

GEOFFREY BOLTON LECTURE 2010

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PARLIAMENT, THE PEOPLE AND ARCHIVES: DOCUMENTING POLITICS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In November 1945 at the age of 9 while recovering in hospital from a surgical procedure I received two presents. One was a sweep ticket for the Melbourne Cup, the Cup subsequently won by Rainbird, which sadly was not the name on my ticket. The other was a copy of Stephen Roberts, *History of Modern Europe*, first published in 1933¹ and presented to me by family friend and distinguished West Australia writer J K Ewers. In different ways each of those events has a degree of significance, or perhaps better expressed, a degree of meaning, in terms of my topic for this lecture. I am not suggesting for a moment that I was a precocious nine year old who could read Professor Roberts' book with a depth of awareness and understanding. Indeed my real introduction to history had come to me a couple of years earlier when an elderly great aunt presented me with one of her school texts. a Longmans' History of England, and it was this volume which introduced me to the fascinating world of successive Kings and Queens and the implications of the concept that 'the King is dead, long live the King'.

This concept of one ruler replacing another which so fascinated me in the UK context may also help to explain my equal fascination with election nights, my first experience of which came soon after my sojourn in hospital. I can still recall sitting cross legged next to the large radio receiver in 1946 and listening to Professor H D Black (no relation of mine) endeavouring to make sense of the likely allocation of preferences which led ultimately to the Chifley Government winning a further three years in office albeit with a reduced majority—an election outcome rather different than that in August this year.

As for the Melbourne Cup sweep this led me into a fascination with horse racing, albeit only at the highest level and relatively transient unlike my continuing fascination with the comings and goings of British monarchs (a happening which has become somewhat rare in my lifetime), American Presidents and governments and oppositions in Australia, the US and the UK alike. As it was, the peak of my fascination with the successes and failures of great Australian racehorses came in the late 1950s and early 1960s when I, like many of my contemporaries, was fascinated with the exploits of Tulloch in my view, the greatest three year old racehorse ever to race in Australia. In this regard therefore I felt that it was a fitting tribute that the legendary trainer Tommy Smith named his stables Tulloch Lodge after the greatest horse he had ever trained.

And speaking of stables—and I admit I am drawing a long bow here—I like to think that I was a product of the same historical stable which produced Professor Geoffrey Bolton, in whose honour I am speaking tonight as have those who have preceded me over the last few years. Pardon the analogy, but in my mind Geoff Bolton can undoubtedly be

considered the Tulloch equivalent in status and output of all the numerous historians and historians who emerged from the UWA history department stable in the 1950s. As an author, as a teacher, as a publicist for history, as a major contributor to and long standing servant of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, Geoffrey Bolton he stands out from his contemporaries and in 2006 he was a worthy recipient of the honour of being named Citizen of the Year in this state. Whether one refers to his biography of Edmund Barton² (and we all await with eager anticipation his forthcoming work on Paul Hasluck); to *A Fine Country to Starve In*³ which he brings to life Western Australia's very special experiences during the Great Depression; to *Land of Vision and Mirage*⁴ the successor volume to Frank Crowley's *Australia's Western Third*⁵; to his Oxford History of Australia volume with the highly appropriate title of *The Middle Way*⁶, to his first major work on Alexander Forrest⁷; to his contributions to the histories of communities, academic institutions and a multiplicity of other publications⁸—in every instance his publications are not only works of comprehensive and penetrating research but are presented in the same inimitable manner which makes his speeches, both prepared and off the cuff, immensely informative and immensely entertaining.

Let me look for a moment at some of the other teachers who made this stable so extraordinarily productive and from which Geoff Bolton (and I) emerged. My years at UWA in Geoffrey's wake in the 1950s were spent in an academic world which included Fred Alexander, an academic of a kind who is all too rare these days and whose words of wisdom and encouragement inspired me both then and now; with John Legge who showed me the paths down which history could lead me from the moment when I grappled to cope with his very first tutorial assignment in his History 2D Pacific History course in which I was asked to consider the extent to which Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 could be directly attributed to the 'beggar-my-neighbour' policies of the West (and China) thus depriving Japan of access to adequate supplies of raw materials during the depths of the Great Depression; or to Josh Reynolds whose lectures on the Middle Ages were a world of fascination even if we all knew that you could pass the History 10 exam and even do very well without answering any questions except those on the Tudor and Stuart kings.

And then of course there was the legendary Frank Crowley, whose office had row after row of Hansards stacked ceiling high and who sat behind a desk wearing a tennis shade—that is if you could find your way through the books to his desk. He was blunt in manner but an effective guide and teacher and he left me with one particularly important message which over the years I have passed on to generations of budding historians who carry out research for day after day, week after months perhaps even year after year before they sit down to write. 'Start writing as early as possible' Frank Crowley would say to me 'because only then do you know what it is you are looking for'. And whenever I said I don't know where to start writing his reply was simple but effective: 'just start anywhere that immediately comes to mind'. I have followed this advice ever since.

Having indulged myself with these reminiscences let me then follow my own advice in this lecture and try to focus on the role of the historical documents held in places such as the State Records Office. These documents have a meaning and potential impact that

extends far beyond the hallowed halls of the library building: the current ongoing debates about Anzac Day and Kokoda or about the black armband views of history, make all too clear that the study and lessons of history have a real impact well beyond the hallowed halls of academia. In discussing the significance of the documents, however I would like to continue drawing the analogy from own experience which to a very large degree, more than many of my important contemporaries, has been focused on the political and parliamentary scene, whether it be the comings and goings of MPs and the debates at the local parliament; election night in the West, state or federal; the life and work of John Curtin; or the comings and going of the respective king (and occasionally queen) equivalents who have dominated Western Australian history and politics.

One other general point before I come down to detail. In my view history is both a science and an art—there are aspects of the work of the historian which follow very specific rules and methodologies and where the conclusions reached must be carefully and specifically documented and tabulated. At the same time, however, there are elements in the work of the historian where the artist is in play and the story must be told and illustrated in a way that has not only meaning but brings the sequence of events and the underlying message to the audience in much the same way in terms of emotional impact as does) say *King Lear*, a performance of which I attended only two or three months back. And to borrow from the terminology one of my former colleagues, an anthropologist, the historian is concerned not to tabulate happenings but to focus on events, that is on happenings which have meanings to others, whether that be to individual others, societies or even the international community. And to take this one step further again it is the written word (even if it originated as the spoken word) which turns these happenings and then events into history and in the end historians work by telling stories in one form or another. Where would Captain Scott's part in the history of polar exploration be without his diary; or where would the Anzac legend be without the very first despatches filed back to the English press? Of such stuff are legends made and these legends form an integral part of history.

