

Historical Society of the Northern Territory

NEWSLETTER JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2026

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Email: hsnt@iinet.net.au Newsletter Editor: Bev Phelts

HSNT Committee – President: Derek Pugh; Vice President: Bev Phelts; Secretary: Libby Siebert; Treasurer: Clare Corfield. others - Brian Reid, Clayton Fredericksen, Matthew James, Jane Munday, Vida Goodyach & Peter Siebert

Sunday 1 February - HSNT annual Second hand book sale - 2pm to 4pm

1/16 Charlton Court, Woolner

The Historical Society is having a book sale. New books but old stock slashed to \$5 each, 2nd hand books \$1 and DVD's 50c.

We have a great range of books on Territory history, archeology, anthropology, general interest to suit everyone. We are taking **CASH ONLY** so raid your piggy banks. The Genealogical Society of the NT will also be selling their books at the sale.

Come along to History House and enjoy our airconditioning and a cuppa .

2nd hand books \$1



New books
but old stock \$5

**Starts Saturday 7 February until 29 March - Museum and Art Gallery Theatrette –
Flix in the Wet**

A series of films shown at MAGNT. The first film is titled "Urchin" and commences at 7pm.

See link for the film program [Flix in the Wet Show Times](#)

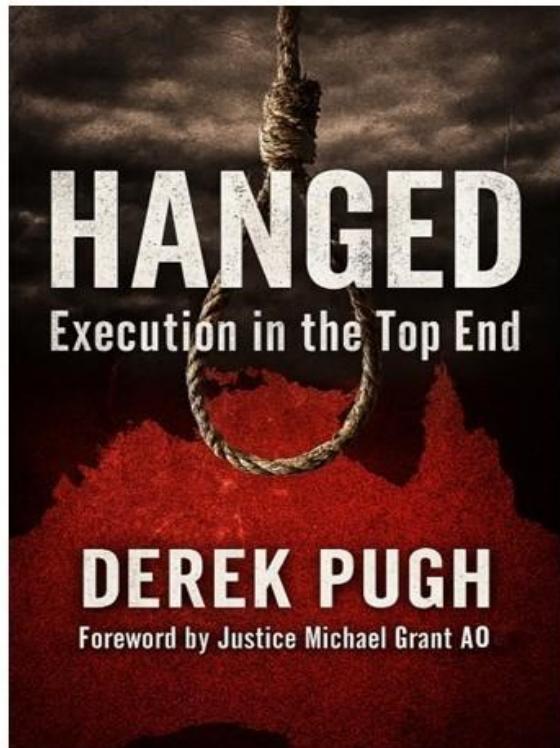
Tuesday 24 February-Museum and Art Gallery-Curator Talk:Purple Poppy Day–11am-noon

Commemorate the National Day for War Animals - Purple Poppy Day. The National Day for War Animals - learn about the military mascots that served in the Northern Territory, including Gunner the dog, Blackout the goat, Min the donkey, Joan the hen and Hughie the pig, with MAGNT Assistant Curator of Territory History, Paige Taylor.

Saturday 28 February-Museum and Art Gallery-Curator Talk: The Mystery of HMAS Moruya-11am-noon

A "ghost ship" that survived the Bombing of Darwin.

Large numbers of civilian vessels were pressed into service during World War 2 with many used extensively in the NT. One of these was HMAS Moruya, a "ghost ship" that survived the Bombing of Darwin. Learning more about it's history has required patience and detective work. MAGNT Curator of Territory History, Jared Archibald, will expose the tangled story of how the Moruya was used by the Navy in Darwin Harbour and what happened to it post war.



Book Launch

11 March 2026, 5-6:30pm

Supreme Court, Darwin

To be launched by

Chief Justice Michael Grant AO

Ten men were hanged for murder in the Northern Territory of Australia. Of these, six were Aboriginal, two were Chinese, and two were Czech 'New Australians'. Three were executed on country as a warning to their respective clans and the remaining seven are buried in unmarked and forgotten graves within the walls of Darwin's Fannie Bay Gaol.

