



MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY OF
AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS

Descent

90TH ANNIVERSARY
COMMEMORATIVE
EDITION

1932-2022

WINTER 2022

"It is with much pleasure that we announce that His Excellency The Right Honourable Viscount Dunrossil, G.C.M.G., M.C., Q.C., Governor-General of Australia, has granted his Patronage to the Society of Australian Genealogists.

This is the first occasion on which the Society has been granted Vice-Regal Patronage, and it is a signal honour which will be greatly appreciated by all our members."

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER, #3, MARCH 1960

Congratulations



His Excellency, General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd.) and Her Excellency Mrs Linda Hurley



His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd)
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

***Descent* – 90th Anniversary Commemorative Edition**

It is a delight to contribute an article for this special commemorative edition of *Descent*, marking the 90th anniversary year of the Society of Australian Genealogists. To think the Society has been helping advance family history for just shy of a century is remarkable and a credit to all involved.

I am pleased to learn that Governors-General, including this Governor-General, have granted patronage to the Society for 62 of its 90 years.

Online access to genealogical content in the 21st century has never been easier. However, I would contend that the ease of accessing the primary resources, original publications and know-how of the Society makes its expertise more, not less, important. I commend the Society for ensuring the wealth of information, educational tools and resources available to members is valued and promoted. In my experience there is no substitute for diligent research and being able to cite original documents and sources to ensure what appears in the public domain is accurate.

As readers of *Descent* might recall from an earlier contribution, the Hurley family descend from Ballinspittle, a village not far from Cork City, Co. Cork, Ireland. I know that because a team of dedicated genealogical volunteers was able to trace my roots.

And, of course, family trees continue to grow. Linda and I are soon to be grandparents again. Our eldest daughter and her husband are expecting their second child in July. That will bring to three the number of Hurley grandchildren.

From my family to yours, thank you for your continued support of the Society of Australian Genealogists. To all involved, enjoy the 90th birthday celebrations.



“We may now consider the barge of our joint venture successfully launched; and as your president I have confidence in predicting a future that will be very satisfying to all of us.”

PRESIDENT'S REPORT, HERBERT J. RUMSEY
THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGIST, VOL. 1, PART 2, 1933

On 29 August 1932 a meeting attended by those with an interest in family history took place at the Education Building in Sydney and a decision was made to form a Society of Australian Genealogists. This meeting also saw the formation of a temporary committee and suggestions for a card index, reference library and the publication of a quarterly magazine.

In 2022, we are 90 years young and the Society has come a long way since that inaugural meeting and witnessed many changes both in local Australian history and also world history.

Importantly, the Society was founded on volunteers and to this day our volunteers remain a vital part of the Society, sharing their knowledge in the many facets of the Society's operation. Now, like then, the Society cannot function without their wonderful contribution.

During its 90 years, the Society has had to adapt to an ever-changing environment, perhaps no more so than the past two years. How we operate has had to change in order for us to provide the best learning experience for our members, and you, our members, should be congratulated on your willingness to embrace the changes we have made and to adapt with us. Without this willingness to adapt, the Society would not be celebrating this important milestone.

I'd also like to thank all the Society's staff, both past and present for their continual support and for always going above and beyond, regardless of the challenges and changes happening at the time, to keep the Society functioning at a high standard.

In the past two years we have seen enormous change due to the pandemic however, this has only strengthened our bonds and we have grown into a connected community that share a passion for researching our family history.

While many things have changed, some have remained as they were first envisioned, such as

our wonderful reference library which is part of our Research Centre at 379 Kent Street, Sydney and the development of our quarterly magazine *Descent*, though both have, like all facets of the Society, adapted to their changing environment.

The Society's mission is to inspire all to learn about their past and we now have in excess of 3,600 members, making us the largest family history society in Australia. While it might seem like we are achieving our goal, we cannot become complacent. Our lease on Richmond Villa expires in 2030 and the past two years have seen changes and challenges in how we function that will likely influence how the Society will operate as we head towards our centenary. However, these challenges are something I know we will overcome and as the past two years have shown us, we thrive in the face of change. We are in the process of building a long-term strategic plan for the Society that will guide us towards not only our centenary but to a sustainable and robust future in the Australian family history community.

Personally, I feel very honoured and privileged to be serving on the Board and to be your President during this momentous milestone. I was asked recently what I love about being the President and my answer was simple, I love that it allows me to meet so many of our members and to hear the wonderful stories of your research and your families. We all have an interesting story that is uniquely our own and for that reason alone, worth sharing.

The Society of Australian Genealogists has been helping people trace their families and tell their stories for 90 years. I do wonder if the attendees at that inaugural meeting ever envisioned that family history would be as popular, if not more so, 90 years on. I think they would be rather pleased to know that something that started as a meeting of family history enthusiasts has grown into the organisation and community we are all proud to be a part of today.



Celebrating 90

The Board



This image first appeared in *THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGIST*, Vol. 1, Part 7, 1934. It was taken in the Sydney Botanical Gardens, 17 January 1934.

THE FIRST EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS

Back row - left to right: W. A. W. de Beauzeville,
J. H. Mitchell, Miss F. E. Osburne-Lilly, Miss M. E. J. Yeo,
Col. H. V. Vernon, M. B. Younger

Front row - left to right: J. K. S. Houison, P. W. Gledhill,
H. J. Rumsey (President), E. McC. S. Hill (Hon. Sec.),
Rev. F. R. Swynny, R. W. Small

Insets: B. Turner, Miss B. Maughan, S. W. Webb





Then & Now

CURRENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE SOCIETY OF
AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGISTS

Back row - left to right: Janette Pelosi, Philippa Shelley Jones,
Darryl Low Choy

Front row - left to right: Melissa Hulbert, Keith Roberts, Cheryl
Wright, Kerry Farmer

Left: Betty O'Neill and Sonya Russell



Chief Executive Officer



*The Executive Committee have
suggested the following motto:
Memor esto majorum -*

“Be mindful of your ancestors.”

THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGIST,
1933, VOL. 1, PART 1.

The Society has had a long history of personnel, both volunteers and paid staff who have had the unique privilege of serving members from the offices of the organisation based in the various locations in the city of Sydney as you will see from page 19.

I'm the latest of the administration leads of the organisation (think of having to follow up Heather Garnsey and Nick Vine Hall!) juggling the complexity of providing 21st century family history education for members and the public.

One of the lasting legacies that both Nick and Heather left to the Society was their media appearances on ABC Radio and for Nick, publishing *Tracing Your Family History in Australia: A National Guide to Sources*, and Heather, or 'legend' as I like to call her around the office, has produced numerous SAG guides to collections and was instrumental in bringing on the Society's membership from paper to digital sources of research. Heather edited two Australasian editions of *Tracing Your Family History Online for Dummies*, compiled a monthly genealogy column for *Australian Netguide* and later the *Australian Personal Computer User* magazine.

With just over two years into the role, I feel as though I have been in lockdown more than I've been in our Research Centre and Library in Kent Street, Sydney. But I've been online. I've had the absolute pleasure of hosting events and building relationships over Zoom – a sign of our times. I realised that I had no idea of the height of some people when coming across one of our group leads in May, I declared immediately, "You are so tall in person!"

More bridge building (the Sydney Harbour Bridge is go too!)

I see my role as developing our largely new administrative team to cater for the translation of how to approach 21st century family history. That involves interpreting the growing options of online platforms for family records and web services as much as having an understanding of each Australian state's BDM holdings, similar to how a politician needs to be able to quote the latest unemployment and inflation figures! A huge part of that approach is understanding how Society members undertake their research, listening to them and our essential volunteer cohorts on how they see the future of the Society and their roles within.

One of the other aspects of the future is shouting about some of the Society's successes! For instance, in 1974 the Society of Australian Genealogists, National Library of Australia and Mitchell Library, forged a partnership to preserve original parish registers on microfilm to not only ensure their long-term survival, but to also make them more accessible to researchers. Almost 50 years later, the project continues to deliver extraordinary results for researchers as the Joint Copying Project.

From the Board, to all of our Committees and staff, we are proactively seeking out the best new family history research methods, technology programs and ways to enhance our pastime or professional practice relevant to our community. Not always possible to undertake as there are many researchers, centres, institutions within Australia and across the world. However it is defined, finding family may be the most important thing we are all doing in some form.

I am working on the architectural tradition inherited from my predecessors. This encourages a future-thinking mindset to constantly look for ways to build the bridge between the Society and those important in the family history world. We strive to ensure the place of the SAG within the industry ecology. That is, pursuing the functions of educational delivery, resource provision, research support, institutional liaison, translation, partnerships – basically, how to extract and connect our family history community with the relevant expertise. This expertise might be in the form of academic, institutional or commercial informers. Meet your Society builder and broker. There is an apt quote for these times that I can round this out with "Men build too many walls and not enough bridges." So let us build more bridges.



Image: File 22: Mrs Macquarie's Chair, 1950s / photographed by Max Dupain - Sydney Harbour Picnic 1947, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW

Our Staff

“What I love about working at the Society.”



