



# BOAB BULLETIN

No. 102

February 2011

## NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at

Shenton Park Community Centre, corner Onslow and Herbert Roads

**Wednesday, 2 February 2011**

**Roger Passmore, Mike Donaldson & Jeff Gresham**  
**“Bushwalking in the Kimberley Region”**

**Wednesday, 2 March 2011**

**Ed Hatherley (DEC) and Sarah Legge (Australian Wildlife Conservancy)**  
**“Monitoring Fires in the Kimberley”**

**Wednesday, 6 April 2011**

**Greg Keighery (Dept of Environment and Conservation)**  
**“Kimberley Islands Bio-Survey”**

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

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 18th AGM of Kimberley Society (Inc.) will be held at Shenton Park Community Centre, corner of Onslow and Herbert Roads, Shenton Park, on Wednesday, 2 March 2011, at 7.30 p.m. The Agenda will comprise: the President's Welcome, Apologies, Minutes of the previous AGM, Business arising from the Minutes, Council Report, Treasurer's Report and presentation of Accounts for approval, Election of Office Bearers and other Councillors, and General Business. The AGM will be followed by two guest speakers and supper.

The draft Minutes of the 2010 AGM were published on pages 9 & 10 of the *Boab Bulletin* in April 2010. The associated financial statements were published on the following page. See page 9 of this newsletter for information about nominations for 2011-2012.

*Jeffrey J Gresham, President (Perth, 24 January 2011)*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

The unfolding scale of the tragedy and devastation caused by the floods in Queensland and the other states in the east of the country is difficult to comprehend. This is doubly so given the continuing spell of exceptionally dry and hot weather we are experiencing here in the south west of Western Australia. As the La Nina climate pattern takes hold, some climatologists are predicting the event could be sustained for the next 20 to 30 years although there have been conflicting statements on this issue. The impacts of this weather pattern on likely rainfall levels in the Kimberley are of considerable interest. Modelling from previous La Nina events (see [www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/ninacomp.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/ninacomp.shtml)) indicates generally higher rainfall levels in the Kimberley region between June and November during a La Nina event. This is thought to reflect an earlier than usual onset of the Wet Season. However they do not suggest La Nina has any significant impact on rainfall levels in the Kimberley during the height of the Wet Season between December and March.

Recent daily rainfall figures from the Kimberley indicate that the normal monsoonal pattern for this time of the year appears to be clearly established. With the likelihood of cyclonic events adding to the standard Wet Season rains over the next 2-3 months there is the potential for an above annual rainfall for the region. Flooding of the Kimberley rivers happens almost every year but the sparse and dispersed population of the region limits the human impact of these events. The scale of these flood events was first brought home to me during my first walk on the Drysdale River in 1998. In 1996 there had been two back to back cyclonic events that flooded the river to unprecedented levels and ripped away the river level monitoring equipment below the Solea Falls. Flood debris was left tens of metres above the normal Dry Season river level we observed while on our walk. The scale of the flood was hard to imagine and I talked to a pilot who had flown over the river during its flood peak and he said the Solea Falls were hardly recognisable. Last year while walking on the Lower Drysdale River we met Don McLeod who lives at the mouth of the river. He said his camp had been swept away by the flood waters but fortunately he was not "in residence" at the time. The distressing events in Eastern Australia only serve to remind us of the dramatic climatic variations that affect our country and the difficulty we have in predicting them. Our thoughts are with all those whose lives have been touched by these terrible events.

In 2011 your Society will be organising a series of interesting and diverse talks for our monthly meetings. We are attempting to cover a variety of topics that will appeal to all our members. Remember we would be pleased to hear from members with suggestions for talks. Good progress is being made on editing the papers for the Proceedings Volume from our History Seminar that was held in March of last year. We hope to publish this in the first half of this year. I look forward to seeing those of you who can make it to our meetings during the year.

*Jeffrey J Gresham*

## **OUR WORLD – BARDI JAAWI, LIFE AT ARDIYOOLON**

On 1 January, *The Weekend West* carried an illustrated article about a book titled *Our World – Bardi Jaawi, Life at Ardiyooloon*. It has been produced through the collaborative effort of the school and the community at One Arm Point near Cape Leveque. Published by Magabala, the book contains stories, artwork and photos from the school's culture program, which is managed by a team that includes local elders.