For the first time, Derek Pugh brings their extraordinary stories together in a detailed historical account of all the judicial executions in Australia's Northern Territory up to the last two, in 1952. Pugh explores not only the lives of the ten condemned men, but also their victims, and the Territorians who judged, witnessed, and remembered them.

RRP \$39.95

Saturday 21 March -Museum and Art Gallery- Exhibition in Focus | Unruly Days: Territory life 1911 – 1921 – 11am-noon

Join MAGNT Curator of Territory History, Jared Archibald, for an in-depth tour of the exhibition.

The Northern Territory has always been a land of contrast and extremes. From its monsoonal Top End to its arid interior, larger than life characters, bountiful resources and highly diverse society – life in the Territory has always been different to the norm. Utilising a wide range of objects, photographs and stories, *Unruly Days: Territory life 1911-1921* explores what it was like to live in the Territory in the first decade of Commonwealth rule whilst the world was in turmoil. Join MAGNT Curator of Territory History, Jared Archibald, for an in-depth tour of the exhibition.

Sunday 29 March at 3pm - Historical Society's AGM

The Historical Society will be holding its AGM at History House. Please come along and support us. Drinks and nibbles will follow the AGM. If you are interested in being on our committee, a nomination form along with the agenda are at the end of this newsletter. The AGM minutes of 23 March 2025 are attached

History House is located at 1/16 Charlton Court, Woolner. Charlton St is off Bishop Street (look for pink Middis Lighting). Turn into Charlton Street then first right into Charlton Court. History House is at the bottom of the court.

Membership for 2026 (January to December 2026) is now due

The fees are –

Concession membership student/pensioner: \$40.00

Individual membership: \$70.00

Family membership: two adults at one address: \$90.00

Institutional membership \$90.00

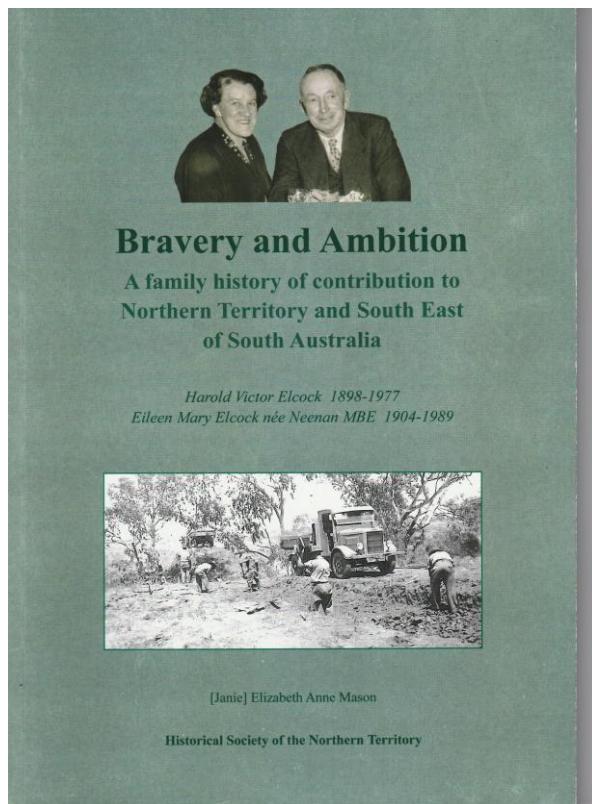
You can pay on line via credit card on our website www.historicalsocietynt.org.au/membership

Alternatively, you can pay via cheque, money order or bank transfer

Bank transfer details: Historical Society of the NT BSB:015 896 (ANZ) Account No: 228391976

Remember to include your “SURNAME & MEMBERSHIP” against your deposit and email your details to hsnt@iinet.net.au if your personal details have changed.

New Book Published by the Historical Society



Eileen Neenan, a nursing sister arrived in the Territory in 1939 and worked at the Darwin Hospital. She was awarded with the Member of the Order of the British Empire for her brave conduct during the Japanese bombing raids on Darwin.

Her future husband, Harold Elcock came to the Territory in 1936 and worked as an engineer for the Commonwealth Government. Both Eileen and Harold were active in the post War rebuilding of Darwin.

In 1951, they moved to South Australia and took up farming and established a construction company.

