



AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

STREAM PROGRAM for

AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

"HOME TRUTHS"

1-4 JULY 2024

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY, ADELAIDE

Welcome!

We first acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kurna people, the custodians of the land on which we are coming together this week, and acknowledge that storytelling and the sharing of ideas and knowledge has taken place here for millennia.

The Australian Women's History Network is proud to once again host its annual stream at the Australian Historical Association's annual conference. We are thrilled to be in Adelaide, a city with a rich history of feminist activism, and thank the Flinders University organising committee for hosting us.

We are delighted to present to you a program of stimulating and rigorous papers, demonstrating the vitality, dynamism, and ongoing relevance of women's, gender, and feminist history in Australia (and beyond). We are also very proud to present our plenary speaker for 2024: **Dr Jordana Silverstein**, a Senior Research Fellow in the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness at the University of Melbourne.

Please find herein the full program of the AWHN stream, the abstracts of all speakers, as well as information about the AWHN Dinner and Feminist Dance Party, to be held on the evening of Wednesday 3 July. The 2024 Mary Bennett Prize will be awarded at the AHA Conference Dinner on Thursday 4 July.

For urgent conference enquiries you can contact:

A/ Prof Catherine Kevin

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We hope you enjoy three days of exciting and timely feminist research!

Australian Women's History Network National Convenors

Dr Chelsea Barnett

Dr Micaela Pattison

Dr Michelle Staff

Dr Ana Stevenson

Front page image credits:

Palestine refugees (British Mandate of Palestine –1948).
"Making their way from Galilee in October-November 1948.

Image by Fred Cszaznik, Public domain, via Wikimedia
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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palestinian_refugees.jpg



The Australian Women's History Network invites
members and their colleagues, comrades and sisters in struggle
to the inaugural

FEMINIST DANCE PARTY (Ft. DJ Narelle)

Where: The Irish Club, 13-15 Carrington Rd (Adelaide CBD)

When: 7pm- Midnight on Wednesday 3 July

How much?: We will be collecting \$5 donations for Palestine Australia Relief
and Action (<https://para.org.au/>) **Please bring cash!**

Bar available. Dinner is not provided. We have permission to BYO food. **La Trattoria
Restaurant** (346 King William Street) is around the corner and we encourage you to
order from their takeaway outlet on arrival. Please aim to order food before 7.45 and
where possible place orders in groups.

We have advised La Trattoria to expect orders from our group between 7pm and 7.45pm.

See their menu here: [Menu | LaTrattoria](#)

Image credit: Kate Millington, *Typical Girls*, 1984, screenprint, ink on paper, 50.9 x
37.8 cm, Gift of Kate Millington, collection of Flinders University Museum of Art
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Tuesday 2 July		
9:00—10:30	AWHN Stream AWHN Plenary Chair: Micaela Pattison	Jordana Silverstein, University of Melbourne “Feminist fragmentations and connections: stories of making home in / from statelessness”
10:30—11:00	Morning Tea	
11:00—12:30	AWHN Stream Cultural practice as grassroots activism Chair: Zora Simic	Jacquelyn Baker, Deakin University “‘WE ARE NICE, WE ARE FUN, WE ARE RUN on a collective basis’: Grassroots Women’s Sport and the Feminist Cultural Renaissance, 1980s”
		Megan Graham, University of Leeds “‘It’s the politics of the streets’: Black Theatre and Cultural Protest in 1970s Redfern”
		Charmaine Robson, UNSW Sydney Locating Australian Mid-twentieth Century Female Protest in the public persona and performances of Glen Tomasetti”
12:30—13:30	Lunch	
13:30—15:00	Conference Keynote	Vannessa Hearman, Curtin University “Not-quite-Australian: Working with people, communities, and organisations marginalised from national histories”
15:00—15:30	Afternoon Tea	
15:30—17:00	AWHN Stream Learning from the campaign: Critical evaluation of political campaigns and spaces of activism Chair: Ana Stevenson	Alison Holland, Macquarie University “Part of the Solution? Exploring Women’s Role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission”
		Barbara Baird, Flinders University “Contested marriage memories: The effects of political organisation and strategy in the mainstream campaign for marriage equality in Australia”
		Nadia Gregory, University of Wollongong “A hard truth: forgotten legacies and memory, in the figure of Cissie Gool”
	AWHN Stream, co-badged with the Australian Migration History Network Marriage and family Chair: Kathryn Schumaker	Rachel Bright, Keele University “The Home Truths of Migration Archives: An exploration of women and families within early twentieth century Australian naturalisation files”
		Anna Wilkinson, Deakin University “‘A love story that would have inspired immortal Shakespeare’: Asian Australian war bride marriages during the Vietnam War”
		Dianne Hall, Victoria University “Irish mothering in colonial Australia”

Wednesday 3 July		
9:00—10:30	AWHN Stream Histories of the anti-abortion movement in Australia Chair: Barbara Baird	Leigh Boucher, Macquarie University “The Lusher Debate: A feminist success story?”
		Prudence Flowers, Flinders University “‘If the USA can do it, with God’s help, so can we’: Opposition to Abortion in Twenty-First Century Australia”
		Timothy Jones, La Trobe University “‘Child Care, not Child Abuse’: Abortion and the New Christian Right in 1970s Australia”
	AWHN Stream Gendered labour: Negotiating empire, bureaucracy, and the urban landscape Chair: Angela Woollacott	Rach Cottle, La Trobe University “‘A Page for Womenfolk’: the representation of women in The Victorian Railways Magazine”
		Taylah Evans, Macquarie University “‘Convicting agents instead of reformers’: the work of early women police officers in NSW, 1915—30”
		Victoria Haskins, University of Newcastle “Amina and the Ayahs’ Home: Women negotiating empire in London, 1867—1902”
10:30—11:00	Morning Tea	
11:00—12:30	Conference Keynote	Natalie Harkin, Flinders University “‘... our descendants need you’ an Archival-Poetics manifesto for a just making of history”
12:30—13:30	Lunch	
13:30—15:00	AWHN Stream Making it work in Canberra Chair: Michelle Arrow	Claire Thomas, La Trobe University “Canberra 1926—66: Not just men and the business of nation making”
		Erin Gates, Australian National University “Sexism in academia: Dr Marie Reay at the ANU”
		Madeline Pentland, Australian National University “The ‘Ernie Awards’: (de)fame, sarcasm and misogyny in NSW Parliament, 1993—2022”
	AWHN Stream Gendered and social histories of Australia in the nineteenth century Chair: Melissa Bellanta	Catherine Gay, University of Melbourne “Education and exercise books: Girls’ schooling in nineteenth-century Victoria”
		Corinne Ball, History Trust of South Australia “‘For God’s sake don’t send me back there!’ The experiences of a female Convicted Inebriate, 1913—1923”
		Karen Filewood, Independent Scholar “‘Worthy’ Women: Power, paternalism and process of the National Shipwreck Relief Society of NSW”
15:00—15:30	Afternoon Tea	
15:30—17:00	AWHN Stream Reflections on settler colonialism and Australian women’s history	Ingrid Ryan, UNSW Sydney “White women artists in Central Australia 1925—1933: Historiographical correction or reproducing whiteness?”

	Chair: Catherine Kevin	Ruby Ekkel, Australian National University "To protect and preserve: native species conservation and women's work for animal welfare, 1877—1921"
		Deborah Jordan, Monash University and Griffith University "Settler Colonisation and the Queensland Women's Vote"
	AWHN Stream Gendering histories of espionage	Holly Moorhead, Deakin University "Feminine armour': The tactical performances of female agents in F Section of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the perceptions of gender in occupied France"
	Chair: Prudence Flowers	Hannah Viney, Independent Scholar "Was she 'co-operative' or could she 'play dumb very well'? Finding the truth between ASIO files and oral histories"
17:15—18:30	AHA AGM	
19:00—late	AWHN Dinner and Feminist Dance Party, with DJ Narelle Walker The Irish Club 13—15 Carrington Street, Adelaide Doors open 7pm for 7.30pm start Colleagues, comrades and sisters in struggles welcome!	