Alex Mountain - Archival Project Manager

I love the people: the staff, the volunteers, the members, and the ancestors found in the pages and photographs of the archives. All make my work at SAG enjoyable and rewarding.

Danielle Tebb - Membership Officer

Although various systems periodically change, the fundamental qualities of the Society – a genuine love of family history and a desire to share acquired knowledge and tips - remains unchanged and, as staff, I witness this in action on a daily basis.

Gemma Beswick - Library Services Manager

I love working at SAG, particularly in the library, because every day is so

full of potential for exciting discoveries. It's mind boggling to think just how much family history information is contained within the resources that SAG holds. I love working with our wonderful volunteers too!

Karlie Frelingos - Librarian

I love books and history, to have the two merged into this role is a dream come true. I am also really inspired by the team I work with, they are incredible people and I am encouraged by their passion and motivation to see this Society continue to grow and evolve.

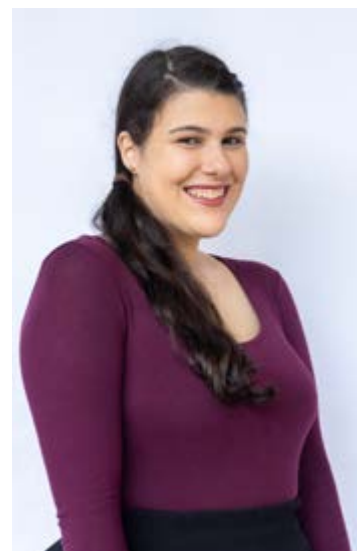
Vanessa Cassin - Education Manager

I love working with SAG because of the dedicated team, both staff and volunteers, and the willingness of all the members to share their knowledge with their fellow researchers.



Above - left to right: Gemma Beswick, Danielle Tebb, Ruth Graham, Vanessa Cassin

Right - Alex Mountain and Karlie Frelingos





Vice-Patrons

The Society is fortunate to have four Vice-Patrons who are long standing officers and supporters of the SAG. Richard d'Apice, Keith Johnson, Martyn Killion and Malcolm Sainty have all provided outstanding service to the Society for decades and continue to be on hand for a diverse set of needs from legal advice to the story of how a collection of brass rubbings made their way into Richmond Villa!

A word from one of our Vice-Patrons Martyn Killion:

Being one of the Society's Vice Patrons is a great honour and I embrace the opportunity to be an advocate for the SAG in the wider community. My involvement with the Society goes back to the 1970s. I have volunteered in many capacities, including as a Board member for 20 years with two terms as President. The Society's continued growth over 90 years is

due to the foresight, tireless work and passion of many individuals who have devoted years and in many cases decades to its work. This dedication has resulted in some extraordinary outcomes. One need only think about initiatives such as the transcription of the headstones in Rookwood, the largest cemetery in the southern hemisphere, the determination to raise funds for, and own our own premises, our leadership of collaborative projects such as the Australasian Genealogical Computer Index and being at the forefront of genealogical education, including webinars. It is a laudable track record of achievement which has earned the Society respect from the wider historical research community, government archives and libraries as well as the general public, and it has helped shape the genealogical community that we know and love today.

...we should take, as soon as funds will admit, the publication of a small quarterly magazine, with the papers read by members, items of genealogical interest and news of the progress of the Society.

President Herbert J. Rumsey, F.S.G. (Lond.). A paper read at the first meeting of the Society of Australian Genealogists, on August 29th, 1932.



1932

1933	Rev. Frank R. Swynny
1933	Herbert J. Rumsey
1944	Colin B. Berckelman
1944	Rev. William Beck
1945	Colin B. Berckelman
1946	Arthur G. Spencer
1947	George A. King
1948	Rev. William Beck
1950	George A. King
1950	Rev. William Beck
1956	Rev. O. Bruce McCarthy
1961	K. A. Slater and George B. Gidley King
1965	A. J. Gray, K. A. Slater and George B. Gidley King
1966	K. A. Slater, G. B. Gidley King and Lorna Blacklock
1967	G. B. Gidley King and Lorna Blacklock
1969	Lorna Blacklock and Holford Beattie
1971	Lorna Blacklock and B. W. Thomas
1975	Lorna Blacklock and S. A. Landsdowne
1977	S.A. Landsdowne and Dr. K. W. Knight
1979	Evan C. Best, Dr K. W. Knight and John K. McLaughlin
1984	Evan C. Best
1986	Evan C. Best and D. A. Weston

Our Publications

FROM *THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGIST* IN 1933, THE FIRST NEWSLETTER IN 1944 TO *DESCENT* IN 1961, OUR MISSION HAS BEEN TO INFORM AND EDUCATE OUR MEMBERS.

What a delight it has been to review all of the journals, newsletters and magazines, produced by previous Editors of the past 90 years. How fortunate members are to have such records available and we are indebted to the founders of the Society who knew the value and importance of capturing and sharing information. These publications not only map the progress and challenges of the Society but also parallel what was happening more broadly across the Australian social landscape.

Each Editor (Joint-Editor, Co-Editor and Guest Editor), have brought their own editorial style to the publications. What is consistent across all 90 years, is a desire to inform, assist in the pursuit of family research and

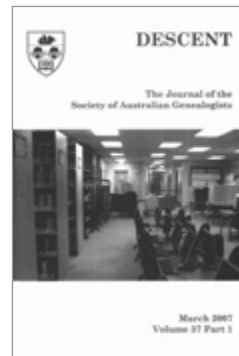
bring a variety of quality resources and content to all members and interested parties.

Decisions regarding layout, style, fonts, colour and composition are all easily identifiable changes. When did we first introduce images, maps, family trees? What did these changes represent to the reading audience?

To celebrate the extraordinary achievement of continuous publication over the last 90 years, we have put together this commemorative issue for you to enjoy.

As the outgoing Honorary Co-Editors, we are thankful for the opportunity to have contributed to the evolution and continuation of *Descent*. We look forward to its ongoing success.

- 1987 ● Evan C. Best
- 1988 ● Evan C. Best and John T. Spurway
- 1989 ● Evan C. Best and Heather Garnsey
- 2000 ● Evan C. Best
- 2010 ● Evan C. Best and Carole Riley
- 2012 ● Carole Riley
- 2016 ● Carole Riley/Janette Pelosi/Michelle Coventry
- 2017 ● Michelle Coventry/Anne Powell
- 2018 ● Anne Powell
- 2020 ● Jennifer Kapp and Melinda Kapp



The evolution of the Society's magazine from 1932 to now.

Right: Melinda Kapp (standing) and Jennifer Kapp (sitting)

Opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge
 Founding of the Australian Broadcasting Commission
 Great Depression
 Extinction of Tasmanian 'Tiger'
 Thylacine

World War II
 First women elected to Australian Parliament
 Post-war immigration drive
 Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme

Korean War
 Introduction of polio vaccine
 Melbourne 1956 Olympic Games
 Television first broadcast
 First nuclear weapons test by British at Maralinga

Referendum on Indigenous Recognition
 Introduction of decimal currency
 Vietnam War
 End of White Australia Policy

Sydney Opera House opens
 Cyclone Tracy hits Darwin
 Governor-General dismisses Whitlam Government
 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park



1930s

1932

The first meeting of the Society's Council on 29 August 1932

46 Founding Members

Life members accepted at £8/8/-

1933

The Library is established

1934

The Society's First Annual Exhibition - Genealogical and Family History Exhibition (held in the Gallery of the Education Building)

1936

First Ladies' Evening - Miss Margaret Windeyer gave a very interesting and witty address on "some prominent Sydney ladies" of a previous generation

1940s

1942

With the impact of World War II, monthly lectures were temporarily abandoned (these had been held since 1933)

The Council decided to open the Reading Room on Sundays, for the benefit of service men, who may be in Sydney

Paper rationing required the Society to consider the volume of printing

1943

Special meeting of the members of the Society on 18 November to register the Society and change the Constitution

1944

The Society is Incorporated (under the Companies Act, 1936)

1950s

1950

First Patron of the Society - The Hon. K. W. Street, Chief Justice of New South Wales

1953

The Majority Year of the Society - "Respice" (look back), "Prospice" (look forward), adopted as an additional motto

1954

Death of Miss Mary Yeo - In 1940 Miss Mary Yeo appointed as the Society's first female Vice-President

1956

Family Chart sent to all current members to complete

1957

Society's Silver Jubilee Year

1958

First Appeal Fund

1960s

1960

First granting of vice-regal patronage

1961

Descent is born and the front cover designed by the Society's Librarian, Mr. G. W. Laver

1965

28 volumes of the Australian Cemetery Index bound and available to members

1967

H. J. Rumsey Annual Lecture commenced "H. J. Rumsey, The Society of Australian Genealogists and an Era" an introduction By O. B. Waldron-McCarthy (President)

1970s

1973

Introduction of the first Diploma in Family Historical Studies (Dip.F.H.S.)

