

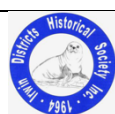
Next Member's Meeting - Thursday  
10 October - morning tea from 10am



# The Sea Lion

*Quarterly newsletter of the Irwin Districts Historical Society Inc*

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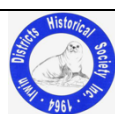
**From the Editor**  
**Friday 4 October 2019**

The Winter & Spring issue of *The Sea Lion* is almost ready for distribution, but due to the Denison Hall issue occupying so much time and attention in recent weeks, this special issue has been produced to keep you up to date.



*The Goods Shed and Bond Store, c1900*

**24 SEPTEMBER**  
**IRWIN SHIRE COUNCIL MEETING**



**Hopes for Shire  
change-of-heart  
dashed**

Irwin Shire Council held its regular meeting on 24 September. There were some 40 people in the public gallery, although not all signed the attendance sheet. The usual gallery crowd is 2 or 3, or less.

The meeting began with some 19 questions being asked by members of the public, most of which referred to the Denison Hall matter. Some of the key questions were whether Council was already spending on the

demolition before the budget was approved (taken on notice), has a demolition application been made (inquiries made to a neighbouring council), why do Council want to knock the hall down (26 February resolution reiterated), what will be put in its place (to be workshopped to attract future funding), why is Council not interested when DPFA and IDHS bring this proposal forward (26 February resolution reiterated), does the shire support telling Denison's history (26 February resolution reiterated). Several people had their questions curtailed because they were deemed to be statements rather than questions.

IDHS Secretary Bruce Baskerville was then invited to make a 10 minute presentation to the councillors. He spoke to a power point slide show titled 'Denison Hall has a Future', beginning with an introduction to the Society, then outlining the Hall's history, its heritage significance, the Museum of Fishing and the Sea (MOFATS) concept, risks and benefits of MOFATS, and concluded with a plea to the councillors to defer implementing their earlier decision to demolish and instead allow time for a more concrete proposal to be worked-up. The presentation is now available on our website at [https://irwinhistory.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Presentation\\_V3\\_24Sep19.pdf](https://irwinhistory.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Presentation_V3_24Sep19.pdf)

The first substantive issue on the agenda was adoption of the Shire's 2019-2020 budget. Our petition had asked that the budget include no funding for demolition of Denison Hall. The budget included a line item of \$30,000 for demolition of Denison Hall. The budget was passed without any debate.

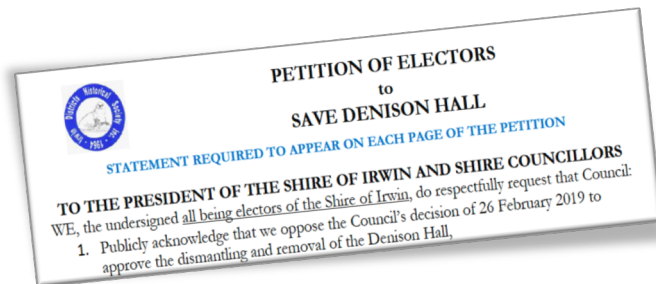
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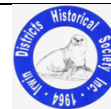
The meeting then came to the council officer's report on our petition. The officer's report recommended that the Council "not act". By various means, of the 287 signatories on the petition, 106 were excluded. One councillor derided the petitioners as a "noisy minority", but others called for the community to be respected. The vote was tied 4-4. The Shire President used his casting vote to reject the petition.



*View over Point Leander Drive and William Street to the Fishermen's Hall after the demolition of McIntyre's Shop (now site of Southerlys)*



## PROFESSIONAL FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION



### DPFA Proposal to the Council

Following the petition debate, a debate followed on deferring demolition in favour of accepting a proposal from the Professional Fishermen's Association to lease the Hall, pay for its maintenance costs and provide time for the museum concept to be developed.

The Fishermen's proposal was dismissed by one councillor as a "stalling mechanism", but other councillors supported giving the proposal a chance to work, arguing it could provide an iconic museum, and they did not want to deny the Fishermen's Association natural justice. The vote was again very close, but ultimately lost 3-5.