## THE KIMBERLEY: AUSTRALIA'S LAST GREAT WILDERNESS

*On 3 November 2010, Victoria Laurie, a Perth-based journalist and writer, with a strong personal interest in natural history, presented an illustrated talk about her book, The Kimberley: Australia's Last Great Wilderness. The book, which the Chief Scientist of Western Australia, Professor Lyn Beazley, had launched at the WA Museum a fortnight earlier, is also the subject of a book note in this newsletter. The notes that follow comprise Victoria's précis of her talk.*

Addressing a roomful of Kimberley experts and frequent visitors to the region is a daunting prospect, but I can only describe to you the aspects about the Kimberley that that struck me as worth telling the rest of Australia about in my book.

My first stirring of interest came when, in the early 1980s, I was sent by Radio Australia to northern Australia to record a radio series on mining provinces. I travelled to Koolan Island and glimpsed a jewel-like scattering of offshore islands, the wide grey-green lace pattern of Derby's mangrove and mud shores and Broome's pindan and wattle landscape.

In years that followed, I made periodic trips north as a journalist – among them, trips to the Oscar Ranges outside Fitzroy Crossing for a Kimberley Land Council cultural camp, to write about traditional law; to Mornington Station to explore its eco-tourism and fire management regimes; to Broome to chase Snub-fin Dolphins with WWF ecologists; to Kununurra to talk education and irrigation and bush rodeos with locals.

When I was asked to write a book about the Kimberley by UWA Publishing, I asked that we focus on the natural assets of the region, and what we know about them. I divided up the Kimberley into roughly eight or nine regions, and set out to describe to a general reader what lives in the landscape, the fauna and flora, topography and interesting natural features. I sought out every person with a body of knowledge, from ecologists to amateur botanists to traditional owners with a close affinity with the bush. My words are matched by wonderful images, all the work of others.

I wanted to transmit the thrill of discovery that permeates this part of Australia. It is easily demonstrated in the work of Matt and Russell Barrett, botanist brothers who have endured storms, soaring heat and drenching humidity in the Wet season in their air-borne quest for new species of plants.

The pair can find themselves strapped into a helicopter as it hovers over the lip of a steep sandstone cliff, poised mid-air between a rust-orange rock shelf and a dappled green valley hundreds of metres below. Their pilot is aiming to land them on a remote rocky plateau, so they can scout the area for new plants. But while the helicopter is still a few metres off the ground, one of the brothers spots something new, a shrubby acacia he knows from experience is not a familiar one. Before they've even landed, the Barrett brothers have made a new discovery!

By the time the helicopter revs up and drops back over the ledge like an agile dragonfly, the botanists have pressed hundreds of plant specimens between newspaper and board. They've stacked them so high that the piles reach up to the helicopter cabin roof; the brothers can barely see out.

In the following weeks, back in Perth's Biodiversity Research Centre at Kings Park, they add to the body of known northern Australian plants – on one trip, they discover ten new plants in six days – among them new *Acacia*, *Hibbertia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Melaleuca*, *Boronia*, *Triodia* (or *Spinifex*), and *Solanum* (or bush tomato).

The Barretts are in their mid-thirties, a little older than Charles Darwin was when he began to shape his ideas about evolution on a visit to the Galapagos Islands, still

largely unknown in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two Australian brothers are making discoveries in a place every bit as remote and scientifically unexplored.

Remoteness is a hallmark of most Kimberley country – whether you are visiting Twin Falls on the King George River, or the towering, tumbled rock of the Mitchell Plateau. In such places, there are no paved roads, few tracks, no towns and only a few outposts in an area covering thousands of kilometres.

Some Australians will have been to more accessible parts – they may have driven along the famous Gibb River Road from Derby to Wyndham. They may have gone exploring in Tunnel Creek and Windjana Gorge, encountering the arc of ancient Devonian reef that has deposited fossils of early fish and aquatic life in its rocky ramparts. At Gogo Station, they may have picked up a perfect fish fossil encased in limestone nodules.

Many people may be unaware that Australian researchers have made remarkable contributions to early fish fossil research, thanks to those little Kimberley fish that were captured and preserved – internal organs, muscles and all – in the silt 380 million years ago.

In my own journey of discovery about the Kimberley region, I've come up against persistent themes that have set me thinking. The first is that this part of Australia has a remarkable combination of fauna and flora in a relatively unsullied landscape.