The book can be purchased for \$20 plus postage \$10 at this link

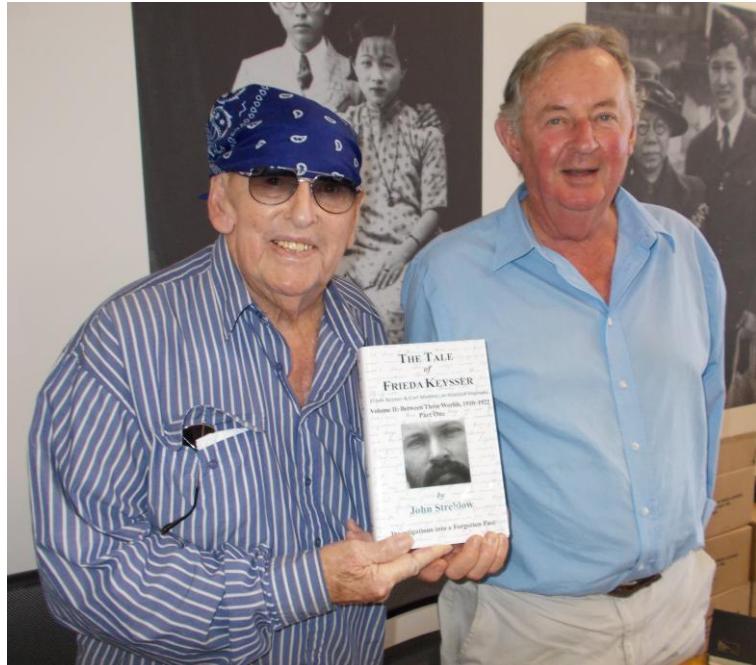
Historical Society of the Northern Territory

Jose Petrick

A short film clip on centenarian Jose's life in Central Australia has been produced by TrickleUp Media. The clip is free to view.

<http://www.the100project.com> www.facebook.com/the100project
<http://www.youtube.com/@the100project>

Vale Ted Egan AO 1932-2025 – State Memorial



Ted launching John Strehlow's book in 2020

Folk music legend, author and former Northern Territory Administrator passed away at the age of 93 at his Alice Springs home on 4 December 2025.

A State Memorial will be held on Tuesday 17 February at the Alice Springs Convention Centre

Members of the public are welcome to attend the State Memorial to pay their respects.

The Last Men Hanged in Darwin – where are they now? By Derek Pugh

In 1952, two young men, orphaned Czechoslovakian child refugees, who had come out to Australia alone after World War Two were homesick and wanted to go home. To get there, they decided to travel from Darwin to Melbourne to board a ship and return to Europe. Jaroslav Koci, 20, and Jan Novotny, 19 figured the best way to get there was to steal a car and drive, using dud cheques along the way to pay for the fuel. The car they chose was a 1950 Plymouth taxi, owned and operated by George Grantham, 42, a popular member of the small Top End community.

On 17 April 1952, the pair hired Grantham to drive along the Stuart Highway. At 11-Mile, Novotny, in the back seat, asked him to stop, and then calmly shot him in the head. They then dumped the body and drove south.

They were arrested three days later near Duchess, a small community east of Mount Isa, unaware there was a B.O.L.O.F (“Be On The Look Out For”) issued to the police, even in Queensland. They confessed to their crime and were brought back to Darwin, tried by Justice Kriewaldt, found guilty, and hanged.

They died at exactly 8 A.M. on 8 August 1952, and while the official observation party retired to the office to drink the £2.8.0 bottle of whiskey provided to calm the nerves, the priest read the last rites, and the coroner prepared his report. They were then buried immediately. But where?

Perhaps as is fitting for murderers, Koci and Novotny and the other executed felons in the goal’s grounds have no marked graves, and their locations are officially lost – or are they? On the wall of the infirmary are two plaques containing the initials and the date of execution of the two Czechs. Their origin, and who put them there, has long been forgotten, but perhaps the plaques are grave markers and Leo Izod, who was 18 years old at the time, says he remembers graves there. It was worth finding out.