The Council meeting closed just after 7pm. The gallery emptied, but people gathered in small groups with a lot of discussions on the verandah before adjourning elsewhere. The Society thanks councillors Kellie Wilson, Mark Lennard and Ian West for consistently supporting the community, its heritage and Denison Hall during the meeting.

At its most recent Annual General Meeting, the Dongara Professional Fishermen's Association voted to apply to the Shire for a lease over the Hall. The Association offered in its letter to the Shire of 6 September to "be responsible for the cost of all maintenance and upgrades as required, meaning there would be zero cost to the rate payers of the Shire of Irwin for the building moving forward.

The Fishermen would then work in conjunction with the Irwin District Historical Society to renovate the building and develop it into a museum of the history of Western Rock Lobster Fishing in Port Denison while also incorporating the history of the Bond Store and maintaining a public use of the building.

In its letter, the Association said "the idea of a Fishing Museum has been bandied about for some years. There is no other museum dedicated to the history of our iconic Western Rock Lobster Industry, we can only see that this as a positive step forward in attracting more visitors to our town and establishing an experience which cannot be recreated anywhere else on the west coast. However, without this historically significant building as a backdrop, making this museum become a reality is difficult to envisage."

Is this the so-called 'stalling mechanism'? Actually, it was the generous and far-sighted offer that was considered by the Council in its final debate of the meeting.

### Voting Record

Councillors (in alphabetical order)	IDHS Petition	DPFA Proposal
Gillam, A	Against	Against
Gumley, S	For	Against
Leonard, M	For	For
Scott, I	Against	Against
Smith, M	Against	Against
West, I	For	For
Wilson, K	For	For
Wyse, B	Against	Against

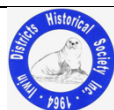
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### Shire Response to the DPFA

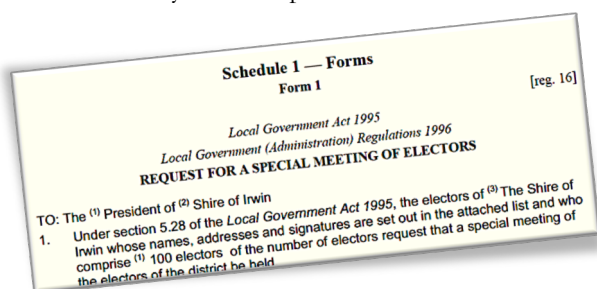
The Shire responded to the DPFA letter on 19 September. The Council's resolution of 26 February was reiterated, which the letter said made it impossible for a lease to be granted as it would be contrary to the resolution.

Nevertheless, the Fishermen's letter would be raised at the next Council meeting on 24 September.



### DPFA Petition for a Special Meeting of Electors

The Fishermen's Association commenced a new petition on 27 September to hold a Special Meeting of Electors. The petition needs the signatures of 100 electors for the meeting to be called by the shire president.



The issues to be discussed at the Special Meeting are set out in the petition. They are:

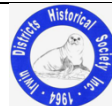
- To explain the museum proposal and adaptation of the Hall, which would be funded by the DPFA and operated by the Society,
- To discuss the Council's refusal on 24 September to allow time for the proposal to be developed,
- To urge the Council to reconsider its position, and
- To allow the public to express its views on the proposal and on Council's position

Once the petition is presented, the meeting must be held no more than 35 days after the shire president receives the request, on a day selected by the shire president.

The petition is being circulated by members of the DPFA, and several copies are moving around the shire.

**ALL MEMBERS AND FRIENDS  
ARE URGED TO SIGN THE  
FISHERMEN'S PETITION**

### REQUEST TO WA HERITAGE COUNCIL



### 'Continuing Protection Order' sought for Denison Hall

After some deliberation on our options after 24 September, committee members agreed to make a request under the new WA Heritage Act for a Continuing Protection Order to be made over Denison Hall. The request was formally submitted on 2 October.

The Order has been requested to prevent demolition of the Hall before its real heritage significance can be properly determined, while the building still stands.

The outcomes sought from making the Order are to retain the parts of the building that have heritage significance, to establish a reliable history of the place (including its associations with fishing), to determine its capacity for adaptive reuse, and to undertake a feasibility study into the option of adapting it for a Museum of Fishing and the Sea and as a public meeting place.