The second is that, everywhere you turn, too little is known about its ecology. The third is more of a question – at a time of controversial change in the Kimberley, how much do we need to know about the natural environment before we can make informed decisions about human activities that will affect it?

To take the first and second points, Kingsley Dixon is the director of science at Perth's botanical gardens at Kings Park and he mentored the Barretts. Kingsley says the Kimberley is "the last great botanical frontier in Australia." When Kings Park scientists started exploring the area in the 1980s, 1500 plant types were known; it's now 3000, or double. Literally hundreds more plant species are yet to be discovered, maybe the same amount again as all known plant species in the United Kingdom.

It was only in 1965 was it realised that rainforest grows in the Kimberley. Only in the late 1980s did an expeditionary team map a wide, patchy network of 1500 rainforest thickets scattered across 170,000 square kilometres. It's now known that a quarter of all Kimberley flora is found in those vine-covered thickets. That may surprise people who think of the Kimberley as one vast grassland savannah grazed by cattle barons.

Those same people may be surprised to hear that there are ephemeral wetlands and marshes across parts of the north Kimberley, damp grassy meadows dotted with flowering herbs—royal blue, deep purple, sunny yellow. One of the people I met and interviewed for this book was Allen Lowrie, a self-taught botanist who was drawn to carnivorous plants that can trap insects.

Some are small and beautiful, others are showy, like a giant Sundew at Moonlight Stockyard on Carson River Station, which has flowers the size of a 50-cent coin on a lime-green stalk a metre tall. Others are incredible survivors, like a small Sundew whose insect-trapping leaves dry off in the Dry season, leaving only a bulb-like leaf base encased in soil that soon dries as hard as concrete.

"If you hit the dry ground with a rock hammer, sparks would fly off it," Allen told me. "Yet when the rains come, the same soil becomes so soft that a car could drive on it and sink up to the door handles." With rain, the plant's soil straightjacket melts; it

shoots leaves and floats them on the water to catch insects. Allen says: “These plants can survive in sun-heated water so hot you could easily make a cup of tea out of it.”

The story of native animal life in the Kimberley is a mixed one – people who have travelled the region know that uncontrolled fire and roaming cattle have caused enormous damage over the decades. Yet there is an interesting and hopeful story that I first heard a few years back, when Dr. Andrew Burbidge gave a lecture about the need for caution in development along the Kimberley coast.

We’ve heard much about the disappearing native mammals of northern Australia, but Andrew will tell you that one part, the northwest corner that the Barretts love so much, is a rare exception. “It’s one of only two places in Australia where there have been no mammal extinctions,” he tells me. “Sadly, it’s a rare exception on a hostile continent.”

He says this unique region appears to have hung onto its entire suite of pre-European mammal fauna, including endangered mammals like the Scaly-tailed Possum and the rare Golden Bandicoot, the Golden-backed Tree Rat and spotted northern Quolls.

Andrew has a personal stake in preserving the Kimberley’s mammals—in 1972 he identified the smallest of Australia’s kangaroos, the Monjon, which lives only in tumbled piles of sandstone on the Mitchell Plateau and on a couple of Kimberley islands. This rock wallaby is a pretty creature with a delicate snout and it weighs no more than the kilo bag of sugar in your shopping. But the Monjon is so shy and elusive that, for seven years after its discovery, nobody had captured a single image of it in the wild.

Photographer Jiri Lochman spent three exhausting weeks hiking alone on foot to find it. One night, tucked in his sleeping bag, he looked up to see a miniature wallaby dancing on a rock. “Fully absorbed in its performance,” wrote Lochman later, “the wallaby stamped its feet vigorously, while repeatedly turning on the rock in either direction.” Jiri set up a camera hide behind a low forking tree the next night, where under an almost full moon, he captured the Monjon’s image for posterity and science.

How come the northwest Kimberley has managed to hang onto its mammals? Probably its extreme remoteness, says Andrew. It helps that predated foxes can’t live so far north, and feral cats have a tough time hunting in the broken-up terrain of Kimberley stone country. Maybe healthy populations of Dingos keep cats in check. Or maybe the north-west’s stony ramparts offer shelter to animals when flames tear through the landscape. Why don’t we have a more exact picture of what’s going on? Same answer – extreme remoteness, but also the cost of conducting scientific work in the north.