Thursday 4 July		
9:00—10:30	AWHN Stream, co-badged with the History of Violence An old scourge by new names: historicising domestic violence and coercive control in South Australia and beyond Chair: Barbara Baird	Claire Morey, Flinders University “Applying contemporary understandings of financial abuse to our colonial past”
		Zora Simic, UNSW Sydney “Seeing the Signs: Thinking historically about coercive control”
		Catherine Kevin, Flinders University “Discovering reproductive coercion in an age of normative heterosexual intimacy”
10:30—11:00	Morning Tea	
11:00—12:30	Conference Keynote	Julia Laite, Birkbeck, University of London “The Trouble of Damage Worlds: Telling Home Truths in Britain’s Oldest Overseas Colony”
12:30—13:30	Lunch	
13:30—15:00	AWHN Stream Contested inclusion: civility, citizenship and human rights Chair: Michelle Staff	Angela Woollacott, Australian National University “Jessie Street and her international allies stand up to Eleanor Roosevelt: Fighting for women to be in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948”
		Debra Parish, University of Queensland “‘Uncivil Tongues’: Civility, Gender, and Conflict in Seventeenth Century England—Continuation and Relevance”
	AWHN Stream New feminist histories of health and sexuality Chair: Micaela Pattison	Natasha Szuhan, Australian National University “‘My body, my choice. Their science’: Female Technologists and Oral Contraceptives in Australia, 1961—91”
		Paige Donaghy, University of Melbourne “‘When her ship was laden with wares, then she could take in passengers’: Pregnant Women’s Sexuality in Early Modern England”
		Michelle Arrow, Macquarie University “‘I will fight the monster with a mother’s fury’: Understanding schizophrenia in letters to Anne Deveson, 1987—95”
15:00—15:30	Afternoon Tea	
15:30—17:00	AWHN Stream, co-badged with the History of Violence “Home truths” about gender-based violence in South Africa and Australia Chair: Nell Musgrave	Saneze Tshayana, University of the Free State, South Africa and University of Southern Queensland “The ‘Second Pandemic’: Changing Responses to Gender-Based Violence in South Africa”
		Zoe Smith, Australian National University “The brutality of the breadwinner: historicising economic violence in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria”
		Bridget Andresen, University of Queensland “Rape trials in Post-war Queensland”

	<p>AWHN Stream Female subjects and their relations</p> <p>Chair: Catherine Kevin</p>	<p>Cassandra Byrnes, University of Queensland "Reproductive Coercion and Abuse: Intimate Partners and Familial Perpetrators"</p> <p>Michelle Staff, Australian National University "Telling the truth through (or about) feminist biography"</p> <p>Yuan Jing, University of Queensland "Another Facet of 1950s Land Reform in China—from the Perspective of Hui'an Women"</p>
19:30—23:00	<p>AHA Conference Dinner Adelaide Festival Centre Festival Drive, Adelaide</p>	

Plenary Speaker

Jordana Silverstein, University of Melbourne

Feminist fragmentations and connections: stories of making home in / from statelessness

Over the last couple of years I have been conducting oral history interviews with people who were stateless when they migrated to Australia in the second half of the twentieth century. While globally, most stateless people are in situ – that is, they are not migrants or refugees – there is a long history of stateless people migrating to Australia. This includes Palestinians, whose words I will focus on in this paper.

One interviewee explained to me that their statelessness can be seen in their creative practice, through their engagement with fragmentation: the breaking up and stitching together in new ways of words and textiles. In this paper I learn from this description and theorisation of statelessness as fragmentation. I will explore Palestinian, feminist and queer, projects of critiquing the nation-state project and building community across and with the fragments. That is, I want to think about how the fragmentations caused by statelessness produce a multiplicity of horrors and possibilities. I want to consider how in these testimonies we can see new ways of building homes and connections amongst us that defy and refute the nation-state order. Particularly in this moment when Palestinians face and endure the violence of genocide, what can histories of statelessness and community-building teach us about the crafts of community- and home-building produced through fragmentation? How can feminist projects of listening to oral histories to see what can be said open us up to genuinely diverse modes of how we can organise ourselves?



Bio:

Dr Jordana Silverstein is a feminist social and cultural historian. She is currently employed as Senior Research Fellow in the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness in the Melbourne Law School at the University of Melbourne, where she researches histories of statelessness, Australian child refugee policies, and Australian Jewish history, focusing on questions of belonging, nationalism, identity, historiography, emotions, sexuality and memory. She is the author of *Cruel Care: A History of Children at our Borders* (Monash University Publishing, 2023) and *Anxious Histories: Narrating the Holocaust in Jewish Communities at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* (Berghahn Books, 2015). She is a longtime member of the Australian Women's History Network and served as the AWHN National Convenor (with Dr Mary Tomsic) between 2014 and 2018.

Speakers and Abstracts

Bridget Andresen, University of Queensland

Rape trials in Post-war Queensland

The issue of sexual violence has arguably never been more visible in global society than it is today. Historical investigations into this topic are part of a fast-growing field dedicated to revealing long-standing issues in the structures of policing and the criminal justice system, as well as the impact of reductive and stereotyped ideas about sexual violence on cases, victims, and defendants. This paper presents key findings from an investigation into adult rape trials in post-war Queensland, 1945-1955. Though Queensland's legislation and justice system did not widely differ from other Australian jurisdictions, a close reading of court material has highlighted the unique Queensland experience of the policing and prosecution process. Stereotypes about sexual violence rendered many victims silent in the criminal justice system, with cases in this sample only reflective of a particular 'type' of rape. The vast geography of the state had a direct impact on investigations in a number of ways, including delaying trials which were scheduled to take place outside of a metropolitan centre, and there were accessibility issues regarding skilled police and medical professionals. Police conducted only very brief investigations into complaints before placing charges, and cases were finalised in a fraction of the time they are today.

Bridget is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Michelle Arrow, Macquarie University

I will fight the monster with a mother's fury': Understanding schizophrenia in letters to Anne Deveson, 1987-95

Released in 1991, Anne Deveson's powerful memoir *Tell Me I'm Here* remains a landmark examination of the experience of mental illness in Australia. Deveson offered a candid account of her eldest son Jonathon's experience with schizophrenia, her family's attempts to weather the storms of his illness, and her research into the condition. The book was influential in reshaping community understandings of schizophrenia in Australia in the 1990s. Deveson's public narrative about her son's illness provoked many people to write to her with their own stories of mental illness. These stories revealed people's experiences of giving care outside formal medical settings, particularly within the family, and the difficulties accessing support for mentally ill people, especially in the context of the deinstitutionalisation of mental health care in the last quarter of the twentieth century. They also offered insights into contemporary attitudes towards schizophrenia, and reflections on motherhood in an era of rapid transformation of Australian families. This paper will examine this correspondence in the context of Deveson's published work, to speculate on how a critical analysis of this material can help us understand the history of mental illness in the very recent past.

Barbara Baird, Flinders University

Contested marriage memories: The effects of political organisation and strategy in the mainstream campaign for marriage equality in Australia

As soon as the parliament voted in December 2017 to establish marriage equality in Australia a range of competing claims to the truth of the marriage campaign and its 'success' started to emerge. The campaign had begun in 2004 when LGBTIQ+ activists responded to the Howard government's amendment to The Marriage Act 1961. It came to a climax when a national ballot on marriage reform was conducted in the lead up to the vote. Tasmanian gay activist Rodney Croome published the first of series of articles critical of the campaign in early 2018. Two of the leaders of Australian Marriage Equality (AME), which lead the campaign, Shirleene Robinson and Alex Greenwich, published a more or less official version later that year and a collection of about fifty short pieces, many critical of the campaign and indeed the desire for marriage,

co-edited by trans and non-binary scholars Quinn Eades and Son Vivienne, appeared shortly afterward. In 2019 GetUp's Sally Rugg, who had been at the centre of the campaign, published a frank insider's view.

This paper canvasses the range of accounts of the marriage campaign and the 'home truths' told by First Nations and other people of colour, trans, gender non-conforming and disabled folk, those un-enamoured by marriage, and others simply critical of AME's strategies.

It includes focus on the style and methods of organisation employed by AME, common across many contemporary social movements, to facilitate questions about the effects of centralised, digital and often feel-good campaigning.

