



BOAB BULLETIN

No. 99

August 2010

NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETINGS

commencing 7.15 for 7.30 p.m. at
Shenton Park Community Centre, corner Onslow and Herbert Roads

Wednesday, 4 August 2010

Cathie Clement (Historian)

“Landscape, Art and the Kimberley”

Wednesday, 1 September 2010

Western Australian Marine Science Institution [WAMSI]

**Peter Rogers (WAMSI Chairman) and Sue McKenna
(WAMSI Communications Manager)**

“Marine Science needs for the Kimberley”

The talk by the WAMSI team will be illustrated by a small documentary recently made by Trevor Almeida, one of Australia's up-and-coming film makers

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

WHAT'S ON

Perth: *Kings in Grass Castles*, a special screening of the two-part drama mini-series based on Mary Durack's best-seller, State Library Theatre, Episode 1: Wednesday 11 August, 6.00pm; Episode 2: Wednesday 18 August, 6.00pm; 98 minutes each.

Perth: *The Durack Dynasty*, an exhibition showcasing the extensive material recorded by the Durack family, State Library of Western Australia, until 3 October

Broome: Shinju Matsuri Festival, Friday, 27 August to Sunday, 5 September 2010

FROM THE PRESIDENT

While flying from Kununurra to Kalumburu a little over three weeks ago, before we commenced our walk down the Lower Drysdale River, we passed over an area of intense fires immediately west of the Cambridge Gulf. Fire in the tropical north of Australia is a fact of life but it is distressing and disturbing to see intense, hot fires burning in the middle of the dry season. It is well documented that such fires have a devastating impact on the delicate biosphere of the region. Mid to late dry season hot fires lead to a decline in bird species, can severely impact on the population of certain small mammal species and affect certain sensitive vegetation communities.

Walking through the wonderful Kimberley landscape allows one to see at close quarters the impacts of hot fires. One of the most visually obvious impacts is the destruction of groves of Cypress Pines (*Callitris intratropica*). This is a beautiful tree, commonly occurring in small isolated groves, and mature trees can be over 200 years old. It can only re-establish itself from seeds, and juveniles are generally killed by hot fires. It is one of the few termite resistant trees in northern Australia and consequently trees remain standing for many years after they have died. We passed many fire-devastated Cypress Pine groves as we progressed down the Drysdale River, sad testament to the poorly controlled burning practices in this part of the Kimberley.

Another major impact of hot fires is the damage they frequently cause to the extensive rock art in the Kimberley. It is not uncommon to see the partial loss of paintings due to exfoliation of the rock on which they are painted due to the high temperatures generated by mid to late dry season hot fires. Other paintings have been significantly degraded through the impact of fire and some have undoubtedly been lost altogether.

A lot of invaluable research and documentation of the impact of fire in northern Australia was done under the auspices of the Tropical Savannas Co-operative Research Centre. In the past few years, under the direction of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy an EcoFire project has been established and a regional burn plan developed that emphasised early dry season prescribed burns. This early burning significantly reduced the number and extent of late dry season wild fires. Although restricted to a relatively small part of the Kimberley (11 stations, conservation lands and unallocated crown lands) it did indicate that the problem of destructive fires in the region is potentially manageable. In order to protect the Kimberley biosphere and to avoid further damage to the spectacular rock art of the region it is critically important that a sensible, co-ordinated and Kimberley-wide fire plan be established and maintained.

Jeffrey J Gresham

HONOURS

In the Queen's Birthday Honours, **Mrs Peggy Dirrmingali Patrick** of Warmun Community was made a Member (AM) in the General Division 'for service to the arts as a performer, artist and storyteller, to the preservation of the culture and history of the Gija people of the East Kimberley region and to reconciliation'. **Mr Martin Copley** was also made a Member 'for service to conservation and the environment through the preservation of Australia's native species of flora and fauna'. Martin is the founder and chairman of Australian Wildlife Conservancy, which now owns 20 sanctuaries covering 2.5 million ha (6.2 million acres). The Kimberley sanctuaries are Mornington and the adjacent Marion Downs.

AN OUTBACK DASH: MY GRANDFATHER'S DIARY

(A synopsis of an illustrated talk presented to the Kimberley Society on 7 July 2010 by Peter Holland, the well-known performer, lecturer and former ABC broadcaster)

It was the Kalgoorlie gold-rush that brought my grandfather and grandmother to Western Australia from Sydney, in 1907.