Let me therefore begin with a very specific historical activity which was conducted in what I like to call a scientific way but which helped to make real and intense personal experience for me. As a back ground to this I need to emphasise that in 1948 when I was successful in winning a secondary school scholarship to Perth Modern School, Mod (as, we called it then and now) was the only government school in the Perth metropolitan area which taught all five years between the last year of primary school and the Leaving Certificate, the old name for the TEE equivalent. February 2011 will mark the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first students at Perth Modern School and this is not only historic for Old Modernians but for the state education system given that 1911 was the first occasion that a State government school offered full-scale secondary (post primary) education. There had been experiments such as the establishment of a Normal School to provide two years of post primary education for those seeking to enter the Claremont Teachers' College (itself initiated in 1902) and this Normal School was subsequently to be absorbed into the Perth Modern School developed along the lines advocated by the Inspector-General of Schools Cecil Andrews. The name itself, Perth Modern School,

reflected Andrews' focus on achieving 'modern' emphasis on mathematics and science and languages such as German and French alongside the classic studies of Latin.

Over the years Modern School developed its reputation for academic excellence through the highly selective entry system of scholarship and entrances which prevailed until the late 1950s, though from the early 1920s onwards a significant number of additional students were admitted to the final two years before the Leaving Certificate. The significant point which is brought out clearly in the history of the school written by a group of enthusiasts including myself⁹ was that Andrews' vision when Modern School was established did not centre on the selective entry system: this in fact only evolved because of the simple fact that while successive state governments over the years built five year high schools in Bunbury, Albany, Kalgoorlie, Northam and Geraldton (to name but a few) no attempt was made to replicate the Modern School experiment in the metropolitan area. As a consequence, although by the time I entered the school in 1948 the State's population had gone from a little more than a quarter of a million to half a million and was to expand at an accelerating rate in the 1950s it was only in that later decade that schools such as Kent Street and John Curtin were reorganised to admit students for all five years of post primary education. In this sense then until the late 1950s highly selective entry to Mod was a practical necessity rather than a consequence of educational philosophy as distinct from the motivations which led the Gallop Government to re-establish the selective entry approach abandoned by their ALP predecessors in the late 1950s.

Against this background when making my contribution to the school history one aspect on which I chose to focus was the methods used and the consequences of the process of selecting students through so-called scholarships and entrances. In seeking the documents on which this analysis could be based I came upon a wealth of statistical material—literally thousands of cards, handwritten, and containing a mass of information about each student who entered the school between 1911 and the end of the 1950s. Information about the student's parent's occupation, primary school attended, and their progress through the school gave me and others who have worked on these documents since the basis for developing both significant information about each individual and also composite tables concerning such issues as the degree to which entrance depended on which primary school one attended. Information was also available to construct tables on the correlation between the rankings achieved in the entrance examinations and the student's subsequent school career and even the occupation which the student him or herself had nominated as the most likely when they first entered the school. This is a treasure trove of information for those seeking to replicate the Modern School experience now that the school has all but reached the point where all five years will consist of students who gained admission by selective entry.

On a personal note in this regard I was astonished to discover that at the age of eleven I nominated my own career as likely to be that of a statistician. Given that the last major publication for which I was primarily responsible was the most recent edition of the WA Parliamentary Handbook¹⁰—which contains a wealth of tables about such aspects as the changing age patterns of politicians over the years, family relationships (father and son

premiers Charles and Richard Court, brother and sister politicians, and husband and wife MPs (Ruby Hutchison and Fred Lavery)—I can see both from where my concept came of myself as a statistician and how this linked with my already established love of history.

In my chapter in the school history on ‘Fifty years of Scholarships and entrances’ two issues emerged of particular interest. The first centred on the attempts by the authorities to ensure equity in terms of the age of students sitting for the scholarship. Thus, for example, in my year a ‘handicap’ system was introduced adding additional marks for each candidate sitting the preliminary scholarship examination (as distinct from the main scholarship exam) depending on what was their birthday month. The students sat the exam in the year they turned twelve and a candidate born in January, for example, had 1.5 marks added to their score, one born in July as I was (an additional 10.5 marks) and one born in December the full eighteen mark bonus. Given that the most brilliant student in my view was born on 30 December this seemed to be a somewhat arbitrary approach. The other issue of particular interest to me focussed on the growing concern in the 1930s and 1940s about ‘coaching’ and the holding of ‘special classes before and after school which were said to account for North Perth School, for example, becoming the front runner by the 1940s and 1950s in winning scholarships and entrances for its students—28 out of a little over 100 entrants in the 1949 examination for example. The content of the testing too changed over the years from the early stages when history and geography were examined as part of the process to the situation in 1948 when mathematical and English expression questions were supplemented by an IQ test.

The cards on which all this research was based were held at the school rather than the State Records Office because of space limitations but I would like here to acknowledge the significant assistance from State Archives staff which made it possible for all these cards to be digitised thus allowing for the various statistical constructs to be created. This issue of the accessibility of archives is one to which I will return shortly.

However, having now established just one example of where my fascination with statistics led to interesting conclusions about the broader sweep of history let me then turn to politics and parliament and the role of the archives in this process. To put this into perspective I intend to begin by outlining briefly the different stages of my career first as a teacher and lecturer but then increasingly as a researcher and writer as well as media commentator. In each of these aspects of my life and career I was always primarily dealing with sources and issues which in one form or other centred on Western Australian political and parliamentary history.

My first direct involvement in historical research came of course with my Honours and Masters of Arts theses in which (I hope) I was able to demonstrate my intellectual impartiality by writing my Honours dissertation on Labor Premier Philip Collier embracing the first six years of his nine year tenure as WA Premier¹¹ and my Masters’ thesis on the non-Labor Liberal and Nationalist parties from 1917 to 1930 (noting that Nationalists of this period should not in any way be confused with the National Party of today!!).¹² One important initiative for me at this time was the use of computer analysis (at a time when computers were huge in physical size and I needed specialist help from a

full time university computer analyst) to analyse voting patterns in parliamentary divisions thus identifying the realities of political alignments at a time in the wake of the so-called conscription crisis of 1916 and 1917 as a consequence of which party labels were extremely flexible and often short-lived.

In 1968 I made the transition from school teaching and working in the curriculum branch of the Education Department to teaching history and politics at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (later to become Curtin University). While it was not my original intention when I first applied for the position at WAIT I very soon came to specialise in the teaching of both Australian history and politics. Significantly, too it was also in 1968 that I first received the opportunity to comment publicly in television programs on Western Australian elections and politics and from 1972 until well into the 21st century I appeared regularly on television and later radio on election night. This in turn led to my contributing to studies of specific election campaigns—in my case usually focussing most specifically on examining the voting patterns, assessing swings, patterns of preference distribution and the like. While I never became a psephologist in the Malcolm MacKerras sense I did enter into a number of research projects directly linked to this field of study. These included compiling complete registers of election results for the West Australian Legislative Council up to and including 1989¹³; then in collaboration with the WA Electoral Commission the Legislative Assembly results up to and including 1996¹⁴; and also, arising from my role at the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library commencing in the late 1990s (a topic I will discuss further in a moment), studies of the Fremantle federal electorate from 1901 to 2008¹⁵ and of the three federal election campaigns in which John Curtin led the Australian Labor Party.¹⁶ Sources for these works included—in addition to statistical material from Electoral Department and Commission records and newspapers—such material as a diary of John's Curtin's day to day activities while he was prime minister compiled from a variety of sources held at the JCPML.¹⁷ I found this diary especially interesting in assessing how a prime minister in 1943 could arrange a schedule involving visits to every state without the use of aeroplanes: of necessity it meant that electoral considerations had to be very significant in planning an itinerary when inevitably some states would have to be visited for the last time well before election day. Not surprisingly, too, Curtin's narrow squeak in 1940 when he won Fremantle by only 600 votes meant that returning to Fremantle in the last week seemed an absolute necessity even if in fact he eventually won by more than 20,000 votes.