Jacquelyn Baker, Deakin University

'WE ARE NICE, WE ARE FUN, WE ARE RUN on a collective basis': Grassroots Women's Sport and the Feminist Cultural Renaissance, 1980s

In 2004, Susan Magarey drew our attention to the way that cultural disruption and cultural transformation were key aspects of women's liberation activism. Coined the 'feminist cultural renaissance', Magarey contended that women's liberationists achieved their goals through cultural practices, such as writing and publishing; plays and theatre; and music and radio programs. This was a pivotal moment in women's liberation historiography and historians of second-wave feminism in Australia have since delved deeper into the cultural pursuits of feminists. However, there is one area of feminist cultural disruption and transformation that has remained largely overlooked—that is, women's sport.

This paper focuses on grassroots women's sport in Melbourne in the 1980s. Drawing on feminist newsletters, I examine accounts written by lesbian feminists to consider how grassroots women's sport was an important part of the feminist cultural renaissance—particularly in the way that they attempted to disrupt the 'typical Aussie-het' masculine sporting culture. In addition, I argue that it was crucial in the turn toward cultural feminism as women's sport, particularly for lesbian feminists, was seen as a practice that helped to strengthen a sense of community and promote self-assurance as well as a way to 'show pride to a heterosexual society'. Ultimately, by examining this overlooked aspect of women's liberation and lesbian feminist grassroots activism, we can better understand the positive impact of women and gender diverse athletes today.

Corinne Ball, History Trust of South Australia

'For God's sake don't send me back there!' The experiences of a female Convicted Inebriate, 1913—23

In late nineteenth-century Britain and her colonies, medical science began to conceptualise problem drinking as a disease, rather than as a sin or moral failing. At the same time, developments in criminology enabled the categorisation of 'habitual' offenders, who merited extreme supervision, or even total exclusion from society. In South Australia, as elsewhere, these theories converged in the establishment of state-sponsored Inebriate Institutions, often figured as 'Homes' or 'Retreats'. From 1913 Adelaide and Gladstone gaols were gazetted as Institutions, and lengthy sentences imposed upon a new type of inmate: the Convicted Inebriate.

Female alcoholics, doubly deviant for their offences both legal and moral, were particularly reviled: Mabel Worley was one of these unfortunates. As Gladstone Institution's female inmate #2 Mabel was a guinea pig under the new regime, enduring nearly a decade as a Convicted Inebriate. She repeatedly pleaded in court not to be returned to the Inebriate Home, where despite lofty ideals of reform and treatment, inmates suffered under the usual penal system and worse.

This paper explores how the changing discourse around alcoholism affected Mabel, and how the designation of Convicted Inebriate shaped her experiences. It examines how Inebriates were managed and monitored by South Australia's police, courts, charities, and medical professionals (inside and outside the Home), and uncovers the resistance and evasion strategies Mabel employed. Finally, it highlights the woman behind the designation, rereading official records to find evidence of Mabel's emotional and social life during her time as an Inebriate and beyond, when home, family, and hope seemed unobtainable.

Leigh Boucher, Macquarie University

The Lusher Debate: A feminist success story?

In 1979, Stephen Lusher, a National Party MP put forward a motion to address what he described as the 'national tragedy' of 'abortion on demand.' Lusher proposed the withdrawal of Medibank rebates for abortion, except in very limited circumstances, a manoeuvre that Right to Life groups had been seeking for the past few years after a concerted campaign to 'break the business model' of abortion provision. Because Lusher was a Federal parliamentarian, his motion produced what scholars have described as a confused and muddled national debate about abortion, because the legal status and provision of abortion was (mostly) determined by state legislation and common-law. For a few months in late 1979, public life in Australia was gripped by a debate about abortion, and parliamentarians complained about their offices grinding to a halt under the weight of letters and phone calls from constituents. While many scholars have noted the 'Lusher Debate' in passing, few have examined its emergence and conclusion closely, and those that have usually position it as an example of the rising influence of anti-abortion activism; feminist activists later suggested they had been caught on the back foot by an effective anti-abortion campaign. This paper will examine this debate and suggest that, rather than representing a disturbing example of the power and success of anti-abortion activism, it instead tells us much about the degree to which feminist arguments has shifted the terrain of public debate about abortion over the previous decade. Using Clare Parker's work on parliamentary debate in South Australia a decade earlier as a counterpoint, this paper will argue that the defeat of Lusher's motion reveals the centrality and potency of feminist arguments in Federal Parliament in 1979. While the ideas and practices of RTL might have underpinned Lusher's move, it was feminist ideas that defeated it.

Rachel Bright, Keele University

The Home Truths of Migration Archives: An exploration of women and families within early twentieth century Australian naturalisation files

The historic lives of female migrants are notoriously poorly documented, subsumed within their roles as mothers, wives, or daughters. This paper, using the National Archives of Australia (NAA) naturalisation files, will explore both the highly gendered ways in which information about women and their families was recorded by the government, and how women themselves presented their family histories. The NAA's current guidebook describes these files as 'primarily of interest to family historians', a description that marginalising them from broader academic histories of migration and citizenship, while also meaning that anyone without children is implicitly delegated unimportant. This is a chance to reflect on the ways narratives around female migrants have been documented and shaped, originally when governments decided what information to record about women during naturalisation applications, and later by archivists deciding what History is important and for whom. And yet, buried within these files are compelling 'home truths' in women's own words about their lives. Admissions of secret bigamous marriages or desertions, sad notes about dead children, the desire to buy a family home: the subject of 'family' dominates many of the conversations within these files, often in ways which challenge our expectations about contemporary respectability. The files offer real insights into women's 'home' lives and occasional hidden 'truths'. This is particularly important in helping scholars understand gendered aspects of migration and migration records, but also it reflects on the centrality of the family unit within governments' conceptualisation and policing of migrants.

Cassandra Byrnes, University of Queensland

Reproductive Coercion and Abuse: Intimate Partners and Familial Perpetrators

This paper maps a recent history of reproductive coercion and abuse in Australia centred on intimate partner relationships and familial relationships in the mid-to-late-twentieth century. Reproductive coercion and abuse are currently understood as the interference in another person's reproductive choices—forced termination of pregnancy, forced continuation of pregnancy, prohibiting contraceptive use, or imposing contraceptive use. This particular violation of consent in intimate partner and familial relationships has been documented as an extension of sexual violence under certain circumstances. Thus far, few scholarly works have focused on understanding the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in decades past. In heterosexual intimate partner relationships, manipulation, promises of marriage and love, and physical and sexual violence were used to enact reproductive coercion and abuse in quite explicit ways. When considering parents' role in making reproductive choices for their children, financial incentives, homelessness, and emotional manipulation were most frequently used. In the same ways that experiences of rape and sexual abuse hinge on notions of consent and bodily autonomy, reproductive coercion is a form of sexual and medical violence that violates an individual's right to make informed choices. Examining its history allows us to see how reproductive coercion and abuse are often coupled with other instances of sexual violence, and it facilitates a broader understanding of the ways in which autonomy and coercion operate in relationships.

Rosa V. Campbell

Oral history, racism and the Australian women's liberation movement

My doctoral dissertation and forthcoming book project considers the global history of Australian women's liberation. I used a mixed methodology of oral history and archival research and interviewed twenty-two feminists, over half of whom were women of colour or First Nations women. In this methodological paper, I begin with Penny Summerfield's concept of 'discomposure,' moments in the interview when interviewees struggle to construct a life that is coherent and composed, and which Summerfield suggests that we oral historians might usefully make meaning from. As I began interviews, I wondered about how Summerfield's concept applied to the interviewer. As we must maintain composure, hold space, listen with depth, and ask follow up questions. Given that women's liberation has been characterised by its deep fissures, particularly along the lines of race, I wondered whether interviewees would feel that aspects of my identity - particularly that I was white - would preclude my ability to build reciprocity in the interview and as a result, I would lose composure. To ensure my composure, I turned to recent feminist theory which discusses white women's defensive responses at moments where they are confronted by their own racism and what we might do differently (for example, Ruby Hamad's 'White Tears, Brown Scars,' Terese Jonsson 'Innocent Subjects,' Layla Saad 'Me and White Supremacy'). But, I wondered if the reading I had done, while useful, was also creating limiting expectations that racism in the women's movement would be the subject of central discussion. While this did often feature, all those I interviewed offered histories far more expansive than this. Particularly women of colour and First Nations women were keen to discuss activism which stretched far beyond a critique of race in the women's liberation movement, highlighting the way that oral history can offer us new histories of feminism.