1976

Announcement in December, by the New South Wales Government, that the Society would be granted a lease of Richmond Villa. "With this announcement commenced a new era in the progress of the Society"

1977

Diploma examination was passed for the first time by three successful candidates

First Australian Congress

1978

Richmond Villa officially opened as the Society's new headquarters

Australia II wins America's Cup
Australian dollar is floated
Uluru returned to traditional owners
Introduction of Medicare

CSIRO develop stable wi-fi
Port Arthur Massacre Landmark
Mabo decision recognising Native Title
'No' vote for Republican Referendum

Sydney 2000 Olympic Games
Bali Bombings
National Apology to the Stolen Generations
Black Saturday Bushfires

First female Governor-General
First female Prime Minister
Uluru Statement from the Heart
Legalisation of same sex marriage

Black Summer bushfires
COVID-19 Pandemic
National borders closed
State Lockdowns
Everyone is baking their favourite family recipe!



Image: Outline of mountains near Welaregang sketched at the request of Sir John Hay in 1857 - panoramic watercolour drawing comprising 8 sheets, 18.5 x 262 cm - State Library of NSW

1980s

1980

Australian Archives Conservator, Mr Neville Corbett, recommended improvements in the storage conditions in the basement area of Richmond Villa

1981

First Computer Committee

1982

Society's Golden Jubilee Year

Grant of the Society's Coat of Arms

1988

First International Congress on Family History hosted by the Society

Rookwood Bicentennial Project

1990s

1992

Leasing and renovation of Rumsey Hall

1993

First contribution by NSW Archives to Descent

1995

Introduction of computers into the Library at Richmond Villa, Rumsey follows the following year

1996

The Society's first 'Showcase' to the public

SAG on the internet

1997

Computerised Library catalogue (Athena) launched

2000s

2000

Launch of the Society's website

Centenary of Federation Program funded additional microfilming of original Anglican registers

2001

Member survey issued on all aspects of the Society

SAG-E monthly newsletter first published

2006

New Library premises bought at Henty House, 2/379 Kent Street, Sydney

2007

Society's Diamond Jubilee Year
Library officially opened

2010s

2012

Significant benefaction received from Colin and Loas Croker

2014

First Croker Prize Winner for Biography

2015

MIDAS launched - Primary Records Collection renamed the Manuscript, Image and Digital Archiving System

First DNA Research Group formed

2016

New Society logo and branding launch

2018

First female President

15th Australasian Congress hosted by the Society

Today

2020

President's Report:

'COVID-19 has seen the lockdown of the world including Australia, and with it, the temporary closing of our bricks and mortar premises.

A new, easy to use conferencing platform, Zoom, will allow even greater connectivity with our members. Our regular Research Groups' meetings will also utilise Zoom. We have also turned our face-to-face lectures into webinars.'

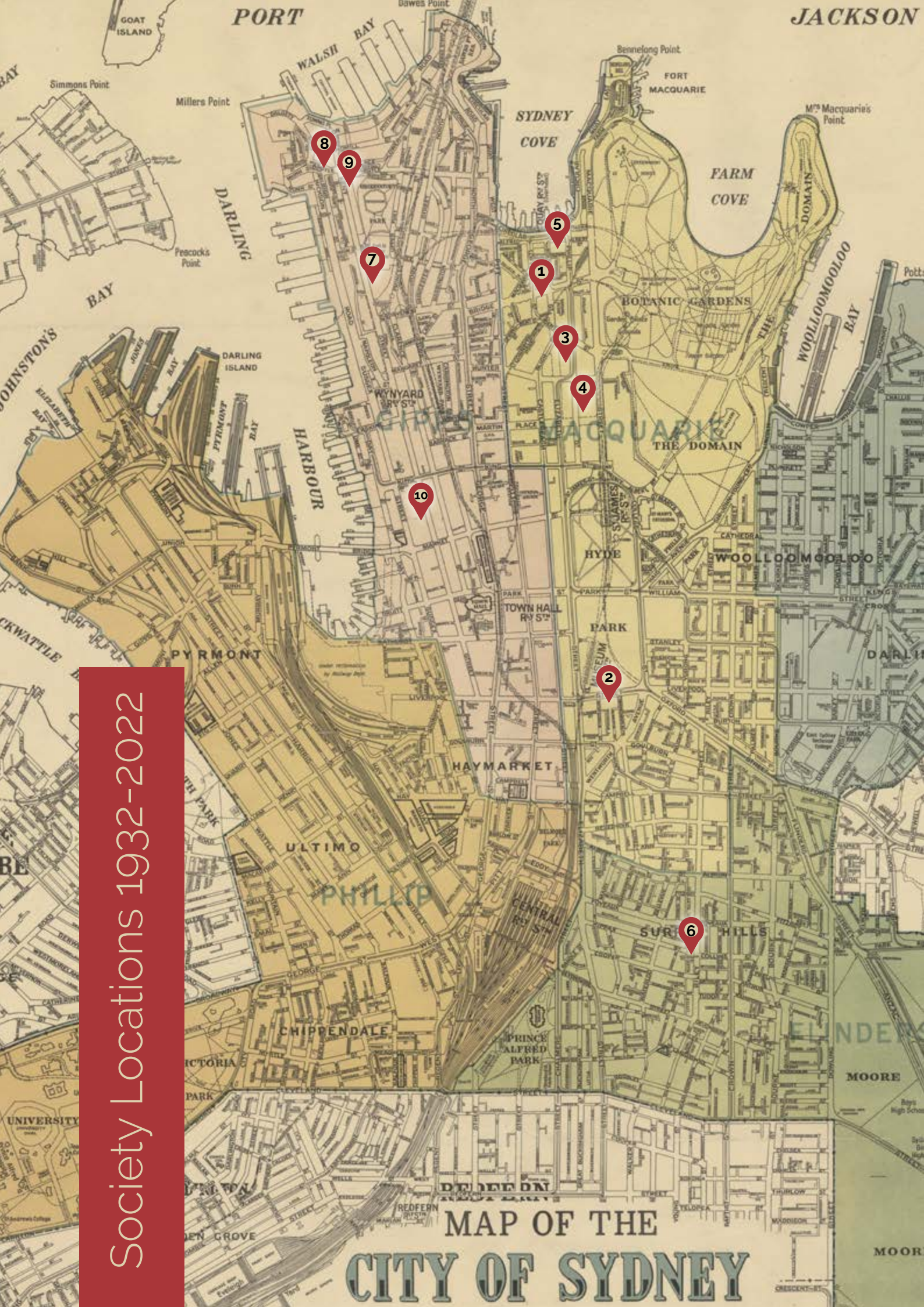
2021

First Nations virtual conference

2022

90th Anniversary

Society Locations 1932-2022



MAP OF THE
CITY OF SYDNEY

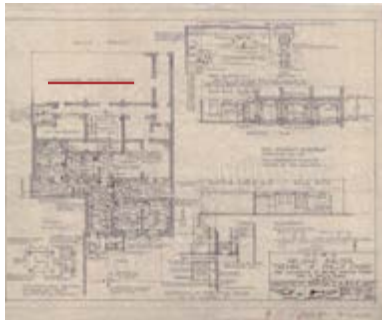
In Residence



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

1. First meeting held at the New South Wales Department of Education Building, 35-39 Bridge Street, Sydney [29 August 1932]
2. A room on the first floor in Buckland Chambers, 183 Liverpool Street, Sydney [1933-1935]
3. Basement of Cromer, 91a Phillip Street, Sydney [1935-1958]
4. Lanark House, 148 Phillip Street, Circular Quay Sydney [1958-1964]
5. History House, 8 Young Street, Sydney, NSW (with Royal Australian Historical Society) [1965-1970]
6. Heritage House, 413 Riley Street, Surry Hills [1971-1978]
7. Richmond Villa, 120 Kent Street, Sydney [12 February 1978 - ongoing]
8. Annex, 8 Argyle Place, Sydney [1984-1992]
9. Rumsey Hall, 24-26 Kent Street, Sydney [1992-2006]
10. Henty House, 2/379 Kent Street, Sydney [2007 - ongoing]