The request was still being investigated and considered at the time of preparing this issue of *The Sea Lion* (4pm, 4 October)

### IDHS DENISON HALL PETITION



### IDHS Petition presented to Council

#### The Petition Presented to Council

The petition asking the Council to (1) rescind its decision to demolish the Hall, (2) not include any funding in the budget for demolition, and (3) instead work to conserve and adapt the Hall, possibly as a museum of fishing, was presented to the Council at its ordinary meeting on 27 August.

The petition opened on 31 March and closed on 25 August. Over that quiet period of autumn and winter, a total of 287 people signed the petition, of which 221 were electors in the



Shire of Irwin and 66 were not electors (visitors from outside the shire). The 221 electors who signed equate to about 10% of all shire electors, which is a fair sized sample of adult-aged public opinion in the shire. I use the word 'electors' here because of the Shire's rules on who it counts as a legitimate signatory on a petition.

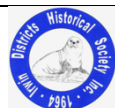
A very big thank you goes to Shirley, John, Trish, all the museum volunteers and the many friends of Denison Hall who talked one-on-one with people and received their signatures in support of the Hall. It was a huge effort by everyone, and shows the passion and commitment that our history and heritage can inspire.

A very big thank you is also due to everyone who signed the petition. The Shire's petition rules, with all the legalistic wording and notes around the petition, could be off-putting, but it also means that every signatory really did know what the petition was about, and supported it and what it stands for. Thank you all.

Cr Scott and seconded by Cr Wyse. Councillors then voted 4 in favour, and 4 against. As the vote was tied, the shire president had to use his casting vote to have the 'no action' recommendation carried.

The vote was, in effect, a rejection of the petition and of the petitioner's requests. But it was hardly an overwhelming vote to do so. The councillors who voted for the petitioners were councillors West, Leonard, Gumley and Wilson.

The recommendation, as narrowly accepted, also "acknowledges the IDHS opposes Council's decision". The petition actually says that it is the petitioners who oppose the Council's decision to demolish. By such 'weasel words' the petitioners, after being reduced in number by 36%, were further rendered invisible. Such cleverness, however, is unlikely to make them just go away (see, for example, Dongara-Denison Noticeboard on Facebook).



#### **IDHS Petition rejected by Council**

The petition was presented to the Council by our Chair, Graham Grundy, at its 27 August meeting, before five people in the public gallery. Graham also advised councillors they would be emailed a link to the MOFATS concept plan the next day.

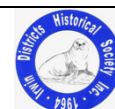
The petition was then examined by the shire and a report prepared for the council. The officer's report on the petition stated that 184 electors' signatures had been validated, although the Society counted 221. It described the signatures of the 66 non-electors as "irrelevant".

After excluding 106 signatories, the 184 validated elector's signatures was said to be only "6.9% of electors". Reasons for not taking any action on the petition, apart from the "small percentage of electors" it reflects, included the Council's Foreshore Plan, the other items on the Municipal Inventory, and "cost impacts", which lead the report to recommend the council "not act".

Following a brief debate, the motion to accept the 'no action' recommendation was moved by

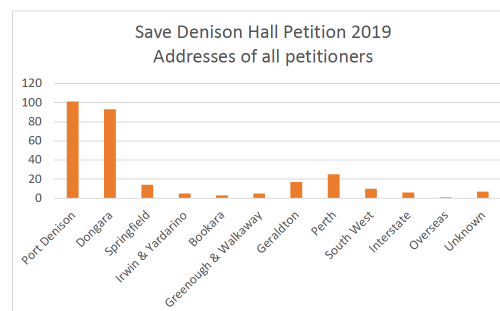


*When Denison was Queen of the Coast:  
the shire emblem of the 1960s*

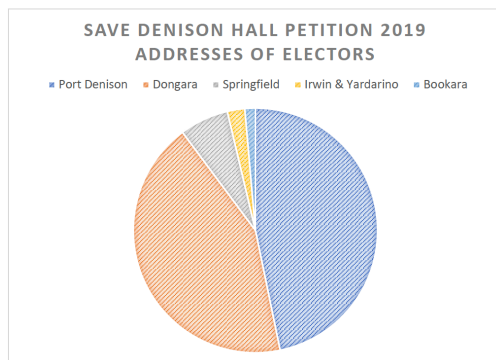


#### **Denison Hall Petition: Some Interesting Analysis**

People signing the petition wrote their name and address, which allowed an analysis to be made of what geographical areas the petitioners live in, and whether they were women or men. This provided some very interesting insights into who supports saving Denison Hall, shown here as a Q&A.