My role with the JCPML developed initially when the University funded me to write an annotated digest of the speeches and writings of John Curtin, the sources for which included not only newspapers and periodicals but also an official digest of speeches and statements compiled in government sources.¹⁸ For me, perhaps the personal highlight of this process was right back in the early days when Elsie Needham, the elder child of prime minister Curtin suddenly and unexpectedly handed over to me as I was leaving the Cottesloe home after a visit, an array of scrapbooks, private letters and other material which she had kept in the House over the years. It is a matter of great satisfaction to me and to many of those involved in these early years that with significant government help and the involvement of the National Trust the Curtin House in Cottesloe has now finally reached the stage when it is open for visits and tours as such an important historical

monument should be. As yet of course it is still only the third of its kind in Australia (the others being the homes of Joe Lyons in Tasmania and Ben Chfley in Bathurst, NSW).

One other fascinating set of source material came when I was able to work with the letters which John Curtin wrote over a three year period to a teenage girl whom we are reliably informed Curtin never actually met. My annotated study of these letters was published in a volume annotating Curtin's correspondence from 1907 to 1945 and entitled *Friendship is a Sheltering Tree*, a title taken from a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge¹⁹. The letters include those from his courtship period with future wife Elsie (letters described by Professor Tom Stannage as 'among the finest in the edition'²⁰), close friends and colleagues but perhaps the most remarkable were the letters written between October 1907 and February 1910 to Jessie Honora Gunn, aged fourteen at the beginning of the correspondence when Curtin himself was 22. Jessie Gunn, was a member of a family closely involved with the Victorian Socialist Movement and Curtin was said to have been 'going with' Jessie's elder sister Nancy until the latter's tragic death at the age of sixteen in August 1906 from an intense fever. In total, 17 letters from Curtin to Jessie Gunn have survived plus a fragment of another but no copies have been found of Jessie's letters to Curtin though the first letter in October 1907 was obviously written in reply to one from her. As they stand the letters give us a wonderful insight into the young John Curtin, his outlook and ideals, his preoccupations and mood swings, his passions in the artistic and cultural area, all aspects of his many-sided involvement in the socialist movement. Yet since they seemingly never met face-to-face we have no information as to why he kept writing for such a longer period only for the correspondence to end abruptly. All this in turn opens up the story of his involvement with his wife Elsie and whatever one might read about that relationship in certain sources the evidence in my view is overwhelming that John and Elsie Curtin were a couple whose contribution to each other's lives was of immeasurable importance and value'.

My work with the JCPML has been very important to me but ultimately the field in which I have spent the longest period of time and produced what I consider to be the most substantial output has been in the area of parliamentary history and it is on this area that I now wish to focus. My close association with the Western Australian Parliament dates from my first proposal in the early 1980s, supported by then Legislative Council member and enthusiastic non-professional historian Phillip Pental, for a history to be written of the Western Australian Parliament. The publication of this volume was to be scheduled for 1990 the centenary year of self government, responsible cabinet government and a bicameral legislature in Western Australia. Gaining official approval for the process took two to three years but by 1984 with the backing of those who mattered both in the government and amongst the senior parliamentary staff we were able to secure the establishment of the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee, of which I am still chairperson after 26 years. For all those years until his sudden and untimely death in 2009 Phillip Pental was also a member of the committee and I would like to affirm here and now that of the well over 800 members who have sat in one house or other of the Western Australian Parliament since 1890 no one else has come anywhere near making the contribution to compiling the history of that institution, its members and its buildings than did Phillip Pental.

From the outset our central task was to produce a multi-author history of the Parliament and this was achieved in 1991 as *The House on the Hill*.²¹ The first half of the book was devoted to a series of chronological chapters commencing with the establishment of the original 1832 Legislative Council the membership of which was identical with that of the first Executive Council; following through the period of nominated Legislative Councillors and the period from 1870 when the first elected members entered the House culminating in the establishment of the bicameral legislature in 1890 with Sir John Forrest as the first premier, and the various eras of parliamentary, party and electoral through the hundred years which followed. The second part of the book then consists of articles concerning the role of the Governor, issues arising from the Constitution, aspects of parliamentary privilege and the like.

Our list of contributors for the centenary history was a distinguished one but in retrospect the real significance of the book was the much more broadly based project to which it gave rise and for which the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee took responsibility at the time and ever since. The committee is in formal terms advisory to the Presiding officers—the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council—and with the sustained backing of the Clerks of each House our advice is virtually always accepted and the two Houses then contribute from their budgets the wherewithal to make possible the numerous projects for which we have been responsible since.

These additional projects and ongoing projects began as a means of providing the research material necessary for the production of the centenary history. Thus, the confusing pattern of elections until 1965 whereby three members were elected for each Legislative Council province with one third of the members retiring each two years (and followed by another twenty-four years of two members for each province elected every alternative three years) was sorted out in the one publication.²² Secondly, the production of the Biographical Registers begun by Geoffrey Bolton, Ann Mozley and later with Patricia Simpson assisting, was taken over by the PHAC leading to a one-off revision and finalising of the *Biographical Register of Members of the Western Australian Parliament 1890-1930*²³ and the publication and regular updating of Volume Two dealing with those elected from 1930 onwards²⁴ (the latest version bringing the information up to 2010 is expected to be published by early 2011). It is important too that I pay tribute to the staff of the Australian Dictionary of biography project generally and in the WA context in particular to Wendy Birman who as part of their work for the ADB contributed substantially to the collecting of information enabling the original publication of the two volumes by the PHAC.

Thirdly, and most important perhaps, the Parliamentary History Oral History Project was launched and since the mid 1980s with the active cooperation of the State Library, originally through the Battye Library Oral History section and still significant assistance from the State Library's overworked and understaffed oral history personnel, more than sixty full-scale oral interviews have been conducted by professional oral historians led by former Battye Library Director Ronda Jamieson. Those interviewed for the project

include not only former members of Parliament but also parliamentary staff both senior and junior including, for example, the first woman telephonist who worked in Parliament House and a small number of spouses of MPs. Even as I speak three interviewers are each recording interviews with two former politicians, chosen for interview by members of the PHAC. I should perhaps also mention here that the members of the PHAC in addition to myself include the Presiding Officers themselves, the two Clerks, invited academics or former members, and usually as at present two serving MPs chosen from opposite sides of the political fence and from each of the two Houses. The oral history interviews when completed are transcribed and copies are available for perusal by researchers and others at both the State Library and in the Parliamentary Library—in the latter instance as part of the members' collection which also includes publications produced by the members themselves such as autobiographies, research projects, community histories and the like.