My book touches on another hopeful aspect of conservation in the Kimberley. We know that Gouldian finches and Purple-crowned Fairy Wrens are among species that have been hit hard by human-related changes to the landscape. I made several visits to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, a private organisation that runs a superb research station at Mornington, a 100 kilometre-drive off the Gibb River Road into the central Kimberley. By controlling fire and cattle grazing, AWC is bringing these beautiful birds back into the landscape.

I also describe a publicly-funded science endeavour by the Department of Environment and Conservation, which has conducted a remarkable survey of 22 Kimberley islands over the last three years. They’re writing up the papers now. A

team of DEC scientists, WA Museum staff and Aboriginal rangers studied the islands in both Wet and Dry seasons and found a great array of creatures. Could the islands become refuges for species like Quolls, which are being wiped out by Cane Toads in some parts of Northern Australia? Or are Quolls found on the islands different from their mainland cousins? Research by geneticist Linc Schmidt and zoologist Ric How suggests a slight but tantalising difference in their DNA.

What happens if some of these regions are opened up, and human populations move in to exploit them? The Mitchell Plateau has huge deposits of mineable bauxite sitting atop it, and from its pebbly scree grow *Livistonia* palms in magnificent fronded forests, unique to the region. If it's mined, the elegant *Livistonia* are likely to disappear.

Ironically, some of the earliest, significant science work on the Mitchell Plateau was done thanks to the mining company that found the bauxite, allowing conservation scientists use their camp in the early 1970s and begin mapping the incredible mammal and plant life.

A similar thing is happening now along the Kimberley coast, where a flurry of scientific surveys, reports, fly-in fly-out ecologists and public consultations have been triggered by industry plans to develop a huge reservoir of oil and gas off the Kimberley coast, in the Browse Basin.

In my book, I describe how the Kimberley coast and its reefs and oceans are among the least studied parts of its ecology. But now the WA Museum has embarked on the first in-depth work on its reefs – you can follow the on-line research teams if you go to the museum website. The work is being paid for by Woodside, the oil and gas multinational that hopes to build the first – but probably not only – liquefied natural gas plant on the Kimberley coast.

There is an urgent need for closer study of the Kimberley coast. Environmental clearances for the gas plant are still some way off, but so is a good understanding of Kimberley marine life. Two years ago, the West Australian Marine Science Institution produced a 60-page report called 'A Turning of the Tide: Science for decisions in the Kimberley-Browse marine region'. Its bottom line message was that marine science research in the Kimberley was an urgent priority, in light of pressing interest from industry.

Ask any marine biologist – or any boat skipper – and they'll show you maps of the Kimberley coast warning of 'insufficiently surveyed' or 'uncharted' waters. Reefs, sponges and sea creatures that live along this tide-ripped coast have barely begun to be studied. Scientists suspect that coral life off the Kimberley coast may one day rival the famous Red Sea reefs in its extent, but we don't yet know. Such lack of basic understanding of Kimberley sea currents, sea depth and organisms makes events like the recent Montara oil spill particularly alarming.

It brings us to the third theme that kept nagging me as I talked to people about the Kimberley: 'How much knowledge is enough?' Well, even the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy admits not enough is known right now. In a policy paper on Kimberley resource development, released last June, the Chamber notes that "the nature and functioning of ecosystems and biodiversity in the Kimberley are inadequately described and understood."

It records how the Kimberley is a National Biodiversity Hotspot, one of only 15 listed in Australia. Not mentioned is that, to date, there has been no systematic inventory of its ecology, and in many areas not even proper plant or animal surveys.

In a way, the driving force behind my book is to add to those voices who believe in the inherent value of natural wilderness, especially in a world that is losing so much, so fast. Gouldian Finches are a warning species in the grassy savannah; if they are suffering then so is the entire ecosystem. But the AWC has proved that knowledge can lead to strategies that save species and conserve ecosystems.

There is value in knowledge for its own sake, so that we can more deeply appreciate the complexity and mysteries of nature. Ten years ago, the Barrett brothers came across a Kimberley grevillea that has its closest relative in south-eastern Australia, on the other side of the continent. Matt says: "As far as we can tell, it's a species left over after plants went extinct over the rest of Australia, and its hanging on now in the Kimberley. To me, that's all fascinating." And I agree with him.