John Joseph Holland, known as Joe, was, on both his mother's and his father's side, the grandson of convicts who'd arrived in Botany Bay in the early 1820s. He was the first member of the family to receive a university education, and he graduated as a doctor of medicine in 1906, when he was 30 years old. The same year, he married Alicia, a nurse, and a few weeks later, the pair set off for WA.

He'd been earning ten bob a week as a newly-qualified doctor in a Sydney hospital. On the goldfields, he was soon earning ten times that amount. In 1910, he moved south to the farming community of Katanning, where he set up in private practice, and in 1914, he was able to buy a practice in West Perth.

He rapidly established a good reputation and was made Honorary Gynaecologist at Perth (later Royal Perth) Hospital, a post he held for 24 years. Later, he also took on the duties of honorary outpatient surgeon and joined the board of the hospital.

It was at this time, that Doctor Holland, at forty years of age and practicing in West Perth, was called to the Telegraph Office, located in what we now know as The Old Treasury Building on the corner of St George's Terrace and Barrack Street, to receive a message transmitted by Morse code along a wire, two thousand, two hundred and eighty-three miles, from the town of Halls Creek, in the far north of the state.

In the Telegraph Office, at nine o'clock in the evening, on the last day of July, 1917, a plea for urgent medical assistance – a series of Morse code dots and dashes – from Halls Creek, in the East Kimberley.

Halls Creek was originally a gold-rush town, but by 1917, it consisted of just twenty people and a handful of buildings, one of which was a post-office, connected by telegraph wire to the outside world.

It also had a postmaster, by name, Frederick Tuckett.

He was known locally as "WBL", which stood for "whole bloody lot". He was postmaster, telegraph operator, magistrate; births, deaths and marriages registrar, commissioner for roads and protector of Aborigines.

Now, it just so happens that 9 years before, he'd been working in Kanowna, on the Goldfields near Kalgoorlie, and he'd gone along to some first aid classes delivered by a young doctor, newly arrived from Sydney, called Joe Holland.

As a result, he had a first-aid certificate and a first-aid kit.

Now, let me introduce the third and central party in this story: 29-year-old stockman, Jim Darcy. And make no mistake, Darcy proved himself to be made of the same tough and wiry stuff as the hero of Banjo Paterson's *Man From Snowy River*.

To tell his story, I can do no better than to quote an extract from an article written a few years ago by Troy Lennon, of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Jim Darcy was mustering a mob of horses on Lambo Station, on a bright, sunny day on July 29, 1917, when the mob suddenly bolted. Setting off after the leader, his own horse stuck its hoof in a hole, throwing the rider off. The horse rolled and Darcy found himself under it.

He was pinned for hours under the horse, slowly baking in the hot sun before his work-mates found him.

Once freed from under the animal, his ordeal was far from over. He would endure days of agony and one of the most unusual outback operations, that would make him and the postmaster of Halls Creek, Fred Tuckett, a part of bush legend.

As Darcy writhed in pain, his friends could tell that he had sustained some serious internal injuries. Darcy was also recovering from a bout of malaria. He was put into a horse-drawn buckboard – a basic wagon consisting of a board between two axles with no springs to cushion the ride. He was taken to nearby Ruby Plains Station, but clearly he needed more help than anyone there could give him.

His work mates then took him to the nearest settlement, Halls Creek, hoping to get some kind of medical assistance from Fred Tuckett. It took 12 hours of agony, with frequent stops along the way, to give Darcy some small respite.

Tuckett was able to administer morphine, to dull Darcy's terrible pain, but he knew that his patient urgently needed medical attention.

He sent messages to Wyndham and Derby, but the doctors in both places were out of town and beyond contact. In desperation, Tuckett sent a telegraph to his former first-aid instructor, Joe Holland, who he knew now had a practice in Perth.

After the symptoms were relayed, Holland diagnosed that Darcy's bladder had to be emptied at once – by this time the bladder had not been relieved for 63 hours, and Tuckett had requested, *"please advise particularly about relieving the bladder"*.

So an exchange of messages ensued: *"If you don't operate he'll die,"* was the grim reply, in dots and dashes.

