



February Meeting

Contributor: Emma Butterworth

Beneath Brisbane's bitumen: 80 years of tram history

There was an air of excitement as members filtered in for the first meeting of the year, soothed by the familiar tones of Stewart on the piano.

The meeting honoured Virginia Balmain who received an OAM in the Australia Day 2026 Honours List for her service to the community and youth. We also acknowledged Terry Beer who passed away earlier this year.

Murmurs of recognition rose from the members as we watched a silent film showcasing trams moving through New Farm and Teneriffe. It was wonderful to see that many of the buildings along the old tram lines still exist today. But how did Brisbane become a rail city?

To answer that question, Glen Dyer from the Brisbane Tramway Museum took us on a journey through 80 years of tram history. Before 1887, Brisbane residents had just three travel options: walking, horse and sulky, or an omnibus (a horse drawn carriage holding up to 20 people).



Brisbane's transition to a rail city encountered a few false starts. Steam trains were found to be inadequate for Ann Street hills and transport issues delayed the roll out. Finally in 1887, horse drawn tram services were introduced in Brisbane by the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company.

A fleet of 18 cars pulled by two horses carried residents along the main line from Woolloongabba Hotel to Brunswick Street at Wickham Terrace. Branch lines then filtered tram users down through New Farm or over to the Exhibition Building.

A 16-foot and 19-foot car had a carrying capacity of 28 and 55 respectively. Car depots and stables were built at Light Street, New Farm and at Logan Road, housing up to 100 horses.

The conductor had to be careful to hold his whip low, to be sure that he didn't flick the riders on the top level of the car. Passengers had to abide by a set of by-laws, banning profanities, smoking and playing musical instruments.



Brisbane was finally a rail city, following in the footsteps of other capital cities.

In 1897 the Brisbane Tramways Company commenced electric tram services with the electrification of the Victoria Bridge to Woolloongabba line, and the New Farm Wharf horse lines.

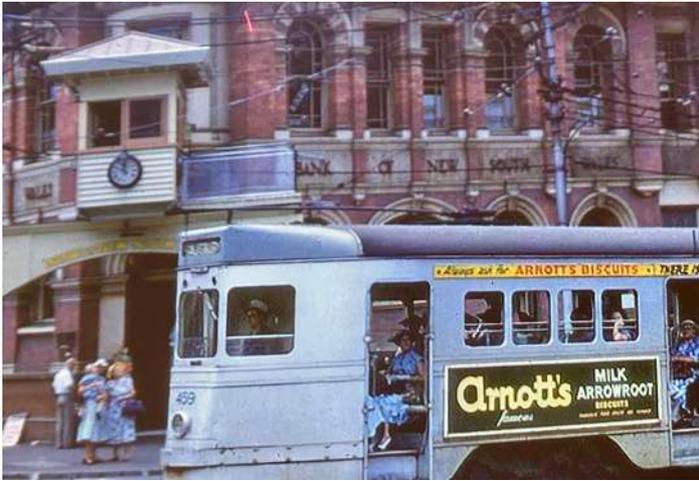
Conductors needed a way to signal so a coloured light system was employed to communicate where the tram was travelling to. There was also no speedometer in a tram, so conductors had to carefully guess their speed.

In 1912 a spark of defiance by Brisbane Tramway Company employees led to Australia's first general strike. Members of the Australian Tramway Employees Association in Brisbane attached their union badges to their watch chains in a public display of their union loyalty. Every one of those employees was swiftly stood down. This escalated into a general strike, involving 43 unions that shut down city transport and commerce. The Arbitration Commission eventually granted the rights for the union to wear their badge at work, but the employees involved in the strike were not allowed to be re-employed until 1924 when the Tramway System was taken over by the Brisbane City Council.

Just like the cars, scooters and bikes that grace our roads now, trams were also prone to accidents and collisions. Along with derailments and collisions with cars, pedestrians had to watch out for trams or else they risked being knocked down.