**Q:** Where do the largest number of supporters live?

**A:** Port Denison (45%), with largest group of supporting non-electors living in Perth.

**Q:** Where do the second-largest number of supporters live?

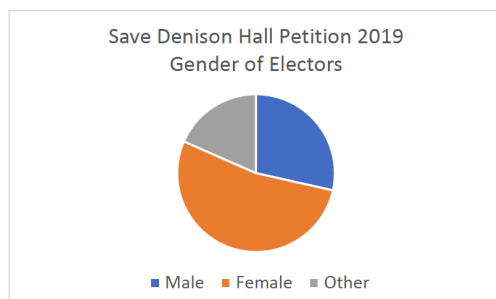
**A:** Dongara (42%), with the second-largest group of supporting non-electors coming from the South West.

**Q:** What proportion of electors came from Springfield, Irwin & Yardarino, and Bookara?

**A:** 10%

**Q:** What proportion of petitioners came from Geraldton, Greenough & Walkaway?

**A:** 9% of all petitioners, and 33% of all non-electors



Other = initials only, gender neutral name, or illegible

**Q:** What proportion of all supporting petitioners are women?

**A:** 60.4%

**Q:** What proportion of all supporting electors are women?

**A:** 62.2%

Most of the signatories were women, and nearly half lived in Port Denison, which suggests that the 'typical' supporter of keeping Denison Hall is a woman living in Port Denison. Its more complex than that – one in ten of electors lived outside Dongara or Port Denison, for instance. But, at the end of the

day, they were all treated as just a 'small percentage' or a 'noisy minority'.

## MUSEUM OF FISHING AND THE SEA



### The MOFATS proposal

There is no museum in Western Australia dedicated to the culture and heritage of fishing and fishers.

Denison Hall offers a unique opportunity to develop such an institution in Port Denison. It could generate economic opportunities for nearby businesses, facilitate accredited training in traditional maritime skills, be a centre for research into changing marine environments and provide public meeting spaces as well as be a keeping place for local fishing histories and artefacts.

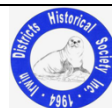
Port Denison, with the fisher hamlets to the south and its links to the Abrolhos, has a long history of subsistence, recreational and commercial fishing and human uses of the sea and its marine resources, from pre-colonial times to today.

It is time to tell these stories and share them with new residents and visitors, with an iconic building that blends the old and the new. Denison Hall provides the opportunity, the location and the space for doing so.

The Museum of the Sea and Fishing (MOFATS) proposal has been presented to councillors, and is available as a download from our website at:

[https://irwinhistory.org.au/?page\\_id=1316](https://irwinhistory.org.au/?page_id=1316)

## SUPPORT FROM BCMHA AND GREENOUGH MUSEUM



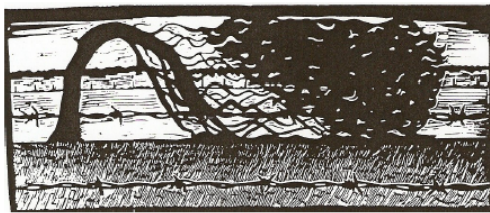
### Welcome support from beyond the Shire

The hard work of collecting petition signatures and preparing reports and presentations received great morale boosts along the way from the DPFA and also from further along the coast.



Batavia Coast Maritime Heritage Association (BCMHA) president, the eminent fishing industry and Abrolhos historian Dr Howard Gray, wrote to the Society on 26 August. He described the Hall and its surrounds as “central to the character and identity of Dongara-Port Denison”, and the MOFATS proposal as “a powerful tool in further building and developing that knowledge and identity in the local community. The museum will become a key visitor and tourism icon that will spread the ‘fishing and the sea’ stories of Dongara-Port Denison far and wide”. With demolition, he wrote, “go the tangible reminders of the past, the stories they tell, the recognition of the pioneers and others that made the community what it is today”.