So, you can see we have a situation here where a Postmaster, trained only in First Aid about nine years before, and with no surgical tools, should perform an operation guided by a doctor 2,000 miles away, at the end of a telegraph wire, communicating through a Morse key operator at about twenty words per minute.

On Thursday, the 2nd of August, 1917, the day of the operation, it took nine telegrams between Holland and Tuckett to describe the surgical procedure required: a perineal incision an inch deep; and a careful outline of how and when to open the bladder.

Tuckett wired back that, "if it were absolutely necessary, he could do this operation".

He gave his patient morphia to ease the pain, and prepared a small penknife with gauze wrapped around the blade to prevent too deep an incision. In the cool of the early evening, he went to work, while my grandfather waited anxiously in the Perth Telegraph office. And at 8 o'clock, the Morse message sounded out.

The operation had been successful, but Darcy was in a very weak state. He needed professional care and attention. Tuckett, and Darcy's two elder brothers, urged Doctor Holland to come north, to Halls Creek, to save their brother.

The next ship scheduled to leave Fremantle for Derby was the ss *Moira*, a State Steamship, chartered to carry cattle, but not licensed to carry passengers.

Dr Holland was required to sign on as a cattleman and to sleep in the mess room for the eight days of the coastal journey north.

It sailed on the 9th of August.

As soon as he disembarked in Derby, Holland wired Tuckett for an update on Darcy's condition. It was now a full two weeks after the operation.

He was told that the wounds and cavity had been healing well, but malarial fever had occurred. Darcy was losing strength, was dry retching and was able to take only a little nourishment.

So, Holland set off in a tiny Model T Ford to travel 360 miles over rough country to Halls Creek, all too aware that his patient's health was declining, and time was running out.

At Fitzroy Crossing, Holland had again been able to contact Tuckett by Morse. Tuckett was concerned by the onset of Darcy's malaria but said... *'the patient says he will walk out to see you and doesn't mind the fever'*.

He was now 220 miles from Derby and travelling in an old Ford car, with no mudguards, held together with a considerable amount of green-hide and rope. Aborigines helped push them across river beds and up sandy banks. They frequently had to unload the vehicle, then push it through difficult patches and over ridges.

His companions were remarkable men: Jack Johnson, a bushman and Bernard Barclay, a driver/mechanic. His diary at this time records the extraordinary skills these men displayed as they battled through country more suited to the horse or camel. The big end bearings in the car repeatedly collapsed and had to be replaced, requiring taking the engine down and rebuilding it. This cost two days travelling time, and they started running short of food. They were forced to detour to Fossil Downs station for supplies before continuing.

Before settling down to rest at Fossil Downs, Doctor Holland gathered together a small group of men and delivered some much-needed instruction in First Aid.

He was ever aware of the total lack of any medical assistance in these remote areas, and of people with serious physical conditions struggling on as best they could. So, as he progressed towards Halls Creek, he aided and advised those who presented to him with ailments.

The going became increasingly rough and difficult. They had punctures, radiator leaks and more big end problems. On occasions, the car was at such an angle that petrol would not run into the carburettor.

They ran desperately short of fuel, and at one point my grandfather used the rubber tubing from his stethoscope to siphon the last gallon of petrol from a can which got them the five miles to where a cache of fuel had been left for them.

The last leg in the dash to save the life of James Darcy was painfully difficult, but they pushed on with all speed, driving at anything up to 30 miles per hour through the bush, and even – most dangerously – driving in the dark.

The Ford engine finally collapsed completely at 10 o'clock at night, when they were only 26 miles from their destination. They walked for two hours to a nearby station where Aboriginal stockmen went out and caught horses for them in the dark. It was one o'clock in the morning when they set off again with two of them in a sulky and one riding ahead, to forge a way through country my grandfather described as "frightfully rough and hilly".

They rode all night and arrived at Halls Creek at daybreak, having travelled 120 miles in 24 hours. My grandfather went immediately to Tuckett's house to hear the heartbreaking news that Darcy had died at 9:30 AM the previous day.

From boarding the cattle ship, *Moira*, at Fremantle, to arriving at Halls Creek by horse and buggy, Joe Holland had made a mercy dash lasting two weeks and covering some three thousand seven hundred kilometres.

