



NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

NEW FARM AND DISTRICTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

www.newfarmhistorical.org.au



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October Meeting

Contributor: Connie Hamer

“Saving Lieutenant Kennedy” – Is truth stranger than fiction?

Lord Byron and Mark Twain both famously acknowledged that real-life events can be less believable than those created in a narrative.

Well, is truth stranger than fiction? Society members and guests at our October meeting would most likely concur. Those present were certainly treated to an extraordinary wartime story expertly researched, written and shared by local resident, Adjunct Professor Dr Brett Mason (pictured above). It was apparent in Robert Allen’s warm welcome and investigated introduction that Brett, with his impressive academic, parliamentary and diplomatic careers, would take us on a fascinating and entertaining literary journey.



Jeff Pople, book reviewer, once and rightly commented in the Canberra Weekly, that Brett’s book “Saving Lieutenant Kennedy: The Heroic Story of the Australian Who Helped Rescue JFK” was “a fascinating slice of military history”. As Brett passionately retold the historical events associated with that fateful night of August 2, 1943, one’s curiosity was aroused. How many wartime stories are untold and undocumented? How many war heroes, both military personnel and civilians, are unknown and unacknowledged? Why have we heard so very little of the intriguing work of a WWII coastwatcher? How many Australian coastwatchers served in the highly secretive Coast Watch Organisation? Do coastwatchers exist in any capacity today?

As we discovered, Australian coastwatcher Lt Arthur “Reg” Evans (pictured left; born in Sydney, May 14, 1905 – January 31, 1989, and therefore most definitely an Australian and not a New Zealander), working with Solomon Islander scouts, coordinated the rescue of the young future president, John F Kennedy, and ten members of his crew. This rescue took place in the Blakett Strait, in the Solomon Islands, after Kennedy’s US torpedo boat, PT-109,



Source: Australian War Memorial

was rammed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer. The two valiant Solomon Islander scouts sent to search for the survivors were Biuku Gasa and Eroni Kumana.



Awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for his “bravery and enterprise in reconnaissance operations” (Australian War Memorial), Evans’ quiet courage and service as a coastwatcher (as an intelligence officer-cum-spy in a jungle hideaway, he became what he called a ‘spider, right in the web of the enemy’) only became public in 1961.



Source: GIS Geography

Brett reflected that the Australia-United States of America alliance was evidenced in this rescue and in the shaking of hands. Kennedy and Evans were understandably more than delighted to meet one another during the rescue effort... and again in later life. On May 1 1961, they enjoyed a reunion, in of all places, the White House Oval Office! Again, their shared and heroic wartime experience makes for such an interesting read.

It was noteworthy to hear that in 2022 Caroline Kennedy, daughter of President Kennedy and then US Ambassador to Australia, visited the Australian War Memorial to hear first-hand accounts of the rescue and to publicly thank the Australian Coastwatchers and Solomon Islander scouts for saving her father’s life. (Continued over page.)

October Meeting Cont.

Brett also explained, on a personal note, that while looking out of his Teneriffe window and surveying the Brisbane River, he is constantly reminded of the US military presence that existed in Brisbane.

As an “American Village”, Brisbane was without doubt a significant strategic base during WWII military operations. With the Japanese moving southward, Brisbane was a vital hub for the Pacific campaign.

Following Brett’s entertaining and educational presentation, we may be inspired to reflect further on Brisbane’s contributions to World War II history. We may be motivated to visit the historical plaques along the Brisbane River, read Society publications documenting local history or do our own research via particular websites.



Contributor: Connie Hamer

Many of us may also seek out the recently dedicated Coastwatchers Memorial Plaque, April 4, 2025, located on the Newstead Riverwalk (pictured).

Read a news article about the plaque unveiling by our own Gerard Benjamin [HERE](#).

Newsletter readers are, of course, also invited to read Dr Mason’s books. Brett made these titles available for purchase at our October meeting and was delighted to personalise copies with an author signing.