## February Meeting Cont.



You may wonder what California Combination, Jumping Jack and Coffin have to do with trams? Believe it or not these are all names for different types of trams, along with the Dreadnought.

Despite the occasional misadventure and odd naming conventions, the trams were loved by Brisbane residents. The trams connected the city and lives of workers and

families, delivering residents to workplaces and home at an affordable price. Over time, ridership began to decline. Private motor car ownership became the new status symbol. In 1969, after 85 years of operation, the last tram ran along the steel tracks. These steel tracks are still with us though, encased under the layers of bitumen that we drive over every day. Thankfully, the tram history is alive and well at the Brisbane Tramway Museum and we thank Glen Dyer for his informative talk - watch it online [HERE](#).



Contributor: Emma Butterworth

## Community News

### *Vodka in a Vegemite Jar: an Australian on a Soviet Antarctic Expedition*

A resident of Norman Park has written and self-published a memoir of his research trip to Antarctica in *Vodka in a Vegemite Jar*.

In 1983 Australian Glaciologist Trevor Hamley and Soviet Traverse Leader Vladimir Papitashvili (now retired and a US citizen living in Washington) embarked on a 3,000 kilometre return over-snow traverse from Mirny to Dome C, near the South Geomagnetic Pole.

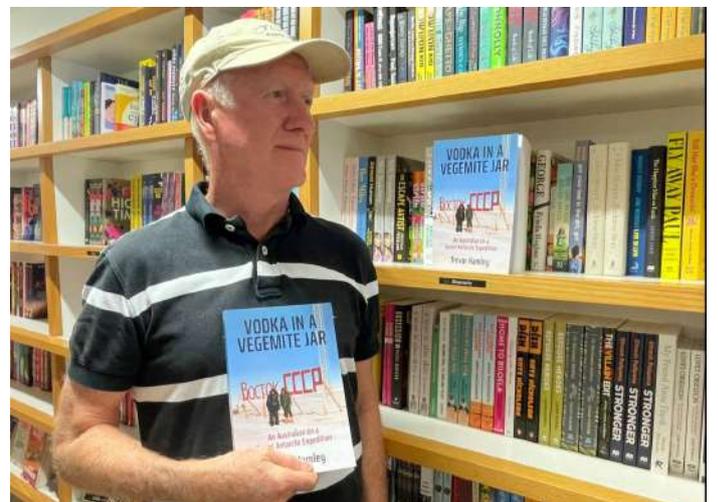
In his memoir, Hamley reveals how fate propelled him towards this unique experience, including a flying visit to Vostok – the coldest and most remote place on Earth.

At every turn, the Dome C traverse was beset by adversity yet achieved its scientific objectives. Mechanical and scientific equipment succumbed to harsh Antarctic conditions: where average temperatures of -45 degrees centigrade plunged at times to -60. An appendectomy was performed 1,000 kilometres from the safety of a permanent station, an unprecedented feat in the annals of Antarctic expeditions. A prime mover was abandoned after catching fire.

Each leg of the journey became an exhilarating episode. But the narrative does not merely recount logistics; it delves into the intricacies of challenging human experiences, Soviet culture, language and history, cross-

cultural friendship, glaciology and the profound issue of our time, climate change.

*Vodka in a Vegemite Jar* is available at the Library Shop at the State Library of Queensland for \$35 or can be purchased online directly from the author in paperback or ebook by visiting [trevorhamley.com](http://trevorhamley.com).



Trevor Hamley published his memoir in 2023

# Meeting Photos

The presentation can be viewed online [HERE!](#)



## Acknowledgements

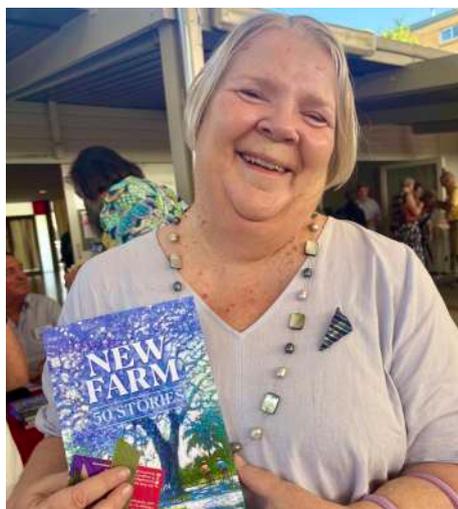
As always, thanks go to our wonderful meeting volunteers as well as:



