



FREMANTLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Established 1994

The Secretary, 24 Fothergill Street,
FREMANTLE WA 6160

**Summer Edition
2003**

Editors: Ron Davidson, Anne Brake



Fishing Boat Harbour, Fremantle, c 1960 (courtesy MG Kailis Group)

The Italian Fishermen of Fremantle

It is sometimes said that the Fremantle History Society's general meetings should reflect more strongly the social, cultural and economic impacts the Italians have had on Fremantle, not least in the area of fishing. We will remedy that at the April meeting when John Minervini tells the Italian story post World War 2. John's personal story in many ways parallels the Italian story in Fremantle. He was born in Molfetta in 1932 and came to Fremantle when he was four. His father Raffaele had been fishing, off and on, from Fremantle since 1912 and in 1937 could at last afford to bring out his family.

John, who was often known as Joe, started work at 15 in a grocery shop. After two years he was trucking crays to Fremantle from Lancelin for the Fremantle Fishermen Cooperative Society Limited. He worked up through the ranks and was general manager from 1976 to 1992. He became the first Italian to be a Fremantle City councillor when he was elected as a representative for South Ward in 1968. He served until 1989.

The material which follows is taken from Sally May's article *The Italian Fishermen of Fremantle* in the Society's *Fremantle Studies* No1 1990. It provides a context for John's talk.

In May 1997, as the passing of the twentieth century approached, Western Australia celebrated the centennial of the opening of the Inner Harbour of the Port of Fremantle. The development of the inner Harbour had a dramatic influence on the town. Shipping that

otherwise by-passed Fremantle began calling, creating new opportunities for trade and commerce and bringing increasing numbers of immigrants from the Old World. Some of these migrants comprised several hundred Italian fishers who were to pioneer the State's first permanent fishing fleets, based in Fremantle. For the Italian fishers it was not an easy passage to acceptance or success in Fremantle, which was dominated by an Anglo – Celtic society. In common with the development of the harbour, they had to erode the barriers that impeded communication to the wider community and impeded their access to a secure economic position. July 1997 marked fifty years since the Italians and others formed the Fremantle Fishermen's Co-operative, a commercial enterprise that, for the first time in the history of the fishing industry, gave the fishers control over the sale and distribution of their produce and passage to a secure livelihood.

A period of internal wars and foreign interference devastated Italy following the invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte in the early nineteenth century. Despite the unification of Italy in 1870 there was much unrest and poverty particularly in rural areas. Many looked to other lands for a better life. Small numbers of Italians had been migrating to Western Australia since the early colony was formed. The numbers increased, particularly with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the signing of the Commercial Treaty in 1883 between the United Kingdom and Italy (and accepted by all Australian states except South Australia) which gave Italian subjects freedom of entry, travel and residence, and the rights to acquire and own property and to carry on business activities. Numbers were also influenced by the Gold Rushes of the 1890s.

Many of the Italians who arrived in Fremantle were fishers and by 1898 there were at least 150 Italian fishers working in Cockburn Sound – mainly from Sicily and Molfetta. Informal but important co-operatives grew up to support each other allowing the men to expand their interests

and build resources to eventually bring out wives and families.

With the increase in population as the 20th century progressed, the accessibility of commercially available ice and improvements in transport meant an increase in the demand for regular, dependable supplies of fish. Enter the 'middle man' who soon gained the upper hand and controlled the industry.

Over the ensuing decades Italian fishers lobbied hard for a better and fairer system. Things came to a head after WW II. Under the arbitration of Paddy Troy a co-operative, similar to those formed by market gardeners and wheat growers was formed for the purpose of selling their produce co-operatively and cost-effectively. After a rocky start, the Fremantle Fishermen's Co-operative which grew into a multi-million dollar enterprise albeit subject to fluctuating fortunes.



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Executive:

Bob Woollett (President)	9335 7451
Kristy Bizzaca (Vice President)	9328 5316
Beres Coley (Treasurer)	9335 9473
Ron Davidson (Secretary)	9430 6096
Ken Hopkins (Minutes Secretary)	9339 1865

Committee:

Elaine Berry	9336 1906
Anne Brake	9336 5206
Jean Cecil	9335 2352
David Hutchison	9335 1594
Alan Kelsall	9336 4573
Alison Gregg	9336 6658

Fremantle History Society's committee meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

If you have something you would like discussed at a meeting, please contact one

of the members at the numbers shown above.

General meetings of the Society are generally held on the 4th Tuesday of the month. Details of these meetings can be found in your newsletter and reminders are sometimes placed in the local press. As we have occasional Sunday afternoon meetings, please make certain to check details.