At this stage I would also like to acknowledge personally the huge contribution made by Ronda Jamieson both then and now to our work and draw attention to the forthcoming publication of Ronda's biography of Sir Charles Court and to the more than 130 hours of recorded interviews she undertook with Sir Charles and which will become available to researchers in the very near future. Her book is due for publication in the not too distant future and will complete the trilogy of biographies of the three men who I see as the larger than life figures in the history of our state—first Governor James Stirling; then Sir John (Lord) Forrest who presided over the extraordinary decade which lifted the West out of the doldrums; and thirdly of course Sir Charles himself whose impact in many respects was as significant if not even more so when he was a minister in the Brand Government than it was when he was Premier.

At this point I will perhaps get ahead of myself a little by referring to an extract from one of the chapters for which I was largely responsible in the third major publication by the PHAC namely *Mirror of the People* a study of the more than 800 men and women who at that time had sat in the Western Australian Parliament since 1890.²⁵ In 'The Young and the Old', the chapter in which we analysed the age profiles of members both young and old over the years, the opening paragraphs dealt with an episode in 1950 when the Liberal Party managed to lose the blue ribbon seat of Nedlands to an independent. Let the story tell itself.²⁶

In 1949 Sir Norbert Michael Keenan KC sought Liberal preselection for the safe suburban seat of Nedlands. He had held the seat since its creation in 1930, firstly for the Nationalist party (initially formed in the wake of the ALP conscription split in 1916–1917) and then from 1945 for the Liberal party following Robert Menzies' success in 1944 in bringing together the disparate non-Labor forces under the revived banner of the Liberal Party of Australia.

It can be suggested that there would have been nothing remarkable if Norbert Keenan had again been endorsed and had won Nedlands for the seventh time except for one fact—by polling day in 1950 he would be 86 years old. Already in September 1949 he had become the oldest man ever to sit in either House of the Western Australian Parliament passing the record set by Sydney Stubbs who had retired in 1947, aged 85

years and 7 months, as member for Wagin after 36 years in the Legislative Assembly and, previous to that, three years in the Legislative Council. Indeed, after one hundred years of responsible government only two other members—James Franklin and John Drew—both of whom were upper House members—had still been sitting in the Western Australian Parliament subsequent to their eightieth birthday.

But Keenan's career was remarkable not only because of his age when he sought to remain in parliament after the 1950 election. No other Western Australian member of parliament in the whole period since 1890 has repeated his experience of leaving parliament by his own choice after six years only to return nearly two decades later to commence an even longer stint. In 1933 as the only member of his party with ministerial experience to survive an election which saw even Premier Mitchell lose his seat, he became leader of the remnants of the then Nationalist party until his resignation in 1938 at the age of 74.

Keenan's bid for pre-selection for the 1950 election had, in the short term at least, disastrous consequences for his party which lost Nedlands for the first and only time to an unendorsed student Liberal, 25-year-old David Grayden, brother of former state and then federal Liberal MP Bill Grayden. The official endorsed candidate for the party, then known as the Liberal and Country League, was prominent Perth accountant Cyril Pangbourne Bird whose accountancy firm was the initial career starting point for a very large number of budding young accountants in the West.²⁷ Bird would probably have made a very successful State parliamentarian but he perhaps lacked flair and style and the presence of Grayden and the aging KC were too much for him to overcome. In the fourth and final count Keenan's preferences split virtually three-to-one in favour of Grayden who won the seat with 566 votes to spare. Three years later young accountant and ex-serviceman Charles Court contested the seat as an endorsed Liberal After four counts Court was 800 ahead of Grayden with a little over 2000 ALP preferences to be allocated. These split 51%-49% in Court's favour giving him a comfortable majority. In the light of Sir Charles thirty year tenure in the seat and his eight years as Premier one wonders how often in retrospect those responsible for the ALP's campaign strategy came to regret their recommended preference allocations in 1953; or for that matter Keenan's decision to block Cyril Bird's likely lengthy career as member for Nedlands.

We will never know what would have happened if Sir Charles had not had the opening to win the Nedlands seat in 1953. But to return to my story outline. Since 1991 the PHAC has continued working in all the three areas I have described producing for example a complete index of all candidates who stood for election in Western Australian state elections or Western Australian seats in federal elections²⁸ and, as already indicated, a constituency-by-constituency summary of Legislative Assembly results produced in partnership with the WA Electoral Commission. Moreover, the scope of the PHAC work has broadened significantly in the last decade and at this stage I would like to outline a few of the major projects which emerged in the last ten to fifteen years

Before doing so, however, I should also add that from early in the 1990s my role as Chairman of the PHAC received an enormous boost with the arrival of Dr Harry Phillips from Edith Cowan University both to work with the Legislative Assembly on its school and public educational activities and also to provide assistance with major aspects of the history programme. The first significant outcome of this collaboration came in 1999 when Professor Phillips and I worked on a publication *Making A Difference*²⁹ to commemorate the centenary of women's suffrage in Western Australia. The particular feature of this publication was that in addition to overview articles on 'Votes for Women—Supply or Demand' and 'Women's Voting Behaviour: Patterns and Explanations of the Gender gap in Australia' written by our academic and professional colleagues Betty Carter and Tamara Fischer a separate section was devoted to each of the 39 women, commencing with Edith Cowan in 1921, who had been elected to the Western Australian Parliament in the 80 years since women were first given the opportunity to seek election to either house. In this regard it should be noted that during the first 50 of those 80 years only 5 women were elected to one house or the other and only one was appointed a Minister of the Crown. Even so over the years Western Australia did manage to provide a number of firsts for women including the first woman member in Australia—and only the second to take her seat in the British Empire—in Edith Cowan; the first Labor woman MP May Holman; the first woman cabinet minister in Australia, Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver, the first woman in the Australian Senate Dorothy Tangney, and Carmen Lawrence as the first woman to become a State Premier.

The format of *Making a Difference* was distinctive in that, in addition to biographical information about each woman written by the editors, each living woman member or former member was given the opportunity, which nearly all accepted, to write their own piece outlining their own perspectives on their parliamentary career. For the small number of women who did not write their own piece as well as for deceased members the editors included extracts from a relevant speech or speeches. Currently plans are in hand for a follow-up volume along the same lines encompassing the significant number of women who have entered the parliament dating from the 2001 election and this at a time when Australia has just seen the election of its first woman prime minister and the Legislative Council in Western Australia now has women constituting nearly forty-five per cent of its membership the highest percentage in any Australian House of Parliament. (Sadly at this stage the Legislative Assembly has the lowest only a little over 20 per cent.) It is also worth noting as an indication of the pace of change that our current assumption is that this sequel to *Making a Difference* will be the last publication of its kind on the basis that in the years ahead women in politics will have become a sufficiently integral aspect of the system that the separate publications of this kind will no longer be necessary.

