



BOAB BULLETIN

No. 116

June 2013

NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at

The Palms Community Centre, Corner Nicholson and Rokeby roads, Subiaco

Wednesday, 5 June 2013

Phil Playford (Geologist and Author)

“The Kimberley coastline: sculptured by mega-tsunamis”

PROVISIONAL PROGRAM FOR REMAINDER OF 2013

<u>Date</u>	<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Topic</u>
3 Jul	To be advised	To be advised
7 Aug	To be advised	To be advised
4 Sep	Alan Dench (Winthrop Professor, UWA)	Aboriginal linguistics
2 Oct	Peter Veth (Centre for Rock Art Research, UWA)	Recent archaeology research in the Kimberley
6 Nov	Jay Anderson (WA-based speleologist)	Caves & Karsts in the Kimberley
4 Dec	Kevin Kenneally (Botanist)	Exploration and Botany: The W R Easton 1921 Expedition

Please note that, with many of our speakers involved in work-related travel, this program may change. Should a speaker become unavailable at short notice, we will try to substitute a similar topic.

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

VENUE FOR MEETINGS

Don't forget that our meetings are now held at **The Palms Community Centre** in the Nicholson Road Reserve in Subiaco. The venue overlooks a large expanse of lawn that was once a bowling green and can be accessed from Thomas Street (going north) or from Rokeby Road. About 40 car bays, situated between the rear of the building and the tennis courts, are shared by people using the two facilities. Some street parking is also available. Buses run along Nicholson, Thomas, and Rokeby.

FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT

This is my first newsletter contact with Kimberley Society members as the President after the AGM held in April. Jeff Gresham's magnificent leadership of the Society since April 2010 has enhanced the Society's sound financial position and maintained its healthy membership numbers. Monthly meetings are interesting and well attended with a list of esteemed presenters for the remainder of the year.

As many of you will not be aware of my background it is appropriate that I introduce myself. As a Cartographer who sought this career due to my interest in mapping and the 'bush' I have spent most of my life trekking and traversing Australia's remote areas. Having retraced most of Western Australia's Government stock routes I pursued other challenges that include white water paddling and rafting the major rivers of Australia, speleology (caving) in the Kimberley region, Nullarbor and SW Western Australia areas, researching early exploration, sea kayaking the Ningaloo Reef coastline, and deciphering Aboriginal place (feature) names.

Specific to the Kimberley region I have accessed the Prince Region River gorges, paddled the Isdell, Lennard and Ord Rivers, climbed all hills and mountains within range of my exploits, and mountain-biked the Gibb River Road from Derby to the Great Northern Highway near Kununurra. Although I have a passion for Australia's remote and vast areas, the Kimberley region holds a special place for its breathtaking scenery, spectacular landscapes and capacity for all of us to get away from the hassles of everyday life.

I know that my wonder of the Kimberley region is shared by many, many others; especially fellow members of the Kimberley Society. I look forward to working with the Council in pursuing the objectives of the Kimberley Society and sharing future informative and interesting monthly meetings with you to promote this unique expanse of Western Australia.

Jeff Murray

REST IN PEACE

On 11 February 2013, **Brian Leslie Chester** died unexpectedly at the age of 68. With a period of service as Western Australia's Chief Hydrographer, and much of his early career focussed on hydrographic work in remote areas, the Kimberley was one of the regions he knew well. Brian travelled broadly overseas and interstate but WA, and in particular the North West, was always his great interest. In later years that interest and his keen sense of history saw him enjoy membership of the Kimberley Society as well as many other activities. Loved and admired by his family and friends, he is survived by his wife Barbara, children Em, Shane, and Quentin, and three grandchildren. In keeping with the fullness of Brian's life, his family invited relatives and friends to continue their celebration of his life with a picnic gathering at Crawley foreshore on the 22nd after a cremation service at Karrakatta Cemetery.

Cathie Clement

AGM NOTE

The 20th AGM of Kimberley Society (Inc.) was held on 3 April 2013. The Minutes, President's Report, and Treasurer's Report will be published in a future newsletter. The names of the Council members – new and continuing – are listed on page 12.