The details of the journey were recorded by my grandfather in his diary, which sits in the Batty Library.

Of course, it would have been a sweeter story if Darcy's life had been saved, but the whole incident illustrated so vividly: against the vast distances and formidable country of inland Australia, there just had to be a way, or ways, of getting skilled medical assistance to people in remote regions, quickly!

The tragedy elbowed even war news from many Australian newspapers and more than any other single event attracted nation-wide attention to the urgent need for doctors, hospitals and nurses in outback Australia.

Dr Joe Holland was one of the foundation members of the West Australian branch of the Aerial Medical Service, as it was first known, in the 1930s.

And as for that 29-year-old stockman? Well, the reverend John Flynn used Jimmy's story powerfully to illustrate the need for medical care in the outback, and to propagate the idea that was to become the Royal Flying Doctor Service. And the name of Jimmy Darcy has become a legend across the Australian outback.

Peter Holland, with acknowledgements to: Ron Sims, Loreley Morling, Troy Lennon.

BOOK NOTE CORRECTION

The June issue of the *Boab Bulletin* carried a book note for *Pearling Days: The pearling voyage of the Sarah to the North West and Kimberley in 1880 and 1881, with an appendix on the death of W.H. Lowe during an expedition N.E. of the Gascoyne in late 1881*, by John Brockman. The publisher, Hesperian Press, has advised that the book note contained two errors. The recommended retail price is \$30.00, not \$22.50 as stated. The new edition is not, as the book note reported, a lightly edited edition of the *Western Mail* material. It is a lightly edited version of the original manuscript. This important point is mentioned in the "Notes on the manuscript" in the front of the new edition but the wording confused your somewhat rushed and weary editor. An apology is extended to the press and to the readers of the *Boab Bulletin* who can now be assured that the book is even more valuable than the book note suggested, even though the true price is higher than was advised.

Cathie Clement

ENVIRONS KIMBERLEY

The Environs Kimberley newsletter, *ek news*, continues to deliver interesting and topical coverage. The June issue includes articles on James Price Point, a proposal for a deep water port and industrial estate at Point Torment near Derby, monsoon vine thickets, and seagrass meadows. It also has a review of the book *Invisible Connections: Why Migrating Shorebirds Need the Yellow Sea*, published in April by the CSIRO. The book, which includes Jan van de Kam's beautiful images, discusses the crucial role played by the shoreline of the Yellow Sea, bordering China and Korea, in the annual migration of millions of shorebirds flying from Australasia to the breeding grounds in Siberia or Alaska. The 160-page book retails at \$50.

remoteFOCUS, CAN WE MAKE GOVERNMENT WORK FOR THE KIMBERLEY?

On 2 December 2009, the Hon. Fred Chaney, speaking as the Chair of Desert Knowledge Australia, shared his view of government with the Kimberley Society. Desert Knowledge is part of remoteFOCUS, which came into being after a group of Australians—industry, government and non-government representatives—got together in 2008 to look at how governance and administration could be improved for the areas they view as Remote Australia. This overview draws on the evening's talk, which was largely off the cuff, and it includes explanatory material referred to during the talk and later sourced through the remoteFOCUS website.

At the outset Mr Chaney stressed that, despite having served as a politician and a government minister, he is not a political spokesperson for any political interest. Rather, after 50 years' involvement in issues that affect the Aboriginal community, he is calling for change in a structure that dictates failure in many programs that are meant to improve people's lives. The change he seeks is in the delivery of services not just to Aboriginal people but to everyone living in regional, remote and rural Australia.

In defining the geographic location of "this often forgotten backyard of our nation", Mr Chaney fell back on the trusted adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. The first screen in his PowerPoint presentation was mostly blank but it showed a string of smallish blobs towards the bottom right hand corner; another blob a little to the left; and then a lone blob well across to the left. "Does anyone recognise this?", he asked. The silence said it all.