Rosa submitted this proposal to the AWHN stream but will present her paper in Oral History Stream at 3.30 on Tuesday (Room SSS 152).

Rosa is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Rach Cottle, La Trobe University

'A Page for Womenfolk': the representation of women in The Victorian Railways Magazine

This paper draws on evidence found in the Victorian Railways employee journals to explore how the representation of women reflects the employment of women in the Victorian Railways. Women were employed in the Department of Victorian Railways in over 30 roles, including Gatekeeper, Station mistress, Waiting-room-attendants, Clerks, Porters and in workshops. Despite the diversity of positions, women of the VR were typically represented publicly in administrative jobs and domestic roles as staff of the Refreshment Services Branch. An analysis of The Victorian Railways Magazine and The Victorian Railways Newsletter provides an insight into how women employed by the railways were viewed and treated by the Department.

Rach is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Paige Donaghy, University of Melbourne

'When her ship was laden with wares, then she could take in passengers': Pregnant Women's Sexuality in Early Modern England

In Lisa Jardine's groundbreaking study of women in early English drama, *Still Harping on Daughters* (1983), she remarked that 'the pregnant woman is the Renaissance image of female sexuality'. Despite Jardine's keen observation, there has been little research into ideas about early modern pregnant women's sexual desires, or how pregnant women were perceived as erotic or desirable. This is striking considering the visibility of pregnant women in this period, and the frequency of debates about whether married couples should have intercourse during pregnancy. While some early moderns believed that a woman's pregnancy meant she could more readily and happily 'take in passengers', others denounced sexual relations between married couples during pregnancy, calling it 'marital whoredom'.

In this paper, I revisit Jardine's observation about pregnant women's sexuality, to canvass ideas about pregnant sexuality in early modern England, across domains such as medicine, popular culture, life writing and religious thought. I suggest that close analysis of pregnancy sex reveals fresh insights into perceptions of the maternal body and sexuality, and the boundaries of 'natural' and 'unnatural' sexuality, particularly for heterosexuality and masturbation in this period. More broadly, this paper also aims to provoke further reflection on the history of pregnant sexualities in general, as pregnant people are arguably underexplored figures in the history of sexuality.

Ruby Ekkel, Australian National University

To protect and preserve: native species conservation and women's work for animal welfare, 1877—1921

Scholars including Harriet Ritvo and Diana Donald have established the significance of women in the emergence of the international animal protectionist movement in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Australia, another form of animal advocacy was taking shape, as scepticism about 'topsy-turvy' marsupials gave way to nationalistic affection and concern: native species conservation. Little attention has so far been granted to the intersections of these causes. This paper will draw out the entanglements of native species conservationism with women's animal protectionism, examining in particular the case of a Tasmanian zookeeper whose transnational career spanned these domains in paradoxical ways. Despite commissioning the violent removal of animals from their natural habitats, and shipping live thylacines and other endangered native animals to distant zoos, Mary Grant Roberts was lauded by the RSPCA. She was held up as an exemplar of a maternal and philanthropic woman who had succeeded in keeping thylacines and Tasmanian devils where many men had failed before her, and who encouraged kindness to animals in children. Roberts highlights the ways in which conservationism could clash and coalesce with women's animal welfare work. Her encounters with animals invite questions about animal care and cruelty in settler colonial contexts, where distinctions between 'native' and 'invasive' were highly fraught.

Taylah Evans, Macquarie University

'Convicting agents instead of reformers': the work of early women police officers in NSW, 1915—30

In July 1915, Australia's first two women police, Constables Lillian Armfield and Maude Rhodes were appointed into the NSW police force. Tasked with the protection of women and children, scholars have suggested women police acted as 'maternal guardians' rather than law enforcement. However, an examination of the work of women police once they were employed by the NSW police force challenges this historiographical assumption. Their role in the policing of fortune telling, abortion, and drug trafficking in the interwar period heightened the NSW police department's capacity for surveillance and detection, thus resulting in a genuine shift in police practices in the interwar period. However, despite women police officers' role in the policing of more serious crime, the work of the women police was consistently positioned as distinctly feminine and welfare oriented. By approaching the history of the NSW women police through a cultural and feminist lens, this paper seeks to reveal the highly gendered and contradictory expectations placed on women police, but also uncover how women police played an integral role in policing of the urban landscape, sexuality, and the family throughout the twentieth century.

Karen Filewood, Independent Scholar

'Worthy' Women: Power, paternalism and process of the National Shipwreck Relief Society of NSW

Ideals of paternalism, morality, social status, gender and the deserving poor are well known in the Victorian era. Less familiar is a recognition of their manifestation and their practical implications for women and their families, in an all-male maritime-based benevolent society, after crises takes their breadwinner. To apprehend fully the consequences, we must understand these ideals, the everyday functioning of a society and its members and the lived experience of the women seeking relief. To achieve this understanding, the National Shipwreck Relief Society of NSW has been used as a case study, focussing on their 1877-1883 minute book. This source provides core information to enable biographical research establishing the life experience of everyone involved and giving insight into the charity's management.

Investigations revealed the committee to contain the classic middle-class male demographic characteristic of Victorian times, while the women came from a variety of social classes and backgrounds. It also disclosed how contemporary ideals, gender and occupational biases, as well as the publicity and circumstances of crisis, affected benevolent activities, with no regard of women's workload or existing support. Overall, this study offers a new depth of insight into how contemporary ideology, emotional practice and women's benevolence created 'arbitrary altruism'.

Prudence Flowers, Flinders University

If the USA can do it, with God's help, so can we': Opposition to Abortion in Twenty-First Century Australia

The anti-abortion movement has consistently been a tiny element of Australian society which occupies an outsized place in discussions of reproductive health care. While its connection with organised religion has been a primary source of this influence, so too is its relationship with the much larger and more powerful US right-to-life movement, which functions as both a source of inspiration and direct assistance. This paper situates the Australian anti-abortion movement in a transnational context, exploring the historical circulation of people, ideas, and strategies across borders. Over the decades, Australian right-to-lifers have hosted some of the most extreme voices within the US movement, and there has been a consistent tendency to seek out Americans who endorse clinic blockades, civil disobedience, and violence against abortion care providers. But although these controversial speakers excite true believers, they have had a muted impact on the activism of the Australian movement, which is constrained by its national context. The majority of the Australian population is strongly pro-choice and society is more secular and less politically polarised than in the US. Far more influential has been the adoption and amplification of US anti-abortion tropes, particularly the pro-woman frame, along with the tactical emphasis on 'late-term abortions,' 'fetal pain,'

and aborted infants ‘born alive.’ Exploring state and commonwealth debates since 2016, along with US and Australian anti-abortion publications, this paper charts the mainstreaming of US anti-abortion rhetoric by activists and its amplification by conservative politicians and media.

Erin Gates, Australian National University

Sexism in academia: Dr Marie Reay at the ANU

Over her career spanning more than five decades, Marie Reay came to be regarded as a well-respected figure in her field of Melanesian anthropology. However, Reay’s experiences with authority figures in academia are emblematic of a period during which, by simply existing within the department as a woman, her career in anthropology was radical, and during her lifetime her work was subsequently undervalued and undermined by many of her male colleagues. When Reay’s career began, while a female anthropologist was legitimized by male patronage, she was also, to varying degrees, both benefiting from and constrained by male protection. Reay certainly would have felt the pressure to conform to current norms within the discipline, or risk repercussions from her supervisors. This paper will investigate some alternative routes her work may have taken, document some instances of abusive treatment from her superiors and the long-term traumatic impacts of this poor conduct on her mental health, and, finally, articulate the complicated positionality of what it was to be a female anthropologist at the ANU during Reay’s career.