OBITUARY

GWENIFER VERITY NORMAN

20th February 1938 – 5th February 2013

Verity was born in Sydney, the elder daughter of Dr and Mrs Clarence Everingham. She and her sister Elizabeth attended Penshurst Public School and subsequently MLC Burwood. Verity and John met in the anatomy rooms of Sydney University, not a place of romance, but rather an introducer. On graduation as a physiotherapist Verity worked initially at St George Hospital. They were married in 1959 at St. Andrew's Cathedral by the Rt Rev'd Dean Pitt, assisted by the Bishop of the North West, Bishop John Frewer CBE. He was a dear friend of the family and a few years later he stayed with them in England. A week after their wedding they were aboard ship on the way to England, with a stopover in Bombay for Verity's appendicectomy at Breach Candy Hospital under the care of Mr Kenneth Bond.

They were greatly blessed - Elizabeth, Sarah and Richard, three fine children and eight wonderful grandchildren. Verity has been quite literally the professional grandmother with births in Wales, England, Australia and New Zealand.

They had an adventurous life, living in England for nearly 14 years and establishing a home in sometimes challenging circumstances. Never once did she complain or cavil about her lot. Whether cleaning out the roof space in Leeds, laying ceiling insulation, organising the roof plumber and managing the dental practice while her husband was a medical student, and subsequently a hospital trainee.

Australians were invariably made welcome. When the family moved from Leeds to Sheffield, it was Verity who found the house with Paul and Jesse Best and Peter and Wendy Lowe and then Verity organised the move.

For some of the time John's parents, Ted and Rene Norman, lived with them and it was during this stage that Verity's interest in the North West was sparked and encouraged.

They returned to Australia, and the children completed their education and training, married and left home.

Verity and John co-authored *A Pearling Master's Journey* (2007, reprinted 2008). The chapter on the Royal Flying Doctor Service by Mrs Jennifer Vickers, wife of Professor David Vickers, was based on the diaries of Dr Alan Vickers CMG, OBE, CStJ. Verity was encouraged by a leading women's organisation to publish *A Pearler's Wife* as a chapter extraction, and she lectured on this subject to various learned societies in Australia including the Kimberley Society.



Gwenifer Verity Norman, 2010

The Polish training ship *Dar Pomorza* visited Broome in 1935, and on Verity's initiative three of the Broome Historical Society photographs were scanned at high resolution, restored, printed and distributed to those who were living in Broome during that visit 78 years ago. With the help of the *Krakow Post* (Poland), the ship's officers were named and twenty-two of those on deck were identified by former Broome girls and Joe Murakami.

In the 12 years of her Broome life Verity found fulfillment in her *pro bono* duties for the Rev'd Sisters of St John of God, reminiscent of the relationship between the Rev'd Sisters in the period 1920-1940 when John's mother came to Broome and thanks are due Sister Patricia Rhatigan SJG, AO and the Community of Sisters. Sister Brigida Nailon CSB was generous with her scholarship in the preparation of *A Pearling Master's Journey*, as was Bishop Emeritus Johannes Jobst CBE.

Rev'd Father Kevin McKelson SAC, OAM, LL.D(hc) broke bread with them regularly and they hungered for his stories of missionary priests in former times, when the Jewish community sometimes painted the Star of David on their luggers and used the Presbyterian Church on Saturday. And the Presbyterian mission schooners with Aboriginal Australian skippers flew the Cross of St Andrew. The Beagle Bay mission provided vegetables for Norman's lugger camp, which by 1910 had 28 boats and 190 crew. It was an ecumenical group of men and women.

Verity was sometimes saddened by the re-writing of local history by certain authors. The acclaimed author Mrs Mary Durack (Mrs Durack-Miller) adverted to this in a letter to Mr H V Howe, who was on Gallipoli at the same time as John's father.

The Broome Historical Society was a particular focus of interest for Verity and she greatly benefited from her hours at the museum and the fellowship and camaraderie of like minded men and women.

Another side of Verity's life was her passion and zeal for detail of the life and courage of women in the outback. She talked with John's mother over 30 years about her life in the Kimberley, and encouraged her to record the detail of that life. The Battye Library and the Girl Guides *inter alia* hold taped interviews. Trina Glover and Jennifer Vickers also recorded her oral history and discovered and unveiled much as did Verity. In the last two years of Verity's life she and John were interviewed by scholars and journalists from the Netherlands, Japan and France, and an article by Pierre Sorgue and Andrew Quilty was published in *GeoVoyage* (Jan-Feb 2012).

