



BOAB BULLETIN

No. 93

August 2009

NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at

Shenton Park Community Centre, corner Onslow and Herbert Roads

Wednesday, 5 August 2009

Josh Coates (Kimberley Campaigner, The Wilderness Society)
“Crunch time for the Kimberley”

Wednesday, 2 September 2009

Peter Knight (Engineer)
**“Construction of the Ord River diversion dam – An
illustrated history”**

Wednesday, 7 October 2009

Wendy Carter (Kununurra Historical Society)
“Border markers exhibition and other news”

Members and visitors are invited to stay for supper after the meeting.
The Society asks a \$2.00 hospitality fee from non-members.

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS

Congratulations to **Kevin and Yvonne Coate** who were recognised with a Medal (OAM) in the General Division “For service to the community, particularly the recording of the natural history of Western Australia, and to eco-tourism and conservation”. Their great effort in those areas is well known to their fellow Kimberley Society members, many of whom have already expressed their delight personally. In the same list, the late **Grahame Walsh** was made a Member (AM) in The General Division of the Order Of Australia “For service to the research and preservation of Indigenous art and cultural heritage”. Also recognised was **Robert William Cox** of Broome, one of three recipients of the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM).

FROM THE PRESIDENT

As it seems to occur each year at this time, I am about to return to the Kimberley for an annual holiday. Apart from catching up with old friends and colleagues, I hope to have a look at some of the Clontarf academies, and to see what effect the alcohol restrictions are having on the various communities. I wish the problem were as simple as the editorial in *The West Australian* made it out to be.

However the main reason is to get back to the bush with a pack on the back and a sleep under the stars. Part of the enjoyment is the planning and preparation. In the past we have traced the journeys and findings of the early explorers Grey and Bradshaw. This time it is Brockman's turn. His diary has been copied from microfilm in the Battye Library, an Easter weekend (once again) has been devoted to plotting his route and interesting sites. We hope to find where he suggested there might be a suitable area for the growing of coffee, revisit some of the places he photographed, find a labyrinth which may not have been revisited since 1901, as well as carrying out scientific surveys. Finding the route should be simpler with the help of Google Earth, modern maps and GPS, none of which were available when we commenced these endeavours twenty-six years ago. At that time as middle-aged expeditioners we felt quite proud of what (in our innocence) we accomplished. Now we hope that limbs, legs and hearts do not give in, and that your President, his wife, and the September speaker, survive to see you at that meeting.

Hamish McGlashan

REST IN PEACE

On 6 June, Wilf Mason died suddenly in Broome at the age of 80. Known widely for his work in the late 1970s fostering the dolphin-based tourism at Monkey Mia, he and his wife Hazel had lived in Broome since 2004. An overview of his life appeared in an obituary in *The West Australian* on 1 July.

On 17 June, Captain Alastair Cuthbert died. Alastair, with his wife Ann, lived at Coconut Wells near Broome 1982-1993, before relocating to Mandurah and later Dawesville in retirement. Alastair played a key role in the establishment of the Broome Bird Observatory in 1988 and was a strong supporter of Coastal Landcare and other environmental initiatives around Broome. Born in 1929, all his life he was a passionate bird watcher and keen traveller, with a special affection for South America. In his working life, he trained as a clearance diver for the Royal Navy, prior to migrating to Sydney in 1957 and joining the Royal Australian Navy. During his Broome years, he captained a range of oil rig tenders serving the North West Shelf. Alastair is survived by his wife Ann, 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

In July, Shirley Graysmark passed away. She and her husband John lived in various parts of the Kimberley, firstly in connection with his police work, which included postings to Halls Creek in the late 1950s and to Fitzroy Crossing in the 1960s. John bought into a Broome hotel in the final years of his police career, and he and Shirley lived in Broome before retiring to the South-West. Shirley's funeral service took place in Mandurah on 28 July and she was buried in the Pinjarra Cemetery.