BCMHA “offers unreservedly its assistance in any way that might assist with the MOFAS project. The name ‘Batavia Coast’ after-all encompasses the region from Port Denison to Kalbarri!”.

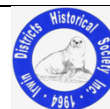


Gary Martin, well-known and respected curator of Greenough Museum, wrote “The Irwin District Historical Society is to be commended for the work they have undertaken on this concept plan for a fishing museum at Port Denison. I am sure that when implemented, it would result in another major attraction for the mid west region of Western Australia. This area has so many stories to be told, both to visitors and locals. What better place for people to learn about our amazing commercial and recreational fishing histories, than the Denison Hall, with its prominent position on the foreshore and close to ample car parking, cafes and other amenities.

The establishment of a fishing museum at Port Denison will also tie in nicely with the opening up of the nearby Abrolhos Islands to tourism. We all know of the financial benefits of encouraging tourists to stay another night, and such an attraction would encourage tourists to linger longer in Dongara and Port Denison.”

Not only did such support lift the spirits of members, they also give insights into the recognition of Denison Hall and MOFATS for their potential cultural and economic impacts within the bigger region.

## EXPERT HERITAGE REPORT ON DENISON HALL



### The Sherwood Report: authoritative but ignored

You might have heard of the ‘heritage report’ written on Denison Hall. This is a report commissioned by the Shire after discussion with the Society. It was prepared by the firm of Eastman Poletti Sherwood, highly regarded heritage practitioners in Geraldton. The Sherwood Report is the first and only specific study of Denison Hall’s heritage significance.

The key findings of the report are:

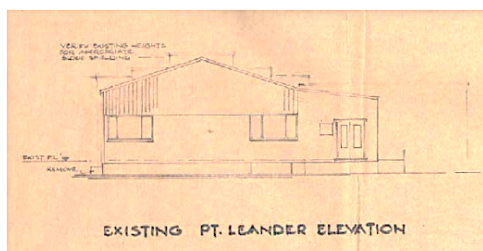
- the original plan and original framework are still evident and more or less intact – this is the most significant fabric.
- The 1930s fabric is of reduced significance.
- The recent alterations and cladding are not of significance.
- the overall form and structure of the building is not unique.
- The original Bond Store probably had a concrete floor on a masonry build up.
- The roof is constructed with timber king post trusses and a ‘stick built’ roof structure.
- The significance of the original fabric is as the surviving fabric of the 1894 building, still in its original location, still associated with the 1867 jetty ruins.
- The original fabric should be retained in its current location.
- The ruins of the jetty are of equal significance, and should also be conserved in their current location.
- The original fabric of the 1894 building should be retained, and there are opportunities to reintroduce 1890s ground levels (associated with the former trolley rail network and external platform, crane and ramp) and undertake archaeological investigations as part of an interpretive approach.



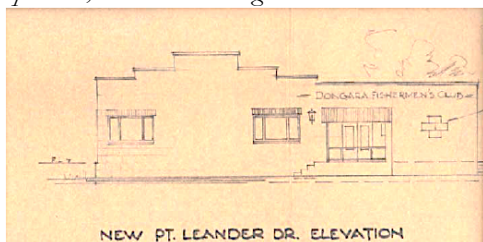
- The former Bond Store and jetty are important landmarks in the developing landscape of the waterfront from a place of commerce and industry to a place of recreation.
- The introduction of contemporary external finishes may have merit in place of the existing finishes.
- Deconstructing and rebuilding the fabric would greatly diminish its significance, to the point where retaining it would be questionable.

The Hall was physically inspected for the report, which included removing part of the 1996 interior lining to confirm the survival and good condition of the 1894 jarrah framework, still quietly robust between the internal lining and the external concrete blocks.

The report makes it clear that much historic fabric survives, in fact is the actual skeleton of the building, and it is that 125 year old fabric that is important. The cladding outside and inside is cosmetic, and has been changed several times. It can be changed again, and that change can be done in ways that reveal and highlight the 1894 structure.



*Plans for the Pt Leander Drive façade before (top) and after (bottom) the 1996 extensions, as shown in the report. Windows and door are in the same position, and both drawings are at the same scale.*

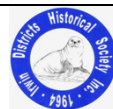


The heritage report is itself an important document, and sets out the basic parameters for adapting the building to contemporary new uses while highlighting its historic fabric. The report confirmed the Society's own assessments that Denison Hall is a significant

historic building, and that it is capable of adaptation for use as a contemporary museum.