## BOOK NOTE

***The Kimberley: Australia's Last Great Wilderness* by Victoria Laurie. UWA Publishing, Crawley (WA), 2010, hard cover, 270 pages, illustrated, ISBN 9781921401329, RRP \$59.95.**

The opening sentences in this book's acknowledgements sum up its essence. The author writes: "As a working journalist, I am equipped only with an inquiring mind, interviewing skills and a keen personal interest in the natural world. I am therefore indebted to those people whose combined knowledge of the Kimberley would fill many tomes, and who agreed to help an enthusiastic non-expert write for a general readership." Special mention is made of five Kimberley Society members who helped: Pat Lowe, Kevin Kenneally, Tim Willing and Kevin & Yvonne Coate. Other members who are quoted in the book include Marion Blackwell, Chris Kloss, David Pearson, Phillip Playford, and Sandy Toussaint. Also familiar are the names of past speakers such as Richard Costin & Annabelle Sandes, Ric How, Ron Johnstone, and Di Jones. Add to that list other prominent indigenous people, scientists, and researchers, as well as some of Australia's best landscape and natural history photographers, and you start to get an idea of the book's breadth.

A skilled journalist often brings to non-fiction a flow that few other authors are able to achieve. That is definitely the case here, where Victoria Laurie weaves anecdotes, facts, quotes, and personal observations into a seamless narrative. It is easy to imagine visitors to the Kimberley devouring her chapters as they move through the region, relishing the knowledge they gain and regretting the gaps in their itineraries.

The nine chapters written to celebrate the diversity of the Kimberley are: 'Broome & the Dampier Peninsula'; 'Fitzroy River, Windjana & Geikie Gorge'; 'King Leopold Ranges, Durack Range & Mornington'; 'Mitchell Plateau & Prince Regent River'; 'Kalumburu, Drysdale River & Wyndham'; 'Kununurra, Lake Argyle & Purnululu'; 'Halls Creek, Wolfe Creek & Lake Gregory'; 'The Islands & Offshore'; and 'The Reefs & Ocean'. The final chapter is 'Science & Wisdom: The Future of the Kimberley'.

Every chapter has magnificent photographs. It hardly seems fair to single out any but those that particularly appealed to me included Gunther Schmida's Freshwater Whipray, Rod Hartvigsen's Ta-ta Lizard or Gilbert's Dragon, and Clay Bryce's underwater shots, one of which shows the Christmas Tree Worm. Double-page spreads do justice to both landscapes and wildlife, with the former including David Bettini's waterlily garden at Marlgu Billabong and his dry spinifex plains near Halls Creek.

*Cathie Clement*

## **MARY G IN STRAIGHT SHOOTIN'**

In late January, Mary G, who appeared as the real life Mark Bin Bakar at the Kimberley Society's History Seminar in March last year, was at the ABC studios in East Perth filming *Straight Shootin'*. This 10-episode lifestyle series was commissioned by National Indigenous TV and is described by ScreenWest as 'a candid, lively and unapologetic look at Indigenous life - offering up helpful hints and opinions that will both shock the senses and tickle the funny bone'. Five high-profile panellists – described as 'Indigenous women who aren't afraid to call a spade a spade' – will comment and advise on a diverse range of opinions voiced by other Indigenous people from around Australia. Contentious topical issues will include deaths in custody, land rights, alcohol addiction, welfare, and whether dysfunctional communities should be shut down. The hosting by cross-dressing comedian Mary G should help to lighten what could otherwise be very heavy viewing. *Straight Shootin'* will be broadcast in March/April on NITV. It will also be available on Foxtel/Austar channel 180.

## **ENVIRONS KIMBERLEY**

If you haven't visited the Environs Kimberley website recently, drop by to see the smart new look and the latest media releases. A sequence of great photographs has been set up to display across the top of the screen, with each one lasting just long enough for appreciation. The group's December newsletter is also there, with articles about James Price Point; training workshops for monitoring the seagrass meadows in Roebuck Bay; Red-backed Fairy-wrens; the flora around Carnot and King Peaks near Beagle Bay; the West Kimberley Nature Project; and trees. In the trees' coverage, Mad Cow ruminates on the microclimate they produce and expresses dismay over those that are being hacked down. Christine Elsasser reports on the efforts of 30 people who braved hot steamy weather to plant 110 vine thicket trees and shrubs on Gubinge Road to match the vegetation in Minyirr park. The Shire of Broome and SKIPA (Society for Kimberley Indigenous Plants and Animals) donated plants for the exercise. See <http://skipas.wordpress.com> for more about SKIPA.