Grace Grace MP  
Member for McConnell  
(07) 3145 9100  
Newsletter  
printing



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



## About the Society

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### Office Opening Hours:

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**Treasurer:** Denise Buckby

**Membership Secretary:** Bruna Burello-Day

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### Committee Members:

Immediate Past President Desley Garnett,  
Ben Pritchard, George Cowin, Judi Jabour and  
Linda Whatman.

### Membership Fee:

\$22 per calendar year or part thereof.

Add \$17 for posted newsletter.

Apply for or renew membership:

[www.newfarmhistorical.org.au/membership/](http://www.newfarmhistorical.org.au/membership/)

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### Meeting Photography:

Maria Shaw, with supplementary images by  
respective contributors and others.

## March Presentation

### Jan Power, her markets, and her legacy



New Farm and Districts Historical Society Inc

Jan Power: Her Markets and Her Legacy  
As told by her daughter Astrid



Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2:30 pm

Uniting Church Centre, 52 Merthyr Rd, New Farm

[www.newfarmhistorical.org.au](http://www.newfarmhistorical.org.au)  
Enquiries: 0437 280 104

Jan Power was a much-loved Brisbane identity on our radios and TV screens for many years. Jan's daughter Astrid will join us at our March meeting to talk about her mum, her legacy, and Jan Power's Farmers Markets, which have been a Saturday morning fixture at the New Farm Powerhouse for more than 25 years.

## April Presentation

### Coming up... ANZAC commemoration

Our April meeting falls on Anzac Day this year. In honour of this important commemorative occasion, we will focus on some stories of New Farm residents and their experiences and sacrifices during wartime.



YOU'RE INVITED TO A

### MEMBERS' AFTERNOON TEA

Thursday 19 March 2026

2:30pm

Ron Muir Room  
New Farm Library  
135 Sydney Street, New Farm

This is an opportunity to meet other members  
over a cuppa. I hope to meet you there!

Robert Allen  
President

RSVP to [membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au)  
Text or leave message: 0417 190 675

## President's Message



Welcome to the March newsletter. My thanks, as always, to our editor Kate and her contributors. I commend their articles to you.

We've lined up some great guest speakers for this year's meetings. Topics will include New Farm's historic links with the Brisbane River; how to start researching your family tree; our area's Indigenous history; the New Farm State School's 125 anniversary; and an exploration of our favourite local architecture. Some of our talks will be traditional presentations, while others will use the popular 'in conversation' format we've used with some of our guests in the past couple of years.

Many of us will remember the late Jan Power and probably all of us have shopped at her Farmers Markets at the New Farm Powerhouse. Jan started the markets more than 25 years ago as a way of connecting primary producers directly with their customers. Jan's daughter Astrid will be joining us at our 28 March meeting to discuss the markets and how her family are continuing to build on her mum's legacy.

New and existing members alike are invited to our Members Afternoon Tea on Thursday 19 March from 2:30pm.

The venue is the Ron Muir Room next to the New Farm Library in Sydney Street. Admission is free but please RSVP for catering purposes to Bruna at [membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:membership@newfarmhistorical.org.au).

The arrival of Autumn signals the resumption of our guided history walks. Gerard has already slotted in three different Saturday morning walks around New Farm over the next few months: 18 April, 16 May and 20 June. You can stay abreast of all our upcoming walks and book your tickets by following the society's Eventbrite page here:

### New Farm & Districts Historical Society Events - 1 Upcoming Activities and Tickets | Eventbrite

Glen Dyer's presentation on Brisbane's trams at our February meeting was very popular and brought back many memories, as I thought it would. A reminder that Austin records, edits and uploads our talks for you to watch online at your leisure. You can find 65 of them – including Glen's tram presentation – at [vimeo.com/showcase/8485721](https://vimeo.com/showcase/8485721).

