



President's Report

Prof Deborah Gare

23 October 2023

Committee Membership

The Committee of the History Council of WA has met formally on six occasions in the past year, and on numerous occasions for smaller working parties and advocacy work. Its members have included the following people in 2022 - 2023:

Member	Office	Representation
Deborah Gare	President	Murdoch University Australian Dictionary of Biography (WA)
Michael Nind	Vice President	Royal Western Australian Historical Society State Records Office of WA
Lucy Hair	Secretary	Local history and government Heritage
Lorraine Clarke	Treasurer	Western Australia Genealogy Society Friends of Battye
Toni Church	Membership Secretary	Museums and Archives
Paul Arthur	Committee Member	Edith Cowan University
Bruce Baskerville	Committee Member	Centre for WA History Local and regional history/heritage
Kyra Edwards	Committee Member	Local government Indigenous communities
Allen Graham	Committee Member	Fremantle History Society
Susanna Iuliano	Committee Member	Vincent Local History Library
Sue Lefroy	Committee Member	Albany Local History Library
Sarah Fulford	Committee Member	Curtin University
Annemarie McLaren	Committee Member	The University of Notre Dame Australia
Helen Munt	Committee Member	Professional Historians Association Heritage City of Perth Cultural Advisory Committee
Bobbie Oliver	Committee Member	The University of Western Australia Labour History Society State Records Office of WA NAA Perth Consultative Forum
Samantha Owen	Committee Member	Curtin University Chamber of Arts and Culture
Justin Owen	Committee Member	Curtin University Heritage and built materials

Rosinda Sears	Committee Member	History Teachers Association of WA
Aileen Walsh	Committee Member	Indigenous communities

It has been a pleasure and privilege to serve with my colleagues, and I thank them sincerely for their impact, enthusiasm and dedication to the History Council.

I particularly thank several colleagues who have declared their intent to retire from the committee at the 2022 AGM, following significant service to the History Council (and other organisations in the history and heritage sectors): **Bobbie Oliver a former vice president of the HCWA and long-serving member; Aileen Walsh who stepped down earlier this year while representing indigenous communities and histories; and Allen Graham, who has stepped down now that this role as president of the Fremantle History Society has ended.**

I thank all of my colleagues who have served on the committee this past year, and in particular **Lucy Hair who, has worked tirelessly as Secretary** to support the council and has made much of what we do possible. Lucy has indicated her intent, after a long stint of service in this role, to step down as Secretary of the History Council (though she will remain as a member). It's also the case that we don't yet have a nomination for that role on committee, which leaves us with a gaping hole in our capability.

Our 2022 – 2023 committee continued to have excellent regional representation, with members based in Albany, the Kimberley and the state's Mid-West. This has been particularly important as we work with government and communities to prepare for the 2026-2029 commemorative events, and I personally thank Sue Lefroy, Bruce Baskerville and Kyra Edwards for their work.

We also had full representation of all universities in Perth this past year, for which I am grateful.

The long reach of history

Several critical issues have dominated national and international news this year. As historians, we are particularly mindful of the importance of several key issues and events:

- The shifting social and political experiences of the pandemic now that the emergency of that period is easing, helps us better understand previous experiences and language of post-war societies;
- The coronation of Charles III reminded us of the long-reach of the past while also bearing witness to a new era of social, political and cultural change;
- Continued experiences of climate and environmental change, which can only be truly understood with the combined wisdom of science, the humanities, social sciences, and history; and
- Conflicts abroad, most notably in Ukraine and Israel-Palestine, which remind us so dramatically of twentieth-century events and the long reach of the past.

I said to members last year, and I will say again now that never in my lifetime, I think, has there been a period in which the Humanities and Social Sciences—and History in particular—have been so important in the solving of real-world problems.

Arguably the most important event of the past year was the recently held Referendum at which Australians considered a proposal to establish an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Like similar organisations, including other History Councils in Australia, the committee members of the History Council of Western Australia issued a public statement in support of the Referendum. We believed the vote offered Australians a chance to make history and, by doing so, place ourselves within a movement that has sought to advance the participation of Indigenous Australians in our democracy for a more than a century.

As historians, we sought inspiration from previous events, including the 1967 referendum, 1970s activism at Wave Hill and the native title recognition that followed, the 1988 movement that contested a single story of colonisation, the 1992 Redfern speech by Paul Keating, and the 2007 apology to the stolen generations by Kevin Rudd.

While we understand and respect that our organisation's membership will have held diverse perspectives on the Referendum, the History Council committee was proud to speak publicly in favour of the vote and saw this is a hugely important function of our role as advocates for history in Western Australia.

And while most Australians voted convincingly against the proposed constitutional change, I personally hope that this is the beginning of change, and not the end of it...that the complex and often painful public discussion we have engaged in as a nation will lead to other opportunities for reform and better understandings of our shared histories.

The Urgency of Advocacy

All of these events and issues remind us of the urgency of advocacy for our understanding of the past, its long reach into the future, and importance of our material, social and cultural heritage.

Advocacy remains the most important function of the History Council of Western Australia, and yet I will acknowledge that this feels more difficult than at any time I can previously remember.

We have previously talked about the importance of the looming 200th anniversary of the Swan River colony in 2029, and of Britain's settlement in Albany in 2026. The anniversary presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to interpret, reflect upon, commemorate, and teach others about the origins of our community. Most importantly, it should provide momentum in the reappraisal of Western Australia's past, including that of the frontier, in which Indigenous voices will shape our understandings.

And yet, despite years of advocacy before governments and public organisations, attempts to influence conversation and planning, it is hard to believe that we have yet had a significant impact on any considered, values-driven planning for 2026-2029 by the State.

Similarly, we remain concerned at the accelerated challenges faced in the protection of and advocacy for heritage in Western Australia. While our organisation regularly engages in consultative and advocacy processes regarding heritage matters, we find it more difficult than ever to achieve impact. There is particular tension in the often competing interests of heritage, development and planning, and while we may sometimes win the ear of one relevant minister, we rarely win the ear of both.

It is safe to say, in which case, that the most important issue facing our History Council in the next year is the need to dramatically improve the impact of our advocacy, the visibility of our organisation, and the strength of our voice.

This can only come with careful relationship building and profile raising, which will require hard work in person as well as smart communication strategies that are fit for our modern society. It will also be supported by the representation of our Council in other spaces and bodies, which we will urgently review.

This renewed impact of the Council will, I hope, be supported by the renewed membership of our committee in this next year, and I would like to thank the many colleagues from universities and other organisations who been nominated for the Council for the first time this evening. And I also sincerely thank colleagues who continue to serve our organisation in their re-election.

I look forward to the opportunity a year from now to fill you in on the progress I hope we will make.

History Council of Western Australia, 2023 Awards

I am delighted that the History Council will again present its annual **History Awards** to individuals and organisations who have made outstanding contributions to advocacy for and/or understandings of Western Australian history.

This year we received a number of nominations from individuals, museums, local government organisations, and community and professional associations. Nominations were assessed by an experienced panel of judges and ratified by the History Council Committee. Awards will be presented for the following categories at the 2023 AGM:

- an outstanding and enduring contribution to understandings, impact and advocacy in Western Australian history;
- a significant contribution to understandings of Indigenous history in Western Australia;
- a significant contribution to understandings of local history in Western Australia; and
- a significant contribution to the teaching of Western Australian history.

Thank you

In conclusion, may I thank each of you for your continuing support of the History Council. Never has the work of organisations such as ours been more important; never has it been more urgent for the Humanities and Social Sciences to be heard and for their impact to be felt. Your membership of our organisation helps give us a voice with which to be advocates, and I thank you.