



**PARRAMATTA FEMALE FACTORY FRIENDS INC.
NEWSLETTER – ISSUE NO: 65 September - October 2025**



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The Parramatta Female Factory - Augustus Earle 1826 - nla.pic-an 2818460 National Library of Australia (NLA).

Patrons: Meg Keneally & Thomas Michael Keneally AO
President, Research Centre Coordinator: Gay Hendriksen; **Vice President, Technical Officer/Tour Coordinator:** Kevin Dodds; **Public Officer/Treasurer:** Sharyn Byrne;
General Secretary: Jane Clain, **Committee:** **Site Watch:** Judith Dunn OAM; **Newsletter Editor/Publicity Officer:** Ronda Gaffey; **Membership Secretary:** Lorraine Henshaw;
Minutes Secretary/Guest Speaker Program Coordinator: Lyn Watkins

Next Bi-monthly Members' Meeting: 12pm
Friday 17th October Venue: PFFF Rooms, 5 Fleet Street, North Parramatta.
 Parking available at Parramatta Leagues Club Car Park.
 Parramatta Light Rail from Parramatta Square to Ngara - short walk to site.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Factory Friends,



Welcome to our September edition of the Newsletter as the beautiful spring blossoms begin to make themselves known. The new season also heralds a new Committee for the Factory Friends. Our new Committee and primary roles include: Sharyn Byrnes - Treasurer, Public Officer and Creative Initiatives Coordinator, Jane Clain - General Secretary, Kevin Dodds - Vice President, Tour Coordinator and Technical Officer, Judith Dunn OAM - Site Watch, Ronda Gaffey - Publicity Officer and Newsletter Editor, Lorraine Henshaw - Membership Secretary, Lyn Watkins - Minute Secretary and Guest Speaker Program Coordinator and myself - President and Research Coordinator. We are all bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to make the most of the coming year for the Parramatta Female Factory. There is also a new general email contact@parramattafemalefactoryfriends.com.au and Committee members will have new emails to deal with their specific areas of responsibility - more information will be coming soon.

Advocacy has continued with ongoing engagement with key stakeholders. As yet there is still no resolution for the O'Connell Street and Albert Street development proposal. The Friends continue to monitor this.

There is a new development application (DA) from the Parramatta Leagues Club (PLC). A previous DA had 17 storeys but the new application has eight storeys and includes an upgraded club, open space, retention of historic trees and community spaces. PLC consulted with the Friends to understand our perspective and the importance of World Heritage. This application has the hallmark of what a reasonable corporate citizen can do.



In a different form of advocacy recently, Andrew Charlton MP, Federal Member for Parramatta, invited the Friends to take a colleague, the then acting Prime Minister, the Hon. Richard Marles MP (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence), around the Factory for a familiarization visit. His approach was very positive concerning the value of the site. Let's hope this turns into positive action for the future of the Parramatta Female Factory.

Our next big event is the iconic Riot Day, *'It's a Riot'*, on the 25th of October. We will celebrate with a Colonial picnic, so bring a rug and good cheer and enjoy our signature open day. There are tours, Nora and Sarah's Curiosity Shop and Matron Gordon's Tearoom offerings as well as spinning demonstrations and a clay-making workshop. This year the Annual Thomas Keneally Lecture will be given by the well-known historian and archaeologist, Dr. Siobhan Lavelle. Our three Writers in Residence will also be sharing their creative writings. The result will be three great additions to the Research Centre and public access to these talented individuals' work.

All the best and I look forward to seeing you soon,

Gay Hendriksen,
President PFFF

Photograph: Above left - Gary Carter, Jane Clain, Andrew Charlton MP, Gay Hendriksen, the Hon. Richard Marles MP and Kevin Dodds.