John writes: Thanks to the generosity of spirit of the Paspaley Pearling Company, Verity and I and Ms Philippa Fogarty of the BBC (Editor, Asia-Pacific, BBC News Online) spent the day with the pearling fleet and another day at our house. Nicola Kalmar wrote an account of Verity's life (*Broome Advertiser* 28 Feb 2013) *A special gathering was held by the Sister's of St John of God and Broome Historical Society last Wednesday, at the Broome Heritage Centre, to commemorate their friend and colleague, and share their stories of a remarkable lady.*

In the last months of her life Verity continued working on material for another edition of *A Pearling Master's Journey* and in particular her chapter *A Pearler's Wife*, now in early proof form. She was indefatigable.

Particular thanks are due the doctors and nurses at St George Private Hospital. Verity was thankful for family and friends who gave support, and her general practitioners in Broome and Sydney.

St Anne's Church Strathfield was packed for the service, conducted by the Rev'd Dane Courtney and Rev'd David O'Mara, formerly of Broome. Particular thanks are due Rev'd Fr Matthew Digges and Sister Patricia Rhatigan of Broome and other members of the Broome clergy, and parishioners of the Church of the Annunciation, and the Rev'd and Mrs Darrell McKerlie who have given succour at this time.

Vale - Gwenifer Verity Norman - my wife, mother of our children and grandmother, a peerless Christian woman.

John Norman

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KUNUNURRA FARMING DAYS — THE WAY IT WAS

Denva Ball, our speaker for the April 2013 meeting, started his talk saying he arrived in Kununurra in 1963 originally to help his brother-in-law construct the service station. Under the building approvals, it had to be completed before work could start on the Kununurra Hotel. He also pointed out that he did not own a farm but had worked on a number of places including cotton farms when they were introduced.

Turning the wild plains of the Ord Valley into cultivated farm land may have seemed a radical if not impossible dream, but in the 1940s – largely through the work of Kim Durack – tropical agriculture in the Kimberley became a reality. Once the governments of the day were convinced of the viability of irrigating Australia's north, an initial investment of £20 million was made and the Ord River Irrigation Scheme was born. The first farmers arrived in 1963; 30 farms were allocated and established; and a tight knit community emerged around the newly established township of Kununurra.

Cotton was harvested from 1964 onward, and, with the opening of Stage Two of the Ord Irrigation Project, a number of farmers came from the USA. As Denva's photos showed, they were instantly recognisable because of their Stetson hats, which he said they never were seen without! He had slides showing how inventive the early farmers were. They had to be innovative with their equipment because of their distance from supplies and, by comparison with today's machinery, it was very primitive. Things such as constructing covers over their tractors to protect themselves from the intense Kimberley heat as there were no air-conditioned cabs. In fact, there were no cabs at all, although Denva then showed slides of farmers sitting in tractors with no protection from the sun just their hats and trousers.

In the early days they aerial sprayed their crops with DDT. One slide showed a young woman in T-shirt and trousers holding "markers" for the pilot. She had to stand in the rows of cotton plants to guide the pilot down the rows and ducked at the last minute as he flew overhead and moved to the next section to be sprayed. No doubt getting sprayed in the process! The spraying was originally carried out every second day. As Denva said, Work Safe didn't exist then.

Initially they planted all year round but the insect pests became immune to the DDT and ultimately caused the downfall of the early Ord cotton industry. Today the spaying is only carried out twice, firstly at germination and then the defoliator when the crop is ready to harvest. Helicopters have replaced the light aircraft as it was decided the down draft from the helicopter gave better penetration to the plants. Crop rotation was not done initially; it was only later when new crops were being trialled such as melons, peanuts, rice and sugar.

Another slide showed how in the early days Urea was emptied by the bagful into the head ditch to fertilize the crops, again very different from today's hi tech systems of adding fertilizer. The water siphons had to be changed regardless of the time of day or night, and Denva remembered getting up at 4 AM to change the siphons as the cost of water for irrigation was not cheap and no one wanted to waste it. Water was obtained from sub channels by means of a water wheel which measured the amount of water used, and the farmer was then billed for that amount.

Denva explained how the water was gravitated through the various channels and then head ditches and finally the siphons to deliver the irrigation to the crops. Also, how all the levels had been constructed by using very primitive land levellers which were hand made by farmers.

Another wonderful photo showed the local farm kids all sitting at the front of the cotton harvester at the end of the day as they were returning home.