Tim Willing & Cathie Clement

YOUNG TEACHERS AT BALGO HILLS – 1969/70

On 1 July 2009, David Heath began his presentation by first reminiscing that he had begun his teaching career quite close to the venue of our meeting – at Rosalie Primary School. He taught there from 1961 to 1966. He observed that life has some interesting twists. While now retired, he still does some consulting work for the Department of Education Services and he noted that one of his superior officers at the Department was a student in the first class he taught. He worked with the Education Department for 17 years, including his stint at Balgo Hills and a further unique experience when, together with his wife, they were appointed as the first expatriate teachers to teach at the Home Island school on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. He later moved to the Catholic Education system and served in the Catholic Education Office before returning to schools as Foundation Principal of Seton Catholic College and later as Principal of Corpus Christi College.

David followed this introduction with a short slide show presentation covering the location, brief history and some of the interesting sights of the area. One of the pictures was a group of students that included a number of children who were later to make significant contributions to the community life of Balgo, including the Balgo Art scene. With tongue firmly planted in his cheek, David claims that he and his wife Marie contributed to the start of this wonderful operation by running night classes for older members of the community, teaching such basic skills as holding pencils and crayons and cutting out.

During the presentation and talk David related the story of how he came to be posted to Balgo. Seeking promotion for the first time he spoke to a staffing officer in the Education Department, stipulating that with two young children the family required a posting with hospital facilities close by. The choices were Cundalee Mission 100 miles north of Zanthus on the trans-Australian rail line (the closest hospital) or Balgo Hills, "...with a hospital on site." Little did David realise, and he suspects that the officer also didn't realise, that the "Hospital" was a nursing outpost staffed by St John of God Sisters, and that the nearest hospital was in Derby, hundreds of kilometres to the West!!!

The story of the family's flight from Perth to Derby in the MMA Fokker Friendship conjured up some memories for many in the audience who had experienced similar, or even earlier "Dove" flights. The next leg, from Derby to Balgo via Halls Creek was perhaps a little more unique. Being late January, and still in the grip of a particularly heavy wet, many of the normal landmarks used by the pilots were indistinguishable, and the first attempt to fly from Halls Creek to Balgo was aborted. At the time Balgo didn't have a navigational beacon installed. However a second attempt was successful and the young Heath family had finally commenced what turned out to be a very happy, if challenging posting.

Experiences abounded, and David related stories of schooling, travel, cattle station involvement and something of the characters who are drawn to such remote places. He acknowledged the work of the Mission personnel, both priests and nuns, and left Balgo full of admiration for these selfless people. However he was saddened by the

social dislocation so evident in so many communities resulting from the 1967 Referendum. While he will argue the “rightness” of the referendum and its presumed outcomes, he is very critical of the planning and preparation pre-referendum, and the post-referendum implementation. However he sees the futility of simply criticising, or attempting to return to the past, but admits to great sympathy for those charged with finding contemporary solutions.

AWARDS

In July, **Kevin Kenneally** was recognised as an unsung hero. His Pride of Australia medal is in the Environment category, which is “For an Australian or group of Australians whose actions prove that by making one degree of difference to the local environment, people can make a difference to the broader community”. It recognised Kevin’s volunteer work as president of the WA Gould League and his other work in developing educational programs and undertaking botanical research.

In the 2009 WA Citizen of the Year Awards presented on 30 May, **June Oscar** and **Emily Carter** were joint recipients of the Indigenous Leadership Award. They were recognised for the valuable community service they provide to the Fitzroy Crossing community through the Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre, and, in particular, for their role in having liquor restrictions introduced in the town. Other Kimberley people nominated for these awards included **Stephen Albert** (one of six finalists for the Arts Culture & Entertainment Award), **Kevin Fong** (one of five finalists for the Governor's Award for Regional Development), and **Kenneth Torres** (one of six finalists for the Youth Award).

In the 2009 NAIDOC awards, **Brandon Walters** received the WA prize for outstanding achievement in the performing arts. Fittingly, the ceremony was held in Broome where the 13-year-old actor, who received international exposure in the film *Australia*, lives with his family. At another NAIDOC ceremony in Brisbane, his grandmother **Doris Eaton**, a law woman of the Nyamal people of the north Pilbara, was recognised jointly with Elsie Heiss, a NSW nominee, as female elder of the year.