NOTICEBOARD

A warm welcome to new PFFF members: *Peta Beattie, Leanne Allbutt, Kylie Nowalinski, Angela Gibson, Kathryn Mulligan, Cindy Louisa Chawner, Vanessa Cassin and Dr. Annette Carruthers.*

DATES for your diary

- **Friday 17th October:** Bi-monthly meeting at 12pm, followed by afternoon tea at 1pm. Guest Speaker at 1.30pm is author and historian **Sue Castrique** - Topic: Gentlemen and Convicts on Cockatoo Island.
- **Saturday 25th October is Riot Day - It's A Riot, at the Factory!** 9am-3pm
Note that for the Annual Thomas Keneally Lecture at 11am with Dr. Siobhan Lavelle OAM, (renowned historian and archaeologist) and for the **Tours at 1.30pm,** Eventbrite bookings are essential - bookings open 1st October - <https://bit.ly/RiotDay2025>
- **Saturday 1st November is Parramatta Foundation Day** - this year it will be held at the Hambledon Cottage Reserve with house tours of Hambledon Cottage, Experiment Farm Cottage and Elizabeth Farm, plus talks and lots of family friendly activities, market and information stalls. More details soon!

HISTORY CORNER - Governor Brisbane - Astronomer and Man of Science

Ronda Gaffey

Following an illustrious military career, on the recommendation of the Duke of Wellington, Major-General Sir Thomas Brisbane was appointed Governor of NSW in 1821.

Brisbane was beset with all manner of administrative challenges in the Colony but his one personal pursuit was astronomy. It is reckoned that he may well have sought an appointment to NSW to further his astronomy interests.

During his tenure, he was perceived as spending more time on his 'star gazing' than on his administrative tasks - to counter such a view, Brisbane wrote:

In place of passing my time in the Observatory or shooting Parrots, I am seldom employed in either. And Altho' I rise oftener at 5 o'clock in the Morning, then after, I cannot get thro' the various arduous duties of my Government...

From his observatory in Parramatta, Brisbane recorded his significant observation of the stars, following on the work of Abbé Louis de La Caille in South Africa (1751-1754).

When Brisbane departed the Colony in December 1825, he left his astronomical instruments and 349 volumes of his scientific library to the Colony.

Years later, he was awarded the Royal Astronomical Society gold medal, he became President of the Edinburgh Astronomical Society and then in 1832, was elected President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The Observatory at Parramatta was in use until 1855, the domain of the Government astronomer. Today only the meridian stones remain¹. An Obelisk marking the location of the Observatory, was erected c1880.



de La Caille studied the Southern Hemisphere sky at the Cape of Good Hope.

References:

Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Australian Dictionary of Biography: <https://adb.anu.edu.au>

Encyclopedia Australian Science and Innovation; online.

Mary Burk (Burt), a housemaid from London, married Thomas Johnstone (per *Asia* 1825) at St. Philips Church, Sydney, in October, 1826. There are no further details found for her.

Mary Dale, a nurse and needlewoman from Harding, Wales, appears in the records in 1827, for *absenting from her service without leave* - her punishment was to spend one month in 3rd Class at the Factory. At the time of the 1828 Census, Mary was assigned to R. Jones of Sydney. Mary received her Certificate of Freedom in 1832⁸ on which she is noted as *wife of John Dale*. Little else is known about her.

Among the *Midas* women who just could not stay out of trouble were **Ann White** and **Mary Weaver**. Within two years of their arrival, they were charged with multiple offences - their good intent expressed in the letter to the Ladies of Newgate, was put aside. They reacted to the 'assignment system' and were punished time and time again.

Ann White, a housemaid from Sussex, had been sentenced for *swindling* - she was 41 years of age when she was transported and had left a husband and four children in England. Her early Colonial life was rather eventful with repeated stays at the Factory. In May 1828, Ann was charged with being *Drunk and Absenting* herself from service and sent to 3rd Class for six months⁹, then 10 days later, she was placed on punishment by Matron Gordon for *Disobedience of Orders*, and spent 24 hours in the cells¹⁰.

In April 1829, Ann was charged at the General Sessions, Sydney for being *drunk and absenting herself from service* - she was to spend three months in 3rd Class at the Factory. In August she was charged with *receiving stolen property* - a serious crime, and sentenced to a further three months in 3rd Class⁹.

