

SLIPS OF THE PEN IN KIMBERLEY HISTORY

On 7 August 1996, a scheduling problem resulted in the advertised speaker being unavailable. Dr Cathie Clement, a public historian, filled the gap by presenting a talk about the multitude of errors that have affected the writing of Kimberley history. She drew on a range of published works to show how writers can distort history – often quite unconsciously – by making assumptions, doing too little research, or using other people’s work without checking its accuracy. Cathie stressed that much of the distortion is evident only to people who are familiar with a topic. That factor accounts for a lot of errors being perpetuated. Her essential message was that, whilst each person who writes about history benefits from his/her predecessors’ work, each one also needs to think about the credibility of that work before making use of it. People also need to think about whether the things that are “known” about history are true, as opposed to simply having been repeated often enough to appear to be true.