Austin is also gradually adding talks to our new Youtube channel, which you can find here: [New Farm and Districts Historical Society Inc. - YouTube](#).

Until next month,

*Robert Allen*  
President NF&DHS

## Community News

### Talking History at Rendu and New Farm Park

Is History the big picture, or the minute details; the grand sweep, or the annals of the past?

In the case of around 70 residents of Rendu Towers in Newstead on Monday, 2 March, "History" was a talk and slideshow ("A Walk over Bowen Hills") which was enjoyed from the comfort of armchairs.

Presenter Gerard Benjamin received an enthusiastic welcome when attendees relished little known facts about the heights nearby.

Many had danced at Cloudland, some had attended Our Lady of Victories Church or enjoyed a show at Twelfth Night Theatre, but few had been regular walkers up the steep hills or knew that there was a Mary Poppins connection.

The funicular railway, which had carried fun-seekers up from Breakfast Creek Road to the ballroom, was

regarded as an amazing novelty.

The following day, Tuesday, 3 March, Gerard was again talking history, this time to a large group from the Maleny Garden Club whose "Mystery Bus Tour" had delivered them to New Farm Park.

During their morning tea in the Rotunda, Gerard offered the gardening enthusiasts an entree of local history as a prelude to the main course of "Roses" offered by Robert Wilson, Supervisor of Operations at Mt Coot-tha Gardens.

Many thanks to Di Smith of Rendu and Diana Begbie from Maleny for organising the respective presentations.

Watch a previous presentation on the walking tour [HERE](#).



*Quaint funicular rail cars conveyed fun-seekers from Breakfast Creek Road up Cowlishaw St to the back door of Cloudland*

## Membership Matters

Contributor: Bruna Burello-Day  
Membership Secretary

### An outstanding membership roll

As at the end of February, just two months into our NF&DHS membership year, I am thrilled to announce that our current membership stands at 215 (including four Life Members), thanks to 14 people being added at our public meeting on 28 February. Five of these were new members. This is a fantastic result for this time of the year. It was also a fantastic turnout for the first meeting of 2026 with 101 attendees counted, with many visitors joining our ranks. No wonder our Society has the reputation of being “the best historical society in Queensland”!

### Your membership matters more than ever

While we are very pleased with the numbers so far, there is room for many more. With our new membership platform TidyHQ now operational, we are pleased that many members have chosen to renew via the Stripe link in the invoices that were sent out in late December. There are still some 60 members from 2025 who have not yet renewed and whose inboxes or spam folders contain those all-important invoices with the payment link. So, we urge you to check for mail coming from [hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au). As we have so often stressed, your membership fees are crucial in sustaining the Society’s activities in a world where expenses are ever-increasing. The membership is a very reasonable \$22.00 per year, plus \$17 postage if you’d like a printed newsletter posted to you.

If you were a current member in 2025 and wish to renew but can’t find an invoice, please contact me via [hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au) and I will be happy to resend it. However, there is always the option to pay via other means:

- By Bank Transfer to New Farm & Districts Historical Society Inc, BSB 034065, Account Number 146217, Reference: MEMB plus your surname and first name.

Please advise payment by email to  
[hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au](mailto:hello@members.newfarmhistorical.org.au).

- In person, by cash or card at public meetings or at the Society’s Office on Thursday afternoons between 2:00pm and 4:00pm.

### New members are always welcome

Currently we are working on implementing the function for new membership applications in TidyHQ. In the meantime, new members are welcome to download the application form from our website [here](#) and apply as per the instructions therein. There is always the option of applying in person as per the renewal process outlined above. Why not attend our next public meeting to see what the fuss is about and apply at the membership desk where our wonderful volunteers will be very happy to assist you.