Sadly, the report's findings have been ignored.

#### SHIRE HERITAGE BUDGET FOR 2019-2020



#### Pittance for heritage, nearly half to be spent on demolition

The Shire's 2019-2020 budget was adopted at the Council meeting. Total budgeted expenditure on heritage places in the Capital Works Program is \$77,000. Dongara Oval (Municipal Inventory Item 049) will receive \$20,000 for maintenance, and Stage 2 of the oddly-named Cemetery Revitalisation program (Municipal Inventory Item 046) will receive \$27,500. The only other budgeted expenditure on a heritage place is \$30,000 for demolition of Denison Hall.

The relative size and importance of the \$30,000 spending on the demolition of the Hall can be gauged from these figures drawn from the budget:

- 39% of all expenditure on heritage places of \$77,000.
- 1.17% of all expenditure on 'Recreation & Culture' of \$2,814,835
- 0.28% of all expenditure in the budget of \$10,506,634

Or, to look at it another way, it is:

- equivalent to 11.1% of the Port Denison Foreshore Development Reserve of \$268,298
- equivalent to 37.59% of the budget for Elected Members Remuneration of \$79,800

Whatever way it is looked at, the overall budget for shire-owned heritage assets is pitiful. Even the councillors' remuneration is larger. The picture is even more woeful when nearly half the heritage expenditure is devoted to the destruction of one single heritage asset. The Society formally asked the Shire by letter of 22 July to redirect any funding it might be considering spending on demolition to the maintenance of other shire heritage assets. Clearly, no notice was taken of that request.

**Next Member's Meeting - Thursday  
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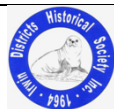


There is no definition of what is included in the demolition budget. Does it include the cost of fees and consultancies for demolition approvals? Does it include the costs for storing Hall timbers that Council might want to re-use in another Foreshore project?

A curiosity in the budget is the continuing inclusion of fees for hiring Denison Hall, day or night, with a bond and key bond. On the other hand, no fees are stated for hiring Dongara Hall.

Our petition had asked that the budget include no funding for demolition of Denison Hall. Instead, the budget included \$30,000 for demolition. Like the Sherwood Report and the DPFA Proposal, it came to naught.

#### FLASHBACK: RESOLUTION R54/22 TO OPPOSE DEMOLITION



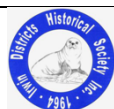
#### A lot has happened in a short time

It is a perhaps surprising to recall that the Committee resolved back in November 2018 – just ten months ago – to oppose the demolition of Denison Hall because of the building's historical values and heritage significance. A fortnight later the Shire's Greenspace Initiative canvassed public support for demolition, and received a very clear “no” from 87% of respondents.

The Council voted to demolish the Hall on 26 February 2019, with a vote of 7-1. That was the closest the Council ever came to unanimously supporting demolition of Denison Hall. The margins on Council have only widened since.

IDHS members reaffirmed their opposition to demolition at the Society's planning meeting on 14 March. That was the moment the Save Denison Hall campaign was born.

#### MEANWHILE ...

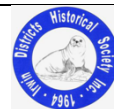


#### \$14 Million claimed Benefits

A question was asked during the public Q&A session about why a proposal to re-route Indian

Ocean Drive through the northern section of Beekeeper's Nature Reserve and directly enter Port Denison was being investigated.

The response was that it would “add \$14 million to the local economy”. Unfortunately, the Q&A format did not allow for the costs and benefits of the idea to be explored.



#### Shipwreck Walk Relocation

The recent foreshore works removed the eastern end of the Shipwreck Walk, and several plaques were placed in storage in the Shire depot. An inspection showed most of the plaques needed at least some cleaning, and some are in poor condition.

After discussions with the Shire on 8 August, it was agreed the Society would work with the Shire on a new setting and installation for the plaques. We remain hopeful of moving forward with this project.