Mason, Brett (2023). *Saving Lieutenant Kennedy: The Heroic Story of the Australian Who Helped Rescue JFK*. Sydney, UNSW Press.

Mason, Brett (2022). *Wizards of Oz : How Oliphant and Florey Helped Win the War and Shape the Modern World*. Sydney, UNSW Press.

Brett, the Society thanks you most sincerely for your research contributions, your publications, your October presentation and, of course, your loyal membership.

Watch Adjunct Professor Dr Brett Mason’s presentation online [HERE](#).

Holiday Office Closure

The Office will close from 4pm, Thursday November 27 and re-open at 2pm on Thursday February 5, 2026.

Date Claimers

Public meetings are held at 2.30pm at the Merthyr Road Uniting Church Centre, 52 Merthyr Rd, New Farm, on the fourth Saturday each month from February to November.

Entry fee: \$5 for members; \$10 for non-members.

Other events include:

- 13 Nov:** Members’ Afternoon Tea
- 22 Nov:** Monthly Society Meeting
- 22 Nov:** Researching the Emigrant: Ship of Death with Royal Genealogical Society of Queensland. Book [HERE](#).
- 23 Nov:** Embroiders’ Guild Christmas Craft Market
- 25 Nov:** Enoggera Memorial Hall Centenary Event & Book Launch. 2 - 5pm. Call 3355 4714 for more info or visit the Enoggera & Districts Historical Society Inc Facebook Page
- 5 Dec:** Book Launch: “The Moreton Bay Settlement”. Book [HERE](#).
- 6 Dec:** Driven Exhibition Opening Day Celebration at State Library of Queensland

The first meeting of the new year will be February 28, 2026.

Empty Christmas Tree

This is an NFDHS tradition! You are invited again to bring gifts of non-perishable foods, toiletries and cash to our November meeting. These gifts will be passed on to Trinity Pantry, Fortitude Valley.

Trinity Pantry started out as a small help service for those who simply didn’t have enough to eat or who had met with some temporary crisis and no funds. Over thirty years later, it is now a food assistance service providing for over 1000 people each year.

We give out of our abundance to assist this service. Our tree will be empty of decorations, but will be full of your love-gifts.



Useful Links

Brisbane Living Heritage:
www.brisbanelivingheritage.org

State Library of Queensland:
www.slq.qld.gov.au

Royal Historical Society of Queensland:
www.queenslandhistory.org

Genealogical Society of Queensland Inc:
www.gsq.org.au

Meeting Photos



Acknowledgements

As always, thanks go to our wonderful meeting volunteers as well as:



Grace Grace MP
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VILLAGE VOICE
Your Trusted Voice



Brisbane City Council
Use of the Ron Muir
Meeting Room,
New Farm Library



President's Message



Nostalgia is a powerful thing. I recently moved house, an exhausting experience that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. As moving day grew closer, and my efforts to sort, cull and pack my belongings grew more frenetic, I noticed an interesting thing. I was quite willing to give away valuable household items I didn't want

anymore but I couldn't bring myself to throw away any of my now adult children's handmade cards, paintings or macaroni string art. Sometimes the objects that mean the most to us can't be bought or sold.

We were fortunate to have former senator and diplomat, and current author and society member, Brett Mason address our October meeting. Brett's passion for story telling was evident as he related how Australian coast watcher Reg Evans and Solomon Island scouts saved future U.S. President John F Kennedy from Japanese capture in August 1943. The incident became a pivotal moment in Australia-US relations. It was great to see the discussions afterwards as Brett signed and sold a number of his books.

New and existing members alike are invited to come along to our monthly members' afternoon tea on Thursday November 13 from 2:30pm. The venue is the Ron Muir Room next to the New Farm Library. To help with catering please RSVP to membership secretary Bruna Burello-Day at membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au.

Saturday November 22 will be our last meeting for the year and it promises to be a bumper one.