It was early in the twenty-first century that another major initiative was taken by then Legislative Council President John Coddell in securing for Harry Phillips and for me the title of Parliamentary Fellow. Soon afterwards our number was expanded to three with the retirement from parliamentary politics of Philip Pandal who had been a member of the PHAC throughout its whole history and was at the time its vice Chairman. Once free from the day-to-day grind of constituency politics Phil provided a dynamic third force

and it was primarily through his drive and enterprise, not to say flair that the PHAC was able to move ahead with the second and third books in the grand trilogy which currently provide the centrepiece of its work since 1984.

While there had been plans for some time to piece together the history of ‘The House on the Hill’, the parliamentary building itself, it was our newly created Parliamentary Fellow Phillip Pental who came up with the idea and linking the histories of the two houses of government—namely Government House and Parliament House—in the one publication *House to House*³⁰, in terms not only of the actual history of the design, construction and controversies of each of the two separate establishments but also the gradual transference of power from the one to the other. Interestingly, in this regard the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, of which I am the WA Chapter Chairman, is organising an evening seminar focussed in part on the respective roles of Governor and party leaders when forming a government in a so-called ‘hung Parliament’ an issue which you may recall caused some difficulties in Tasmania earlier this year (and of course recently we have seen the historical federal election outcome).

In the short time available to me this evening I would like to refer briefly to two issues which emerged from our account in *House to House* leaving aside such aspects as the controversy over the Barracks Arch which represented a major setback to then Premier Sir David Brand and the debate over the actual selection of the site on the hill instead of the central city site favoured by many.

Of particular interest to me, however, given the title of the book, was the material which Phillip Pental unearthed, if that is the right term, concerning the proposed arrangements for carrying on the government of the state in view of military invasion of Australia or at very least serious bombing raids on the capital city itself. The research for this section of the book was carried out initially from the official *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* in August 1940 when the then minister for Health and Mines Alexander Panton introduced legislation to provide for Emergency Powers for Civil Defence, legislation which at the time was focussed on the potential threat of enemy bombings but at a time when Germany was the declared enemy. Two years later and with Panton’s role upgraded (at least in parliament and in the press if not in the official records) to take in the new portfolio of Minister for Civil Defence, ‘the state was now to make a practical call on his legislation’.³¹ Working both from Premiers Office documents held in the State Records Office and often in files marked ‘Secret (war’) and significantly from an interview in 2003 with Ralph Doig who was then within three years of becoming Permanent head of the Department Phil Pental was able to piece together the specific arrangements made to protect the Governor, the Ministry and Parliament itself in the event of Japanese bombing raids which had already impacted on Broome and Wyndham should reach the metropolitan area.³²

In the book Pental recounts how Sir James Mitchell as Lieutenant Governor was relocated to ‘a house in Kalamunda’ which in reality was the Kalamunda Hotel, officially in order to free up Government House for extra civil servants for war service work but in reality because of ‘the Japanese invasions scare’.³³ (Interestingly, though Mitchell

continued to perform many of his community-based functions while based in Kalamunda). Doig, in his interview with Pental also provided detailed information concerning the action taken to move the Premier, his staff and a number of key ministers to Lawson Flats on the corner of Sherwood Court and The Esplanade, a steel reinforced structure from which the existing occupiers were moved out to alternative premises without the payment of rent or compensation to the owners. In addition, in the immediate aftermath of a bombing raid on Broome on 3 March 1942 plans were set out in a secret documents dated 12 March to move the whole seat of government to Kalgoorlie. Issues such as securing an adequate water supply and food were canvassed in the documents, as was the need for special constables to deal with uninterned aliens and the need for financial provision for paying those engaged on essential services. Pental notes that in terms of this possible move several of the leading ministers in the government had had their political bases at one time or another in mining and provincial centres. What then seems most surprising was that although air raid shelters were built around Parliament House no plans at any stage were made for the Parliament itself to be relocated even though ‘the Houses on the Hill were, from the air at least, ‘as visible and vulnerable as any housing the civil service and the government to the east along St George’s Terrace’³⁴.

It was Phillip Pental too who provided important aspects of the inspiration behind the third book in the trilogy—one from which I have already quoted—when having written about the history of the Parliament itself and on the building it occupied we—that is Harry Phillips, Phillip Pental and I—turned our attention to the men and women who had been elected to represent their fellow citizens in the Parliament. We should also acknowledge our debt in this regard to Joan Rydon whose book on the federal Parliament *A federal legislature*³⁵ published back in the mid 1980s gave us a useful model in determining what were the more significant characteristics of members—age, occupation, war service record, place of birth and the like that we should analyse in terms of trends and changes over time. What was distinctive about our book, however, is obvious from the title—the *Mirror of the People*—in that the attempt was made to discern the extent to which the politicians who sat in the Western Australian Parliament over the years were representative of the community from which they came and in turn how the public came to see they had chosen to represent them. In this regard the authors commissioned a survey concerning interest in and understanding of the parliamentary system among those surveyed and their attitudes towards those they elected. Among the findings from that study were that the survey group were divided over the extent to which the Parliament represented them but less than 9 per cent considered, perhaps not surprisingly, that Parliament was a ‘mirror of the people’.³⁶

A quick overview of the list of chapters indicates that in the early chapters the authors analysed such issues as the age of MPs, Aboriginality and religion in politics. The analysis in the chapter headed ‘A Migrant Parliament’ the authors noted the influx of t’othersiders in the 1890s and the next decade, the gradual predominance of the locally born among MPs until the post Second World war era and then the impact of the migratory waves which makes Perth in 2010 next only to Sydney as having the highest proportion of overseas born in the Australian Commonwealth and subsequently the

gradual infusion of these new arrivals into Parliament. Later chapters dealt with the occupation and educational background of members over the years, the gender balance issue, sporting involvement of MPs, war service records, the length of service in Parliament (more than half all the members over the years served for ten years or less) and life after politics which for some can be relatively passive and for others the start or resumption of other careers. The book also focused on the very different situation for members in the modern era with the invasive press and in very recent times the invasive phone tapping investigators.

In this latter context I cannot resist referring to the case of Thomas Walker who in an earlier life had shot to death a Sydney clergyman, and earlier still in another continent had conducted a séance at which one of the participants was burned to death. Despite this bizarre background he was nevertheless able in Western Australia to become Attorney General and then Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.³⁷

In connection with *Mirror of the People* which for me personally was one of the most interesting and enjoyable of the books in which I have been involved, reference should also be made to Phil Pandal's research into John Verdun Newton who in November 1943 at the age of 27 and while serving overseas with the RAAF was elected as Labor member for Greenough but less than three months later was reported missing believed killed while on a bombing raid over Germany and thus was never able to take his seat in the house. During his research into this man who was assessed by his commander as 'an above average officer' and 'an excellent leader of men',³⁸ Phillip Pandal was able to locate the transcript of a broadcast message Newton was able to send through the BBC and which in a sense served as the 'maiden speech' that he never had the opportunity to make. It was one of the quirks of the parliamentary system that the only way that Newton's seat could be declared vacant after the war (and in the process leading to a by-election won by future Premier David Brand) was on the grounds of Newton's continued absence without leave from the proceedings of the House.