#### ADVERTISING AND NOTICES

[Notice]



**Thursday 10 October 2019**

**Next Committee Meeting**

9am – 10am, Research Centre

**Next Member's Meeting**

**Morning tea from 10am,**

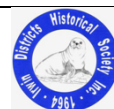
**Meeting from 10:30am**

Day Room

Old Police Station Museum

*ALL MEMBERS  
ENCOURAGED TO COME ALONG*

*“Maintaining the identity of the Irwin District”*



#### DISCLAIMER

Opinions and assessments expressed in *The Sea Lion* remain those of their authors, and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the Irwin Districts Historical Society Inc.



**Next Member's Meeting - Thursday  
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## The Irwin Districts Historical Society Inc., Office Holders for 2019/2020

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Mr John Fitzhardinge

### **Chairperson**

Graham Grundy

### **Deputy Chairperson**

Bob Cail

### **Treasurer**

Trish Parker

### **Secretary**

Bruce Baskerville

### **General Committee Members**

Shirley Scotter

Nan Broad

Julie Nunn

Joy Heitman

John Rossiter

Jean Amos

### **Irwin District Museum & Archives**

#### **Curator**

Shirley Scotter

#### **Russ Cottage Co-ordinator**

Bob Cail

#### **Database & Website Manager**

Graham Grundy

#### ***The Sea Lion* Editor**

Bruce Baskerville

### **Membership subscriptions, 2019/20**

Associate \$2, Individual \$10, Household \$20, Corporate \$25.

### **Address for all correspondence**

The Secretary

Irwin Districts Historical Society Inc

PO Box 347, DONGARA WA 6525.

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08 9927 1323

### **Email**

[ids@midwest.com.au](mailto:ids@midwest.com.au)

### **Website**

[www.irwinhistory.org.au](http://www.irwinhistory.org.au)

### **Registrations**

- WA Incorporated Association A0690104G, registered 19 March 1970
- Australian Business Number (ABN) 88 965 371 802, registered 29 May 2000
- ACNC Registered Charity, same ABN, registered 3 December 2010

### **Affiliations**

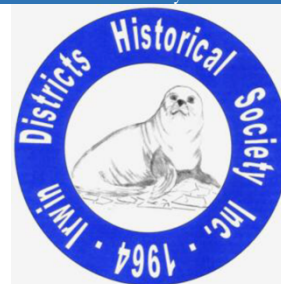


### **Honours**

Irwin District Museum: Winner, Irwin Shire Heritage Award 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007,

2008, 2010, 2012 | Runner-up, Museums Australia (WA) Museums Award 2003 | Museums Australia WA Public Program Award 2008

### **Objectives of the Society**



- I. To encourage the study and writing of the history of the Irwin Districts.
- II. To maintain the identity of the Irwin Districts by preservation and restoration of buildings and settings of historical significance.
- III. To encourage the use of sympathetic architectural patterns when new buildings are constructed.
- IV. To discourage the disfigurement of premises, streets and open places by unsightly and inappropriate advertisements, poles, wires and unseemly structures.
- V. To encourage the conservation of aspects of the natural environment as it affects the character of the Shire of Irwin.
- VI. To collect, classify and preserve records and objects relating to the history of the Irwin Districts. Records may include physical and digital records.
- VII. To publish articles and selected records in special bulletins, or in an official journal of the Society or by any other method approved by the Society.
- VIII. To exchange information among members of the Society, by lectures, readings, discussions and public exhibitions of historical materials.
- IX. To promote public interest in and support for the preservation of historical relics, including buildings and sites, the recognition of notable anniversaries in Irwin Districts' and Western Australian history, and the erection of memorials to outstanding persons and events.
- X. The founding, subsidising or contributing to scholarships or prizes to promote this object
- XI. To establish and maintain a library, reading room, historical museum and Web presence.
- XII. To join with other associations having similar objectives to pursue common aims.
- XIII. To recognise and honour achievement in advancing these objectives or for outstanding contribution to the study and writing of Irwin Districts and other histories.

# DENISON HALL



*The earliest-known coloured picture of the Bond Store (now Denison Hall) on its stone platform to the left, the tram line running off the jetty, Shenton's Warehouse in the middle, the obelisk on the horizon, and people promenading on the jetty.*

*Oil on tin, by Tom Reynolds (1865-1939), c1905, Irwin District Museum collections*