

The Genealogical Society of Victoria Inc.

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COUNCIL REPORT 2013-2014

Report from Council to the Annual General Meeting of the Genealogical Society of Victoria concerning the activities of the Society during the financial year 2013-2014

Overview

Over the past year, the Society has continued to expand and improve its extensive collection and resources, for the benefit of members wishing to pursue their family history research beyond what might be available on the Internet and elsewhere.

Yet, as reported in past years, and despite the fact that we continue to attract new members, overall membership continues to decline. Surveys of past and present members have not shed much light on why.

As reported in our financial accounts for 2013/14, listed separately in the members' part of our web site, the Society made a further operating loss.

Faced with the prospect of further reductions in membership and increasing costs, Council applied for and received a grant from the Helen

Macpherson Smith Trust to engage an external consultant's advice on how to provide ongoing services to our members, in a sustainable way, consistent with our purposes. This review had just commenced at the end of June 2014, and the recommendations not yet evaluated.

The Society is extremely grateful to the many members who have made voluntary donations throughout the year. Contributors of donations of \$1000 or more are acknowledged on the Society's Major Donors board, except where anonymity has been requested.

Library

The library collection and services are continually improving in many areas. 126 CD/DVDs were added to the collection this year. After permission was granted by many Family History Societies, these are now accessible via the Library's networked hard drive which saves handing out discs: preventing damage to the disc and improving accessibility. Indexes and transcripts received include Lincolnshire Poor Law Union records, Sandgate dispensary casebook 1844-1958, Registers of the French Chapel Royal, London 1792-1846, 4 volume Magna Carta Ancestry, Parish register transcripts for Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Doncaster, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Peterborough, and Wiltshire and Monumental inscriptions for Hampshire, Herefordshire, Ayrshire and Peterborough.

The importance of GIN (Genealogical Index of Names) and LINX (Lists and indexes) this year is demonstrated with this resource being significantly expanded as we added an additional 401,802 entries. These collections allow our records to become more accessible when members log in from their home computer. In many cases including a digitized image, some of the larger collections indexed are: the City of Richmond rate ledgers from 1857-1881; Geelong hospital deaths; St Marks Fitzroy marriage register; Sale, Kyneton, Creswick, Echuca and Maryborough cemetery

headstones and the records of the 1850s Group of Victorian Colonists member's ancestry submissions.

Podcasts of talks are another great resource that members can access from home and here we have added an additional 37 digital recordings covering a wide range of topics such as Researching family history in New Zealand, Web collaboration tools for genealogists, Researching my Polish family history and People of Richmond.

Over 1400 traditional items such as books, manuscripts and pamphlets have been added to the library this year and continue to enrich our collection. From FamilySearch an additional 176 long term films have been added. These include many European films covering, Germany, Italy, Poland, Denmark, Austria, Russia and others.

As relevant genealogical Internet resources grow, we have continued to add these links in our catalogue with another 140 new links this year, plus a further 157 links which have been updated.

Members can keep up to date with the latest additions by checking the online catalogue, and should use our GIN and LINX databases to search for family names.

Education

The education team organised 43 interesting weekly Thursday talks. With the permission of Presenters, most of these have been recorded on podcast, and are available to members to look at from home. There is an explanation in the December 2013 edition of *Ancestor* on how to access these recordings. Most of the recordings have been converted to mp4 format, which is faster and compatible with most devices.

There were a number of seminars for members throughout the year. The talk by Graeme McKenzie, professional genealogist and clan historian, on Highland Scottish Ancestry was so popular that Graeme kindly repeated it. Other seminars included Poverty and Poor Law (UK), Minor Ports and Inter-Colonial Ports, Dirt Bricks & Mortar and Free Online Australian Databases at the GSV.

Courses available to members were Australian, Beginners, English, Irish, Scottish and Writing Family History.

Research

The research team spent well in excess of 500 hours on research for members and non-members during the year, answering 535 formal requests for information and advice along with many informal queries. Two thirds of these came from the free eResearch service with the most common questions about passenger records, Victorian Early Church Records and requests for civil registration references.