- Andrew Darbyshire will share his research on the public craze for rolling skating which has periodically gripped Brisbane – including New Farm – since the 1880s. Andrew will discuss the history of two local roller skate venues in his talk.

- Just in time for Christmas, society stalwart and history expert Gerard Benjamin will launch his new collection of tales, "New Farm: Another Fifty Stories" and sign copies afterwards.

- And we also invite you to bring along non perishable items or a donation for our annual Empty Christmas Giving appeal. All proceeds will be given to the community pantry and outreach services run by Holy Trinity Church in Fortitude Valley.

I am an apology for our last meeting as I have an existing commitment to run history tours in Fortitude Valley that day. The focus will be on the Carroll's Corner and Rollinson Buildings in Brunswick Street, which both celebrate their 100th birthday this year.

If you're quick, you can book a history tour and still get along to the November meeting. You can find more information and purchase tickets via eventbrite at *100 Years, 100 Stories: Valley History Tour Tickets*, Sat, November 22, 2025 at 10:00 AM.

Book tickets [HERE](#).

The committee will have one further meeting for 2025, at which we will be planning next year's events. Please email me at president@newfarmhistorical.org.au if there are any particular speakers or subjects you'd like us to focus on next year.

Robert Allen

Community News

A Tribute to Helen Gregory

It was sad news indeed to hear of the passing, on October 15, of historian Helen Gregory. She and husband Scott were regular attendees at our monthly meetings.

Helen had taught at the University of Queensland, worked in government as a consultant, and supported the study of history at many levels.

In our July 2025 newsletter, Rita Cleveland's article explained how Helen had just been awarded the prestigious John and Ruth Kerr Medal for Distinction in historiography, historical research, and writing Australian history.

At the Moreton Club nearby in Moray Street, Helen had served as President, and had been collating its history since this year the Club turned 101.

Helen was best known to listeners all over the state who tuned into ABC Local Radio of a Sunday morning to hear her speak about Queensland History. One morning the presenter perceptively referred to her as the 'Historian Laureate of Queensland'.

On the Sunday following her death, the ABC devoted a 30-minute Tribute to her, drawing on past episodes, such as the one where she explained why, as a young university student, she switched from medicine to history. (The program is [HERE](#) — go to the marker at 35:40 minutes).

Helen was always happy to answer any of my historical questions, and I will certainly miss her. Our deepest condolences go to Scott and family. Vale, Helen.

Contributor: Gerard Benjamin



Membership Matters

Yet again, attendance at our October meeting surpassed the magic 100 mark, with approximately 103 people counted. It was great to see many new faces, with 16 visitors signing in, making for a very gratifying result.

Let's see if we can get a record crowd for the final meeting of the year. It promises to be an enjoyable afternoon topped off with a special Christmas-themed afternoon tea and a few surprises.

Connections Galore: The Coastwatchers Connection

Sprightly nonagenarian and near-centenarian Society member, Penny Tait, had a special reason for attending the October meeting. Penny is the niece of Commander Eric Feldt, who led the Australian Coastwatchers and about whom a book was written by his great-niece, Dr Betty Lee, titled "Right Man, Right Place, Worst Time". This was the subject of a presentation by Dr Lee at our October 2022 meeting, and the report can be accessed in the **November 2022 newsletter**, while the Vimeo of the presentation can be seen [HERE](#). The Coastwatchers Plaque recently installed on the Newstead boardwalk is a direct result of the petition organised by another member, John Gates (see report in our **October 2023 newsletter** which also includes a link to a podcast of the Coastwatchers event of July 27, 2023 featuring the speech by Ambassador Caroline Kennedy). In the photo below, Penny is enjoying a catch-up with longtime friend, our very own historian, prolific author, and Life Member, Gerard Benjamin.