## **AN HONOUR FOR LORD ALISTAIR McALPINE**

Broome's Shire Council and high-profile community members have decided to honour Lord Alistair McAlpine by making him an honorary freeman of the municipality. They plan to invite him back, on an all-expenses-paid trip, to accept this accolade. Flip Prior, writing in *The West Australian* on 14 January, noted that the honour, which is the highest a shire can bestow on an individual, will recognise Lord McAlpine's 'distinguished service of ongoing significance to the community'. The distinguished service is seen to include supporting Aboriginal arts, culture and heritage and formation of the Broome Preservation Society, through which various heritage buildings were conserved, and putting Broome "on the map" with his now defunct Pearl Coast Zoo.

In *Bagman to Swagman: Tales of Broome, the North-West and Other Australian Adventures* (Allen & Unwin, 1999), McAlpine told of first seeing Broome in 1974 and returning in 1981 to begin purchasing properties there. The house owned by Peter and Jean Haynes was first, and Sun Pictures was part of that package. McAlpine also built new places that included the Cable Beach Club Resort, where, should he come back to Broome later this year, he will be feted at a civic reception.

## BOOK NOTE

***Memoirs of a Nurse, Hall's Creek, Western Australia, 1921* by Mary McCombe with editing by Joan Rogasch. Peacock Publications, Norwood (SA), 2010, 193 pp., illustrated, map, ISBN 978-1-9807855-1-7.**

These unusual memoirs were written in draft form in Wyndham in 1925 while the author, aged about 45, lived there with her husband. Before their marriage in 1923, they had been at Halls Creek. She had arrived in 1918 as Mary Elizabeth Rogasch, the first fully qualified nursing sister for the Kimberley's first Australian Inland Mission hospital. Cecil David McCombe had been in and around town for some years, first as a civil servant and then as a storekeeper and pastoralist. Sister Rogasch stayed until late 1921, and the memoir covers her last 12 months at the hospital – a time when she shared duties with her youngest sister.

The book can be read at several levels. A reader interested in period writing is likely to find it appealing for what it tells of day-to-day activities, attitudes, travel, courtship, and personal interaction. Historians and researchers might find it frustrating as well as useful because, while real places and events are mentioned, all or most of the people's names are fictitious. Helpful notes provided by the editor reveal the identities of the two main characters. "Madge" is the author. She was known variously as Lilly, Lil or Bessie. "Rosalie" is her sister Beatrice May, who was known to family and friends as Dot. More will be revealed in "Lil's story", in which Mary McCombe wrote about her life and gave people their real names. It will be launched this month, and a book note will be written about it in due course.

The first four chapters of *Memoirs of a Nurse* tell of Rosalie's car journey from Derby to Halls Creek. Information about the trip and stopovers at places en route is delivered in easy-to-read narrative and dialogue. The next 11 chapters, set in and around Halls Creek, tell of hospital life, Aboriginal workers, the monthly mail and the lending library, rides in the countryside, a race meeting, and the teamsters who packed freight to Halls Creek. A reflective piece in Chapter 10 tells of the trips that Madge made when she first went to Halls Creek via Wyndham in 1918. The last two chapters tell of the sisters' journey back to Derby to begin their sea voyage home to Adelaide. An epilogue then provides a little more information about them.

The book can be purchased by sending a \$28 cheque or money order (made payable to J.I. Rogasch) to 9 Willoughby Street, Klemzig, SA 5087. That price includes postage within Australia.

*Cathie Clement*

## COUNCIL NOMINATIONS FOR 2011–2012

The Constitution of Kimberley Society Inc. requires that the Council shall consist of a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary, a Membership Secretary, a Treasurer, and not less than 3, or more than 7, other persons, all of whom shall be Members of the Society. In the interest of conservation, nomination forms will be available only at the February meeting or by request from Jeff Gresham (phone 08 9388 0780). Forms must reach the Society by 5.00 P.M. on Tuesday, 8 February 2011 and, while facsimiles will be accepted (08 9272 2087), the original form must reach the Society by 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 2 March 2011. If insufficient nominations are received to fill all the vacancies on the Council, further nominations will be received at the Annual General Meeting. Should any positions remain vacant at the conclusion of the AGM, such vacancies will be deemed casual vacancies and may be dealt with by the Council according to the Constitution.