In June, the names of two prominent Kimberley men were added to WA’s Walk of Honour in St Georges Terrace, Perth. The walk has one name for each decade of the state’s history, commemorated with a plaque set in the pavement. The late **Rover Thomas** was honoured for 1990, in recognition of the style of painting he developed. **Patrick Dodson** was honoured for 1991, in recognition of his work to preserve and better the rights and culture of indigenous people.

Broome teenager **Jasmijn Tadros** enjoyed the prestige of being selected as the Snap it runner up for the People’s Choice Award in the National Talent Competition 2009. More than 4,000 people entered the competition, which runs during National Youth Week to highlight the talent and creativity of young people across Australia. Jasmijn’s photograph is titled ‘Water Dance’ and has the sunset and shore ripples creating a double silhouette while four of her friends perform an impromptu dance. It featured in an article in *The West Australian* on 18 June, along with ‘Broome Boys’, which was taken by her fellow WA finalist **Danielle Farmer** and included Brandon Walters (mentioned above) as one of the boys. Both girls studied photography with teacher Damian Kelly at St Mary’s College in Broome and they captured their images when he organised an excursion to Cable Beach.

FACT AND FICTION IN THE OTHER COUNTRY

On 3 June 2009, Stephen Scourfield, who is both an author and Travel Editor of *The West Australian*, presented an illustrated talk to the Kimberley Society. His summary appears below, with a preamble that mentions a trip undertaken immediately after the talk.

I was thrilled to meet everyone at the Kimberley Society – and in our brief conversations, names were mentioned, stations named, and experiences retold that added to what I fondly think of as the northern encyclopaedia growing inside me.

I have never pretended to be anything more than a visitor to the Kimberley, though I have been there certainly more than 100 times, sometimes for a long time, and have written hundreds of thousands of words about the area.

Recent travels, and articles in Travel in *The West Australian*, have been on the development and traineeships at Home Valley Station, on Gibb River Road by the Pentecost River, which on one hand is now a terrific place to stay, and on the other is offering a constructive future, with qualifications possible in everything from horticulture to tour guiding, and to Faraway Bay, which intrigued me as much, or more, for the coastline it is on as for the place itself.

The last trip which ended in the Kimberley began on June 4, the morning after my talk to the Kimberley Society. With Glen Chidlow, chief executive of Australia's North-West tourism, I drove the Warlu Way, a new drive trail from Exmouth to Broome which encourages travellers to swing in through Karijini and Millstream-Chichester National Parks.

After the very first night, there was a bit of a fuss because I had lost my passport at the hotel in Exmouth.

“Why did you have your passport, anyway,” someone asked.

I made a joke about crossing the border and when Glen and I finally set out on that long, straight road up Eighty Mile Beach, sure as anything we felt a bump when we crossed the border.

This feeling is somewhat at the core of my novel *Other Country*, set mostly along some fictionalized version of the Gibb River Road and concluding in the East Kimberley.

The Kimberley is a learnt place for me. I grew up on the Malvern Hills, in the West Country of England – a wonderfully pleasant rural English childhood, with horses, donkeys and laneways.

I was working in London and recruited by *The West Australian* to come here. The first week I was writing here, I was writing for “specialists” – people who lived here, and perhaps were born here.

The place had to be learnt, and I started with the geology, flora and fauna – but it also involves the clothing, dialogue, utes, Aussie Rules, history, agriculture, styles of horse riding, you name it. I have a decent collection of Akubras (I *need* a decent collection of Akubras). Who would wear a sheep farmer's hat to a cattle station?

I learnt WA and more specifically I set out to learn the Kimberley. Not long after I had, I was sent on assignment to muster with Aboriginal stockmen in the Kimberley. It was the start of something.

It has been an intense relationship with place, and a place of intense friendships.

Other Country has come from more than 20 years of this intensity – and I still find it interesting how much I needed to know, to boil down into a relatively short novel. It's

a bit like cooking – reducing and reducing until it comes to some thicker, more viscous, more substantial essence.

The title is about the Kimberley, of course, but as much about the possibility of migrating within ourselves, of finding other country, of moving on.

The story follows the lives of two brothers, and their decision to leave the station and their Old Man and try to make better lives for themselves. It is about the ability to shift within ourselves, but also about the power of recurring family histories.

The boys' ability to change their lives is mirrored by their views on the use of landscape. Should we just go on the old way? Should we diversify and use the land more lightly?