As the screen took on more detail, it became evident that the blobs were the portions of Australia toward which most government services are directed. The map on which they appeared identified the blobs as "Inner Regional" areas (in terms of remoteness) that encompass Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide and Perth. Other cities and towns could be visualised nestling in the biggest blob—a corridor of green that ran southward from the central-northern coast of New South Wales and then swung inland before it embraced the Albury-Wodonga area and fanned out over the central and southern parts of Victoria. Other bands of colour showed Hobart positioned in an "Outer Regional" area, and Darwin in a "Remote" area. The dominant feature on the map was the "Very Remote" area, occupying 85 per cent of the continent but containing only 4.5 per cent of the population. The modified map, which can be seen online (via <http://www.desertknowledge.com.au/>) was based on one identified as *ABS preliminary Estimated Resident Population, based on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing*.

Geographically, much of the "Very Remote" area comprises country that is arid or semi-arid. Desert Australia is described as 70 per cent of the continent with only 2.5 per cent of the population. Approximately half of the Kimberley falls within the semi-arid area.

We heard that the events of the past 30 years have turned Australia into the most urbanised continent in the world, and that more than 90 per cent of our population lives within 100km of the coast. As Mr Chaney put it:

Our view of our country has shrunk. We now have our backs to our land and face the sea, and the globalised world. Our thinking, our democracy and economy has progressively been refined to best serve the vast majority who live in metropolitan Australia.

In travelling outside the urbanised areas, he has picked up an immense sense of discontent. It was not with any particular political party but with government in

general; government that comes across as being irrelevant, unhelpful, and committed to a structure that does not work. Not surprisingly, the further he went from the capital cities, the more dissatisfaction he saw. One source of it, he feels, is the lessening of scope outside the capital cities to participate in decision making. For instance, whereas hospitals previously had local boards with a strong say, that approach has largely gone, and regional staff now have less chance to contribute to policy and important decisions.

Mr Chaney sees the remote and very remote parts of Australia as those that unify our country but he notes that, as places, they mean different things to different people. There are mythical elements that make the remoteness “the heart of the Australian Psyche, alongside the Anzacs, the bodyline series and other fading influences”. There is wealth, most noticeable in the form of mines and the thousands of vehicles that carry workers, tourists and other travellers. And then there is what many people think of as Aboriginal dysfunction.

In discussing the high concentration of Indigenous communities in the remote areas, Mr Chaney related some aspects to the findings of a Brookings Institution project . A paper about the project – Susan E. Rice’s *Global Poverty, Weak States and Insecurity* – identifies 52 weak states, which are mostly in Africa, Central Asia and South Asia but also include Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Her paper (http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2006/08globaleconomics_rice/08globaleconomics_rice.pdf), mentions the four Brookings Institution criteria for “a failed state”:

1. poverty
2. security issues relating to violence and homicide
3. the capacity of governments to provide basic needs for human development
4. [perceived] legitimacy of government

The people who established remoteFOCUS extended this idea to include Remote Australia. They see parts of Remote Australia as “a failed state within the nation” and they argue “that there is an escalating crisis that will lead to significant consequences to the nation unless it is addressed”. Their argument reflects their limited faith in the Australian government capacity (at Federal and State levels) to transform policy objectives into positive outcomes. Mr Chaney included this argument in evidence he provided at a Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities hearing in October 2009 (www.desertknowledge.com.au/remotefocus). His stance there was that it is more than just a policy issue because the problems arise from the fact that the policy is being considered on the wrong scale and at the wrong location. He also advocated responding to failure by building the capacity of people to achieve good outcomes rather than, as is often the case now, punishing them for their failures. What is required, he says, is expert help and mentoring that will enable regional or local boards and committees to perform well.

While it might seem a giant step to some to extend the “failed state” idea to parts of Australia, remoteFOCUS believes that a succession of government reports and inquiries lends credence to its thinking. In its *Revitalising Remote Australia* prospectus, it points to items that include:

... successive reports on the parlous state of education in remote regions; and the Western Australian State Coroner’s report on the suicide of 22 Indigenous people in the Kimberley region delivered in February [2008], in which Coroner Hope found an appalling lack of governance, little or no coordination between the Federal and Western Australian Governments, and a lack of a system of government

accountability to measure outcomes from significant public investment aimed to alleviate Indigenous disadvantage.