Before I turn to the final two issues on which I wish to focus I should mention another interesting project which was undertaken by Harry Phillips namely the preparation of a work concerning the presiding officers of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council both in terms of their political careers and their contribution to the functioning of parliamentary democracy in each house.³⁹ In this book Professor Phillips, in addition to providing biographical information about each presiding officer (all of whom even to date have been men), gave special attention to rulings made in the respective Houses that proved to be of longer term significance.

In summing up the whole process of investigating the development of Western Australian parliamentary and political history, however, I should like to conclude with a look at two of the most interesting and in many respects significant areas of study with which I have been involved during my time at Parliament namely the Documenting A Democracy project and the digitising of the handwritten minutes of the Legislative Council encompassing the period from 1832 to 1870.

In 2000 as part of a number of events and projects linked to the centenary of Australian federation I became involved in the National Archives of Australia *Documenting A Democracy* project which raises some significant issues in terms of constitutional development and change in Australia today.⁴⁰ The basis of the project was the selection of 110 key constitutional documents described as ‘the foundation of our nation’ and ‘Australia’s birth certificates’. Working in conjunction with all of Australia’s nine government archives and supported by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation National Advisory Panel, of which I was a member, was established to select the relevant documents to ‘tell the story of Australia’s democracy’. As outlined on the archived website ‘Australia is a documentary democracy—we can tell the story of our country through tracing the documents which give our governments the right to govern’.

The documents which emerged from this process as far as Western Australia was concerned were twelve in number selected by discussions within the State at the SRO and at the national level.⁴¹ It tells us something about Australian federation when I point out that although I was funded to attend the Advisory Panel meetings the archivist, Damien Hassan, with whom I was working in Perth and who made a major contribution to the whole project, was not able to attend because there were no funds forthcoming either from Canberra or Perth—and there were also other funding issues which I will not go into here. The documents we eventually selected pertaining to Western Australian settlement and the development of its political/constitutional ‘birth certificates’ commenced with the Instructions to the Admiralty to take formal possession of the western portion of the continent issued on 5 November 1828 and a series of documents indicating the process leading to Stirling’s appointment as Lieutenant Governor and then Governor, and culminating in 1832 with the creation of the Executive and Legislative Councils and the first act to set up a law court.

The documents which then followed included the ordinance providing for the sending of convicts to WA and culminated (all bar one document) with the Constitution Acts of 1890 and 1899 and the Letters Patent of 1890. All three of these latter documents have to be read to establish the basis and nature of the constitution under which Western Australia has been governed to the extent that it was and remains a self governing entity. Only one document from the twentieth century was included and that was the Constitution Acts Amendment Act passed in 1978 during the tenure of the Charles Court Government which entrenched certain provisions of the Western Australian Constitution so that in future a referendum would be needed to amend certain specified provisions, for example, e.g. the position of Governor and the existence of the bicameral legislature. It is worth noting here by the way that the genesis of this act was the concern by then Premier Sir Charles Court about the possible impact on the position of the Governor in the State’s constitutional structure in the aftermath of the constitutional crisis of 1975.

In the website which was developed from this project there is a scanned image of all or part of each document; a brief discussion of the significance of the document; a short outline of the history of its development; a listing of the sources consulted; and finally there is a physical description of the document and reference to its provenance. It is of interest too that the originals of three of the documents including the Constitution Act of

1889 which received the Royal Assent in the UK 1890 are still held in the UK while the other nine are located in the State Records Office.

From my perspective I found the process of selecting these documents and the discussions entailed in the process was especially fascinating but I fear that the impact the project has made on the community itself is, perhaps not surprisingly, somewhat limited. The website is of course readily available and easy to access but it is difficult to see how it can be used effectively unless it is linked to aspects of the school curriculum and sadly that has not eventuated despite a number of efforts in that regard. As to the question of whether people can be made enthusiastic about constitutional documents I agree there are significant problems but during my historical research for writing my chapters in *The House on the Hill* I found that on one occasion at least in Western Australia community enthusiasm was raised to an extra ordinary level suggesting that the interest can be there if the circumstances are right.

To illustrate my point let me then read some short extracts from the very first chapter of *The House on the Hill*, which was as I have already indicated the official history of our Parliament published in 1991. The chapter is titled 'At Last She Moves'.⁴²

At 5.00 pm on Saturday 18 October 1890 Sir William Robinson stepped ashore from the RMS *Orient* at the Land Company's jetty at Albany. From there he was conveyed by special train to the town to make the first speech of his third term as Governor of Western Australia. The ships in the harbour were flying bunting and the jetty was 'lavishly decorated', as were the streets in Albany, with a large triumphal arch adorned with transparencies stretching across York Street and a double triumphal arch with Norman towers bedecking the railway station. Two months earlier word had been received from England that on 15 August Queen Victoria had granted the Royal Assent to the colony's draft constitution, which Sir William now brought back to the colony for proclamation and implementation. In anticipation of his arrival, Tuesday and Wednesday, 21 and 22 October, had already been gazetted as bank holidays to allow the first Proclamation Day to be appropriately celebrated.

Four and a half hours later Sir William rose to address a large welcome meeting in the Albany Town Hall. Turning for inspiration to two of his predecessors — Governors Weld and Broome — he told his listeners the time had come when

. . . we can venture to say, with all sincerity, and in the full conviction that it will be realised, 'At last she moves'. (Cheers). It is necessary that with one hand and with one voice the colonists should use their best energies to launch the ship of State in deep waters.

. . . One day later, just before seven in the evening on Sunday 19 October Sir William boarded the train for the journey to the Great Southern Railway's terminus at Beverley from whence he would proceed on the government line via York to Perth. It was an extraordinary journey. At the direction of the Great Southern's general manager, J A Wright, bonfires were lit every one and half miles along the track all the

way to Beverley. At each stopping place—Mount Barker, Cranbrook, Broomehill, Katanning (at just before midnight), Wagin, Narrogin, Pingelly and Beverley—there was a welcoming crowd, a formal address was presented and the Governor made a speech in reply. After breakfast at Craig's Hotel in York, and a 30-minute stop at Chidlow's Well, Sir William reached the capital just before noon. . . . Given his sleepless night he displayed considerable stamina by attending a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* that evening . . .