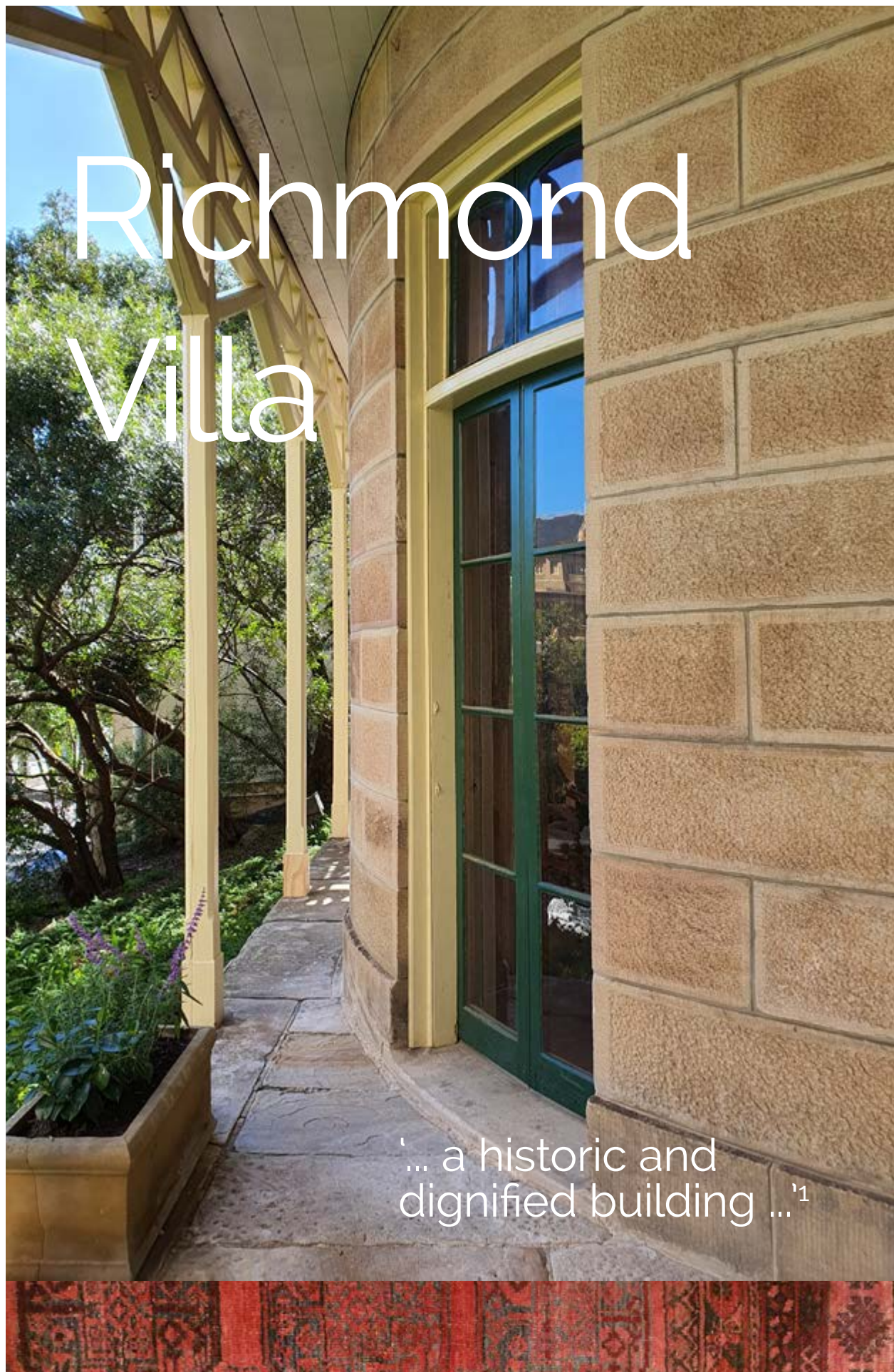


Opposite: Map of the City of Sydney, 1930 [cartographic material/Ken Craige].

This page:

1. Education Department building, [A-00010510]. City of Sydney Archives
2. Fire Underwriters' Association of NSW, Plans of Sydney (Fire Underwriters), 1917-1939. (01/01/1917 - 31/12/1939). [A-00880256]. City of Sydney Archives
3. Phillip St (91) Cromer (01/01/1942). [A-00545479]. City of Sydney Archives
4. Lanark House Phillip St. Golden Jubilee SAG p.42
5. History House, 8 Young Street, Sydney. Royal Australian Historical Society, <https://www.rahs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/8-young-street-sydney-nsw-royal-australian-historical-society.jpg>
6. 413 Riley St. Golden Jubilee SAG, p.43
7. Richmond Villa, Golden Jubilee SAG, p.2
8. H Percy Dove, Plans of Sydney (Doves), 1880. Map 25 -. City of Sydney Archives
9. Rumsey Hall. SAG Images
10. Fire Underwriters' Association of NSW, Plans of Sydney (Fire Underwriters), 1917-1939. Blocks 146, 147 (01/01/1917 - 31/12/1939). [A-00880241]. City of Sydney Archives

1932-2022



Richmond Villa

'... a historic and
dignified building ...'¹

In December 1976, the New South Wales Government announced that the Society of Australian Genealogists would be granted a long-term lease of Richmond Villa.² Less than 12 months later, coinciding with the Society's 45th Anniversary in 1977, Richmond Villa was moved from its original location and re-erected at its current Kent Street site.³

Each stone was painstakingly recorded and numbered before the dismantling of the building began and the move took place.⁴ Heritage NSW describes the reconstruction as 'a successful and rare example of careful dismantling, re-erection and adaptive re-use of a state significant building'.⁵

The official opening of Richmond Villa at the Kent Street site took place on a 'perfect summer Sunday afternoon' on Sunday, 12 February 1978 by the then Governor of New South Wales, Sir Arthur Roden Cutler, VC, AK, KCMG, KCVO, CBE.⁶

Richmond Villa is a glorious 'two storey stone building with large rooms and a full-length basement'⁷ and is built from Hawkesbury Sandstone.⁸ It is presently located at 120 Kent Street, Millers Point only two minutes' walk from Sydney Observatory on Observatory Hill.

Richmond Villa was designed by and built for, then Colonial Architect Mortimer Lewis between 1849 – 1851 and "originally adjoined Richmond Terrace and stood behind Parliament House, facing the Domain from 1849 to 1975".⁹

Mortimer Lewis became insolvent in 1849 and Richmond Villa was sold to George Rogers, Samuel Peek, Josiah Vincent Lavers and finally James Williams and family resided at the property until 1872.¹⁰ In 1880 Richmond Villa was resumed by the New South Wales Government and 'was one of a number of privately-owned properties on the east side of Macquarie Street resumed under the Macquarie Street Land Resumption Act'¹¹ for "quarters for the Parliamentary Librarian and a Storage Depot for Books'. Known as Richmond House¹², the building operated as an annex of Parliament House and had been the office and party rooms of the NSW Country Party until 1975.¹³

Richmond Villa has almost seen it all, from Colonial Architect, to merchants, grocers, importer, city councillor, cordial manufacturers, families with young children, a stock & station agent through to parliamentarians and distinguished characters.¹⁴ At least two children (both daughters of George Neville Griffiths a leasee of the building¹⁵) were born in the building!¹⁶

In the time that SAG has occupied the building, politicians, parliamentarians, presidents, and former prime ministers have graced its majestic rooms and hallways. Richmond Villa has been the backdrop to photography sessions, morning teas, dinner parties, book launches, events and tv shows. It has also been (or maybe still is) home to a ghost!

Richmond Villa has obviously also seen the likes of thousands of enthusiastic genealogists and those attending family history events pass through its doors over the past 45 years and even witnessed the awarding of the very first Diplomas of Family Historical Studies to the first three successful candidates in 1978.¹⁷

In 1982, Jean Watson (Fellow) remarked in 'Golden Jubilee History: Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982' 'The Villa was proving to be a gracious home for the Society' and 40 years after Jean's comments, this remains true.¹⁸

1. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1975. New Premises. Australian Genealogists' Newsletter, December 1975 (Number 5), p.1
 2. McLaughlin, J., 1976. Report of the President. Descent: The Official Organ of the Society of Australian Genealogists, 8 (Part 2), p.94
 3. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1977. New Premises. Australian Genealogists' Newsletter, December 1977 (Number 7), p.1
 4. Martin, M., 2022. Painted decoration from Richmond Villa. [online]. Sydney Living Museums. Available at: <<https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/painted-decoration-richmond-villa>> [Accessed 18 May 2022].
 5. Heritage NSW, 2022. House 'Richmond Villa' Including Interior | Heritage NSW. [online]. Apps.environment.nsw.gov.au. Available at: <<https://apps.environment.nsw.gov.au/dpcheritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=2423502>> [Accessed 18 May 2022].

6. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982. Golden Jubilee History: Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982. Sydney: Society of Australian Genealogists, p.61.
 7. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1975. p.1
 8. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978. Richmond Villa. Australian Genealogists' Newsletter, December 1978 (Number 8), p.1
 9. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978, p.1
 10. Heritage NSW, 2022.
 11. Martin, M., 2022.
 12. ibid.
 13. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978. p.1
 14. Heritage NSW, 2022.
 15. ibid.
 16. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1978. p.1
 17. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982. p.62
 18. Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982. p.63



The Value of Membership

Gillian Iles

SAG has an elite group of members who have attained over 50 consecutive years of membership. Many of them have not only supported us financially throughout those years, but have also dedicated countless hours in supporting us in numerous voluntary capacities. Danielle Tebb asked these members for some of their memories of SAG over the years.



Sometime in 1964, on a visit to Sydney from the Upper Hunter, I decided to investigate the Society of Australian Genealogists, then located at 148 Phillip Street. All I remember was a long, book lined room with Miss Watson sitting at the end. In those far off days, to gain membership of SAG, you needed to be sponsored by a current Member and your personal details approved by the Committee!