Ann appears again in the records in November 1831 when she was before the Sydney Bench - the charge is unknown but she was sentenced to three months in 3rd Class again. In September 1833, Ann appeared before the Picton Magistrate's Court and was returned to the Factory *from the Campbelltown Cells to the Government*¹⁰. In 1836, ten years after her arrival, Ann, now aged 49, had the remainder of her sentence remitted and was discharged. She died in 1855 aged 68 and is buried in Camperdown Cemetery, Newtown¹¹.

Mary Weaver, a dairy maid, butter and cheese maker from Staffordshire, was returned to the Factory in March 1826 having been *given up by her master*. In October 1827, Mary was charged at the General Sessions Sydney for *absenting from service* - the punishment was two months in 2nd Class at the Factory. Two offences are noted for Mary in 1828 - in March, she was charged with *disobeying orders* and sent to the cells for 24 hours. Undeterred, in July, Mary was charged with *improper conduct* and sentenced to two months in 3rd Class¹².

Over a period of five years, Mary was *returned to the Government* on numerous occasions¹³. The last entry found for her is April 1831, when she was charged with being *Absent without leave and drunk in a disorderly house* - for this, she spent six weeks in 3rd Class at the Factory.

There is a marriage for Mary Weaver and Joseph Wyer in November, 1829 at St. James Church, Sydney¹⁴. Her death, to date, cannot be confirmed however there are three possibilities - Mary Weaver (d.1854), Mary A. Wyer (d.1847) and Mary M. Wyer (d.1848) - all are registered in the Parish of St. James¹⁵.

For the three remaining *Midas* women, Sophia Davis, Ann Montague and Ann Unwin, life was to be the most turbulent and tragic - their stories are yet to be told*.

*These stories will feature in the next edition of the PFFF Newsletter. Ed.

References

⁸Convict Records online - Mary Dale; ⁹Sydney Gaol Description & Entrance Books, 1818-1930, entries for Ann White; ¹⁰Col.Sec Papers Reel 2278 dated 01.01.1828-30.06.1828, SRNSW; ¹¹BDM - death Ann White, ancestry online; ¹²Sydney Gaol Description & Entrance Books 1818-1930 - entries for Mary Weaver; ¹³ibid; ¹⁴BDM - entry for marriage Mary Weaver and Josep Wyer; ¹⁵BDM - entries for death of Mary Weaver/Mary A. Wyer/Mary M. Wyer - ancestry.com online; Research notes - *the Midas Women* - R.Gaffey, J.Gaffey.



The Research Centre continues to be a hive of activity. The volunteers, as well as being hosts in the Centre, respond to the many research inquiries and drop in visitors.



The general ordering of the book resources is completed. This was a huge task. Thanks to Pip Palmer, Philippa Crosbie, Leslie Richman, Ange Hardy and Christine Hardy, for their unerring dedication. The next big project is ordering our digital resources, which are quite substantial.

One exciting project is partnering with Parramatta Clay Arts to research the use of clay in the Factory. One part of this is reproducing pipes used by the Factory women. Research Centre volunteers are also busy discovering the potters who would have made these and other items in Parramatta which the women and staff would have used. One exciting note was finding a female potter, but more on that in a following issue.

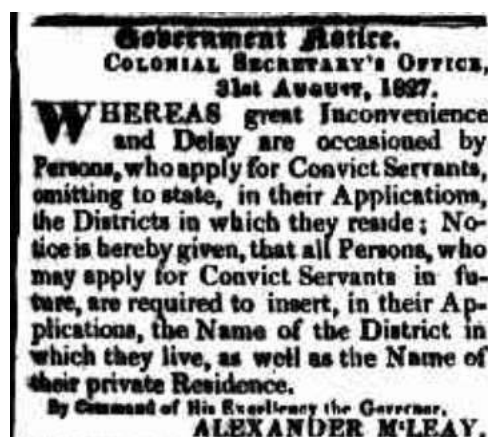
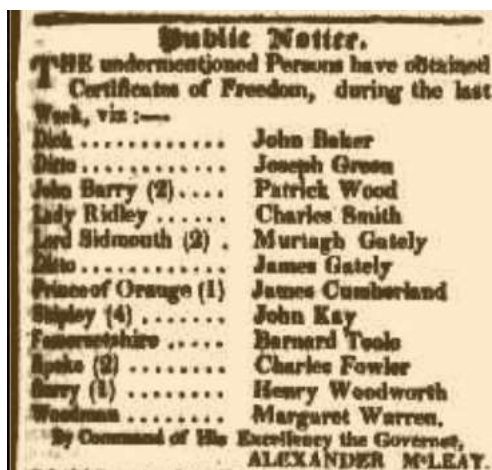
We are also very excited to add a 19th century Parramatta wooden washtub to our Research Centre Object Collection. There is also a very special Prayer Book that belonged to a Female Factory woman, coming soon.