Next day—the first Proclamation Day—was, in the words of historian Tom Stannage,

. . . a day to remember. Despite the inclement weather the town was gay and colourful. The main streets were decorated with small banners suspended by ropes attached to painted masts. At the Town Hall corner there was a triumphal arch of palms, ferns, eucalypts and other foliage, and decorated with flowers, flags and inscriptions. The four faces of the arch were inscribed 'God Bless our Western Land', 'Success to the new Constitution', 'Welcome Thrice Governor' . . . and 'thanks to our Delegates'. A similar arch at the corner of Hay and William Streets bore the following inscriptions: 'God Save Our Queen', 'God Bless the Prince of Wales', 'Advance United Australia', and 'Union is Strength'.⁴³

What is it then that happened to the enthusiasm and fervour which marked the lead up to and Proclamation Day itself on 21 October 1890 not only in the capital city but in numerous other centres throughout the colony (as in Geraldton where there was a ritual burial of the 'old constitution')? Although Proclamation Day remained a gazetted holiday until 1919, as early as 1894 the day was being pre-empted by those wishing to celebrate the 8 hour working day and in 1919 the day became known instead as Labour Day and subsequently lost its connection altogether with 21 October.⁴⁴

In explaining this paradox one inevitably focuses on the fact that 'Barely had the colony achieved its self governing status when it found itself drawn into discussions about federation, and its new-found status as an independent colony was to be diminished after only a decade'.⁴⁵

This and the arrival of thousands of 't'othersiders' in the gold rush-inspired-migration to the West meant there were large numbers of WA residents people for whom all that the 1889(1890) constitution meant was 'transfer of power from an imperial representative to a colonial oligarchy'. Similarly, in this day and age Western Australians are more than willing to be caught up in the enthusiasm of Australia Day and to be as committed to Anzac Day (if not more so given Albany's connection with the departing troops for Gallipoli and the first dawn ceremonies) as those in the eastern seaboard but it also means our distinctiveness and commitment to our constitutional structure focuses on the Australian Constitution and on how we are being treated therein (hence the constant revived allusions to secession) rather than on our own Western Australian constitutional instruments. In this regard there are those including my close friend Dr Harry Phillips who contend that if we could produce one single constitutional document in Western

Australia (and preferably including a preamble) we could develop much more awareness of and commitment to our own state-based system of constitutional government than exists at the moment when our constitution can only be pieced together from a number of different documents.

Looking back on the Document a Democracy process I can only argue that notwithstanding my reservations as to what the project has achieved it has made some important documents, and an understanding of their significance, more accessible and hence available for scrutiny if and when significant educational and political processes are finally developed.

Secondly, and finally, I would like to conclude with some reference designed to enable greater accessibility of political/constitutional documents and the value of which I can confirm because of the diligent and incisive research conducted by one of my colleagues at the Western Australian Parliament. As you are all presumably aware the proceedings of Parliament these days are recorded (and in the past taken down in shorthand) and transcribed by the Parliamentary Reporting personnel, still referred to generally as the Hansard staff. When I first came to work with the PHAC all the proceedings from 1876 onwards were available in bound volumes of Hansard under the title of *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* which meant that published debates were available for all but six years of the period since elected politicians first entered our Parliament. Soon afterwards on the initiative of the Hansard staff themselves the records of the period from 1870 to 1876 were produced in printed form taken from the issues of the *Perth Gazette* which in that day and age actually produced the detailed report which appeared regularly in the ordinary issues of the newspaper (just imagine if the *West Australian* were to provide such a coverage today!!!).⁴⁶

What remained then was the period from 1832 to 1870 when the Legislative Council (as the only house in that era and indeed until 1890) included the Governor himself, the Crown officials who also constituted the Executive Council and from the late 1830s onwards a number of colonists nominated to the Council by the Governor of the day (usually in consultation with the Government in the UK). The minutes (as distinct from the full scale record of the debate) of this period only existed in handwritten form and were lodged with the State Archives. It has been one of the most satisfying achievements of the period with which I have been associated with the Parliament that by cooperation between the State Records Office, the Hansard reports themselves and the PHAC that these minutes have all been transcribed and are now available in digitised form for future researchers and it is to the potential fruits of this newfound accessibility of these documents that I now wish to turn.

In 2009 I attended the ceremony at the State Library when it was announced that Isla MacPhail had won the Margaret Medcalf Award for her published work *Highest Privilege and Bounden Duty: A Study of Western Australian Parliamentary Elections 1829–1901*⁴⁷ a work published by the WA Electoral Commission itself and originally written as part of a Ph. D thesis. (I note in passing that much of the work is concerned with the process that led eventually to the holding of the first semi-official elections for

members of the Legislative Council in 1867 when the Governor agreed to nominate those whom the electors had chosen to endorse at the ballot box and then in the first official elections in 1870 for two-third of the then twenty-four member house).

Isla's work was especially commended by the judges for achieving such an eminently readable and fascinating account when writing on a topic which many would consider bluntly to be as dry as dust given that so much of the work was about constitutional niceties and manoeuvring for constitutional change within a largely official-dominated environment. However Isla's book is especially valuable in the context of this lecture because it illustrates vividly how all the available documents need to be read and interpreted in order to determine what actually happened and why and to avoid the errors made by one or two historians becoming regarded as received wisdom.

Even before I was able to read Isla's manuscript I had discovered at the point when the process of typing the minutes was relatively advanced that a check through the lists of members recorded in the minutes at the beginning of the report of the proceedings for each year that when J S Battye in his seminal *History of Western Australia* published in 1924 stated that in 1852 that the newly appointed Comptroller-General of Convicts become an official (as distinct from a nominated non official) member of the Legislative Council as well as of the Executive Council⁴⁸ that he was quite wrong. In fact the Comptroller General was only included in the Executive Council and a longstanding error in our Parliamentary Handbook had to be hastily corrected.

What this seemingly minor point reveals, and this is a facet of writing history which Isla's book illustrates over and over again, is that it is only by meticulous research work with the original documents that incorrect and quite misleading conclusions can be avoided. Furthermore, once these misleading conclusions are embodied in 'respectable' history tomes they can become regarded as fact as distinct from interpretation. Let me just cite a couple of the examples that Isla pointed out to me, and there are many more where these came from.