I asked MAGNT for permission to survey 12 square metres of the ground immediately beneath the plaques using a ground penetrating radar (GPR) owned and operated by Wayne Parslow. Wayne’s contribution to finding and counting graves at the 1830’s settlement of Fort Victoria in Port Essington was well known to me, and I was thrilled when he quickly came on board.

We met at the gaol early on a steamy wet-season morning with museum curator Jared Archibald. Wayne wheeled his machine into position and walked back and forward across the ground. In a remarkably simple and quick process, it was obvious that two rectangular ‘disturbances’ had been carved into the coffee rock beneath our feet - two graves. An undisturbed wall of rock between them confirmed they are separated, rather than in one big hole, and interestingly the grave on the right, under the initials J.K., is shallower than the other. Maybe the diggers ran out of time, or their equipment failed.



Wayne Parslow using the Ground Penetrating Radar to identify grave shaped cuttings into the bedrock below, in December 2025.

The GPR did not show any human remains of course, and the digital images do not prove that the graves belong to the two Czechs but, we agreed, it is most likely that this patch of ground in Fannie Bay Gaol is indeed their final resting place.

I, at least, am convinced that they are there.

Derek Pugh's new book, *Hanged: Execution in the Top End*, will be launched on 11 March 2026

HIGHLIGHTS OF PAST EVENTS

7TH Oration - guest speaker was Dr Wendy Garden on “Capturing time past and present: the McArthur River Mine in visual representation”



Peter & Libby Siebert, Wendy Garden, Merry Cooper & Allan Mitchell



Marnie Cameron, Elaine Hellyer & Penny Baird



Mark Ames, Libby Siebert & Merry Cooper



Allan Mitchell, Jared Archibald & Ian Anderson



Albert Foreman & Jeremy Hemphill



Kevin Coonan with John & Sunny from the RSL



Ian Anderson & Derek Pugh



Peter Siebert & Wendy Garden



The audience



Jeremy Hemphill & Mark Ames

Christmas Soiree at History House held on Sunday 30 November



Margie Roe, Earl James, Penny Baird & Wendy James



Wendy Garden & Heather Boulden



Fiona Scott, Heather Boulden, Elaine Hellyer, Wendy James, Julie Mastin, Penny Baird & Marnie Cameron



Carole Miller & Garth



Jared Archibald, Ian Anderson & John Krumbeck



Jane Munday & Christine Tarbett-Buckley



Allan Mitchell & Penny Baird



Kevin Coonan, Merry Cooper, Mark Ames, Peter Siebert, Jane Munday & Christine Tarbett-Buckley



Bev Phelts & Wendy James



Fiona Scott & Heather Boulden



Maureen Reiter & Janie Mason



Elaine Hellyer, Marnie Cameron & Brian Devlin

Tree planted in honour of Austin Asche by Friends of the Darwin Botanical Gardens.

On 28 November, FODBG members gathered and planted a tree in honour of their late patron, Austin Asche. Drinks and nibbles followed at Eva's in the 1897 Wesleyan Methodist Church



Ben Lui, Gardens Director,
Harry and Wendy Asche,
Kuala Murphy, FODBG President



Wendy Asche, Ben Lui, Gardens Director & Kuala Murphy, FODBG President



Peter Pusterla, Peter Siebert & Peter Knibbs



Libby Siebert & Brian Reid



Wendy Asche, Kuala Murphy & Peter Knibbs

Photos courtesy Libby Siebert

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
3pm Sunday 29 March 2026**

Welcome and thanks

Present

Apologies

- 1. Minutes of Annual General Meeting 23 March 2025**
- 2. Business arising from minutes of AGM**
- 3. President's Report**
- 4. Treasurer's Report**
- 5. Election of Office Bearers**
 - **President**
 - **Vice President**
 - **Honorary Secretary**
 - **Honorary Treasurer**
 - **Council Members [up to 8]**
- 6. Other business**

Nomination Form
Historical Society NT, PO Box 40544, Casuarina NT 0811

I,
[please print]

hereby accept the nomination for the position of

.....
[please print] on the Council of HSNT 2026/2027

Signed :

Nominated by :

[please sign & print]

Seconded by :

[please sign & print]

Date :