Our Factory women’s list continues to grow, so please keep those names and stories coming in. You can give directly to us at the Research Centre or email it to: gayhendriksen@parramattafemalefactoryfriends.com.au and put ‘Research Centre’ in the subject field.

A day in the life of...

In September 1827 there was the usual issuing of tickets of Freedom and a note for those requiring convict servants:



Good read and online history adventures

Highly recommended reading is: *Two Years in New South Wales; A Series of Letters comprising Sketches of the Actual State of Society in that Colony of its Peculiar advantages to Emigrants, of its topography, natural History &c &c* 1827 Facsimile Vol.2, by Peter Miller Cunningham. This book gives an eyewitness account of the Colony in 1827 and provides some insights into the world inhabited by the Female Factory women.

This month's research link is to a database of all the Factory women who went through Darlinghurst Goal and Sydney Gaol and provides two ways to discover if a Factory woman spent time in the Parramatta Female Factory. <https://mhns.wa.gov.au/indexes/female-factory/sentenced-to-parramatta-female-factory/>

Of course you can find digital resources like this at the Friends Rooms including the PFFF Research Centre and Babette Smith Collection – where we can help you help yourself in your history and family history discovery!

Musings on a Mystery: Augustus Earle's 1826 Painting of the Parramatta Female Factory:
Gary J. Carter

This article examines Augustus Earle's 1826 painting of the Parramatta Female Factory, with specific attention to his vantage point, the line of sight, and background structures. It considers whether the tower in the distance, based on visual evidence and alignment from Factory Street, may represent Governor Brisbane's Observatory or a granary.



Figure 1: Earle's 1826 painting showing the Parramatta Female Factory, with the tower structure noted in the background.

History has a way of not defining everything to a researcher. Hypotheses are often the only way to find an answer that approaches the truth. Quite often the Occam's Razor philosophy of looking for the obvious, pans out. I was asked to look at sight lines for the famous Augustus Earle 1826 painting of the Parramatta Female Factory. There was some conjecture as to where Earle placed his easel for this work, so I went about working on lines of sight from the artist's perspective.

The angle and line of sight suggest the painting was made from high ground near the junction of Factory Street and modern-day Dunlop Street, from the top of the sandstone quarry (off Fleet Street today). This orientation looks southwest across the Parramatta River toward the Factory and beyond to a structure potentially aligned with the location of Governor Brisbane's Observatory, built within the Domain precinct, c1822. Speculation was that the structure may have been for grain storage. This came about because the speculative sight lines do cross areas where these structures may have been warranted. However, these types of building in that period were of a

square design with pitched rooves. The one object on the sight lines that did consist of two separate domes, was Governor Brisbane's Observatory.

Given the elevated vantage point and the 45-degree Factory orientation in the painting, it is plausible that the distant domed structure is the Observatory, not a granary. This interpretation aligns with Governor Brisbane's known interest in astronomy and the 1820s construction of the Observatory within visual range. Although the two-domed Observatory was low and likely not fully visible, artistic licence and its scientific symbolism may have justified its appearance in Earle's scene.

Conclusion

The structure in Earle's 1826 painting is likely a stylised depiction of Brisbane's Observatory, included for symbolic and compositional reasons, rather than strict geographic accuracy. This interpretation not only re-positions the Observatory in Colonial iconography, but also reflects Earle's critical eye toward power, knowledge and control in the early Colony. Augustus Earle did interact with Governor Parramatta in 1825 and he may have included it in his painting as a tribute.