I was pleased that the book was the fiction winner in the WA Premier's Book Awards, of course, but even more thrilled when a health worker in the Kimberley, who didn't know it was my book, said it had helped her understand the culture there a little better.

The next book, *River Country*, is set in the West Kimberley and should be published early next year.

I am writing this at Perth Domestic Airport, and now I hear them calling my flight. I am heading north again, to add to the encyclopaedia that I feel inside.

Editor's note: *Other Country* is published by Allen and Unwin and is available at book shops. The web site www.stephencourfield.com has information about *Other Country*, other titles and other writing. Congratulations are also due to Stephen for being named as Australia's best travel writer in the National Travel Industry Awards in July this year.

THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

On 1 April 2009, we were privileged to be addressed by Ms Carol Martin MLA for the Kimberley, the first Aboriginal woman to be elected to any parliament, State or Federal, in Australia. She had rushed to our meeting as soon as the day's parliamentary session had closed, and she was still recovering from a trip to India where she had been invited to address a women's forum (at no expense to the Australian taxpayer). In a laid-back introduction to the talk, we heard how she was so stressed by cuddling from a wayward elephant's trunk during her visit that it seriously challenged her recent resolution to quit smoking. But the imminent birth of another grandchild, so imminent, in fact, that Carol was due to act as midwife that evening, was a big incentive to stick to the resolution.

On a more serious note, Carol spoke of her birth in Subiaco, her childhood in Perth, and how she became a ward of the state at the age of twelve. Four years later, she moved to Broome to be with her mother. Her passionate commitment to family and the younger generation was forcefully articulated. Not only have she and her husband Brian raised two children of their own but they have "grown up" fourteen others from her extended family and her social work contacts.

Carol's pre-parliamentary career saw her involved in social work for 19 years, and, in that time, working in the child protection area, she had no qualms about seeing that indigenous children were taken from their families if such a step was in the child's best interest. She is a strong believer in early intervention where there are problems, and she has had to apply the "tough love" principle on numerous occasions. There are, however, too many instances in which no help, or too little help, is available. The

high rate of suicide amongst young Aboriginal people in the Kimberley has seen Carol attend funeral after funeral, and she is glad that intervention is finally starting to reduce the toll of young lives.

The “tyranny of distance” accounts, in part, for Carol having become the Member for Kimberley. Her decision to stand, back in 2001, resulted from the frustration that she and her fellow Kimberley residents felt in making their voices heard by the people who make the laws in the south. She is passionate about presenting her constituents’ views and, in the process, setting the record straight about many of the things that affect them.

Before Carol left parliament on the evening she spoke to us, agreement had (almost) been reached on the site of the proposed gas hub at James Price Point. In discussing the extensive negotiations that preceded the tentative agreement, she paid tribute to the Premier, Colin Barnett for his bipartisan approach. She is enthusiastic about the economic and employment benefits that both the gas and the recently-approved second phase of the Ord irrigation scheme will bring to the Kimberley and to its Aboriginal people in particular. Broome TAFE is currently training people for marine and agricultural careers but, with construction imminent, training relevant to that industry will be offered.

The potential benefits that Carol sees in having a hub in the Kimberley include the creation of 7,600 jobs (for two shifts of workers) during the construction phase. On the choice of James Price Point for the site of the proposed hub, she stressed the importance of the indigenous people having agreed to go forward with that site, rather than with others that had been short-listed. She also feels that its distance from Broome affords a safety factor in the event of an explosion.

While strongly supportive of the idea of having a hub in the Kimberley, Carol is just as strongly opposed to the idea of a single hub. She believes that it poses a terrorism risk as well as an unacceptable risk for the economy should anything disable it. Another unwelcome aspect, she says, is that the focus on a single hub has destroyed opportunities for progress that might have been enjoyed by other Aboriginal communities. The desire to have development on the Maret Islands, for example, was voiced by the traditional owners and was not, as public perception has it, a push by Japanese interests. As far as Carol is concerned, the abandonment of that plan, in favour of piping the gas to Darwin, was a bad move. The notion of a single hub appeals to the government, and perhaps to industry, because it will keep down the cost of infrastructure. Yet, she says, both sides of the Kimberley would have benefited from two lots of infrastructure.