Catherine Gay, University of Melbourne

Education and exercise books: Girls’ schooling in nineteenth-century Victoria

In 1872, the Victorian government declared that under their new Education Act, all children would receive free, compulsory primary education in state-run schools. Despite numerous barriers posed by ethnicity, class, indigeneity and geography, more Victorian girls than ever before had access to formal education. The likelihood of boys attending school changed little after the Act’s implementation, but girls’ attendance increased markedly. Girls’ private secondary education also expanded, though it was only available to a small number of middle-class and elite girls.

How did girls experience school? This paper employs girls’ school exercise books to glimpse into the state and privately-run classroom. Exercise books were envisioned as a learning tool, a way for pupils to record and remember a curriculum that aimed to produce useful, neat and dutiful future citizens. Yet, read alongside diaries, letters, memoirs and education archives, surviving exercise books demonstrate that female students used the new opportunities provided by schooling in ways that often contradicted or went beyond adult intentions. Although educators and parents still anticipated marriage and motherhood as the eventual outcome for their female pupils and daughters, exercise books reveal that schoolgirls could pursue academic excellence, imagine future careers and cultivate friendships. Schoolgirls could style themselves as scholars, as future professionals and as friends, developing a sense of self that in some ways contradicted the aims of the education system.

Megan Graham, University of Leeds

‘It’s the politics of the streets’: Black Theatre and Cultural Protest in 1970s Redfern

This paper examines the intersections of race, politics, and performance in late twentieth century Australia by tracing the history of Black Theatre in Redfern through the theoretical arcs of space, agency, and community. Functioning as an alternative cultural institution and grassroots engine for social transformation, Black Theatre ruptured normative social, racial and heterosexist hierarchies to radically nourish and empower black communities. A product of the radical transnationalism and rising intranational clamour for Aboriginal autonomy at the turn of the 1970s, Black Theatre operated casually from 1969 and formally from 1972 until 1977. This work explores how the stage, which had symbolically served to uphold the violent hegemony of cultural imperialism, was repurposed by activists to be a space where silenced truths were told, pasts were

reclaimed, and recuperative possibilities were creatively imagined. Written, oral and performance records highlight that Black Theatre embraced and embodied self-determination through its performances, pedagogical programs and international outlook, whilst simultaneously nurturing cohesion by sustaining other local and national liberatory initiatives in the 1970s. This work seeks to redress wide-scale cultural amnesia that silences radical black creative histories in a global paradigm. Offering a counter-discursive cultural history of theatre and performance in Australia, this localised study serves to refigure the traditional archive by using soundscapes to imagine emotionality and elevate subjugated voices while also illustrating the potency of theatre as a weapon in the struggle for racial empowerment in Sydney.

Megan is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Nadia Gregory, University of Wollongong

A hard truth: forgotten legacies and memory, in the figure of Cissie Gool

This paper will outline the life and legacy of Cissie Gool, a South African leader against apartheid who from the 1930s into the 1960s campaigned against the increasingly intense segregation laws in the Cape. Cissie Gool was a Coloured councilwoman, Coloured being those who essentially identified as mixed race in South Africa, who campaigned for the people of District Six – an area where many Coloured peoples were forced to relocate from, due to the apartheid system. The legacy of her struggle has been one allocated to the outskirts of the history books, internationally but also surprisingly within South African history. This paper will discuss the hard truths of why it is that a prominent figure of the time has now been neglected in terms of her legacy, and within this example will seek to answer why it is that women as leaders of protest movements are relegated to the sidelines in historical memory.

Dianne Hall, Victoria University

Irish mothering in colonial Australia

One of the most well-known poems of early twentieth century Australia was 'The Little Irish Mother' by John O'Brien (1922). This sentimental poem praised the aged Irish woman of the title in her old age as a silent figure who was the backbone of the new nation. This paper looks at these stereotypes in the light of histories of Irish women's experiences of motherhood, including those of the young women known as the 'Famine Orphans' and more well known women such as Ellen Kelly. Data from inquests, newspapers and police records shows both the stresses of mothering in extreme conditions as well as the efforts by Irish women to comfort and help their fellow migrants.

Victoria Haskins, University of Newcastle

Amina and the Ayahs' Home: Women negotiating empire in London, 1867—1902

In 2022 the installation of a Blue Heritage Plaque on a Hackney building in London marked a long-overdue recognition of the presence of South Asian women in the imperial metropole. The plaque commemorates the existence of an institution known as 'the Ayahs' Home' and the intrepid women who passed through its doors between 1900 and 1921, as they accompanied British families travelling around the circuits of empire, as nannies and nursemaids. Yet there is an even more hidden history lying behind this institution: of an Aldgate lodging-house that catered to the travelling ayahs throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In this paper, I focus on the intriguing woman that ran the nineteenth-century enterprise, one Amina Hanson, and the stories of some of the women who resided in her establishment, to consider the complexity of women's interracial encounters and agency at the metropolitan heart of empire.

Alison Holland, Macquarie University

Part of the Solution? Exploring Women's Role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

In a report commissioned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's Office of Evaluation and Audit in 1995 it was found that ATSIC did not adequately represent the interests of Indigenous women. In part they were rendered invisible within the notion of the family or their specific rights were subsumed by a discursive rights agenda that tended to promote an homogenous Indigenous voice. Leading Indigenous scholar, Megan Davis, suggested that the problem of gender inequity within the organisation had contributed to its decline. Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that, at least in its earlier years, ATSIC was a 'safe place' for Indigenous women who were inspired by its female leadership and the opportunity it afforded for capacity building. Indeed, many Indigenous female leaders today were schooled in ATSIC. ATSIC had an Office of Indigenous Women and it supported delegations of women's attendance at leading international women's conferences.

This paper considers the question of women in ATSIC with a view to providing an explanatory frame for the question of Indigenous women's historical experience of it. Recovering the contours of this history, it considers the possibility of two distinct phases in the body's history, a feminised phase, 1990-1996, and then a masculine phase, 1996-2004. It situates the latter in the context of the political contest over ATSIC at the time to locate ATSIC's later failure of women not just in the overly patriarchal nature of its leadership but to what amounted to a competitive masculine political tussle over the organisation's very existence.

Yuan Jing, University of Queensland

Another Facet of 1950s Land Reform in China—from the Perspective of Hui'an Women

This paper uncovers the ambiguity and complexity of defining a "Married" Hui'an woman, a female group on the coast of southeastern China, due to different marital status criteria set by the state legislation, customary law, and local marriage customs. The interplay between these three elements resulted in a meandering and unstable boundary of marriage status among Hui'an women at the end of the 20th Century. This paper argues that the customary marriage ritual is the critical factor in defining the marital status of Hui'an women. Once a Hui'an woman has gone through these covenantal "Six Rituals" of contracting a marriage, she is considered "Married" and vice versa. In contrast, registering a marriage with a government authority was not a necessary condition for a Hui'an woman to be considered "married" by herself and her community, although the idea that a marriage must be registered to be valid was already prevalent in a significant portion of the country by the end of the last century. Further than this, the Hui'an women's unique marriage custom of "Extended Natal Stay" complicates the situation even more. Hui'an women would not shift their residence to the conjugal homes from the natal homes after marriage until she gives birth to a child. As Hui'an women use various means, including elaborate hairstyles, to avoid "early" sexual intercourse with their husbands, this "Extended Natal Stay" can last as little as two years to as long as twenty years. As a powerful active factor, this practice can dismantle marriages contracted in accordance with traditional rituals and undermine the foundations of registered marriages and render them null and void. This paper concludes that the ambiguity and complexity of Hui'an women's marital status, caused by the interplay between local marriage custom, the customary law and state legislation, plays crucial role in their stigmatisation by mainstream China.