COMING EVENTS

SUNDOWNER AT ARTHUR HEAD

Enjoy the summer evening out of doors. Committee member, Elaine Berry, will lead a tour of Arthur Head and the surrounding area, Fremantle's rich historical precinct. The evening will conclude with a BYO picnic at a nearby location. Meet at the Round House car park (no 19 - fees of \$1 per hour apply.) **Tuesday 25 February, 6 pm.**

VISIT TO THE (NEW) MARITIME MUSEUM

There is so much to see at the new Maritime Museum that it is easy to miss some of the more interesting and quirky parts! Guides are not usually available at the weekends but FHS member, Michael Seats, who has been a long time guide at the old museum and is now at the new, has kindly agreed to conduct us on a special tour of the museum. A fee (\$8, \$6 concession) will apply. Numbers are limited to 20. If you would like to attend ring Bob Woollett on 9335 7451 by **Monday, 24 March.**

The tour starts at 2.00 pm and should finish by about 3.30 pm. Meet at the museum entrance on Victoria Quay. **Sunday, 30 March.**

THE ITALIAN STORY WITH JOHN MINERVINI

Much of the colour and flavour of Fremantle comes from its strong Italian heritage. At our April meeting John will talk on the Italian contribution to the social and commercial life

of Fremantle since World War II. He came to Fremantle as a boy in 1937 and has played a prominent role in the life of Fremantle. He was a long-term Fremantle City Councilor and General Manager of the Fremantle Fishermen's Coop. **Tuesday, 29 April, 7 pm, at the WA Maritime Museum Education Centre, Cliff Street.**



MEETING REPORTS

TURKEY AND HAM SLAP-UP

Just when we thought the Pub Lunch at the Rose Hotel in August would have to be rated as the Society's show-of-the-year along came our Christmas dinner at the Fremantle Club in Bannister Street. Forty members and friends dined from a special Fremantle menu starting with Terrace Turkey and Hilton Ham followed by Prison Plum Pudding and Barrack Brandy Sauce.

The Fremantle Club's manager, Wally Maker, told us how clubs in Fremantle boomed in the fifties and sixties. With hotels shutting at 9 pm from Monday to Saturday and all day Sunday, clubs did big business in thirsty Fremantle. They could open till 11 pm during the week and had two two-hour sessions on Sundays. Wally told us that the RSL Wyola Club in High Street went through 50 eighteen-gallon kegs of beer a week. Life became tougher for clubs in the seventies when hotel hours were extended particularly on Sundays.

Wally then mentioned wine saloons, the refuge of the less fortunate. He described Tate's in High Street.

'I worked there in the fifties' called Connie Herbert from one of the tables. 'There was a party of four who came in each morning, settled at a battered table, and ordered ports. That gave them a glass each which they continually filled with a mix of methylated spirits and orange juice poured from bottles they had smuggled in.' (History Society general meetings will never be the same again without you, Connie.)

The craftily worded menu for the Christmas dinner is reproduced here for your enjoyment!

A FREMANTLE FESTIVE FEAST

TERRACE TURKEY AND HILTON
HAM

(with Croke Street Cranberry Sauce)

'Stirlingly' served with

Round House Roast Potatoes

Harbour Honey Roasted Sweet Potato

Bather's Bay Baked Pumpkin

King's Square Cauliflower au Grey Street
Gratin

South Beach Summer Greens

PRISON PLUM PUDDING & BARRACKS
BRANDY SAUCE

MONUMENT MINCE PIES & COLLIE
STREET CREAM

CLIFF STREET COFFEE
OR
TOWN HALL TEA



CONNIE

Rusty Christensen

On December 9, 2002, our long-standing and enthusiastic Fremantle History Society member, friend to the world, writer, poet and performer extraordinaire, Constance Marguerite 'Connie' Herbert took her final bow.

Connie joined the Society out of her deep feeling for Fremantle and its environs and what its historical and social roots meant to her.

Connie was born in Pemberton where her Irish Catholic parents battled to make a

living on a Group Settlement property. She was number five of 14 Doherty children; her early years were spent helping to care for an increasing number of siblings while her mother was away from home on paid employment to boost the family coffers. Times were tough.

The family eventually gave up the struggle and moved to Fremantle where her father found casual work on the wharf. Connie continued in her child-minding role until she was 21 when she obtained a position in that old Fremantle institution, Pellews, which was to be the first of a succession of varied and interesting jobs and vocations.

The Doherty family lived in various rental accommodation around Fremantle before purchasing and moving to a spacious older-style weatherboard house on the north-east corner of Marmion and Carrington Streets in Palmyra. I remember a raised stage in the backyard where Connie and one of her sisters and friends would entertain the family and neighbours on warm summer evenings.