Denva showed a slide of a 4-wheeled trailer with canvas sides and said how he brought his bride from Perth to Kununurra and when she saw her “new home” she cried. He said he couldn’t blame her as he would have done the same!

A few very amusing stories of the early days included one of having to guard all the spare parts such as hub caps and oil tins from the service station because the Booze Shed, as it was called, had no glasses (after a fire) and a great deal of improvisation was done. The bank manager from Wyndham, who was nicknamed “Maverick” used to come over every Friday and sit at a table at the back of the Booze Shed and do all the banking for the community. He was reputed to drive home from very fast with a gun sitting on his passenger seat! He repeated this journey every week until the Kununurra Hotel opened and the Booze Shed was no longer the “local”.

Denva felt it was a great shame that the cotton industry as he knew it collapsed, and in 1974 he left Kununurra. His closing comments were that, despite all the hardships people endured, it was a tremendous community to live in and he missed “the good old days”.

Susan Clarkson

KIMBERLEY ROCK ART TRILOGY LAUNCHED

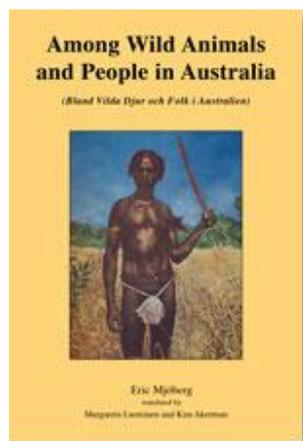
On Sunday 7 April, at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Federal Member for Durack, Mr Barry Haase officially launched the 3-volume, limited edition, large format books on Kimberley Rock Art by Society member Mike Donaldson. Mr Haase, who had actually spent time with Mike’s group on the Roe River in July 2012, indicated that Mike had made a major contribution to the documentation of a very important part of Western Australia’s heritage. Based on his limited experience over the 2 days he spent with Mike’s group, he stressed the tremendous effort and time that had been involved in documenting the various art sites over such an extensive area.

In conjunction with the opening, a series of Mike’s photos from the 3 volumes were on display in the Linkway space at the gallery. They were there until the end of May.



Society members, Dr Martin Gole, Dr Roger Passmore and Dr Hamish McGlashan at the launch with some of the photographs from the exhibition.

BOOK NOTE



***Among Wild Animals and People in Australia (Bland Vilda Djur och Folk i Australien)* by Eric Mjöberg, translated by Margareta Luotsinen and Kim Akerman. Hesperian Press, Carlisle (WA), 2012. Casebound, dust jacket, 362 pages, illustrated, ISBN 978-0-85905-507-9, RRP \$95.00.**

This long-awaited translation of Mjöberg's 1915 work is the ninth volume of the Western Australian Explorers' Diaries Project series produced by Hesperian Press. It fits into that series because Mjöberg's diary, as well as being a chronicle of his expedition, holds a lot of new information gleaned during his time in the Kimberley.

Most of the volume (pages 48 to 312) relates to the Kimberley. The rest covers preparation for the expedition, voyages, a visit to Queensland rainforest, and the expedition results. The last two pages contain maps – 'Overland Routes travelled by the 1st Swedish Scientific Expedition' and 'Eric Mjöberg's trip through the St George Ranges. February 1911'. Footnotes added during the translation and editing supplement the few written by the author. Most give current identification for species, with the botanical ones owing much to generous input from Tim Willing of Broome. Other footnotes add details taken from Mjöberg's notebooks, journal or field notes. The volume is far more detailed than is suggested by the main index, which is for the original pagination (shown in the text in bold type inside square brackets). A separate index, prepared by Alex George and Tim Willing, lists plant names. Some of the shortcomings in the main index can be offset by checking the list of captions to plates and figures (pages 332 to 339).

The synopsis (pages xvi to xvii) describes four routes traversed by the Mjöberg expedition between October 1910 and August 1911. The first is a round trip from Derby, north-easterly, as far as the Isdell River. That trip is mentioned only on page 267 [421]. The second is from Derby, along the Fitzroy River to Noonkanbah Station, with excursions to Mt Anderson, the Grant Range, the Edgar Range, and Fitzroy Crossing. The third route takes in the St George Range, Noonkanbah and the adjacent Cherrabun Station, and the return to Derby. The last one is a boat trip to Broome, followed by excursions in and around that town.