Timothy Jones, La Trobe University

Child Care, not Child Abuse': Abortion and the New Christian Right in 1970s Australia

Anti-abortion activism was a core issue that engaged the nascent New Christian Right (NCR) in Australia. Pregnancy termination began to be legalised in Australia in 1969 with the passage of legislation in South Australia and the Menhenitt ruling in the Victorian Supreme Court, which found that pregnancy termination was lawful to preserve the physical or mental health of the woman. This paper explores the subsequent emergence of an Australian right to life movement. Anti-abortion politics was a mainstay of

the Festival of Light and subsequent NCR groups, but a distinct anti-abortion movement also emerged that attracted a wider support base than the NCR's demographic, particularly amongst Catholics. The paper charts the early history of the Australian pro-life movement, its relationship with the NCR in Australia and internationally, and the ways it's articulation of the values of motherhood and the child evolved. It shows the ways in which the personal became political for conservative women actors in this era, and considers their contributions to debates about children's and women's rights.

Deborah Jordan, Monash University and Griffith University

Settler Colonisation and the Queensland Women's Vote

Myth-making about how white women in Australia won the vote has been enduring. This paper addresses key historical questions about the campaigns for women's rights that have been eclipsed. When we listen to the voices of the earlier suffragists, especially in Queensland with its delayed introduction of manhood suffrage and a property vote where a wealthy man could hold up to 72 votes, very different accounts emerge. Unlike most western countries, Australian women were not granted the vote because of their support of patriotic militarism and World War 1, indeed leading suffragists opposed the war and led the national campaigns against conscription. In their combined call for both the women's and the democratic vote, for justice as well as equality, Australian suffragists' achievements on the world stage are largely overlooked. The question why they failed to enter parliament until decades later, slow in contrast to their early uptake of the vote, can start to be addressed. With the violence unleashed by the war and the associated shifts in gendered relationships, suffragists stepped back from leading positions and disappeared from the public gaze.

Catherine Kevin, Flinders University

Discovering reproductive coercion in an age of normative heterosexual intimacy

As the South Australian government reckons with home truths about family and domestic violence in this state, the language of its inquiries speaks to a recent national and international history of naming and detailing different forms of abuse. For example, the term reproductive coercion was coined in the 2010s and refers to the obstruction of a person's reproductive autonomy by interfering in decision-making relating to contraception or termination of pregnancy. In seeking to write a history of domestic violence in Australia in the period 1914 - 1970 that is alert to the specific meanings of different forms of violence in their contexts, I have explored the utility of the term reproductive coercion. This paper contends that by focusing on understandings of and conditions for reproductive autonomy, reproductive coercion provides a constructive line of inquiry into a history of domestic violence. Working with this term demands a reconsideration of what reproductive autonomy could mean in the period under examination and the ways in which it might be undermined in the context of domestic abuse. It leads to a careful consideration of the intersections of histories of the availability, affordability and legality of contraceptive and abortion technologies, and changing understandings of and conditions for heterosexual intimacy and agency.

Holly Moorhead, Deakin University

'Feminine armour': The tactical performances of female agents in F Section of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and the perceptions of gender in occupied France

This paper examines the tactical performances of women in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during WWII, and how female agents manipulated gender stereotypes to avoid detection or interrogation in the field. Thirty-nine women were deployed into occupied France between 1941-1944, operating in high-risk roles like couriers and wireless operators. Drawing from oral and written testimonies of former agents and F-Section leadership, this paper examines how such women utilised perceptions of femininity to avoid arrest and further conduct espionage in enemy-occupied France. An advantageous factor for women's recruitment was the ability to be seen in public under the guise of errands, social calls, and employment, without raising suspicion. Whilst conversely, the Service du Travail Obligatoire had forced the enlistment and

deportation of young, able-bodied men in occupied France. The STO greatly hindered the ability for men of that demographic to be seen in public under the same guises as women, due to their mandated obligations of employment. Recruitment officer Selwyn Jepson's reasoning for his decision was driven by his favourable attitude towards the characteristic potential of female agents, arguing that women 'had a far greater capacity for cool and lonely courage than men'. This paper further argues that women were not selected as agents in spite of being female, but rather, because of it. There were equal expectations of standards in training to their male counterparts, and their success in the field proved women had the aptitude and ability to engage in previously male dominated roles.

Holly is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Claire Morey, Flinders University

Applying contemporary understandings of financial abuse to our colonial past

Financial abuse is a central component of domestic violence. Often difficult to disentangle from other forms of domestic violence, its complex and near invisible nature can allow it to go undetected by those experiencing it and by the legal system alike. It is only within this century that financial abuse has been considered a distinct category of domestic violence. Historicising financial abuse is a delicate and challenging task, but it is essential for a few reasons. First, although abuse in nineteenth-century South Australia was largely understood as physical, many colonial women's accounts closely mirror women's experiences of financial abuse today. Failing to historicise financial abuse hinders our ability to understand these origins and how it has reached its crisis point today. Furthermore, the doctrine of coverture entrenched women's dependence on their husbands, meaning that a husband was legally bound to provide for his wife and family. Some husbands transgressed this obligation in various ways, such as in periods of desertion, refusing to purchase food or necessary household items, or through more explicitly cruel acts like exploitation, extortion or sabotaging their wives' income or business. In examining these types of financial abuse across several case studies, this paper seeks to contribute to the nascent field of financial abuse in both Australia, as well as internationally. In so doing, I show how women's deep-rooted financial dependence on their husbands helps to bring to light the existence of this financial abuse, both to us now but also to the nineteenth-century petitioners.

Debra Parish

Uncivil Tongues': Civility, Gender and Conflict in Seventeenth Century England - Continuance and Relevance

In his conduct book for English 'gentlewomen' (1631), Richard Brathwaite extolled the virtues of 'civility' for the female sex. Civility was a popular topic of early seventeenth-century prescriptive texts for women and was associated with other feminine ideals such as 'silence', 'modesty' and 'submission' to male authority. My paper demonstrates that discourses of 'civility' and similar codes of feminine behaviour, were not restricted to conduct books but spilled into the key politico-religious debates of the English Civil War period.

At this time of intensified religious separatism and conflict, critics appealed to models of civility and feminine conduct, accusing women who joined the religious sects or dared to preach in public, of transgressing their prescribed gendered roles. However, civility discourse, I argue, was not only aimed at restricting women's agency but also for the restoration of social and religious order more broadly.

Why civility? These same calls for civility resonate in our current politically charged times as we witness the rise of extremism and misinformation, and the increase of toxic and misogynistic speech fueled by social media. There are claims of a 'civility crisis' and media headlines calling for a return to civility in our political and public discourse. My paper uncovers both the gender and political elements of 'civility' in the turbulent early modern period, as it highlights its continued relevance and implications for our own contemporary context.

Micaela Pattison, Flinders University

Modern Monster: Visualising the Eugenic Child in Republican Spain

Madrid teenager Hildegart (1914-1933) was variously described as a child prodigy, a pioneer of Spanish sexology, a feminist who 'far surpasses [the Spanish feminists] who blazed the trail', and a well-connected internationalist who cut 'an exotic figure' on the cultural landscape of Republican Spain. Yet, her legacy was curiously reconfigured by her death and the emergence of details about a mother's quest to create a eugenic child. My book project is framed with a meditation on the process by which records of Hildegart's political activities and image in public life became tangled into the archive produced by medico-legal inquiries into her murder. This paper examines the place of visual art in that tangling. I explore how studio portraiture and photojournalism shaped understanding of her life and death, and the development of a hybrid mode of self-presentation that blurred the boundaries of the salacious and scientific to advance her career in public life while publicising campaigns for women's education, modern hygiene, sexual reform and eugenics.

Micaela submitted this proposal to the AWHN stream but will present her paper in the Eugenics Stream at 9am on Thursday (Room LWCM North Theatre 4).

Madeline Pentland, Australian National University

The 'Ernie Awards': (de)fame, sarcasm and misogyny in NSW Parliament, 1993—2022

The Ernie Awards (1993-2022), an annual charity dinner hosted by women of the Labor Left in NSW Parliament House, was a satirical presentation night for the year's most sexist remark by a public figure. The event had humble beginnings, with only 40 attendees and one award: The Golden Ernie, named after Australian Workers' Union secretary Ernie Ecob. The event soon grew to a crowd of 400 attendees annually, and the ever-growing number of worthy nominations led to an additional nine categories by 2003: four Silver Ernies, The Warney, The Fred, The Trump, The Good Ernie, and The Elaine. With the catchphrase 'keep them nervous', there was seemingly no misogynistic speech in Australia safe from the judgement of the Ernie Awards.