To continue the maritime theme, for almost 12 years Gerard and Society member Ron Altmann crewed for Penny's brother, retired Dr Ted Reye, at the WAGS (Wednesday Afternoon Go Sailing) race from Manly each week. Skipper Ted acquired quite a number of winner's shirts emblazoned with "WAGS Legend" and was considered the "senior statesman". He sailed until he was 97 and passed away a year later. *(Thanks to Gerard for extra input.)*



The Netherlands Connection

New member, Maud Holvast (*pictured top right*), Dutch citizen and permanent Australian resident, enjoyed a chat with presenter and fellow member, Brett Mason, about their Netherlands connection. Amongst numerous career highlights, the Hon Dr Brett Mason served a term as

Ambassador to the Netherlands from September 2015 to August 2018.

Maud moved from the Netherlands to Sydney about 12 years ago and has been living in New Farm and

Newstead over the past six years. Maud loves history and Brisbane and is keen to assist in our projects while she enjoys a one-year sabbatical from her employment with a French IT company. Maud intends to stay in Brisbane for as long as she can. Welcome, Maud!



*Contributor: Bruna Burello-Day
Membership Secretary*



Rita Cleveland, (*pictured left with Kris Sullivan at the Membership Table*), has recently returned to New Farm after a long absence, including several years

residing in the Netherlands. Rita remembered Brett from that time and caught up with him at the meeting.

The New Brew Crew

Thank you, Judi and Linda, for stepping in to help keep the coffee flowing. Also at the servery were Grant (our regular tea pourer) and George who also assisted while our regular long-term assistant, Barry, was having a well-deserved break from duties while recovering from wrist surgery. The assistance given by all the catering crew is much appreciated. Compliments to Ann and Jenny and other kitchen helpers who diligently prepare the food, including making the sandwiches fresh on site, and assembling other often home-made and donated treats that make our afternoon teas so special.



Membership Matters

Contributor: Bruna Burello-Day
Membership Secretary

Membership Renewal Process Update

We're pleased to advise that our membership currently stands at about 260, and we already have 21 paid-up members for 2026! We hope to see many more of you renew by the end of the year. You'll soon have the option to use our new online system to make sure your membership is current and you're ready to enjoy everything we have planned for 2026.

As I mentioned at the October meeting, the implementation of our new online membership management system is now underway. The platform we've chosen, TidyHQ, is proving to be a valuable tool for both members and administrators.

The Society has been trialling this Australian-based online platform as part of the Historical Organisation Project, supported by a Brisbane City Council grant. So far, TidyHQ has been successfully used for committee meetings, task allocation, and calendar bookings. The next major step is to begin using its membership renewal and payment modules for the 2026 membership year—a transition we hope members will find simple and convenient.

We're currently conducting final trials of the invoicing function in early November, with the aim of sending detailed instructions to members in the coming weeks. Initial renewal invoices for 2026 are expected to be distributed progressively by mid-November. We're doing our best to ensure the process is as straightforward as possible.

As many of you know, the Society is run entirely by volunteers—not just those you see at meetings, but also the many who work diligently behind the scenes. We hope members will support this new system, which will lighten the workload for volunteers and streamline renewals for everyone. Both the membership platform and payment gateway have been selected with cyber safety and data security in mind.

We also recognise that some members may prefer not to pay online. Alternative options—including cash or EFTPOS payments at meetings or at the Society Office, and payments via bank transfer—will continue to be available.

Please stay tuned for further updates as this work progresses. Once the renewal process is fully in place, we plan to introduce a similar automated system for new memberships in early 2026.



Norma King Koi Presenting at Dragon Tails 2025



We are pleased to share that long-time researcher and Society member, Norma King Koi, will be a presenter at the upcoming Dragon Tails 2025 Conference, being held in Brisbane over three days from Thursday 27 to Sunday 30 November 2025.

Norma brings a rich background in education and community service. After retiring in 2015 from teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to migrants and refugees at TAFE, her passion for teaching took her around the world, with stints in China, Kiribati, and Mongolia. She continues to give back to the local community by volunteering her ESL teaching skills for Communify at the New Farm Neighbourhood Centre.