Mjöberg was in his late twenties when he came to Australia. He had worked in the entomology department of the Swedish Museum of Natural History each summer after 1903 and had recently received his PhD in entomology. He is described as a biologist in the synopsis, which lists his main companions on the expedition as an ethnographer, an ornithologist, and a taxidermist. As the diarist, Mjöberg wrote descriptive passages about the people, plants, animals, insects and other things he saw. He was fascinated by the natural history but was not impressed by the 'tiresome climate' or the 'unbalanced, reprehensible diet'. He looked down on the men he labelled 'bushmen' and concluded 'that usually less stable individuals are recruited to people the north'. Those individuals were all from the European population. He was even less taken with 'the Australian Negroes' and the Asians.

Frank Hann, by comparison, received nothing but praise. His exploration and mapping warrant praise but some of Mjöberg's other remarks should be treated with caution. If Hann did immortalise some of Derby's barmaids by naming features after them, Mjöberg was wrong in thinking that Mt Elizabeth came by its

name that way. Hann named it after his mother. Where Mjöberg obtained his information about Hann is unknown but he seems to have viewed Hann as a kindred spirit when it came to the collection of Aboriginal remains. Unlike Mjöberg, Hann neither collected nor removed skeletal material. But his apparent willingness to do so, in the interest of science, made him unpopular in some quarters.

By the time Mjöberg set out from Derby – page 72 [112] of the book – I felt ambivalent about his writing. He told how ‘a bullock wagon pulled by a long span, packed high with all sorts of boxes and chests, meandered away from the outer post of civilization, to be buried for more than half a year in the inaccessible interior’. Inaccessible interior? As Mjöberg noted several pages later, their bullock driver (“Bullocky” Johnson) had recently blazed a road from Yeeda Station, through the King Leopold Ranges, to Isdell Station. Johnson took the expedition along a much easier road than that one. But, meandering from station to station along the Fitzroy River road, ‘his impertinence went too far’ and Mjöberg dismissed him near Mt Wynne. That ruckus resulted in ‘nine days of involuntary camping’ and contributed to the first five weeks of Mjöberg’s time in the ‘inaccessible interior’ being spent on or close to the road between Derby and Noonkanbah Station. Meanwhile, the ornithologist and the ethnographer had branched off and gone south of the Fitzroy at the invitation of a station owner.

Mjöberg’s writing resonates with the mixture of arrogance, naivety and wonder with which he viewed the Kimberley. There are no dry descriptions of flora, fauna or landscape. Lively anecdotes tell of encounters and incidents. Photographs and sketches are plentiful. Comments from or about local residents embellish the personal observations. Some text and photographs are, however, unsettling.

For several months from 1 December, Noonkanbah was the expedition’s base. It was there that Mjöberg obtained his ‘first anthropological material’ – by taking an Aboriginal skeleton from a platform in a tree. Then, at a burial cave on Skeleton Hill, he ‘dug out layer after layer’ of bones and skulls where ‘generations of aborigines lay buried’. He claimed to be the first white man to have ‘disturbed the peace of these natural crypts’. On the way back to camp, he laughed inwardly as he walked behind Aboriginal men he had tricked into ‘carrying the remains of their dead comrades’. He was aware that ‘a law had already been passed by the government, that under no circumstances were whole skeletons of the black aboriginals, or parts thereof, permitted to be taken out of the country’. Undeterred by that, he used bluster, threats and subterfuge to get away with six skeletons. In 2005, those remains were repatriated.

The value of Mjöberg’s book lies primarily in its 230 images and its recording of flora, fauna and ethnography. He wrote up his encounters with Aboriginal people and he provided informative descriptions of some of their customs. His narrative reads as an adventure story or, as he terms it, a ‘travelogue’ in which he braves the hazards of the ‘inaccessible interior’ to chase or shoot the prey from which his party collected about 300 bird skins and 50 animal skins. Those collections were made around Derby (October 1910 and April/May 1911), along the Fitzroy River and in the adjacent ranges (November 1910 to March 1911), around Broome, and, with the assistance of Hugh D Norman’s schooner *Ena*, between Broome and the Eighty Mile Beach (April to August 1911). Mjöberg wrote next to nothing about his colleagues’ trips to Mowla Downs Station and the Edgar Range, the Isdell River, Sunday Island, Meda Station, and Beagle Bay.