With most of the evening given over to a lively two-way discussion, plenty of topics had an airing. Jim Anderson asked about the potential for bringing the gas in through King Sound and was advised that investigations had shown that the vortex there would make that approach too dangerous. Bringing the gas down the peninsula adjacent to King Sound was touted as another possibility but the traditional owners did not favour that idea.

Jim also asked whether Carol saw any prospect of action being taken to create a “food bowl” at Camballin. While she thought that the work originally done there was one of the best projects ever initiated, she was also aware of many things having gone wrong. For example, local people ensured that the barrage stayed open and could still be used to hold water in the dam catchment. If the project were to be restarted, millions of dollars would be required for any reconstruction of the levees; and then there is the question of whether it is appropriate to dam the waterways.

Carol believes that it is not appropriate. Another change is that, today, a proposal for a project of that type would have to be assessed both on heritage grounds and in terms of the traditional owners' native title rights.

Kevin Kenneally asked Carol to comment on the bauxite tenements on the Mitchell Plateau, and, in particular, on how Aboriginal people would view any proposal for strip mining in that area. The response was essentially that, while the traditional owners are not opposed to development, they could not reconcile strip mining. While Carol believes that bauxite mining would not be viable, she made the point that the tenement holders are obliged to continue their exploration. She also remarked that opposition to that work, and to any future mining, tends to come not from the traditional owners but from people who want to protect the environment. Going further, she commented on another situation where measures introduced to protect the environment cut across the interests of indigenous people. After centuries of collecting plants and seeds for food and cultural use, those people are now required to have a plant collecting licence before they take plant matter from the bush!

In touching on another aspect of people's lives, Geoff Vivian, who has worked at Halls Creek and retains a strong attachment to the place, commented on the situation there. The indigenous leader Peter Yu had at one time remarked that people working in government departments have not had a proper relationship with Aboriginal people at Halls Creek. Carol described that situation as "structural racism" — people arrive, try to cope, burn out, and then leave without making enough progress to deal with the problems.

In commenting on media coverage of the problems faced by many Aboriginal people, Carol condemned the generalisations that are made. As she pointed out, the vast majority of her people live sober and "ordinary" lives connected to the world's oldest continuing culture. The media, however, largely ignores that reality, preferring to highlight the problems that blight the lives of the minority. That approach ties in with, and makes much of, the controversies that surround the application of remedies involving imposts on entire communities in the Kimberley and elsewhere. Adamant that prohibition has never worked, Carol would prefer to see the imposition of selective liquor licensing controls abandoned in favour of remedies that target the problem families. The funds and services for that sort of assistance are badly lacking, and the situation is made more complex by Aboriginal people being too proud to ask for help to deal with addiction. Nonetheless, with only about 300 people needing help, mostly in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, the situation could be handled through the implementation of appropriate social intervention.

Despite having to deal with many difficult and sometimes depressing situations as a politician representing Kimberley people, Carol retains her sense of humour and enjoys the diversity of other people. She does not let Labor ideology get in the way of fairness, and she is quick to praise good works done by others (regardless of their political persuasion). In that area, the work that Kimberley Society member Elsie Archer does for the community came in for a mention.

While the need to travel frequently between her home in Broome and the parliament in Perth takes its toll — part of the "tyranny of distance" — Carol puts the travelling time to good use. When she is not dealing with paperwork, she relaxes and does artwork. She brought several of the delicate but vibrant pieces along to the meeting and donated one as a prize for the evening's raffle. Needless to say, the winner was delighted with the attractive work.

Hamish McGlashan and Cathie Clement

KIMBERLEY ART: ASSERTION AND RESPONSE

On 5 November 2008, John Stanton, who is the Director of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, spoke to the Kimberley Society about contemporary Aboriginal art. John has worked in the Kimberley on and off since the early 1980s, after arriving there by a rather circuitous route. He came from New Zealand at the age of twenty-three to do a doctorate with a focus on Mt Margaret Mission in the north-eastern part of Western Australia's goldfields. Social change was his main interest, both in N.Z. and after arriving in W.A.