Example One refers to the period in the mid 1860s when in the light of the announcement from the British Colonial Office that convict transportation to Western Australia would cease within three years moves were made within the colony to take advantage of the specific provision of the 1850 British Act which applied to West Australia. under Section IX of the *Australian Colonies Government Act* the Legislative Council of Western Australia was empowered to 'pass an Ordinance adding elected members in the same proportion as its own members; whenever the inhabitants shall, by Petition, have declared themselves generally favourable to such a change'⁴⁹ As various committees in the colony endeavoured to gain the necessary signatures to make such a petition effective the Governor of the day, John Hampton, invited the members of the existing non-elected Legislative Council 'to give their "unbiased" opinion on the subject.'⁵⁰ When the petition was received by the Legislative Council in July 1865 the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State informing him that he had 'carefully abstained from any interference or expression of opinion in the matter; that the Official members of the Legislative Council had been left 'wholly free to act as they may see fit with reference to the proposed

change'; and then expressed the view that ' I have reason to believe (Governor's Despatches Item No 10, 1865–1868) that a large majority will vote against it'.⁵¹ The wording is clear—he was referring to a majority of the official members not to a majority in the community at large—yet somehow in the work of W S Kimberly and of JS Battye as well as others who followed this was interpreted as implying that the Governor, [probably influenced by those of his officials who believed that 'the people should be saved from themselves' and that 'the change would lead to a state of anarchy and confusion'] had concluded his despatch by saying that he had "reason to believe that a large majority of colonists would vote against it" an assertion repeated by Battye.⁵² Only by reading all the documents can it be seen that this was not what the Governor was saying at all and it puts what happened in a very different context from that conveyed in many works which have been regarded as the last word on certain issues. As it was we also know that Hampton played a particularly interesting role when in 1867 he agreed to nominate those whom the electors chose at 'unofficial' 'elections an offer which the residents of the Champion Bay (Geraldton) district refused to accept insisting they wanted 'nothing short of the Elective Franchise'.⁵³

I have time for one more small example (and Isla has supplied me with others as well). The issue relates to developments in 1884 during that phase of the colony's history when pressure was developing for a fully elected assembly and self government to align Western Australia with the situation which had prevailed since 1859 in the other five Australian colonies. According to the local press Governor Broome had, by calling 'hurry scurry elections' when one was not necessary before April 1885, 'stolen a march' on those in favour of self government, an episode they described as demonstrating 'political trickery' with the intention of placing a 'gag' on 'any decisive expression of public opinion upon this one political question of the day'.⁵⁴ As it eventuated the election campaign period for the election held in October/November 1884 was certainly short but Isla has cited Broome's despatch to the Colonial Office dated 2 June in which he had sought leave of absence for six months commencing in October/November to enable him to visit England and accordingly proposed that the election be held in September/October directly after the Legislative Council session.⁵⁵ Citing the dates of earlier elections Broome contended that 'an election in September or October 'would be 'convenient' and 'according to precedent'. In justifying his request further he pointed out that the period he would be in the UK would include 'the least busy months of the year' and for three of those months in any case he would otherwise have been at Rottneest Island. The evidence certainly does not suggest that Broome had any deep-seated constitutional motive beyond noting his further suggestion in the despatch that he would 'not like the new Council to be chosen during my absence for various reasons'.

In brief then, it is imperative when using documentary sources to unravel and write the political, parliamentary and constitutional history of Western Australia that one obtain and utilise access to the full range of relevant documents, public and private, and accordingly the researcher needs the capacity to consult these with the minimum of difficulty. Where Isla had to battle through her study of the Legislative Council proceedings before 1870 with access only to handwritten records and was hamstrung when others were using the same material these minutes are now fully available in

written form already in published form and hopefully on line in the very near future. I would like to think that in the twenty-five plus years since the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee came into existence genuine researchers now have access to a whole range of additional official parliamentary documents, detailed statistical material relating to elections and the members of Parliament chosen thereby and the transcripts of interviews with several dozen former MPs and parliamentary officials, both senior and junior. When I think of the situation which prevailed when I first studied Western Australian history at UWA we have come a very long way indeed.

Can I therefore conclude by simply paying tribute to those historians, archivists and researchers generally who have contributed to this marvellous explosion of knowledge of our political and parliamentary history. May we now find a means of seeing more of this information conveyed to the community at large and thereby contribute to a more informed and involved citizenry to support our very much undervalued constitutional parliamentary system.

End notes

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 - ⁷ G C Bolton, *Alexander Forrest: His Life and Times*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (in association with UWA Press), 1958.
 - ⁸ For example, Geoffrey Bolton and Jenny Gregory, *Claremont: a history*, Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia press; and Geoffrey Bolton and Geraldine Byrne, *The campus that never stood still: Edith Cowan University, 1902–2002*, Churchlands, WA: The University, c2001.
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 - ¹⁵ 'The Federal Electorate of Fremantle. A history since 1901', located at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/fremantle/index.html>
 - ¹⁶ 'Curtin as an election leader' located at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/electionleader/index.html>
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- ²⁰ Ibid. foreword.
- ²¹ David Black (ed.), *The House on the Hill: A History of the Parliament of Western Australia 1832–1990*, Perth: Western Australian Parliamentary History Project, Parliament of Western Australia, 1991.
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- ²³ David Black and Geoffrey Bolton, *Biographical Register of Members of the Parliament of Western Australia, Volume One, 1870–1930*, Perth: Western Australian Parliamentary History Project, 2001 (1990).
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- ³² Ibid, pp. 131–145 passim.
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- ³⁵ Joan Rydon, *A federal legislature: the Australian Commonwealth parliament, 1901–1980*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1986
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- ³⁸ For this reference and the subsequent Newton story see *ibid*, pp. 191–197.
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- ⁴⁰ See <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/>
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- ⁴² D Black 'At Last She moves' in Black (ed.) *The House on the Hill*, p. ??
- ⁴³ Ibid, pp.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, p.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid p.
- ⁴⁶ *Hansard reference*
- ⁴⁷ Isla MacPhail, *Highest Privilege and Bounden Duty: A Study of Western Australian Parliamentary Elections 1829–1901*, Perth: Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2008.
- ⁴⁸ J S Batty, *Western Australia. A History from its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*, facsimile edition, Nedlands: University of Western Australian Press, 1978 (1924), pp. 216–217.
- ⁴⁹ This excerpt is from an prior explanation of the intended purpose of the act embodied in a despatch from Earl Grey to Charles Fitzgerald dated 3 August 1948 and held as Document No. 26 in SROWA, 391/1182/38–39. The full text of Section IX of the 1850 Act is included in C.M.H. Clark (ed), *Select Documents in Australian History*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1950, pp. 380–381. It should be noted that the act also required the colonists to accept that they would then have to forego the financial grants which were still being received to that date from the Imperial Government. (MacPhail, *Highest Privilege and Bounden Duty*, p.59.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 60.

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- ⁵¹ J.S.Hampton to the Secretary of State, *Governor's Despatches 1865–1868* dated 21 July 1865 and held as Cons/Acc No. 390, AN/WAS No. 1166 Item No 10. See also MacPhail, *Highest Privilege and Bounden Duty*, p. 68.
- ⁵² See *ibid.*, pp. 6768, W.B. Kimberly, *History of Western Australia: A Narrative of Her Past Together with Biographies of Her Leading Men*, Melbourne: F.W. Niven, 1897, p. 218 and Batty, *Western Australia: A History from Its Discovery . . .*, p. 276.
- ⁵³ MacPhail, *Highest Privilege and Bounden Duty*, p. 77.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 223 and see also note 10.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 160; Governor Broome to the Earl of Derby dated 2 June 1884 in Confidential Despatch Book Nov 1869–August 1886 Volume 1, Cons/Acc No. 390, AN/WAS No. 1174, Item No. 47. The Governor actually left the colony on the day the last elections took place in the north.