The story of Connie's life is the stuff of which dreams are made. I became better acquainted with her in 1996 when this colourful, confident character stepped up to the stage at Wireless Hill Park, Melville, and took off the inaugural yarn spinning championship of the WA Bush Poets and Yarnspinners. Since that meeting I came to respect the talent, knowledge, versatility, and the wit and wisdom of this free-spirited lady.

It was a joy to yarn with her, especially about our shared Irish background of which we were both fiercely proud. Another shared experience concerned the earlier days of Fremantle and here Connie exhibited her exuberant and eager storytelling. Our discussions about the events and the characters who made life in 'Old Freo' so special was a lasting legacy of this unusual lady. My regret is that I didn't share more of her anecdotes and experiences - the tyranny of time.

Anyone who was touched by Connie gained something. To visit her in her unit – the



Connie receiving the inaugural yarn spinning championship trophy

Mouse-trap she called it for obvious reasons - was a trip back in time, with its potted plants, gnomes and leprechauns, the internal clutter which included five computers (various), books and miscellaneous collectables.

The stories of this remarkable lady abound and she obviously appreciated them all because to Connie Herbert the whole world was a stage.

Editors' note. Connie made an art form of the unusual. She had her first funeral service she was still alive. On her 75th birthday a 'funeral' was conducted so she could hear all the nice things her friends would say about her.



PORT MEMORIES

Connie Herbert brought some notes to the Society's September 2002 meeting on early memories of Fremantle. She said she might

not remember what to say. Unlikely. Just before she died, she left them with the newsletter editors to use later. Here are three extracts.

Morning glory and grapevines trailing over back-yard fences down 'the dunny-man's lane': black-eyed Susans, jonquils, cemetery lilies, growing wild in gardens and paddocks: fig, mulberry and loquat trees in every backyard. I saw them all for the first time when we moved to Fremantle from Pemberton...

The tea-rooms of the Fremantle Railway Station is a place of happy memories. This was a special place. We went there only when we were being taken on a day out to Perth. We were waited on by ladies wearing black dresses, starched white aprons and white pleated caps. They served us with hot buttered scones and tea from a silver teapot. And when we walked on to the platform my mother would give each of us a penny to put into the Nestles chocolate machine....

Then there's the Mad Old Lady. She wore a long black skirt, a lacy cream blouse and carried a furled black umbrella. In my memory from the twenties and early thirties it is always late afternoon when I see her striding down the middle of the road., waving her umbrella and shouting 'Vote agin' Federation'. I didn't know what the words meant but liked the sound of them...



ANY IDEAS ?

Do you have any ideas for our general meetings later in the year? The committee is in the process of drawing up the program and would welcome suggestions from members, particularly regarding venues for the Pub Lunch in August and the Christmas function in early December. Ideas being explored include a forum on Fremantle Prison, talks on Fremantle's pilots and its Water Police, and visits to the old Fremantle Boys School, to the Fremantle History Museum which is developing a new

exhibition and, further afield, perhaps to explore the start of O'Connor's Golden Pipeline Project.



For Your Diary

Tuesday, 25 Feb: Sundowner at Arthur's Head. There is so much history in this fascinating precinct. Join Society members as Elaine Berry unlocks some of the secrets of this place and then share your own stories over a BYO picnic in the cool of the summer evening. Meet at **6.00 pm** at the **Round House car park.**

Sunday, 30 March: Visit to the (new) Maritime Museum. Michael Seats will take us exploring this wonderful new museum. Limited numbers – book by ringing Bob Woollett on 9335 7451 by Monday March 24. Meet at **2.00 pm** at the Museum on **Victoria Quay.**

Tuesday, 29 April: The Italian story with John Minervini. Hear the Fremantle Italian story from someone who has lived it and been a central player in it. John will speak at the Maritime Museum's Education Centre in **Cliff St. 7.00 pm.**



THE AUGUSTA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Bob Woollett

One of the pleasures of visiting country towns in Western Australia is to spend time in the local museum and learn something about the history of the area. Augusta in the state's south-west is no exception. On a recent holiday I spent an informative couple of hours in the town's historical museum. This is an impressive building on the main street, which was constructed to commemorate the sesqui-centenary of the founding of Western Australia, and of Augusta itself a year later. Although the facility now has a full-time curator, it is directed by the Augusta Historical Society.

Not surprisingly a significant section of the museum is devoted to the difficult years of

early settlement when the giant timber represented a continual difficulty to those who needed to clear the land. Other sections trace the revival of the district in the late nineteenth century, through the development of that timber into an industry, and the sorry saga of the Group Settlement program.