Adorned with dress-up themes and accompanied by the resounding jeer of attendees voting in the Ernies' democratic 'Boo-Off' system, the Ernie Awards were a controversial political statement that garnered international publicity. Responses by winners (and losers) varied, with most publicly denouncing the event, and others correcting nominated quotes. By 1995 some contenders were known to deliberately publish misogynistic remarks in the lead up to the Ernies, compelling organizers to implement a strict rule that 'you cannot get an Ernie for trying'. This begs the question, what do the Ernie Awards signify about the 'truth' of misogynistic speech in a highly publicised domain? To consider this question, this paper analyses three key moments of the Ernie Awards history: the first (1993), international acclaim (1999-2002), and post-Julia Gillard's 'Misogyny Speech' (2013-14).

Charmaine Robson, UNSW Sydney

Singing out! Locating Australian Mid-twentieth Century Female Protest in the public persona and performances of Glen Tomasetti

Glen Tomasetti (1929 – 2003) was a Melbourne-based female activist who, from the mid-1960s, was a familiar figure in Australian second-wave feminism and the anti-Vietnam war movement. As a singer, guitarist, and composer, she successfully used musical performance as a vehicle for protest, raising awareness and mustering support for these causes. She also gave public talks and theatre performances, joined women's and peace groups, wrote newspaper columns, and engaged in direct acts of resistance. In tune with the voices and concerns of the corresponding movements in the United States and sharing platforms and modes of protest with other Australians,

she was nevertheless distinctive in her approach. With the object of extending understandings of mid-twentieth century protest movements, this paper explores the elements that made Tomasetti's calls for change resonate with many Australians during the 1960s and 1970s. It will examine the development of her popular public persona which rendered the rebellious acceptable, and her invoking of an Australian identity in her songs of protest. The paper bases its findings on Tomasetti's papers, newspaper sources and the historiography of mid-twentieth century protest movements.

Ingrid Ryan, UNSW Sydney

White women artists in Central Australia 1925–33: Historiographical correction or reproducing whiteness?

Between 1925 and 1933, non-indigenous women artists, including amateur painter, Frances Yeates and professional artists, Jessie Traill and Violet Teague, travelled to Central Australia from the southern capital cities of Adelaide and Melbourne to explore the 'desert' as a new artistic subject matter. After their respective 'sketching tours' of Arrernte country in and around Hermannsburg-Ntaria, the women exhibited their paintings to curious urban audiences in the southern capital cities. This paper explores the contribution of women artists to the elevation of the 'desert' as a place and idea during the interwar period. Histories of interwar settler artist interaction with the desert landscape have focussed on the artistic partnership between Arrernte painter, Albert Namatjira and settler painter, Rex Battarbee. I demonstrate that settler women artists were important figures in the early exposure of the desert landscapes of Central Australia proper to urban audiences and in their inspiring a settler embrace of the arid interior as integral to a national imagery and identity.

I explore the paradox that white women artists both challenged settler representations and understandings of the desert and its exploration while also being viewed by themselves and others as part of the settler pioneer trope. As a non-indigenous historian writing about white women explorers, the challenge that arises is writing a critique of the pioneer trope without reproducing it. The question around 'home truths' is particularly pertinent in relation to settler representations of and stories about the desert and the elevation of particular settler 'truths' around the desert landscape over others.

Zora Simic, UNSW Sydney

Seeing the Signs: Thinking historically about coercive control

In 2023, the South Australian Government launched a public awareness campaign 'See the Signs of Coercive Control'. First, it presents signs to help the person experiencing it to identify the pattern. The signs can include: 'making it hard to see your family and friends' and 'any actions or behaviours that make you feel forced into doing something you don't want to do'. Next, the campaign targets the abusers, who are encouraged to ask themselves a series of questions to begin to take accountability for their actions, such as: 'have I ever made loved ones feel scared or anxious about how I'm behaving?' In the current moment, identifying the signs – a coming into consciousness – has helped people affected by coercive control make fresh sense of their lives.

Taking this campaign as a starting point, this paper considers how coercive control can be thought about historically. In the current moment, advocates for criminalisation include the parents of Hannah Clarke, who along with her three children, was horrifically murdered by her estranged husband in early 2020 – a tipping point moment in the visibility of coercive control as a "home truth" about domestic violence in Australia. Yet coercive control is not new. The archive is replete with examples alongside persistent understandings of domestic violence as primarily physical. Theorising around coercive control is more recent, and its key theorist Evan Stark makes a series of historical arguments which have been heavily debated. How can historians contribute to and extend contemporary understandings of coercive control?

Zoe Smith, Australian National University

The brutality of the breadwinner: historicising economic violence in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria

In 1982, Judith Allen illuminated a crucial ‘home truth’, that late-nineteenth-century women’s economic dependence on the male breadwinner was both ‘the precondition for family violence and the reason for its continuation’. Despite this, not only was the male breadwinner valorised under ideals of domestic masculinity that were increasingly culturally and legally asserted as the norm, but women’s dependence on the male breadwinner would be enshrined in legislation in the 1907 Harvester Judgement. Drawing on established frameworks by Alana Piper and Claire Morey, this paper historicises economic violence in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, connecting feminist concerns about women’s economic dependence in marriage explored in colonial women’s fiction and non-fiction writings to masculine marital behaviours detailed in wives’ petitions, framed by them as ‘cruelty’, that were either then considered a form of economic abuse or can now be considered such by use of modern frameworks. In doing so, I demonstrate how the valorised breadwinner ideal, whose legislative enshrinement was lauded for its progressiveness, instead facilitated and to an extent justified financial abuse and coercion in marriage. Although the economic constraints of coverture were thought to have been eroded with the passage of Married Women’s Property Acts in the late nineteenth century, women’s economic dependence in marriage was not only maintained, but legislatively endorsed in the early twentieth century, despite continued feminist attempts to highlight the deleterious impacts of such. As opposed to being alleviated, the ‘bonds of wedlock’ were tightened under the sanctioned regime of a brutal breadwinner.

Michelle Staff, Australian National University

Telling the truth through (or about) feminist biography

A whole range of books telling the life stories of women from the past are published each year in Australia and around the world, sometimes adopting the mantle of ‘feminist biography’. But what is feminist biography? In the 1980s and 1990s scholars were thinking theoretically about this question, debating what they considered the parameters and core qualities of feminist biography were or should be. For some this was dependent on the biographer’s identity or subject matter; for others, it constituted a distinct approach that was markedly different from other biographical practices. The 2020s presents a very different context with its own set of challenges and opportunities that are in many ways quite different to those in which this original scholarly discussion took place over thirty years ago. Given the genre’s great popularity with a general reading audience, biography has the capacity to bridge the divide between the academy and the public. It can make a difference to society’s understandings of its past and the place of this past in the present. It is therefore important to revisit this discussion from a contemporary perspective to understand what feminist biography is (or might be) today and how it functions (or could function) in a world shaped by rapid change and contestation over the very meaning of ‘feminism’. In this paper I explore these questions and more, using examples drawn from the Australian biographical landscape as well as from other English-speaking contexts.

Ana Stevenson, University of Southern Queensland

Academic Blogging and the Public Humanities in the Twenty-First Century Knowledge Economy

This paper will share the preliminary results from a research project about academic blogging and higher education, especially within the discipline of history. This research project aimed to investigate the influence of academic blogging on the twenty-first-century knowledge economy. Building on a developing literature about the position of academic blogging in the scholarly publishing landscape, this paper will offer a deeper understanding of the position of academic blogging across the three core domains of a university’s mission: teaching, research, and public engagement. The research team undertook qualitative data collection through a survey and interviews with academics about their experience and practice of academic blogging. Research participants included academics across all levels in Australia, Africa, Europe, and North America whose

teaching and research relates to the humanities, history, and education. Additionally, a case study of bibliometric data relating to a history blog further informed the qualitative data. This paper will share initial findings about the use and impact of academic blogging at a juncture when the importance of public-facing research outputs is increasingly recognised.