## FILM, FICTION AND STAGE

The Kimberley is currently enjoying a burst of exposure that will build on the international fame it gained through the film *Australia*. On 18 January, Brendan Fletcher's full-length feature film *Mad Bastards* had its world premiere at the Sydney Festival before heading to Utah for the Sundance Film Festival. In both places, live performances of tracks from the film preceded the screening. The tracks came from Alan and Stephen Pigram – great Broome musicians – and Alex Lloyd. The Pigrims, with another brother Phillip and a mate Johnny Albert, toured with Midnight Oil as Scrap Metal in 1987, and, since 1996, they have written and performed (with other siblings) as the Pigram Brothers.

*Mad Bastards* is set in Wyndham, with stunning Kimberley scenery, and tells the story of an Aboriginal man known as TJ (Dean Daley-Jones) who tries to reconnect with his teenage son Bullet (Lucas Yeeda). Daley-Jones, brought into the film as raw talent, had been working as a roofer and tiler in Broome. Yeeda is only fourteen. Other cast members include an Aboriginal elder (John Watson) and a policeman known as Texas (Greg Tait) who draws on his 17 years of real Kimberley policing. Both of those men collaborated in the writing of the script. Bullet's mother Nella is played by Ngaire Pigram, and Uncle Black by Douglas Macale. Arrangements are already in place for *Mad Bastards* to be distributed in the United States.

It was the Sundance Film Festival of 2005 that took the horror film *Wolf Creek* to the world. A low budget (\$1,000,000) hit created by Geraldton-raised Greg Mclean, it features the kidnap, torture and murder of young backpackers and was reputedly based on killings by Ivan Milat in NSW and Kimberley man Bradley John Murdoch in South Australia. *Wolf Creek* was set south of Halls Creek but filmed in South Australia. Both it and *Mad Bastards* were ten years in the making. Mclean is now putting together the finance for a sequel to *Wolf Creek*.

Peter Wise, author of *The Mt Mee Murders* (2008) and *The Body* (2009), has just released *The Kimberley Killers*. Perhaps not quite the thing for the more sedate and discerning of the Kimberley Society's members, the book is promoted by Zeus Publications as a thriller that carries the 'mystery, excitement, sex and thrills' that have become the author's 'trademark'. The story has plenty of intrigue, and more threads than a sewing kit, but the formality of the dialogue between the characters is somewhat disconcerting. Only part of the action takes place in the Kimberley. With ISBN 978-1-921731-30-3 and RRP of \$25.95, the soft cover novel is 187 pages long.

Bunuba Films has announced that a new production of *Jandamarra* will bring festival class theatre to the Kimberley this year. Prices have yet to be advised but the dates are: 13-16 July (Broome); 22-27 July (Windjana Gorge); 30 July (Halls Creek); and 4-6 August (Kununurra). Support has come from State Government agencies, the Commonwealth's Playing Australia program, and backers that include the Kimberley Diamond Company, Savannah Nickel Mines, Horizon Power, and Fitzroy Crossing's Ngiyali Roadhouse. The company will need further backing, however, if it is to deliver the large format projection of the show's unique animations by Bunuba artist Kaylene Marr at the spectacular Windjana Gorge venue, a highlight of the tour.

The tour will see a cast and crew of 35 on the road in the Kimberley for two months, with most of the original cast participating. Bunuba woman Patsy Bedford will take the place of Ningali Lawford in the role of Jandamarra's mother Jini. The script has been improved and reworked to take into account the dramatic outdoor venues in which it will be performed. Tickets will go on sale this month and you can register your interest at [www.jandamarra.com.au](http://www.jandamarra.com.au) to ensure that you don't miss out.

## BOOK NOTE

***Encounter, The Past and Future of Remote Kimberley* by Brigida Nailon. Brigidine Sisters, Echuca, [2010], hard cover, 116 pages, illustrated, maps, ISBN 978-0-9579361-7-1, RRP \$44.**

On 3 September 2008, the author of this book spoke to the Kimberley Society about what was then only a work in progress. An overview of her talk appeared in the *Boab Bulletin* in December of that year and is available on the Society's website.