I was unable to visit regularly until 1980/81. At this time, the Society was at Richmond Villa, 120 Kent Street. I met Commander Swan and Miss Blacklock, both stalwarts of their time. Some years later I became a volunteer (Vol) in the Overseas Room, located upstairs at Richmond Villa. The microform collection (records on either microfiche and microfilm) were in the next room, under the helpful eyes of Noel Layton's wife, Madeline. The Australian Collection was housed downstairs.

I spent a year or so in the Archives section, transcribing details from correspondence which were then typed onto cards by Marjorie Woore. The letters I particularly remember were those to/from Nancy Gray when she was Research Secretary in the 1960s. She obtained UK birth, death and marriage certificates for three shillings and six pence!

As attendance and membership numbers increased, the microform collection was transferred in 1984 to the "Annex", a cottage at 8 Argyle Place. I relieved there occasionally and it was there I first met Heather Garnsey. In 1992 the Society rented a building at 24 Kent Street, later renamed "Rumsey Hall" and moved all the overseas records and later the computers to the first floor. As a Vol, I worked in the "Overseas" section and also helped John Kelly transfer to finding folders all the UK census returns produced in pamphlets by their relative Family History Societies. The "Australian" collection remained at Richmond Villa, which involved a lot of running up and down Kent Street.

Generous donations in response to a Building Appeal allowed SAG to purchase a floor in an office block at Henty House, 379 Kent Street in 2006. At last, the most utilised collections and the library Vols were under one roof again. After many happy years working with wonderful Staff, Vols and enquiring Members, I retired in 2015.



Geoffrey Leggatt

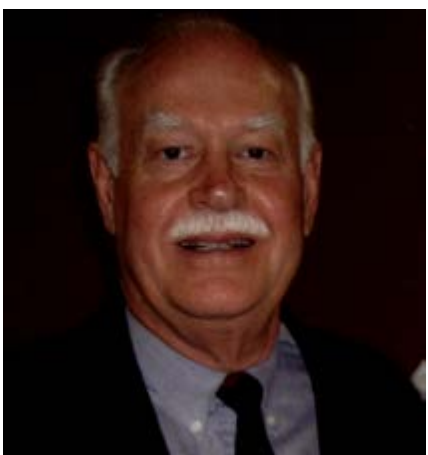
I certainly have many memories of very friendly, helpful and resourceful staff and volunteers along with many hours of research using your wonderful collection of research materials.



Dr John McLaughlin AM

I was on the SAG Council from 1972 to 1998, holding the office of President from 1974-1978. Aside from my time on the Council, I regard my outstanding achievement as being the acquisition of Richmond Villa for

the headquarters of the Society. I have been a member for over 60 years, was awarded a Fellowship in 1997, was made an Honorary Member in 2004, and am also a Benefactor of the Society.



Evan Best OAM

Evan served on the SAG Board from December 1978 until December 2011, was President from 1985-1993, and for most of those 33 years edited *Descent*, either singularly or in a joint capacity - some 128 issues in all! An English master in his professional life, he ensured the journal's content was of the highest standard. Good grammar, punctuation and spelling were non-negotiable for all journal content and he was a meticulous proof reader - very few typos escaped his eagle eye (and red pen). He was also particular about layout, and drilled into us the need to avoid 'widows and orphans' and was a master at editing a paragraph to make sure it fitted the space available.

During his long role as Honorary Editor, he saw the preparation of the quarterly journal progress from being a completely manual process

to one in which the content was set up 'in house' and a final 'print ready' electronic file sent to the printers. He called all computers 'knitting machines' and didn't trust them.

In his last editorial in *Descent* 41-4 December 2011 page 163, Evan wrote 'In this transient world of evanescent electronic web sites and media, everyone seems hell-bent on creating and destroying records with the stroke of a key rather than being concerned with creating and preserving a permanent archive for the future. It is to be hoped that *Descent* will continue to record the progress of the Society and of genealogical research and scholarship, maintaining its place as a leading genealogical journal.' His high editorial standards and services to genealogy were rewarded with an OAM in 2010.

Life Membership



Dr Anthony Joseph

I discovered an interest in genealogy aged around ten when shown a book about English Royalty and the frontispiece was a genealogical table of the ancestry of the then Monarch (George VI) back to Hengist and Horsa! Impressed by this, I asked my father about our ancestral records and he suggested 'that was Royalty and we were immigrant Jews with no records'. I vowed to prove him wrong and set about checking up our family tree.

My Dad (wonderful man, still much missed nearly fifty years after his death, best possible father ever) was never interested in the topic but by the end of his life he agreed that far more records existed than he had imagined would be the case. In fact we are Ashkenazi Jews and were amongst the 5% or so of UK Jewry that can trace its origins in UK itself back to the mid-17th Century.

My father's profession was an actuary and he was in fact a superb mathematician whereas I am scarcely numerate! However we both had noticed that many other mathematicians, historically too (see Eric Temple Bell's book "Men of Mathematics") were also interested in family history and Dad had already found that many of his actuarial colleagues also shared my interest in the subject. It seems statistically significant but in our case the gene may have split itself during generational transmission.

When, aged 18 in 1955, I wanted to become a member of the London Society of Genealogists (SOG) there was a difficulty that you needed to be 21 (it is now 18). My father knew an actuarial colleague, Sir William Elderton, who was then a Vice President of the SOG and he wrote to Sir William:

"Can you do me a favour? My elder son wishes to join the SOG but is apparently too young. I should add that despite my bias as his father he is quite normal, even personable, apart from this kink about genealogy?"

Sir William replied:

"My dear Joseph, with pleasure and I will sort out the bureaucracy in his favour. Give him a word of advice: if he minds what he finds he should not look!"

Dad responded:

"Thanks, it is not Anthony who minds but it is I who gets upset to discover that someone I have always disliked is a third cousin or some such!"

I was unaware of this correspondence until my father died and I had to go through his papers etc. I have followed Sir William's advice ever since!

So since at that time life membership of institutions was much more possible than it is now (probably it should not have been so as actuarially dodgy even then my Dad said), I joined the SOG as a Life member. Perhaps you can now understand why I followed suit with the SAG when I came to Sydney in 1963. In the light of you telling me that I am the ONLY surviving SAG life member I am wondering how many other SOG members are also SAG members? I returned to the UK in 1964, but I had developed a wide interest in the many branches of my family who had settled in various areas of Australia since the 1830s.

As Jews have never been more than 0.5% of the Australian population at any time, although today the ratio is nearer to 0.1%, therefore any items of Jewish genealogical interest reflect on a small minority of the total Society's membership. Quite a number of articles involving Jewish research etc have appeared in *Descent* over the years, including some that I have contributed that are relevant to my sub-specialty. As I have a general interest in the "art" of genealogy, I like to contribute to the mainstream as well as within my own ethnic area.

Many different strands on many different sides of my widespread clan have over the past two centuries or so settled in Australia or New Zealand. It has been a great joy finding them and their descendants; and in many cases establishing life long extra friendships in the process.



90 Years Strong

The Society shares its 90th birthday, not only with other institutions like the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), R. M. Williams and national monuments such as the Harbour Bridge and The Dog on the Tuckerbox, but also with 10 of our valued members. Happy Birthday! We share some of their memories on their time at SAG.

Jill Hyslop

Although I have kept up my membership, it has been years since I worked on my family's history. Having to look after my unwell husband, I just let the research lapse, but hopefully I will get back to it. As for my 90th birthday, it's fun to know we share it with our amazing Harbour Bridge.

Image: The opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, March 19th 1932. bBE7625J7NEk. Dixon Galleries. State Library of NSW

Ellie Browne

I have found SAG to be very helpful and even as I sit here I am continuing family history with my daughter-in-law. I found the "Can You Help" section in *Descent* to be most helpful and was able to trace many family members over the years. The new style of *Descent* is very appealing and easy to read. Although I was not able to visit the Library or attend seminars as I lived out of Sydney, I appreciated the SAG representatives who gave seminars at the Armidale Family History Group.



Volunteer Research Officers



A wonderful team of volunteers, who include our extraordinary Volunteer Research Officers, Judy Meyer and Sue Comrie-Thomson, expertly assist with the many and varied research requests that are sent to us. Gemma Beswick asked Judy and Sue to reflect on their time in the role...

Judy Meyer

After being a volunteer Librarian for the Society for 21 years, in 2015 a vacancy occurred for a volunteer Research Officer for Country Members. I was appointed and quickly learnt it was like "pick-a-box" – you never knew what was coming next! Sometimes the requests will flow for a few weeks and then there is a dry-spell. Most member requests are from New South Wales, however there is the occasional one from New Zealand, Tasmania and Queensland.

The majority of the research requests are for New South Wales and a portion for the UK. None are simple – if they were I wouldn't have received the request! They come in all shapes and sizes – some where I am given so little information, I think the member must think I am a mind-reader! Other requests include copies of certificates and reams of information – obviously all important to get a full picture of the research.

I have discovered some wonderful things over the years, however what I always appreciate is that I am usually guaranteed a lovely response saying "thank you".