Norma's paper, *The Siu Brothers' Australian Journeys*, addresses the theme of "Relationships" which highlights the role of relationships in shaping the lives of Chinese Australasians as well as the world around them. Norma will be presenting her detailed family history research in a session titled: "Family Occupations in Religion, Business & Herbalism from the 1880s". Her talk will trace the unique pathways of her grandfather and his two brothers who emigrated from Zhongshan, China and settled in Queensland, starting in the 1880s:

- The Missionary: SIU King Tim, a catechist in the Anglican Chinese Mission in Brisbane.
- The Businessman: SIU King Koi (Norma's grandfather), a store owner and wholesale agent.
- The Herbalist: SIU King Lim, a renowned traditional herbalist in Maryborough.

This is an opportunity to see Norma's work presented on a national stage and to learn more about the diverse lives of early Chinese immigrants in Queensland.

For conference details and registration, please visit [HERE](#).

Working Bee Snapshots



Community News

New Book about the History of New Farm and nearby



Collectors of books about New Farm history might like to make room on their shelves for the very latest volume. “New Farm: Another 50 Stories” by Gerard Benjamin is to be launched at our meeting on Saturday, November 22, 2025.

The book follows on from the success of its predecessor “50 Stories”, and features on its front cover a recent painting by David Hinchliffe, this time a wonderful view of Newstead House.

“Many of the chapters are based on the articles which have appeared in Village Voice over the years,” said Gerard, “but with extra photos, and in some cases, a ‘postscript’ when further details have come to hand.”

The new book includes more than 225 images, and it has a map with the relevant sites marked 1 to 50.

“The book could well be the basis for a personal walking tour around the New Farm peninsula,” said Gerard, “allowing you to tick off the sites as you visit them.”

The book represents a marvellous collaborative effort, since so many individuals have made a contribution, whether of photos, information or personal stories.

“That’s why the Acknowledgement page lists 102 names,” said Gerard. “Their input has been invaluable in putting together this new volume of local social history.”

At the Society meeting on Saturday, November 22, copies of “New Farm: Another 50 Stories” will be available for purchase and Gerard will be happy to sign copies.

If you happen to miss that meeting, you might like to visit Newstead House the following day, Sunday November 23, for a second “mini-launch”.

Since Newstead House is hosting a collection of David Hinchliffe’s paintings, David will be on hand from 10am, to conduct a “Paint In”. This means that in addition to viewing the historic house (dating from 1846), visitors may enjoy watching while the participating artists work their magic to bring their scenes of Newstead House to life.

The “mini-launch” of “New Farm: Another 50 Stories” will take place at 1pm. The new book will be available for sale, and Gerard will be delighted to sign copies.

Membership Matters

Musical Talent in our Midst

In Stewart Free’s absence, our October meeting’s pre-presentation musical entertainment was provided by Elaine Bergstrum and Fred McAveney. This performance marked the first time Elaine and Fred had played together before an audience, and they were certainly a hit! It’s nice to have something different at our meetings, even though we, of course, always enjoy Stewart’s keyboard preludes.



Thank you, Elaine and Fred, for agreeing to this gig at such short notice!

Elaine is the daughter of enthusiastic member, 94-year-old Bev Bergstrum who grew up in Villiers Street, New Farm, and has vivid memories of that time. Here’s Bev, no doubt recounting her vivid wartime memories, enjoying a chuckle with Brett along with Elaine and Robert.



Elaine plays in a number of bands, including *Brass Roots Live*, who will be performing at the final *Twilight Jazz at the Maritime Museum* for 2025 on Friday November 21, 5 - 7pm. The Queensland Maritime Museum is a volunteer-run fellow historical organisation affiliated with **Brisbane Living History**. Entry is free. See [Eventbrite](#) for further information.



As this is the last newsletter for 2025, we wish all NF&DHS members, friends and readers a joyful festive season and look forward to a happy and memorable 2026!