Sister Brigida's earlier works (as either author or editor) dealt with the encounter between Catholicism and Aboriginal peoples in and beyond the Kimberley. Her new book draws on some of that material, delves into new areas, and ends with a philosophical look at the present.

A 'Background' section introduces the author by way of her involvement with the church, education, and indigenous people. 'Beagle Bay Mission Stories' follow, telling something of life at the mission, leprosy, the taking of children from their parents, the Sisters of Saint John of God, and people's lives away from the mission. Author's comments on the individual stories clarify things mentioned in them, and, in some cases, explain how situations resulted from policies or legislation imposed on indigenous populations.

Chapter 2 discusses missionaries and their endeavours at Beagle Bay, La Grange and Balgo. It also mentions lay missionaries (male and female), Aboriginal workers, and Aboriginal girls who entered religious life. Some of the girls are shown in a photograph of Daughters of Mary Queen of Apostles, 1939–1951. A feature of this chapter is a long petition submitted to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission into the condition and treatment of Aborigines. It concludes: "Again Sir we the Half-caste population of Broome ask you to give us our Freedom and ... release us from the stigma of a native and make us happy subjects of this our country." It is not the first time the petition has been published but, here, presented in its original handwritten form, it has a far greater impact than a closely typed transcript. It is through such material that Sister Brigida seeks to change not only how readers look at the problems faced by Aboriginal and mixed-descent people but also how they view those people in their own right.

The coverage of missions and missionaries continues in the post-war material in Chapter 3 where expansion into Wyndham, Halls Creek and other parts of the East Kimberley is mentioned. Here, too, there is discussion of parishes, communities and the significant social changes that took place in the 1960s and '70s. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary on the limitations of academic analysis of both Australian missionary endeavour and the interaction and accommodation that occurred between the missionaries and those they sought to help.

Chapter 4 comprises an informative chronological commentary on Aboriginal legislation in Western Australia from 1829 to 1981. Self-determination is mentioned, and the discussion of social change continues in Chapter 5, culminating with a look at current dilemmas, aspirations and achievements, particularly in education. It ends with the following observation: "The Future lies with Education – It is in our hands to make it happen."

The book can be purchased by sending a \$54 cheque or money order (made payable to Brigidine Sisters) to Sister Brigida Nailon, 1 Charlotte Street, Echuca 3564. That price includes postage within Australia.

*Cathie Clement*

## AROUND THE STATIONS

It last year's biggest cattle station transaction in northern Australia, the receivers of the failed managed investment company Great Southern sold Moola Bulla Station, near Halls Creek, to its former part-owners, South African Western Australian Pastoral Company. The price is believed to have been about \$20 million (two-thirds of the price paid by Great Southern at the peak of the market in 2006). The previous sale included 35,000 head of cattle and 300 working horses whereas the December 2010 sale included only 24,000 head of cattle. South African Nico Botha is one of the former owners. The Botha family from Bloemfontein teamed up with a local partner in 2002 when the price, which at that time was also a record, was \$18 million. A somewhat chequered segment of history followed with the station manager, Abraham Kriel Reyneke, being accused of defrauding the company of more than \$1 million in 2003. Andrew Cranswick, who was a part-owner, later took charge of the station but his reign, too, was colourful. He was recently bankrupted by the taxation office over a \$1.1 million tax bill. The investigation associated with that bill touched on the intricacies of the ownership of Moola Bulla. With Cranswick now out of the picture, Botha stands to pick up where he left off in 2006. SAWA Pastoral Company also owns Beefwood Park Station in the Kimberley.

Pastoralist Jack Burton, who has steadily expanded his Kimberley holdings since arriving in the region in the 1980s, hopes to start constructing a meatworks facility on Kילו Station near Broome within a couple of months. He wants the pilot abattoir up and running by mid-year and will process more than 100 of his cattle each week. Kילו was originally known as How-Mar Station, the name being a play on those of Howard Hastings Stafford and his wife Marjorie who also had Ardjorie Station. Texas Jack Fletcher changed the name to Kילו in the 1960s, and Burton bought the station in 1993. He grows fodder crops there, using them to fatten cattle brought from the other six stations owned by Yeeda Pastoral Company before he exports the animals from the port in Broome.

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