John's take on socio-cultural change is that, while it features in all societies at all times, the catalysts for the change and the media through which they take place vary widely. Society is the perpetuation of knowledge, art and other practices, and, in that context, art can be seen as a material manifestation of society and culture. In his talk, John presented numerous images of Aboriginal art from the Kimberley and he explained how it has changed in response to outside influences.

Enormous changes have occurred both in Aboriginal Australians and in other Australians. Contemporary art provides scope for analysing some of that change and how people have coped with it.

The Kimberley is a diverse sub-continent with many different cultures and languages. The Aboriginal people did not need to read or write; they relied on their memories and passed knowledge from one generation to the next by telling stories, singing, dancing, and painting. Other early peoples had the same approach and it is only comparatively recently that civilisations have come to be marked by literacy.

Custodianship of country is a dominant theme in Aboriginal art and much of the art re-creates a mythological event or sequences of such events. By depicting those events, the artist demonstrates his or her rights over the places associated with the events. That tradition remains strong and it has embraced changes such as those brought by engagement with tourism and native title.

Some art incorporates elements of contact with other cultures. One of the earliest outside influences was the presence of Maccassan fishermen who sought trepang on the northern Australian coast. No one knows when those visits commenced but the Asia trepangers came decades before the first non-Indigenous people tried to establish themselves in the Kimberley. The Indigenous people accommodated the trepangers, though not without some conflict, and they incorporated elements of the contact in their art, songs and dance. In later years, the same process saw the incorporation of elements of encounters with mariners, pearlers and other outsiders on the coast. The rock art on Bigge Island provides one example of this influence where a painting shows a boat containing figures that appear to be smoking pipes.

Away from the coast, the introduction and spread of the pastoral industry disrupted Aboriginal people's lives and influenced their cultural practices. In looking at the resulting art, dance and storytelling, non-Indigenous people often fail to listen well enough, or to learn enough, to grasp the meaning of what they are seeing. Men dressed as bullocks, for example, "become" what they are.

Both on the coast and inland, containment policies affected Indigenous people's scope for remaining on their country and fulfilling their cultural obligations. Some people went to the missions willingly, coming and going as they pleased, but others had their movements curtailed. The cattle station run by the government at Moola Bulla was a reserve intended to stop the traditional people annoying the pastoralists who had taken their land.

One impact of the depopulation and dislocation resulting from colonisation was the movement of people from the northern parts of the Western Desert into the southern parts of the Kimberley. That large-scale movement contributed to desert art being produced at pastoral centres such as Fitzroy Crossing and Warmun (Turkey Creek). While living far away, people from southern localities used their painting both as a statement of continuing custodianship of their country and as a means of passing on knowledge. A similar effect saw maritime traditions spreading inland, and that resulted in the Wandjina becoming one of the best known images in Kimberley art.

In discussing the emergence of commercial art processes, John talked about art production and what it means, and about discrepancies between intent and use. He touched on traditional art versus tourist art, and declared that tourist art was not a bad thing. It provided local income for artists and paved the way for them to transform their work into the canvases and other media that art galleries wanted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The *balga* or 'everyday dance' also saw pieces of wooden board become collectors' items after artistic works were painted onto them for non-secret ceremonies.

With a large part of the audience having a strong interest in Aboriginal art and culture, and with some of the Kimberley Society members also being serious collectors of art, John's talk was very well received. As with many of our speakers, it was clear that we were listening to someone with an excellent grasp of his subject.

Daphne Edinger and Cathie Clement

Further reading

Stanton, John E. *painting the country : Contemporary Aboriginal art from the Kimberley region, Western Australia*. UWA Press (Nedlands), 1989.

COUNCIL 2009-2010

President:	Hamish McGlashan
Vice-Presidents:	Jack Vercoe and Cathie Clement
Secretary:	Jeffrey Gresham
Membership Secretary:	Mike Donaldson
Treasurer:	Gilbert Marsh
Councillors:	Kevin Kenneally, Daphne Edinger, Josh Coates and Susan Clarkson

Grant Sellwood manages the Kimberley Society's Web site (www.kimberleysociety.org). It carries summaries of the Society's talks (as published in the *Boab Bulletin* but sometimes with additional images), FAQs, and information about the Society and how to join it. An upgrade is almost finished.

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