There was a substantial increase in the number of research requests from members who live more than 100km from Melbourne, making use of their free research of up to two hours per year.

In addition to a steady stream of paid consultations with our team of experts, there were a number of requests for transcriptions of old documents, especially those in latin and requests for images from original documents at the Public Records Office.

Membership and Marketing

A survey of members was conducted during the year to check general satisfaction with the GSV and obtain feedback on what more we can do. The phone survey of a large sample of members chosen at random revealed *inter alia* that:

- 92% of our members are very or mostly happy with the GSV, 6% are moderately happy and 2% unhappy or not sure.
- Currently only 15% of our members use the GSV library once a year or more.
- Of the feedback on what can be done better, 30% of members wished for improvements to the website and delivery of more research material through that medium.

Over the past twelve months the Society has been involved with sponsorship, exhibition stands and presenters at a variety of events, including seminars at Wodonga, West Gippsland, Yarrawonga and the Northern Territory. Displays and promotional material have been on show at a

number of public libraries such as Bayside, Yarra Ranges and Wyndham.

For those who wish to subscribe, there is a monthly email, or eMag, on events, news and other items of interest. A Bookshop Bulletin is also produced and sent out on a monthly basis. The Blog site has had a facelift, and has increased content and regularity.

A digitised version of GSV newsletters and journals *1948-2011 Ancestor*, *Victorian Genealogist* and *News Bulletin* has been released. This publication is fully text searchable.

Ancestor

The *Ancestor* editorial team comprises Barbara Beaumont, Sue Blackwood, Martin Playne, Jenny Redman, Margaret Vines and Bill Barlow. Jay Wickham took over from Rhain DiPilla part way through the year on creative layout. This team continues to work on improvements to *Ancestor*. This year they have included themes of Early English, and European, and taken on the added task of judging the GSV Annual Writing prize with the winning article by Kath McKay appearing in the December issue. Jay Wickham also successfully worked with one of our members who needed sight assisted features in a digital version of *Ancestor*.

Volunteers

A team of 150 volunteers give many hours of work which is essential for the functioning of the GSV. We are extremely grateful for this service which is freely and graciously given. The friendship and willingness of our volunteers to work as a team adds great value to the reputation of the Society.

The volunteers work in all areas of the GSV. A team of Library Research Assistants can be seen at the information desk each day in the library. The Library team assist in the preparation of material for the library and the Monday team keep the library material in order. The Research team answer free eResearch queries as well as requests for paid research from members and non-members. A team of volunteers work in the

Administration area of the Society. The Information Technology team look after the IT equipment; prepare programs to incorporate into our IT systems for better efficiency and the update of the GSV website. A team of volunteers work to produce *Ancestor* and a large team are active in projects.

The Education team not only plan the Thursday talks, classes and seminar programs but are also in attendance and often contribute as speakers at these events.

A number of volunteers also serve on Council and the associated committees.

The GSV offers grateful thanks to the eleven volunteers who have not been able to continue during the year and we have welcomed twelve new volunteers spread over the various areas while others have increased their volunteer time to work in another area of interest.

At the AGM in October 2013, a Medal of Meritorious Service was awarded to Brian Murphy and Certificates of Appreciation to Joan Ryan, Barbara Beaumont, Susan Blackwood, Lynda Collier, Susan Egan, Beryl Neate, Valerie Aristar, Barbara Cheetham, Dianne Beaumont, Elaine Holmes, Esther Lalor, Carole Kirby and Susan Wragg.

Projects

The Fawkner Indexing Project continues apace and our library of images and indexes of names has now grown quite large. We have progressed to the point where we have covered those areas where burials generally occurred prior to WW2. The release of the first edition of the indexed names and related images is planned for later this year.

Indexing of the Richmond Rate Books is complete to 1881, and has been added to the library and the members only web site. Indexing of the books continues beyond 1881 by GSV volunteers and by members of the Richmond & Burnley Historical Society. All the books to 1930 have been digitised.

During the year other data has been indexed including: a variety of cemetery memorials, mostly in the Library's vertical files; Midwives listed in the Victorian Government Gazettes from 1916-1935; about 24,000 patients in the Melbourne Hospital Ward Books; and some hundreds of BDM certificates. Most of this data will soon be made available to members.