Cathie Clement

HON ERNIE BRIDGE AM JP (15.12.1936–31.3.2013) — A TRIBUTE

“Water’s a human right” was just one of his many battle cries, expressed often forcefully, to colleagues and government officers alike as situations demanded. Ernie Bridge endlessly sought solutions for the water needs of the many small regional towns and communities of WA and beyond. However, this pursuit was only part of his story.

As WA Labor’s Minister for Water Resources in the years between 1986 and 1993, the Hon Ernest Francis Bridge AM distinguished himself as an activist minister, rolling out urgent water programs to meet the needs of the battlers in the WA bush. It’s understatement to say Ernie’s determination was not always matched by bureaucratic appetite – especially at Treasury. Ernie responded with all of his many powerful human skills to persuade and cajole, and most often won through.

It was his natural human warmth, ready smile, endless self-confidence and steel-will that ensured Ernie got so many things done, leaving a lasting legacy not easily achieved; he was often so busy dealing with the present, the here and now, the hand life had dealt, paying just polite regard to what his critics might think; and yet across WA there are 180 plaques as testimony to some of his achievements from Bindi Bindi to Warmun and beyond.

Ernie’s parents were East Kimberley station people; his father, Ernest Kimberley Bridge (b. 1899 in Halls Creek) was part of a large family who settled in this area towards the end of the 19th century. In 1935 Ernest Snr married Sarah Parnell, who had come from the nearby Alice Downs Station; with that bond the young couple linked themselves and their children to the Gidja peoples of the East Kimberley.

In the late summer of 1936, while Ernest and Sarah were living on their pastoral lease at Bungle Bungle, they welcomed the birth of Ernest Francis Bridge, the first of their seven children.

As the first son of hardworking station people, it was not long before Ernie was up in the saddle himself, working alongside his father, absorbing all the horse and cattle handling skills imaginable. Extracting Ernie for schooling or anything much beyond practical station work proved near impossible; he fitted in just a few short months of schooling in Derby, but always found an excuse to get back home to the station where his mother Sarah persisted with basic lessons in reading and writing; Ernie’s copperplate signature was from this rudimentary bush education. Ernie’s prodigious energy meant he was always on the go; as a young boy of 4 rather than as an infant, he was christened by a visiting German Pallottine priest, to become the first entry in the Baptismal registry of the Catholic mission at Balgo, operating then from Rockhole, just out from Halls Creek. In later life Ernie recalled this ceremony as having many of the features famed in ‘Banjo’ Paterson’s ballad “A Bush Christening”; for Ernie was a lad who would rarely sit still, not even for a priestly sprinkling with baptismal water.

Again later in life, Ernie recalled that amongst his happiest of early memories was time spent proudly working alongside his father; at least initially this was on their station country north of Halls Creek, east of Turkey Creek, in the area now known as the Purnululu National Park, where endless numbers of the Gidja people proudly laid claim to having “grown him up”. However, while Ernie was still quite young, his parents purchased the pastoral lease around Rockhole and over time this spread developed into the family station holding of Koongie Park.

On each of these pastoral leases Ernie learned the lessons of station life, breaking in horses, settling down stock building yards, looking after the mills. His father saw to it that Ernie was thrust into early leadership roles. As a very young boy he was given the responsibility of leading teams of workers in all aspects of station work, moving trucks and plant, cutting timber for stock yards or homestead fires, and soon graduating to the task of boss drover to move the mobs of cattle up the stock route to the Wyndham meatworks. These early happy memories were also the stuff upon which he drew, not only as he later developed his own holding on the neighbouring Elvira, but as he took the practical skills and the capacity for effective leadership into every aspect of his later years. Along the way the young Ernie had memorable fun: regularly winning as a jockey in the local horse races, with his first win at the

age of 15, going on to win the Halls Creek Cup in 1955; and back at the station or along the stock route developing skills with guitar and song as he rode, protectively, around the stock camps at night.