Sue Comrie-Thomson

My role is to answer written enquiries from non-members who live outside the Sydney metropolitan area, including interstate and overseas. I have been doing this for about 23 years. I love the whole research process, and the challenge of trying to break through other people's brick walls.

I must have answered hundreds of enquiries since I started, but the most rewarding have been those where I have been able to unite people with long-lost (or never before known) close relatives. Two which stand out were the descendants of Australian soldiers who fathered children whilst on leave in England during the First World War. One was a grand-daughter, for whom I was able to find family members in Adelaide, whom she and her son travelled out to visit. The other was a son, who discovered at the age of 66 that his older sister was in fact his mother, and the much older woman who had brought him up had been his grandmother. I was able to find four half-siblings born in Sydney in the 1930s who were very surprised to hear from him, but very accepting, and one or two of them travelled to England to meet him.

Some of the enquiries have been very amusing. The best one was from a woman in England who was trying to verify a number of newspaper articles from Birmingham in 1958-1962, claiming that six brothers living there were entitled to a £60 million fortune by the Australian Government. They were descended from the brother of a convict, Edward Morris, who died intestate in 1822. They believed that he owned Hyde Park and the Sydney Domain, which he bought with money given to him by a sea captain, and that he left it in his will to his brother in England, but because of a lot of "jiggery-pokery" by Australian Government departments, the family had never received a penny under the will. I found that he had two small adjoining parcels of land, running from Castlereagh Street to Elizabeth Street, across the road from Hyde Park. His widow took possession of them when he died, but in 1823 a man named Richard Williams moved in with her and had the leases assigned to him. They married in 1826, when he was 32 and she was 53. In the Land Titles Office I found that he sold part of the land in 1849 for £500 and the rest in 1853 for £225, so that was the end of the story!

Volunteer Legend

Jesica Shroff takes us through the incredible contributions of one of the Society's most active volunteers, Bill Trenwith

Bill Trenwith has volunteered for the Society of Australian Genealogists for over 30 years, working tirelessly behind the scenes on multiple projects. In a recent interview, he recounts the long hours spent on numerous projects with the SAG in addition to how he came to be interested in his own family history.

"I started work in New Zealand and after a few years the company moved me to Australia with the understanding they would send my wife and I back on holiday to Auckland every 2 years. When we went back, my wife and I would go to the graveyard and put some flowers on the grave. It was a nice, beautiful sunny Sunday morning in 1978. We went out to the cemetery, tidied around the plaque and put some flowers on the grave. As we were walking back to where we parked the car, my wife said, "My nana's buried in this cemetery too!" It was a large cemetery - halfway walking up the hill to the car she said, "Look! There she is!" Surely enough, there was her Nana. We looked at it, and I said "If you ever wanted to do your family history, there's an awful lot written on these headstones". So we went back to the car and got a pencil and paper and then wrote everything down off the headstones. Someone had suggested going to the Auckland Registry Office and seeing if they knew when she died. They brought out a book which had when she was married, when she

died. It cost us 5 shillings to look at the book."

The following day, Bill went back to another graveyard in Crafton Gully to look for his great grandfather John Trenwith, who had started a shoe factory in 1870. His grave lay in the centre surrounded by a rusted iron fence with its headstone propped up against a withered overgrown tree.

"We wrote that down and caught a plane to Sydney. The next day someone asked us to inquire into a Sydney genealogy society. So, it all started in a graveyard!"

After retiring in 1991, Bill noticed a section in *Descent* asking for volunteers to help rejuvenate one of the heritage buildings, Rumsey Hall, at 24 Kent Street. Later, this turned into a two year project. A group of volunteers, including Bill, worked Fridays of each week, painting and providing general repairs.

Since then, Bill has been involved in three other volunteer projects. For about 20 years he worked on the NSW archive films of ships' papers to list the passengers and crew of ships arriving in Sydney harbour in the 1800s. The results were added to the AGCI database.

Bill had also been a vital worker on the newspaper project for the SAG. He recounts how he spent

TEN RULES FOR GENEALOGICAL CORRESPONDENCE.

1. Use wise discrimination in choosing those with whom you correspond.
2. Ask courteously for what you want, then complete the letter.
3. Be direct and right to the point.
4. Avoid long, tedious, prosy, and rambling letters, with a detailed history of yourself and family.
5. Make it as easy as possible for the other person to help you by enclosing printed charts for reply.
6. Be sure to give help as well as to ask for assistance.
7. Always send return postage, unless to an official whose postage is provided.
8. Preserve in an alphabetical correspondence file a copy of each letter sent and reply received.
9. Do not ask others to compile information which is accessible to you and which you can do for yourself.
10. Be as prompt in your replies as you wish your correspondents to be in answering your queries.

THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALIST,
1934, VOL. 1, PART 8.

time taking collections of cuttings from local newspapers from around NSW and pasting them onto thousands of sheets of paper, whether they were scrap or other spare paper lying around. On Mondays he came in to do shipping, taking home little cases of 2 or 3 bundles of papers and then working on them throughout the week to extract personal names along with information such as dates, the paper, and why they were mentioned. This was then entered into a computer file and on the following Monday there would be more shipping to do at the SAG. This lasted for 20 years and in total, there was 1.7 million names in the database. Bill recounts how he would then take scans of these sheets of cuttings, including the Arch Gray papers, so they could be stored and recovered as digital copies. This took around 1-2 years.

Bill's contributions towards the Society of Australian Genealogists have not gone unnoticed. His tireless efforts for 30 years towards improving the organisation behind the scenes have been greatly appreciated.



A variety of interests

**Vanessa Cassin
journeys through
the Society's
incredible variety
of Interest Groups**



Interest Groups have been a feature of the Society of Australian Genealogists since Jan Worthington convened the first Computer Users' group in June 1984.¹

Over the years groups focused on software programs and geographic areas have come and gone dependant on the interests of members, emerging technologies and the availability of volunteer leads to facilitate meetings. What hasn't changed is the importance of interest groups to fostering that special sense of community SAG members share.

Interest groups provide a forum where members can find others who mirror their passion for specific topics, collaborate on their research problems and share their knowledge. They also provide a reassuring space for emerging presenters to hone their skills. I am continually surprised by the depth of knowledge of specialist topics some of our quieter members reveal during interest group meetings.

As with the rest of our education program, the Society's interest groups were forced to transition to online meetings as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has proved to be a blessing in disguise as a number of disbanded and new groups were able to commence meetings when volunteers living outside of Sydney (and indeed outside of New South Wales) took up the reins as co-ordinators.

The Society currently has twelve interest groups, with plans to add more over the next year. These are made up of three software user groups, a writing group, two DNA groups and six geographic based groups.

As part of my research for this article I asked numerous past and current group leads what inspired them to volunteer in these roles – they all spoke about the enjoyment they received from meeting other members and sharing their knowledge with them. Many also



mentioned how much they had learned from other group members. They also spoke about wanting to give back to SAG as a result of the friendship and help they had received from other members.

One of our longest running groups has been the Family Tree Maker User Group established in 2003. Larry Czarnik has convened the group since its inception. When I asked him about some of the more memorable moments he has had as a lead he nominated two events – one exciting and the other somewhat terrifying. The former was having Robert 'Duff' Wilson, Senior Product Manager for Family Tree Maker in person in Sydney for a special FTM seminar in 2014 and the latter being when Ancestry announced it was discontinuing Family Tree Maker in Dec 2015 with mild panic ensuing until it was announced on 2 Feb 2016 that Software MacKiev had purchased the program and would continue its development.

At the other end of the spectrum, our revitalised Scottish Research Group held its first meeting in March this year. Cathie Sherwood and Diana Pecar hosted a brilliant first meeting with Australian Clan Chief, Alistair Henderson as their special guest. Following the first meeting Cathie stated "I loved how people contributed their family stories and so many participated in the discussion." These comments were echoed by Marianne Spencer Young, lead of the re-formed Irish Research Group who stated "as far as the group is concerned ... I have been impressed by the range of experience, knowledge and willingness to share."

Similarly, former long-time convenor of the Irish Research Group Dr Perry McIntyre, shared fond memories of members travelling long distances to attend meetings in person and spoke about an occasion where she and another member cooked corned meat in two crock pots and served it on bread rolls at the meeting to provide an authentic Irish experience. Perry recalled it as being a great hit with the attendees!

Founding convenor of both the DNA Research – Tools in Practice Group and the DNA Research Discussion Group, Veronica Williams perhaps best summed up the feelings of many of the society members who have volunteered to lead groups when she stated "At first I was extremely apprehensive as I felt I didn't know anything and was looking to learn myself. However, by running the group I found that it gave me an opportunity to share what I knew and I also progressed my own learning in preparing the sessions for the group. I always found I also learnt more from each of the sessions, by responding to questions and considering the issues of other members whose research challenges were often different to my own. The biggest benefit was finding others who shared my interest and passion and I'm pleased to say I have made many new friends by being involved in the DNA Research Group."