In substantiating the belief that Remote Australia is accelerating towards a crisis, the summary of evidence put forward in the prospectus includes:

... the human costs which are being inflicted upon current and future generations (especially given the young age distribution of the Indigenous population). This reality is highlighted by two recent studies of Indigenous labour-force participation in the Pilbara and Kimberley resource boom regions of WA which concluded that for Indigenous people who do reach workforce age, 28 per cent will not reach 50 years of age. Statistically, more than half (58%) of Indigenous males who reach 15 years of age will not survive to retirement age at 65 years. In other words, out of an average cohort of 100 Indigenous males aged 25, only 42 would still be alive by age 65.

A key point is that, while Aboriginal conditions command the greatest attention in Remote Australia, the “failed state” is not just in the Aboriginal domain; it is a whole of community problem. In that regard Mr Chaney cited the Pilbara – an area 80 per cent non-Aboriginal and an area of great wealth production – which reflects government incapacity to service to the satisfaction of the whole population. There, and in Remote Australia as a whole, a huge, obvious gap exists in opportunity and health. To tackle that gap, remoteFOCUS advocates the use of locally based, bottom-up solutions instead of the current top-down solutions.

In his evidence to the Senate Select Committee, Mr Chaney had given some examples of problems and solutions. One example of a functional service arrangement developed at the local level involved a young woman named Kate Smith who has just done a PhD but has also worked out of Derby for five years. Her interest in providing services for disabled, elderly and infirm Aboriginal people led to the creation of a local partnership in which the relevant government agencies and non-government agencies work with the community. Important differences are that the manager is local; the service is locally resourced, managed and controlled; and the people employed there are not reliant on Perth to get things done. Lots of other examples also exist for people working within the status quo to get a decentralised model. And additional models are being developed, with remoteFOCUS planning to workshop them in the community in a bid to help remote Australians gain fair and effective access to services and funding from governments.

In listing the reform proposals advocated by remoteFOCUS, Mr Chaney included:

1. Focussed and flexible funding for Remote Australia
2. Ensuring continuity and effectiveness of public servants servicing Remote Australia
3. Fair funding for Remote Australia: reforming Commonwealth funding to the States/Territories to ensure that the allocation of finance to Remote Australia is consistent with actual disability factors and real cost differentials
4. Engaging local communities in planning, budget development and budget control
5. A Commission for Outback Australia
6. A social and economic strategy for Remote Australia for the national interest
7. Better scrutiny and accountability mechanisms in the Public Service
8. To establish and maintain the institutional capacity of Governments (the 'governance of government') and the governance capacity of local communities/regions to meaningfully and productively engage with each other (and wider civil society), whilst achieving the aspirations of each.

Then, in urging the Kimberley Society members and visitors in his large audience to respond to remoteFOCUS, he suggested the following actions:

- Register interest (www.desertknowledge.com.au/remotefocus)
- Register support of prospectus
- Use networks to promote
- Enlist political support
- Suggest alternative arrangements
- Financial or in-kind support

Cathie Clement



Please don't forget this is **your** newsletter.

Kimberley news, articles, and items of interest are all most welcome.

BOOK NOTE

***The Long Day* by Rosemary O'Grady. Private publication, Armadale (Vic), 2010, 161 pages, limited edition of 100 copies, ISBN 978-0-646-52820-5.**

This gritty story, set in and around Derby in the 1980s, tells of events that led to the death of a young Aboriginal woman after a day of drinking. Polly, the mother of one-year-old Rocky and the de facto wife of Archie, stood little chance. It was not unusual for her to drink to excess or to suffer occasional injuries. In that regard the last day of her life was unremarkable. But who killed her? Archie was arrested, a charge of murder was reduced to manslaughter, and a sentence was handed down. Yet, while readily admitting that a violent argument took place between them, he denied killing Polly.

The strength of the story lies partly in its portrayal of life through the eyes of the drinkers and partly in the context in which it situates their activities. That context, with its references to departed missionaries, fractured lives, lost opportunities, underemployment, legal cases, police procedures, and legal representation (or the lack of it), provides a grim but convincing setting. The author offers no comment on the extent to which the work should be seen as fiction, leaving the reader to ponder that question and the many others that the book brings to mind.

The cover of *The Long Day* carries a painting by Ashley Oobagooma. Reference copies of the book can be seen in the collections of the National Library of Australia, the State Library of Western Australia, the Northern Territory Library, and the State Library of Victoria.