Systems Upgrade

Council has sought to improve the functionality of the GSV website. Following extensive research it was seen that the GSV current Membership system was not going to be able to support the Society's needs into the future. This has required extensive additional effort of Volunteers to seek out a cost effective solution to replace the ageing Membership system which has served us well for many years. The selected system is currently being set-up and tested to meet the specific needs of the GSV, which includes being able to use a simpler method of becoming Members, or renewing Memberships online.

During this time the computer equipment in the Administration area has been upgraded to be ready for the changeover when all software testing is complete.

Costs associated with this upgrade have been drawn from Members' contributions to the 2013 Appeal.

Council

At the October 2013 Annual General Meeting of the Society there were three retiring councillors, Jane Chalmers, Dorothea Rowse and Dennis Jasper, all of whom were thanked for their contribution to Council over a number of years. Lorna Elms and Peter Johnston were elected as new councillors, and Tony Arthur, Past President, was elected as Vice-President.

During the year, councillors Royce Beale, Anne Burrows and Allen Evans retired from Council for personal reasons. Their respective contributions as councillors have been much appreciated.

Service Groups:

International Settlers Group (ISG)

The ISG has had a successful year celebrating its 30th Anniversary, and with an increasing membership. As a result of member donations it has concentrated on obtaining research guides, CDs, maps, LDS films, atlases and gazetteers relevant to non-British research for the library. Major items focussed on German, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian family history material, to name but a few. It also continued to share journals with European societies overseas and interstate.

The ISG Starter Kits for the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands continue to sell from the Group and the GSV bookshop.

The Group had a very successful day at the Bendigo Family Expo where it was kept busy answering non-British queries.

Topics at the quarterly meetings were:

Problem Solving Workshop – non British.

Celebrating 30 years of the ISG - Memories by Inaugural Members.

Restoring Family Links Speaker – Vesna Zvonar, Team Leader, The Australian Red Cross International Tracing Service.

Researching my Polish Family History, by Eva Hogan.

Talks by members of the ISG were also held at several local and country Societies and also at local libraries.

Scottish Ancestry Group

Through the 2013/14 year the Scottish Ancestry Group has remained strong, with a constant membership and good attendance at the Group's quarterly meetings.

This year the Group held talks on *Scottish Architecture in the Western District of Victoria*; *Immigration*; *Scottish Holdings at the Royal Historical Society*; and *Scottish Coal Miners*, which were all well attended.

The Committee of seven members meets monthly to decide on and organise the Scottish program, and our Newsletter *Thistle* is produced quarterly and mailed to members.

The Scottish Group is looking forward to another successful year with the syllabus for the 2014/15 already planned with four more excellent speakers already booked.

Irish Ancestry Group (IAG)

The Group continues to do well with membership staying steady. Some 450 copies of *Blarney* are printed each quarter, some of which go to reciprocal groups and honorary members. The feedback from *Blarney* readers is positive. The Group continues to supply suitable Irish resources to the GSV Library.

The committee and helpers group remain steady, with this year's volunteers available for the coming year, although campaigning for new blood in the ranks has not been as successful.

IAG has had excellent speakers at the quarterly meetings, including Dr Val Noone, Debra Vaughan, Delia Bradshaw and Dr Christina Henri who the Group sponsored from Tasmania to talk about her *Roses from the Heart* project.

Maureen Doyle and Beryl O'Gorman continue to travel to various city and country venues as speakers on Irish topics. They also ran a four session course in Irish History and Research in October.

IAG is currently involved in a project with Dr Val Noone to find and index all the published family histories of Irish to Victoria, a task which is proving larger than at first thought.

support from our members will continue for years to come.

Council extends its appreciation to all volunteers, who give of their time so graciously, without whom the Society could not function, and our thanks and recognition to our hard-working and dedicated members of staff.

On behalf of Council,

John Blackwood
President.

In Conclusion

The Society exists purely for the benefit of its members. Council would like to thank all members for their support, and hopes that the