Conversation with the Augusta Historical Society member, Noreen Hackett, who was on duty on the day of my visit, revealed strong links with Fremantle. She worked for many years at the office of J W Bateman and then for Pearse Brothers in North Fremantle. She was Pearse Brothers last employee when the company closed in the 1970s.



WELL DONE, FHS

The Fremantle History Society has received high praise for its submission on the draft Fremantle Prison Master Plan. A sub-committee of David Hutchison, Anne Brake, Alan Kelsall, Dianne Davidson and Kris Bizacca prepared the submission. The chair of the group, David Hutchison, received a call from Helen Grzyb who is collating community feedback for the master planners, Palassis Architects. She praised the quality of our submission in the highest terms. The submission adopted a strong heritage position and put the case for a more integrated plan and one which displayed greater clarity on a number of issues.

Palassis Architects expects to have a substantially re-worked master plan ready in early March. Hopefully, it will reflect the substantial community feedback, including that from the History Society.



THE MAN FROM IRONBARK BREWERY CALLS

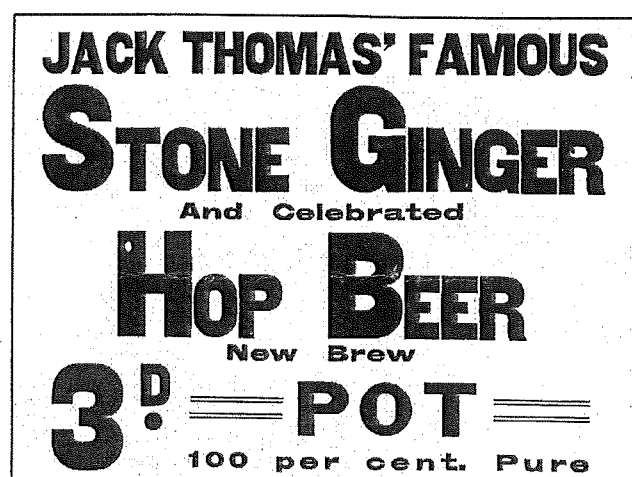
Ron Davidson

We had a call recently from Graeme White, the brewer from Ironbark Brewery, to tell us

of his new project. The company is making a special brew, Tinny Thomas' Ginger Beer, from a mystery recipe Jack Thomas developed in the early twenties. Jack 'Tinny' Thomas became a Fremantle identity, selling his ginger beer from a dark green caravan opposite the Fremantle Railway Station from November 1920. Tinny's son, David, passed on the recipe to Graeme who says it contains 'a few surprises'. He won't say what they are but there was always controversy as to whether the hop beer had an alcoholic content, particularly on Sundays when the pubs were shut.

The original ginger beer was brewed by Jack Thomas and his brother at small house and factory which still stands at the corner of Russell Street and Marine Terrace. Customers could sit at tables and buy pots of stone ginger and hop beer. Later Jack Thomas announced he had 'installed an up-to-date plant with new and improved methods' in South Terrace.

Graeme is looking for outlets in Fremantle for the non-alcoholic beer. In the meantime he is selling it from the brewery in Caversham and developing an appropriate bottle-label. We'll keep you posted on this.



ALISON RETIRES

Fremantle History Society committee member, Alison Gregg, has resigned from her position in charge of the Fremantle Library's local history collection. She has

been there since 1998 and the library hosted a number of History Society functions during that time. Alison was seriously hurt while walking in South Terrace and was away on leave for several months.

Alison has been a member of the Society's committee after taking up her position at the Library and has served as Vice President as well. She is still a member of the *Fremantle Studies Journal* editorial team. Alison is moving with her husband, Jim, to Glen Forrest but hopes to maintain her strong ties with Fremantle, particularly through the History Society. We wish Alison and Jim all the best in any new endeavours.



WAS THIS MAN GUILTY

You are called to jury service!

The Irish Theatre Players present *The Trial* do CY O'Connor - a new play by Tony Evans based on his book *CY O'Connor: his life and legacy*.

While the idea of putting CY O'Connor on trial is, of course, imaginary, the accusations against him and the criticisms contained in the dialogue of the play were certainly levelled against him during his lifetime. As will be seen in the course of the play they occasionally surface even today. The play attempts to be historically accurate although liberties have been taken with procedure and chronological time has been suspended, the characters portrayed use actual words that were reported verbatim in newspapers, parliamentary papers and other sources.

The play is sponsored by the Australian-Irish Association as part of the celebrations to mark the Centenary of the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme which was opened on 24 January 1903.

You can see it at the Irish Club Theatre, Subiaco on 13 - 15, 16 (matinee), 20 - 22 Feb. For more information call 9287 2712.

Loretta O'Reilly
Local History Collection, Fremantle Library
P O Box 807
FREMANTLE 6160