When Ernest Bridge Senior died suddenly in 1962, he left a big hole in the family but also in the local community, including a vacant seat on the Halls Creek council. The young Ernie was persuaded to nominate for the vacancy and moved onto council and within just three years was elected as the shire president. This was a hotly contested move. The outgoing president was from the old-order "station establishment", from bigger spreads further out from the Halls Creek township. Objections were laid; it was argued Ernie could not take up the Presidency because he was an Aboriginal and, they claimed, illegitimate. In those times communications between Halls Creek and the state capital were haphazard and required time and patience. Ernie's enquiries with the Local Government Department and with the Registrar of Birth's Deaths and Marriages eventually confirmed he was born in wedlock and, despite objection from the squattocracy, there was no bar to him retaining the shire presidency. Ernie became the first Aboriginal person to serve on a local council in WA and the youngest shire president when elected to that role in 1965, a position he held until resignation in 1979.

During Ernie's 18 years on the Halls Creek council - much of the time with the help of his brother Benny, the Halls Creek baker - Ernie established a full suite of programs to assist the Halls Creek community grow into a peaceful and harmonious community. Two examples of his initiatives and reforms were the appointment of a town ranger, in Trooper Bedford, and the desegregating of the local cemetery so that from then on Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people could be buried together.

While serving as Halls Creek shire president Ernie was appointed as a foundation member of the WA Aboriginal Lands Trust; he served as an inaugural member of the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Fund Commission and served as a Royal Commissioner inquiring into controversial events at Skull Creek that highlighted problems with Aboriginal and police relations. Ernie served with pride and distinction in all these roles and took pleasure in seeing many of his recommendations implemented; including the first ever recruitment and training of Aboriginal people by the police department to serve as Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers. Ernie revisited this work many years later, modernising the initiative, by recruiting and training Aboriginal people to move into the Police Department, as regular police officers.

In amongst all of this Ernie obtained his air pilot's licence, proudly returning to Halls Creek in his own Cessna that became his regular mode of transport for ferrying his children down across the Tanami to the Alice for boarding school and to get up and down the state for his various official commitments. Simultaneously he and wife Mavis successfully developed a wide range of local business and property interests, expanding out from their station holdings to own the local Road House and run the picture gardens, taking on the MacRobertson Miller Airlines Agency and a range of other local Halls Creek business interests.

In 1976 Ernie accepted ALP endorsement for the state seat of Kimberley. His first contest brought on a big stoush, this time with claims from some of the same opponents from his early local government days, now asserting - with breathtaking hypocrisy - that "Ernie was not Aboriginal; but an Afghan". That was followed by the unleashing of an initially covert plan - subsequently revealed during the proceedings of the Court of Disputed Returns - aimed at thwarting the ambitions of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley to exercise the vote. This galvanised an already determined Aboriginal voting population who, together with their growing support base, delighted in Ernie's belated election in February 1980 to the WA State Parliament, where he took up his seat at the same time as his friend, the future Premier Peter Dowding, who was elected for North Province. The establishment's reaction was vicious, leading to charges and the arrest of some of the key people who had supported the Aboriginal people in securing and exercising their franchise: including Steven Hawke, Jennifer Gardiner, Les Verdon and this author.

Ernie's election victory made him the first Aboriginal person elected to the WA State Parliament; he went on in 1986 to become the first Aboriginal person to serve in an

Australian Cabinet. These were big achievements that Ernie took in his stride, making it just that little bit easier for those who came along behind.

Ernie served with distinction in the Burke Labor Government from 1986 as Minister for Water Resources, North-West and Aboriginal Affairs. In the WA Labor Government of Peter Dowding in 1988 Ernie took on the Agriculture and Small Business portfolios and then in 1989 in Carmen Lawrence's Government he resumed the Water Resources, North-West and Aboriginal Affairs portfolios, holding these until Labor's defeat at the 1993 WA State elections.

After 18 years in local government, followed by twenty-one years in state parliament, Ernie retired from politics in 2001, having served his last four years as an Independent Labor MP.

Meanwhile, Ernie had established the Watering Australia Foundation for promoting the piping of water from the Kimberley to serve the needs of Perth and the regional areas of WA in between, while taking up the promotion of large scale water schemes across northern Australia to meet the needs of a drying continent.

Ernie had also established the Unity of First People of Australia organisation, becoming Executive Director of this not-for-profit organisation that had two main objectives: advancing programs to recruit, educate and train for employment Aboriginal people across Australia; and to promote healthy lifestyles amongst the Aboriginal community, especially in remote regions, with a particular focus on diabetes detection and strategies to help reduce the incidence of this deadly disease.

