

Fremantle Studies Day 2026



SLWA 011246D Looking towards Fremantle Prison 1880-1890

Sunday 25th October 2026

11.00 am – 2.30 pm

Army Museum of Western Australia

Lecture Theatre, Artillery Barracks, 6 Burt St, Fremantle WA 6160

Bookings ESSENTIAL Email: secretary.fhs@gmail.com

Cost: Members \$20.00, non-members \$25.00

Payment can be made online:

BSB: 036-306

Account No: 604012

Reference: *FSD & your surname*

Program:

Peter Dowding

Unfree labour, capital reorientation, and the imperial web: The true legacies of early WA.

Early Western Australia was not simply a small, isolated settlement on the far side of the world. The people who founded and financed the colony were connected to trade, migration, investment and government across the British Empire. Some of the money behind ships, equipment and large land grants in the Swan River Colony was linked to Atlantic slavery and Caribbean plantations. Some influential families, businesses and investors brought wealth and connections that had been shaped by that system. Slavery was abolished in most of the British Empire in the 1830s, but that did not automatically end exploitative labour practices or racist ideas. Employers and governments continued to look for tightly controlled, low-paid workers. In the Indian Ocean region, this included indentured labour arrangements and laws that gave employers significant power over workers. These wider connections matter in Western Australian history. They help explain how the colony was funded, why labour was such an important issue, and how laws and government policies could restrict the freedom of workers and Aboriginal people. To understand early WA, we need to look beyond Perth, Albany and Fremantle.

Peter M'Callum Dowding SC is a Western Australian barrister, author and former Labor parliamentarian. A graduate of the University of Western Australia, he was admitted to the Bar in 1966 and became known for representing conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War and for advocacy in Aboriginal land and civil-rights matters. He entered Western Australian Parliament in 1980, holding a range of ministerial portfolios before becoming Western Australia's 24th Premier, from February 1988 until February 1990. After leaving Parliament, he resumed legal practice, specialising in family and native-title law. He was appointed Senior Counsel in 2002 and awarded the Centenary Medal in 2003.

George Booth

Growing up in Fremantle 1940 - 1960

George has a wealth of memories from his long life in Fremantle. Born three weeks before WW2 broke out, George will describe what life was like growing up on Richmond Raceway - till the US Army seconded the area for a military cantonment, splitting the family till 1945.

His grandfather had horse stables and carriages opposite Queen Victoria Hall. He went to Fremantle Boys' High School in Adelaide Street and worked as a paper boy in Fremantle after school. In 1955 he started work at Dalgety's writing freight manifests and passenger tickets, but occasionally would have to walk a large flock of sheep from the trotting track down to the wharf before starting work. He was conscripted into the army on his 18th birthday and eventually served in South Vietnam.

George Booth comes from a long line of Western Australian George Booths, most of whom have been involved in the trotting and harness racing industry. It was almost inevitable that he would grow up in the caretaker's cottage at Richmond Raceway. He started the first WA owned outbound tour operating Company, bought 15 years later by Qantas. He has always been an active community participant, roles including: President of Rotary Fremantle, Co-Founder Fremantle Hospital Foundation, Juvenile Diabetes committee member and Red Kite fundraising. He was awarded an OAM in 2023 for service to the community and to tourism.

Cameron Wylde The Stone Machine

Early Fremantle presents a simple but uncomfortable problem. Before the town possessed much wealth or population, it had already invested disproportionately in institutions designed to instruct, supervise and regulate conduct. Beginning with the Fremantle Lunatic Asylum and examining the Prison, the Knowle, Pensioner Guard sites, Warders' Cottages, King's Square and the Town Hall, churches and schools, the paper draws Fremantle's separate heritage places into evidence of a wider institutional pattern: authority was embedded within the life of the settlement from the beginning. This paper explores how that ambition was repeatedly expressed through colonial decision making, revealing the kind of population British and colonial authorities were trying to cultivate, and what remains of it today.

Cameron Wylde was born in East Fremantle, but has spent the last 10 years working out of the Pilbara, Port Hedland. Formerly of KPMG, then as a Manager and Executive at Fortescue Metals Group, highlight career achievements include: converting conventional mining operations to autonomous haulage, commissioning and launching a new mine site, and, supporting Rail and Marine decarbonisation. Now on sabbatical, Cameron is developing an independent history project, shaped by his long-standing interest in Fremantle's colonial history, built environment and public memory.

Dr Emily Lanham

"I remain your faithful husband": The family experience of incarceration in 1840s Fremantle

Crime was not an uncommon occurrence in colonial Western Australia, and Fremantle Gaol – the Round House – was a key carceral institution during the 1840s. Yet the history of crime in Western Australia has typically focused on the crimes of imperial convicts from the 1850s or more sensational cases, such as the 1844 murder of George Pollard by John Gavin. As a result, the mundane consequences of crime and incarceration, especially those on the families of colonial offenders, are frequently overlooked. This is particularly significant because the consequences of incarceration extend beyond the individual offenders to affect entire families. This paper examines how imprisonment within Fremantle Gaol shaped the lives of the Farmer, Carson, Gee, and Dearden families during the 1840s. Individuals within these families were convicted of offences including theft and assault, subsequently receiving sentences ranging from two months imprisonment up to seven years transportation. The lives and legacies of these people can be retraced through surviving government correspondence, petitions and newspaper reports further illuminating the impact of incarceration on the families of offenders. Taken together, these cases demonstrate that incarceration was experienced collectively.

Dr Emily Lanham is a historian who studies crime, punishment, and prisons in the nineteenth century. Her research focuses on Western Australia and looks at how systems of control shaped everyday lives in the past. She is particularly interested in recovering the stories of people who have been overlooked in historical records. Alongside her research, Emily works as a Learning Adviser at Edith Cowan University, supporting students in their academic development.