Ana submitted this proposal to the AWHN stream but will present her paper in the stream Teaching and Doing History in a Digital Age at 9am on Thursday (Room SSN 242).

Natasha Szuhan, Australian National University

My body, my choice. Their science': Female Technologists and Oral Contraceptives in Australia, 1961–91

It has been 63 years since the Pill was released onto the global market as a (mostly) female-controlled contraceptive technology. This product was unlike any of the messy, fiddly, inconsistent, fallible, and sometimes mood-killing mechanical and chemical contraceptive methods and products that preceded it. Oral contraceptives basically sold themselves through the promise of spontaneous and guaranteed safe (from pregnancy, at least) marital sex through the regimented daily ingestion of a pill that 'could] be eaten like candy'. The rapid uptake in the Pill in Australia (and most of the western world) in its first decade of sale demonstrates that there was a broad enthusiasm across ecumenical, economic, and ethnic cohorts for an efficient female-managed technology that didn't require constant maintenance, extensive pre-sex preparation, or the use of fine motor skills. But how did this shift in contraceptive practice – and its resultant socio-cultural and gender ruptures – relate to scientific communication and education? Was it a product of an incremental increase in public appreciation and application of medico-scientific knowledge built up over several decades by contraceptive scientists and activists? Or a by-product of the apparent scientific breakthrough that had rendered the reproductive female body wholly manageable? No one has yet asked these questions – but they are central to my oral history of oral contraceptives in Australia. This talk will present initial findings from this project's pilot trial and seek to draw some useful conclusions about the intersection of science and technology communication and gender and reproductive autonomy in recent Australian history.

Natasha is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Claire Thomas, La Trobe University

Canberra 1926—66: Not just men and the business of nation making

In 1932, thirty members of the federal parliament presented a crystal table lamp to Isabelle Southwell, manageress of the Hotel Kurrajong. The occasion is retold on a storyboard in the foyer of the now 4-star Canberra hotel. But why is Southwell's twenty years at the helm of a significant site of early accommodation for politicians and public servants not widely known? Why have women's contributions to the building of Canberra been largely left out of the general histories and popular ideas of the city? The answer appears to lay in the word support. The working women who inhabited the public accommodation of Canberra between 1926-66 were overwhelmingly in support roles. Due to the nature of the work, a supporting role's undertakings easily become subservient to the narrative being driven by the leading roles; in the case of post-Federation Canberra, the narrative was nation building and the roles were played by men. Building on the work, started in the 1970s, of feminist labour historians my paper explores the lives of working women in mid twentieth century Canberra, their experience of living in public accommodation, and the absence of this cohort's contribution from most histories of Canberra. Using the frame of where they lived, I will examine the work they did, the choices they were forced to make because of their gender and labour laws, and how the opportunities and discomforts of public accommodation shaped their lives.

Saneze Tshyana, University of the Free State, South Africa and University of Southern Queensland

The 'Second Pandemic': Changing Responses to Gender-Based Violence in South Africa

In 2006, a woman known only as 'Khwezi' accused Jacob Zuma of rape. He was later acquitted, and one of his most vocal supporters during his rape trial was the African National Congress's Women's League (ANCWL).

Nearly 20 years later, on 8 February 2024, the current president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, delivered his State of the Nation Address. He once again highlighted the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) in contemporary South Africa, reinforcing its labelling as the 'second pandemic', a phrase first used during the Covid-19 crisis.

How does one read these statements alongside each other – Zuma would eventually ascend first to the presidency of the ANC before being inaugurated as South Africa's fourth democratically elected president, while his successor, Ramaphosa, continuously speaks out in the present against exactly what Zuma stood accused of having done. What has changed?

Violence against women in South Africa certainly merits Ramaphosa's attention, with some of the highest incidents of rape and murder perpetrated against women in the world. In the search for local truths – home truths – this is one truth that cannot be ignored.

This paper will therefore, using Zuma and his supporters' remarks as reported in local newspapers during his trial, and Ramaphosa's notions of a 'second pandemic', and also drawing on the works of Pumla Dineo Gqola and Kopano Ratele, chart changing responses to gender-based violence in South Africa. In doing so, this paper hopes to contribute to contemporary understandings of gender-based violence in post-1994 South Africa.

Hannah Viney, Independent Scholar

Was she 'co-operative' or could she 'play dumb very well'? Finding the truth between ASIO files and oral histories

In Brisbane 1963, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) enlisted the help of the Queensland Special Police to find the individuals responsible for the publication and distribution of a 'seditious' anti-nuclear pamphlet. During the extensive man-(and typewriter-)hunt, secretary of the Brisbane Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Janet D'Urso was interviewed three times by ASIO officers. In official reports of the investigation, D'Urso was said to have been 'co-operative' and 'readily gave details' to the investigating officers. Fifty-six years later, Janet D'Urso recounted this same event to me unprompted in an oral history interview for my PhD thesis. In her more recent account, Janet was not cooperative but subversive. She described an active effort to mislead the investigators by embodying a particular image of fragile femininity, leaning into the fact that at the time of the interviews, she was five months pregnant and sick with the flu. As they sat around her dining room table, Janet did her best to look 'at my dumbest and most innocent', well aware that she 'could play dumb very well'. With two wildly contrasting accounts of the same incident, neither of which can be proven or disproven, where does the truth lie? In this paper, I use women's anti-nuclear campaigning of the mid-twentieth-century as a platform to explore these issues. I argue that finding the truth of such accounts is less important than the opportunity they provide to consider how subjective truths are intertwined with identity construction and the creation of historical narratives.

Hannah is a recipient of a 2024 Australian Women's History Network Bursary.

Anna Wilkinson, Deakin University

'A love story that would have inspired immortal Shakespeare': Asian Australian war bride marriages during the Vietnam War

After the Second World War, Asian war brides became one of the few official exceptions to the White Australia Policy. The arrival of Japanese war brides in 1952 has been characterised as a symbol of reconciliation: a pivotal turning point in Australia's immigration policy as well as a reunion between Japan and the Allied Powers after the Pacific War. Although Australia continued to engage militarily within the region, little is known about subsequent Asian Australian war bride marriages including over 100 couples who met during the war in Vietnam. Using a microhistorical approach, this paper will present a biographical analysis of one Vietnamese-Australian couple who met in 1969, married the following October and returned to Australia in the early 1970s. By combining oral testimony with official documentation, the paper will bring attention to these little-known marriages and their impact on Australian society during a time of rapid change. It will also address the difficulties of finding Asian women in the archive and the effect this has had on understanding our past. This paper posits that Asian war bride marriages are an important framework that can assist with understanding Asian-Australian relations in post-war regional engagement and challenges the masculine discourse surrounding wartime histories. These intercultural marriages contribute to emerging Asian Australian histories between the end of the Second World War and the end of the White Australia Policy. These histories - spearheaded by the immigration of women - will add to the richness of our country's complicated past.

Angela Woollacott, Australian National University

Jessie Street and her international allies stand up to Eleanor Roosevelt: Fighting for women to be in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

Jessie Street was the only woman on the Australian delegation to the 1945 San Francisco conference that met to plan the United Nations, culminating with all the nations represented signing its new Charter. As a long-standing feminist and prominent internationalist, Street worked actively with women from other delegations, such as Bertha Lutz of Brazil, to ensure that the phrase 'the equal rights of men and women' was inserted into the preamble of the United Nations Charter. In 1947 Street was appointed as the Australian delegate to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, of which she was then elected 'vice-chairman'. On that body, Street again worked with women from other nations to include women's rights in the draft Declaration of Human Rights. They fought successfully to have the word 'sex' included in the statement that respect for human rights was to be without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. But to do so they had to stand up to Eleanor Roosevelt, a powerful advocate of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, who opposed women being mentioned specifically. As Street noted twice in her autobiography: Eleanor Roosevelt was not a feminist.

This paper uses correspondence from Jessie Street's collection at the NLA to investigate the, ultimately successful, feminist collaboration among delegates in 1948. Both in 1945 and 1948, these victories for global feminism--with continuing influence now--were only achieved thanks to the dedicated cross-cultural collaboration and negotiating skills of a handful of feminists from a variety of countries, including Denmark, Byelorussia, France and Chile.