Parallel to this world of public and community service, Ernie maintained a life-long passion for Country Music, leading him to a huge network of friends, and resulting in photos and memorabilia that include images of him sitting with legend Slim Dusty on the steps of the State Parliament both with their guitars in hand. With the support and company first of Rodney Rivers and then later of his two sons, Noel and Kim Bridge, Ernie recorded various numbers that were, and still are, top hits amongst the people of regional Australia, especially Aboriginal Australia: "Helicopter Ringer" was one such song that emerged from the changing world of the stock camp that Ernie and I shared on the Dunham run at Doon Doon Station in the late 1970s. Ernie and his two sons - Kim and Noel - took that song and others to a treasured live performance at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville Tennessee.

With all of this rich connection with the Bush, it is not surprising that Ernie Bridge was made a member of the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame in 1984.

Woven through Ernie's life story is the theme of leadership; he was certainly born a leader; but he also was able to model himself on the leadership skills of his father and to spend a life-time honing the skills. He was a great recruiter of people to work with him on campaigns, and projects; his teams on the station, in business, in his various offices and organisations were filled with enthused, well selected people, of high calibre and great talent. They brought to Ernie their own many skills, complimentary to his own. Any skill which he felt he lacked he would seek out in others and put it to good use. These teams of extraordinary co-workers were people of substance and character, endlessly awe-inspiring: Phil Vincent; David Berry; Sue Connor; Marion Kickett; Professor Michael Gracey; Paula Hickey; Sylvia Hurse and Helen Sheahan, to name just a very few. Ernie never ceased to amaze his colleagues and co-workers with his disarming skill and charm, his good grace and humour, his warmth and his smile, all of which ensured that he that could settle a hostile crowd or calm an angry delegation, as he displayed a determination to listen, to understand and then to resolve the issues at hand.

Ernie's life spread across a huge canvas made from these many threads. The most secure part of the picture, however, was the warmth of Ernie's extensive network of his friends and, more importantly, the mutual love and care of his close family. Ernie's beloved wife Mavis (nee Granger) predeceased him in 2009; their four children (Kim, Noel, Cheryl and Beverly) and the grandchildren are part of a large Bridge clan, including Ernie's brothers and sisters, active in communities across WA and more widely.

Tom Stephens

ART AND ARTISTS

While the timing of our newsletter seldom permits advance notice of exhibitions of Kimberley art, such exhibitions are frequently publicised in newspapers or in the newsletters sent out by galleries and artists. Established artists who have enjoyed recent exposure include [John Lacey](#) ("Northern Impressions" at [Gallows Gallery](#) in Mosman Park, WA) and [Ian R Hill](#) ([Gomboc Gallery](#) in Middle Swan, WA). Beautiful paintings of gorges and water were included in the broad range of locations depicted in the two exhibitions and, in Hill's works, some paintings embraced Kimberley history and mythology. Images from the exhibitions can be seen on the gallery websites.

History also inspired the unusual works developed by [Teelah George](#) during an extended residency at Fremantle Arts Centre. Aspects of that history had been captured in photographs and other items kept by the artist's grandfather, Jacko George, in connection with his employment at the Wyndham Meatworks. He was one of the young men about whom Ken Mellowship wrote in *Wyndham – with a ton of salt* (Hesperian Press, Carlisle, WA, 2004). That memoir also influenced sculptures, portraits and prints included in "Meatworks Mens Qrtrs", which runs until 2 June at [OK Gallery](#), a contemporary art space located at 5/1 Forbes Road, Northbridge, WA.

While Teelah George's meditative works are described as 'dark' and 'haunting', ex-Broome artist Helen Norton's interrogation of life and landscape continues to display her usual vibrant and whimsical style. Her "[Ulysses Eye](#)" exhibition opens at [Zig Zag Art Gallery](#), Kalamunda, WA, on 1 June and runs until the 30th.

In June, a 700 square metre enlargement of Dayiwul Lirlmim (Barramundi Scales), 2012 by [Lena Nyadbi](#) from Warmun will be painted onto the rooftop of the Musee du Quai Branly in central Paris. Visible from the top of the Eiffel Tower and on Google Earth, the work will be done using disposable paper stencils and rubberised paints. The paints, similar to those used on directional signs on Paris streets, are expected to withstand the elements for 15 years. Dayiwul Lirlmim will then be repainted using fresh stencils created from a digital version of the design.

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