### Entry fees

In the interest of fairness to all, please note that entry fees are \$10 for non-members (that includes those who have not renewed for 2026 and/or do not wish to renew) and \$5 for current 2026 members which is a great incentive to be a current member. Other benefits include discounts for walking tours. Remember that the entry fee includes a generous afternoon tea and an opportunity to meet and mingle with a great bunch of people!

### Useful Links

#### Brisbane Living Heritage:

[www.brisbanelivingheritage.org](http://www.brisbanelivingheritage.org)

#### State Library of Queensland:

[www.slq.qld.gov.au](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au)

#### Royal Historical Society of Queensland:

[www.queenslandhistory.org](http://www.queenslandhistory.org)

#### Queensland Women’s Historical Association:

[www.miegunyah.org](http://www.miegunyah.org)

#### Genealogical Society of Queensland Inc:

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

### 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:

**12-14 Mar:** Side by Side with Sondheim at Brisbane Powerhouse. Book [HERE](#).

**14 Mar:** Walking Tour: New Farm Stories. Join us for a fun walk around a dozen locations in New Farm. Book [HERE](#).

**19 Mar:** Members’ Afternoon Tea

**28 Mar:** Monthly Society Meeting

## Community News

### Floodwater and Family Lines



*James Delahunty in his Spring Hill office, surrounded by a lifetime of pharmacy, family history, and Brisbane stories*

*Drawn from a Talking Stories life story session recorded for the New Farm & Districts Historical Society. Story produced by Sam Regi – find more and get in touch [HERE](#).*

For James Delahunty, Brisbane begins at the river's edge, in the years when floods reshaped neighbourhoods and people stepped in where they were needed.

His earliest memory of a flood dates back to childhood, watching the river push its way through Indooroopilly. The second arrived in 1974. He remembers standing chest-deep in the driveway at St. Lucia, trying to get between family homes as the water climbed the steps. He spent three days in the T&G pharmacy on Queen Street, where he was rostered across the long weekend. The wholesalers at West End opened early so he could keep the pharmacy supplied. He reversed an old panel van through rising water to collect stock, then packed 52 first-aid kits for the Red Cross before dawn. "I never slept for three days," he said. "It was a unique moment... opened my eyes to things outside the CBD."

Floods run through James's life much as they run through Brisbane, unpredictable, exhausting, formative. He remembers the 1955 floods as a boy, the 1974 disaster as a young pharmacist, the 2011 and 2022 events as a long-time Newstead resident watching the river reshape the suburbs. But water is only one current in a much longer family line.

James traces his story back to the 1860s, when his grandparents left Ireland during the famine. They arrived with no passports, only an "X" on their entry forms. The Grosvenor Hotel on George Street run by his grandfather was where James grew up. "I was pouring beers at 13 or 14," he said. "My mother would break up fights in the public bar. That's just how Brisbane was."

His father's story carried its own weight. Orphaned at fifteen, he boarded at St Joseph's Nudgee and later became a respected pharmacist and founding figure in the early Pharmacy Guild.

"He was a great speaker," James said. "He enjoyed helping people. Pharmacies were accessible... People walked in off the street and tested your knowledge."

That accessibility shaped James's life. He moved from the rhythms of the Grosvenor into the rhythms of pharmacy. Long hours, familiar faces, people turning up at odd moments in need of care. He built and ran multiple businesses, adapted to the changing rules of the city, and learned when to take risks and when to wait the tide out.

One of those risks came when he partnered with two fellow businessmen, "Nick the Greek and Giovanni the Sicilian," as he calls them, to buy the Empire House building. Interest rates were 28 per cent. "A lot of interest," he said with a grin.

"But I'm a great believer in having a go." When his ANZ bank manager later wandered across the road and gently suggested he put away the chequebook after exceeding his overdraft, James simply nodded. "Life comes in waves," he said. "When the wave comes, duck down, let it go over you, then get up again smiling."

James has seen Brisbane remake itself again and again: trams giving way to buses, timber pubs disappearing into towers, family-run shops replaced by plazas. But the sense of the place, he believes, endures.