The wonderful sentiment expressed by Pauline Kettle, past lead of the London and Home Counties/English Research Group, provides a fitting end to this article when she says:

**"It is indeed a special year
for the Society and its
praises need to be sung
loud and clear."**

1 Dr Ken Knight, *Seventy-five not out: still battling strongly*, *Descent*, September 2007, page 127

Images: Opposite - Pauline Weeks, NZ Group Lead; Diana Pecar, Scottish and English Groups Lead. This page: Cathie Sherwood, Scottish Research Group Lead and Education Committee Member; Veronica Williams, previous DNA Special Interest Group Lead and Lilian Magill, Writing Group Lead.

1932-2022

The Archives



"To many members, both old and new, the Primary Records System of the Society of Australian Genealogists is either a goldmine of information or else an object of bewilderment and confusion."¹

This is what Archives Assistant Tim Robinson wrote of the Society's archives in the June 1981 issue of *Descent*. To be frank, this sentiment rings true today. The archives are a labyrinthine beast dwelling in the basement of Richmond Villa, guarding a vast amount of jewels and treasures unknown to most.

Currently, we have approximately 65,000 primary records in our collections, including research notes, photographs, audiovisual materials, family trees, maps, scrapbooks and more. These records have been meticulously referenced, with over 2.8 million index records available for members and the public to search through. It is difficult to know exactly when the Society started collecting materials from members for posterity: we have records from the society dating to the 1930s, but these materials were not made available for members to use until 1963.

But when this service for members started, the Society did not even have filing cabinets to store the burgeoning collection of records and research notes donated by members. It took until 1965 to have this hardware installed, and the quest for acquisitions of members' research and original sources continued.

This is, at the most basic level, the story of our archives: made by the members, for the members. The archive acts as the resting place for lifetimes of work by our family historians, and ensures their continued use by future genealogists. A huge amount of work has been done by archivists and volunteers to make the collections more accessible to our members and the public.

The work started with our first archivist, Errol Lea-Scarlett, who fastidiously and carefully managed the archives for over 30 years, and continued with the employment of the first full time Archives Officer Tim Robinson in 1981, with Margaret Bailey taking on this role in 1983. Ralph Hawkins, who would go on to become our long-serving archives officer of over 25 years, began working with the Houson photographs in 1985. These core members helped build our archives up from nothing, creating a preservation and collection management system tailored to our unique collections.

Their mission was to build the collection, preserve the research materials of members, and make the records available to members to aid in their quest to find their ancestors. This mission continued as the archives took their first steps into the digital age. In 1994, the first digital index was created on a single PC in Richmond Villa where members could come and gain access to the index records of the collection. Member Alison Wolf volunteered to help migrate the index cards to the digital catalogue in 2007. Her work to nudge the archives towards a digital future was realised in 2011 as beta testing of MIDAS (the Manuscript, Image and Digital Archive System) began. In 2013 MIDAS was launched successfully. This was an incredible moment for the Archives, and marked a great step forward in providing a greater ease of access for members.

It is this that continues to push the archives forward: the goal to provide easy access to our records for members. Danielle Lautrec, who became archives officer following the retirement of Ralph Hawkins in 2018, helped increase the digitisation efforts of our volunteers, and her successor, Dr. James Findlay, moved to accept mostly digital donations.

Over the long, storied history of the archives of the Society, we have received a number of incredibly significant and treasured donations. The pair of false teeth once found

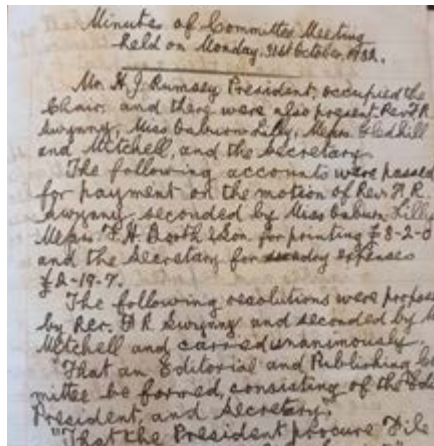
amongst files of research papers was, however, returned to its donor. In my short tenure as Archival Project Manager, these are the two that I have spent the most time with:

a. In 1964, Lois McEvoy donated papers and photographs of the Sydney-based businessman and restaurateur Mei Quong Tart (1850-1903), whose famous tea rooms were situated in the Queen Victoria Building. These papers and photographs document the life of Quong Tart and his family from the 1880s onwards and feature, in particular, his philanthropic activities in late nineteenth century Sydney. Items from this collection were recently digitised and featured in an online exhibit curated by Caitlin Williams as the major work for the Sydney University History unit - HSTY 3902 History Beyond the Classroom. See: <https://quongtartscrapbooks.omeka.net/>

b. The Adelaide Ironside collection is related to the Australian artist, Adelaide Ironside, who is known as the first Australian artist to be formally trained overseas. She was also the first artist to have a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in 1877, ten years after her death, aged just 35, in Italy. These records were used by Dr Kiera Lindsey, an award-winning historian and Senior Research Fellow, for her Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award on speculative biography and historical craft. See: <https://www.rahs.org.au/event/that-luminous-moment/>

The archives hold a valuable collection for Society members. We are eagerly looking towards the future, hoping to make more collections available digitally, and are excited to continue to work with the valuable records we hold.

1. Tim Robinson, "An Introduction to the Primary Records" Descent 11, No. 2, (1981), 83.



Alexandra Mountain looks at the origins and future of the Society's archival collection



**Vanessa Cassin delves
into the guiding principles
that underpin the Society's
continuing education focus**

Providing education programs to further the study and knowledge of family history is a guiding principle in the Society of Australian Genealogists' constitution.

In 1982 the Society produced a publication celebrating our first 50 years that detailed the early attempts to fulfil the educational goals our founding Councillors had set for themselves – from trying to locate premises that were large enough to allow for lectures and holding exhibitions, to ensuring the Society appeared regularly in the newspapers of the day.

In 2007, on the occasion of the Society's 75th anniversary, Dr Ken Knight penned a comprehensive review for *Descent* of the Society's educational activities between 1982 and 2007. This included the introduction of overseas study tours, the eagerly anticipated annual "Lost In" weekends and the very successful Showcase family history fairs. During this period the Society convened both the 1988 Family History Congress and the 2001 Annual Conference of the NSW and ACT Association of Family History Societies.

Given the importance placed on education in the Society's constitution, I was therefore interested to discover that the first Education Committee was only established in the 1980s, some 50 years after the Society was established.¹ This committee was comprised wholly of volunteers and was tasked with developing a program of lectures, seminars and workshops.

It was only from 2004 that managing the education offerings of the Society became a paid role falling

under the Member Services Officer umbrella. A distinct Education Officer role only emerged in the Society's structure as a part time position in 2014. The role transitioned to a full time position in September 2020.

The fifteen years between 2007 and 2022 brought a number of highlights and significant changes to the education program at the Society. The highlight of the period would undoubtedly be the hosting of the 15th Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry in 2018.

The Society has always striven to be innovative in its educational offerings and one of the most significant events of the last fifteen years would have to be the introduction of webinars in August 2011. Providing online lectures was something no other family history society in Australia was doing at the time and allowed the Society's regular lecture program to reach those living outside of metropolitan Sydney for the first time. Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer at the time webinars were introduced recently told me she only knew of one other Society in the world that was providing webinars at that time (the New England Historic Genealogical Society in the United States).

The Society's extensive experience with webinars stood it in very good stead when the Covid-19 pandemic all but shut down Sydney (and much of the world) seemingly overnight in April 2020. Under the expert guidance of Danielle Lautrec and Ruth Graham the education program was rapidly transitioned to being completely online. Members soon discovered the joys and tribulations of using Zoom to communicate and new

Educate



connections were forged as members from regional areas, interstate and overseas discovered SAG's vibrant community of family historians. The volunteers on our Education Committee stepped up to host online events on a weekly basis and many members generously shared their IT skills with those who were less tech savvy.

The increased use of platforms such as Zoom has allowed the Society to hear live presentations from experts around the world from the comfort of their own home. Over the last two years we have been thrilled to have presenters join us virtually from New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland, Belgium, The Netherlands, the United States and more. Whilst the time zone difference can make planning challenging at times, the knowledge these presenters bring has enriched the research of many members.

As the Society moves towards celebrating its centenary in 2032 the education program will no doubt evolve further. Our immediate goal is to continue to embrace new technologies for delivering accessible education programs to anyone passionate about family history, no matter where they live, while balancing this with the need to cater to those members who miss sharing a warm drink and bit of cake with likeminded people during a session break. To this end we are investigating the possibility of adding hybrid events to our calendar enabling a small audience to attend face to face whilst livestreaming to a wider audience.

The future of education at the Society is full of possibilities and I look forward to sharing the journey with our members.