Cathie Clement

REST IN PEACE

On 15 July, Frank Colquhoun AM, passed away peacefully at the age of 101 after living at Stirling Aged Care for several years. Described by his family as one of Australia's last aviation pioneers, Frank certainly deserved that accolade. He first saw an aircraft in flight in 1919 and, inspired by that, he went on to become an aircraft engineer in a career that spanned 56 years. He recorded some of his stories from that time in *Cockpit & Spanner: My Recollections of Early Aviation in Western Australia*, which was published by the Maylands Historical Society and launched in Perth in 2001. There, one can read of his days with Western Australian Airways Limited (WAA), the later MacRobertson Miller Aviation Co. (MMA), and some of the dramas that involved aircraft owned by those companies. Frank last attended a Kimberley Society meeting in 2007 and, before that, he regularly travelled down from the hills with his friends and fellow members, Eddie and Joy Dell, the late Lloyd Butcher, and the late Athol Farrant. Perth members who did not know Frank personally may recall him putting the chairs away after meetings. Ever energetic and practical, his warmth and helpfulness will be missed.

Western Australia lost another of its well-known aviation identities on 6 May when Peter Ruhland passed away at the age of 76. Born in Czechoslovakia, he studied agricultural science before migrating to Australia in 1956. His travel, subsidised by work on the land, took him to the Kimberley where he worked as head stockman on Napier Downs Station out of Derby. After taking flying lessons meant only to equip him to work in aerial mustering, he gained his commercial licence and flew charter aircraft and RFDS planes before eventually becoming the captain of large passenger planes. In writing his obituary in *The West Australian* on 13 July, Torrance Mendez mentioned a unique record that Peter had set: "At a time when pilots retired at 60, he left Ansett in 1996, aged 62, having notched up 21,350 flying hours."

Flying was also part of the life of Alan Hoey who passed away in Geraldton on 17 April aged 79. Alan came from a farming background and, in the 1940s, at the age of only thirteen, he took part in a now-famous cattle drive that left Billiluna Station and went down the reconditioned Canning Stock Route. That and other aspects of his life were covered in an obituary in *The West Australian* on 29 June when Torrance Mendez recalled Alan's pastoral station activities in the Gascoyne and Murchison regions and his aerial mustering in the Goldfields.

Cathie Clement

THE MONTARA OIL SPILL NORTH OF THE KIMBERLEY

Earlier editions of the *Boab Bulletin* (October and December 2009 and February 2010) carried instalments of a log created to provide insight into the oil spill and its management. On 18 June, a media release from the Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP, Federal Minister for Resources and Energy, read:

The Australian Government has today received the findings of the Montara Commission of Inquiry into the uncontrolled oil and gas release from the Montara Wellhead Platform, which occurred from 21 August to 3 November 2009.

The report from Commissioner David Borthwick AO PSM has been provided to the Minister for Resources and Energy, Martin Ferguson AM MP. In handing over the report Commissioner Borthwick commended the Minister on his pre-emptive actions to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 enabling the Commission to be set up to investigate and report on the incident.

The Inquiry focussed on the likely cause(s), the adequacy of the response and the effectiveness of the regulatory regime, including any changes that may be required to further strengthen existing arrangements.

"I will act promptly and appropriately on the report once I have had an opportunity to review its contents," Minister Ferguson said.

"Prior to releasing the report publicly I am bound to give consideration to advice from the Australian Government Solicitor to ensure that in the handling of this report I do nothing to prejudice the conduct of further investigations for possible offences including criminal offences, other civil or criminal action, or undermine any natural justice considerations.

"The Inquiry was not about attributing blame – it was, and continues to be, about understanding and learning the lessons from Montara.

"The Government has not been complacent during the period of the Inquiry. Under my instruction the relevant regulatory authorities are undertaking a range of reviews and safety checks.

"Industry has been very supportive of this process and has undertaken its own independent measures to improve safety in the wake of both Montara and the current incident in the Gulf of Mexico.

"I am focussed on making our oil and gas exploration and production operations the best and safest in the world.

"This report will play an important role in keeping our workers safe, protecting our environment and safeguarding our energy security.

"I thank the Commissioner and his team for their work, as I do all parties who contributed to the numerous submissions and the Public Hearings process."

The *Boab Bulletin* will report further when the Minister releases the report.

COUNCIL 2010-2011

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