This conversation with James was recorded in a Talking Stories session for the Society. A guided interview that gives people room to reflect on the paths they've taken and the places that shaped them. No preparation needed; you simply sit down and talk, and the story builds from there.

Listening back, you hear the way a life gathers meaning over time. In work, in family, in the small turns of chance that stay with us. Sessions like this remind us that everyone carries a story worth setting down, and that all it takes is the right moment, and someone willing to ask.



## Community News

### Local Golden Guitar nomination

New Farm State School 'Old Boy' Carmelo (Charlie) Cacciola has won two first placings at the prestigious Australian Songwriters Association (ASA) Music Awards and been nominated for a Golden Guitar.



Four-year-old Charlie leaving Sicily

Carmelo, also known as Charlie, was born in the town of Caltabiano in Sicily. At the age of four he migrated with his family to Brisbane in the early 1950s.

It took a while to adjust to the hustle and bustle of city life, especially as his parents wouldn't allow him to speak English at home to preserve his cultural heritage.

Charlie began school at NFSS where Miss Goforth was his first teacher. He spent most of his youth working in his parents' fruit shop at 720 Brunswick Street, New Farm, before and after school and on weekends.

The shop, located opposite the Astor Theatre (now New Farm Six Cinemas), was the drop-in place for many of the who's who around Brisbane in the 1960s: Channel Nine presenter Ron Cadee; Olympian Hughie Williams who jogged with Charlie around the New Farm Park roses; local politicians like Sam Ramsden for whom he interpreted for the local Italian community; Australian Middle Weight champion who introduced Charlie to the Varsity Boxing club located by the Brisbane River near the Botanical Garden; as well as quite a few notorious characters of the sixties.

After leaving Kelvin Grove High School in 1964, he worked in the fruit shop between jobs and left home to start his 31-year career in the CBA in 1967 in Stanthorpe. Despite being told by his football coach that he was too scrawny to play grade rugby league, Charlie made his 1st grade debut against Tenterfield NSW at just 18 years old.

## Community News

### A message of support for Diane Gage

A familiar face was missing from our members' welcome table last month. The effervescent Di Gage, a stalwart in the community, has sustained a "life changing" injury which has seen her hospitalised since early February.

Unfortunately, she will thus be indisposed for a long while yet. However, Di is adamant she will return.



Charlie Cacciola recently won two first placings at the ASA Music Awards

At age 12 Charlie began a lifetime of community work when Beattie Dawson of Annie Street, New Farm, 'recruited' students for the Mater Hospital door knock appeal. Dressing as Santa Claus for the kids, mentoring young people, football coaching, assisting and supporting vulnerable young people, and even contributing to the 2000 Commonwealth Boys' Education Inquiry was all part of Charlie's life.

The bank job took Charlie across Queensland even south to Sydney. He participated in the CBA's Queensland Efficiency Review during the 1980s Hawke/Keating Banking reforms in which he advocated for changes to employment practices and more part-time roles for women returning to work. In the 1970s he successfully advocated for policy changes in the bank enabling women to obtain loans in their own right – an achievement he considers as one of his most significant. All this and more are penned in his unpublished autobiographies *Before the Sun Sets* and *My Second Life*.

There's much more to Charlie's story – rugby league, author of children's books, country music singer, songwriting inspired by various events in his life, meeting famous people, songwriting awards .... you can read more on our website [HERE](#).

Charlie finishes his story: "I could never have imagined that as a young migrant boy of four who could not speak a word of English that I would have such an amazing journey." He says that it has been a journey enriched by his wife of 55 years Lynda, three sons, and seven grandchildren.

Contributor: Bruna Burello-Day  
Membership Secretary

Let's all wish Di well in her recovery in the hope that her radiant smile will once again greet us at our meetings as soon as she is well enough.

In the meantime, thank you to those who have stepped in to attend to the members' welcome table. And a big thank you to all the volunteers who do a fabulous job making our meetings run so smoothly.