were created by William Augustus Miles, who served as Sydney's Superintendent, later Commissioner of Police from 1841 to 1848. Their inclusion gives both perspective and atmosphere placing the narrative in the physical landscape of the time.

One of the book's notable achievements is its exploration of the challenges inherent in researching women's history. Women are often marginalised in official records—not often mentioned, but standing before, beside or behind the men whose names dominate documents. In this case in tracing Thomas Bell, the author, where sources allow, is also able to illuminate Sarah's significant contribution to the management of the Factory restoring her to a place of shared authority.

Like many migrants of the colonial era, Sarah and Thomas Bell left their homeland, Ireland, seeking opportunity in New South Wales. Thomas took jobs in the civil service which culminated in the couple's joint appointment in August 1836 as Keeper and Matron of the Female Factory. At the time, it was thought that a man with a wife was needed to control and supervise large numbers of female prisoners. Their appointment came at a crucial moment. In September 1836 the Factory housed 590 women and 134 children; by July 1842, numbers had reached a peak of 1,203 women and 263 children. The dramatic increase in population and the scrutiny that accompanied that would ultimately contribute to Thomas' undoing.

Bell deftly illustrates the regulatory complexities faced by the couple. Apart from managing the behaviour of the women and daily operations, the Bells also had to be cognisant of evolving regulations that affected their management of the system. Good examples are given in the book to highlight this such as the prohibition of assigning women to individuals who kept public houses.

Meanwhile, reforms in Britain influenced by the reformer Elizabeth Fry, advocated for women to oversee female prisons. This movement directly affected the Bells' employment. In late 1837, they were removed, for a woman, Julia Leach, to take charge, alongside Keeper, John Clapham. The timing coincided closely with the departure from the colony of Governor Sir Richard Burke who had appointed them.

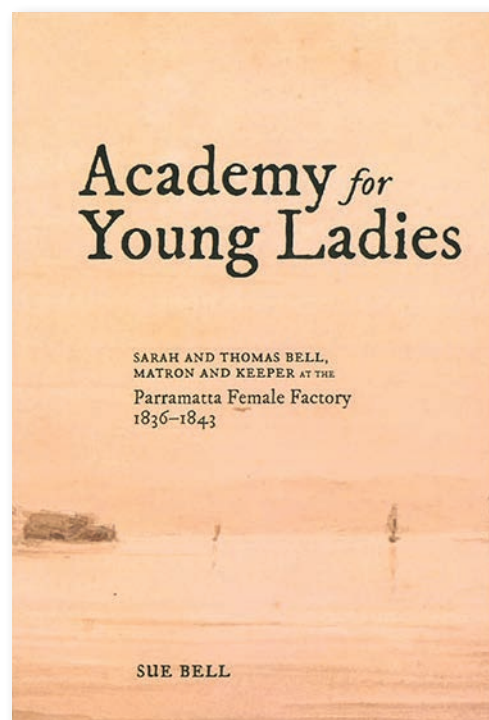
Six months later Sarah and Thomas were reinstated on equal salaries, reflecting Elizabeth Fry's reformist influence. Drawing on contemporary newspapers and Colonial Secretary papers, Bell documents the couple's appointments, removals and reinstatements while highlighting the administrative difficulties of governing a colony located 16,000 miles from Britain.

While following the path of their administration there are glimpses of the Bells' compassion for the convict women. Sarah advocated for shoes and stockings for the third class women and for their seasonal dresses to be changed at more appropriate times to accommodate the changes in weather conditions. Despite rising inmate numbers and increasing responsibilities associated with managing the women's work, the Bells received no salary or ration increases. In September 1843 they left the Factory under "a cloud of suspicion" and Thomas faced charges of embezzlement and conspiracy. The book follows the subsequent protracted court proceedings and traces the couple's subsequent lives.

Interwoven with the institutional history are insights into the Bell's children's lives—their education in Sydney and their later lives—giving depth to the family history.

Academy for Young Ladies achieves what many family historians aspire to accomplish—to publish a personal ancestry in a readable and engaging format within the context of history at the time. By focusing closely on two particular people and situating them within the broader story of the female convict system in colonial New South Wales, Bell's work becomes relevant to many others that had female family in the New South Wales convict system at the time. Supported by an excellent bibliography and index, this book will be valuable in assisting anyone in further research.

Copies are available directly from Sue Bell in both e-version and paperback via this link <https://academyforyoungladies.com>



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