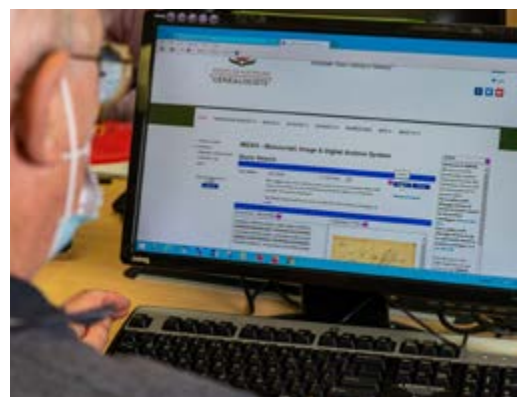
Constitution of the Society of Australian Genealogists:

Objects and Purposes, Clause 5(a)(ii):

to advance education by promoting the study and knowledge of history and, in particular, family history and allied subjects

¹ Dr Ken Knight, *Seventy-five not out: still battling strongly*, *Descent*, September 2007, page 125





JOURNALS 2%

E-RESOURCES 5%

MICROFILM 5%

MICROFICHE 16%

The Library

Gemma Beswick reflects on the Society's Library activities, volunteers and resources

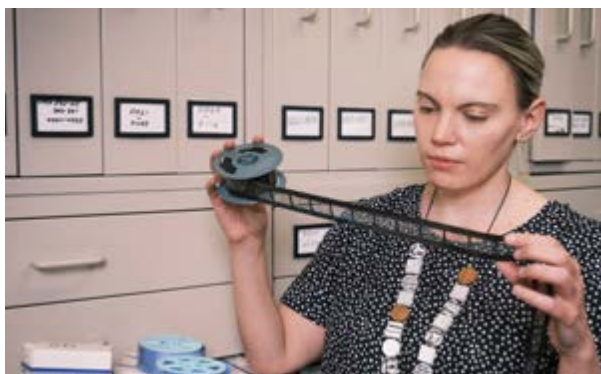
*"We shall also be able to tell you of books and manuscripts which will enable you to follow family history back into the past and assist you to find something of the lives and surroundings of the old folks. Few people in Australia have any idea of the great amount of family history that is easily available for this purpose."*¹

EDITORIAL, THE AUSTRALIAN GENEALOGIST, VOL. 1,
PART 1, 1933
HERBERT J. RUMSEY

The wishes of the Society of Australian Genealogist's first president Mr Herbert J. Rumsey are replicated today by the Society's staff and Board across the many and varied activities we undertake on behalf of the Society each day. Rumsey's sentiment essentially remains the same almost 90 years after those words appeared in the Society's first publication, *The Australian Genealogist*.

In 1933, only months after the Society was formed, Mr Rumsey also wrote "It will be the aim of our Society to establish a Genealogical Library".² In the same publication, a very modest selection of items including one book and four pamphlets had been acquired by the Society. These five items marked the beginning of the mission to fulfil Mr Rumsey's wishes.

In the first two editions of the *The Australian Genealogist* (the predecessor of *Descent*) it was reported that the Society had collected fifteen books and eight pamphlets to date.³ Pressing fast forward to April 1974, the Society was appealing to its members for funds towards purchasing a microfilm reader (valued at \$1,500) to be able to make use of the films they were obtaining as a result of a \$750 grant they had received from the NSW Department of Cultural Activities the same year, and those available from the State and National libraries and from overseas repositories.⁴ Only four months later, the Society reported it had generously received two secondhand readers.⁵



PAMPHLETS 21%

BOOKS 51%

Since the first half of the society's history, the library collection has grown in ways that its founders and early members could only have imagined. Today the library collection contains over 48,000 items across formats including books, journals and periodicals, pamphlets, microfilm, microfiche, and over 2,400 documents, databases and links in our Electronic Resources system. In addition, the Society maintains subscriptions to several commercial websites to ensure that members are able to take advantage of the proliferation of increased availability of worldwide records online.

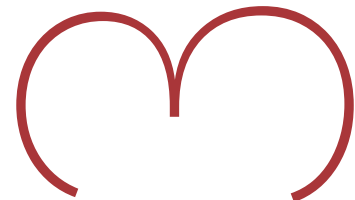
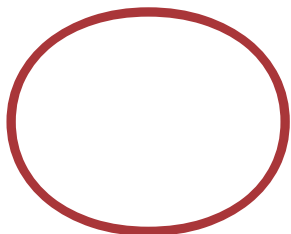
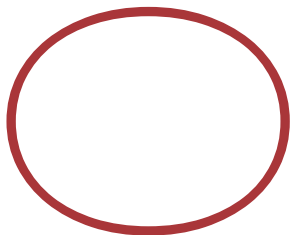
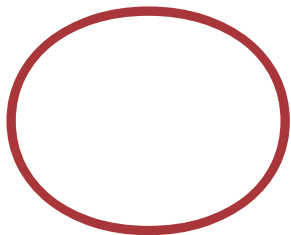
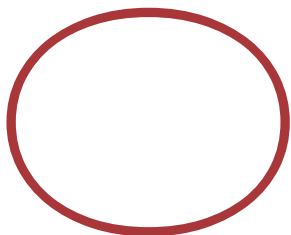
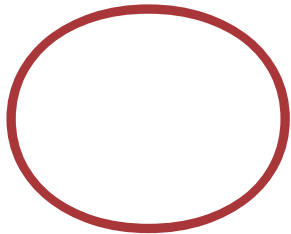
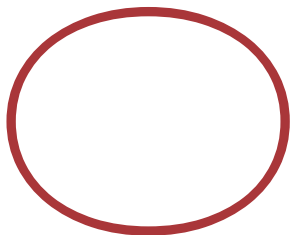
Moving into the next 90 years, the Society is looking towards providing increased online access to our collections and ensuring that we work to continue to provide our members with relevant and useful resources to, as Mr Rumsey would have said...assist you to find something of the lives and surroundings of the old folks.⁶

On SAG's 90th Anniversary, we pay tribute to all of the library staff, voluntary or on the SAG staff team, who have developed and cared for the collection for the past nine decades. They have significantly contributed to the important role the Society plays in the genealogical community in Australia and worldwide. While it is not possible to list all those who have contributed here, we sincerely acknowledge the work and time of the very first Honorary Library staff H. A. H. MacLaurin and Merle

Thomas through to more recent salaried Librarians, Angela Phippen and our recently retired Librarian, Lorraine Brothers. Members and staff are indebted to the professionalism and dedication that every one of those people have contributed to fulfil Mr Rumsey's initial wishes.

The significant progress made to the library would not have also been possible without the generous donors to the collection of which there have been, and thankfully continue to be, many. Nor would it have been possible without all of the library assistants and collection based volunteers who have accessioned new items and prepared donations to be shelf ready and those who have undertaken cataloguing, reshelving, conservation and digitisation over the past 90 years. Thank you!

1. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1933. p.1.
2. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1933. Editorial. The Australian Genealogist, 1 (Part 1), p.14.
3. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1933. Our Library. The Australian Genealogist, 1 (Part 2), p.45-46.
4. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1974. Microfilm Project. Australian Genealogists' Newsletter, April 1974 Number 1, p.1.
5. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1974. Microfilm Project. Australian Genealogists' Newsletter, August 1974 Number 2, p.1.
6. Society of Australian Genealogists. 1933. p.1.



words on family history research are contained within the hundreds of theses deposited in our Library, by successful Certificate and Diploma students, since the 1970s



The Society has been running its Diploma of Family Historical Studies since 1974 and we have had over 100 Diplomates work their way through a combination of essays, theses and examinations depending on the cohort. Diplomate Marisa Yeaman, based in France, told us that "The skills I acquired during the writing of my thesis with the SAG, have given me an invaluable foundation for my work as an author and professional genealogist".

The Certificate of Genealogical Research course was first offered in 2010 and was introduced by the SAG to encourage its members to extend their genealogical research beyond their own immediate family lines and to help them improve their analysis, research and writing skills as a pathway before undertaking the Diploma.

All of the Diploma theses are deposited in the Library with one of the earliest available being *Farquhar Aberdeen of Moreton Bay: The story of a Scots Australian and his family* by Lynn E. Aberdeen. The foreword to the thesis was written by Stanley Gerson of the University of Queensland who writes:

Mr Lynn Aberdeen's vivid account of his family history in Australia is compulsive reading for anybody who wishes to participate, however vicariously, in the making of this country..the sweat and toil of our ancestors should strengthen our faith in ourselves.

Another Queenslander and more recent Diplomate, Liesl Harrold, reflected on her experiences of completing the study:

How did completing the Diploma of Family Historical Studies contribute to how you approach family history research?

The diploma course has given me greater confidence to navigate the intricacies of proof and research methodologies which translates into better quality research. It has helped me to be more thorough, organized and willing to help others.

How do you think undertaking the Diploma will help SAG members in the future?

Undertaking the diploma course supports quality research and consistency of standards. Improvements in the critical analysis of evidence validate the skills required which collectively promote genealogy as a legitimate and distinct field of study.

There is more information on upcoming courses from: <https://www.sag.org.au/StudyOnlineWithUs>

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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.

Descent

Winter 2022 [June 2022 - Volume 52 Part 2]
ISSN 0084 9731

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A special note of thanks to our photographers Udo Bucher and Cindy Yeung, who have helped us to capture the beauty of Richmond Villa, our incredible collections and the wonderful images of our volunteers, staff and Board.

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