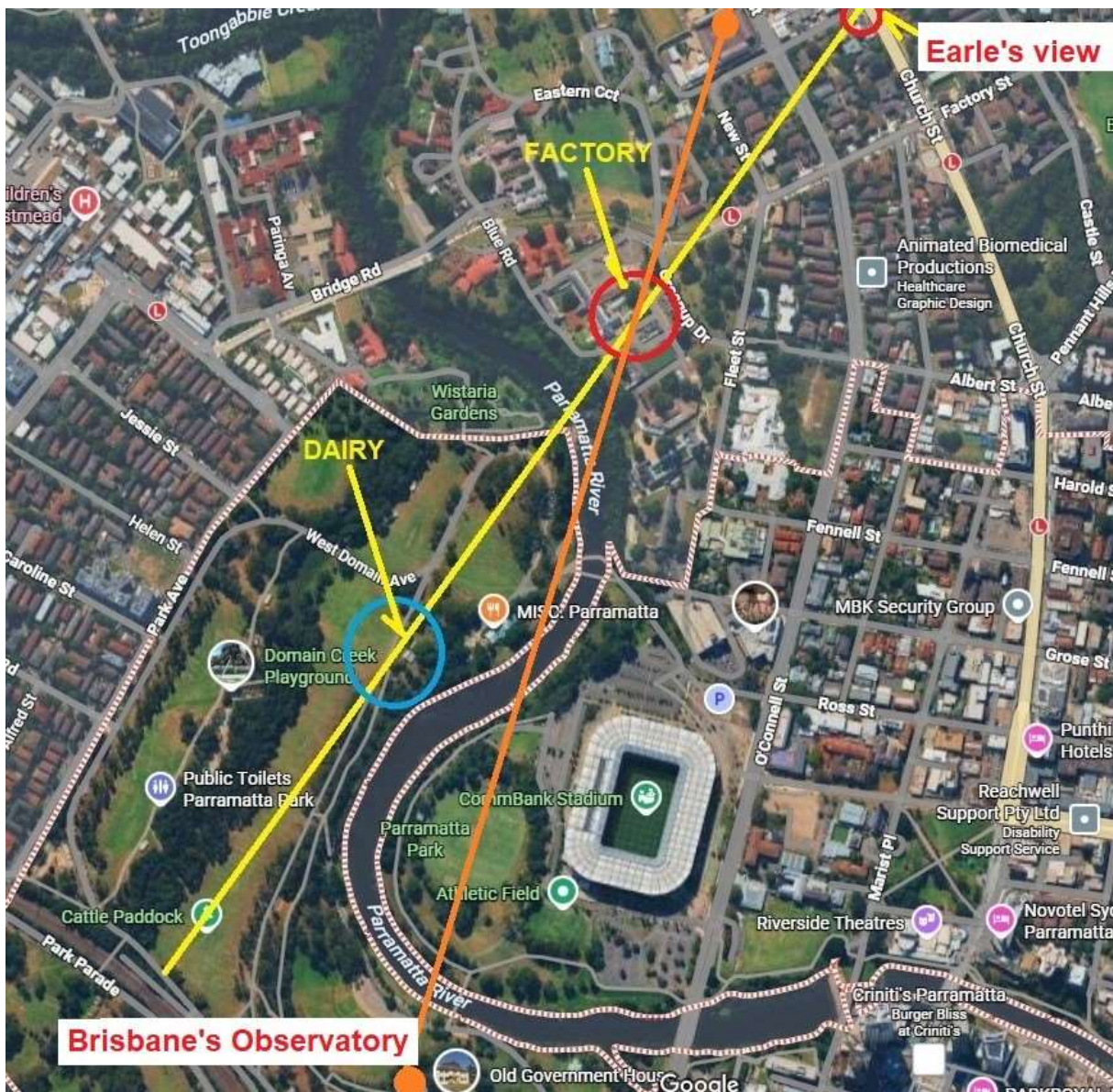


Figure 2: Satellite view of Parramatta with overlay of Earle's likely line of sight from Factory Street to the Female Factory and the Dairy Precinct.

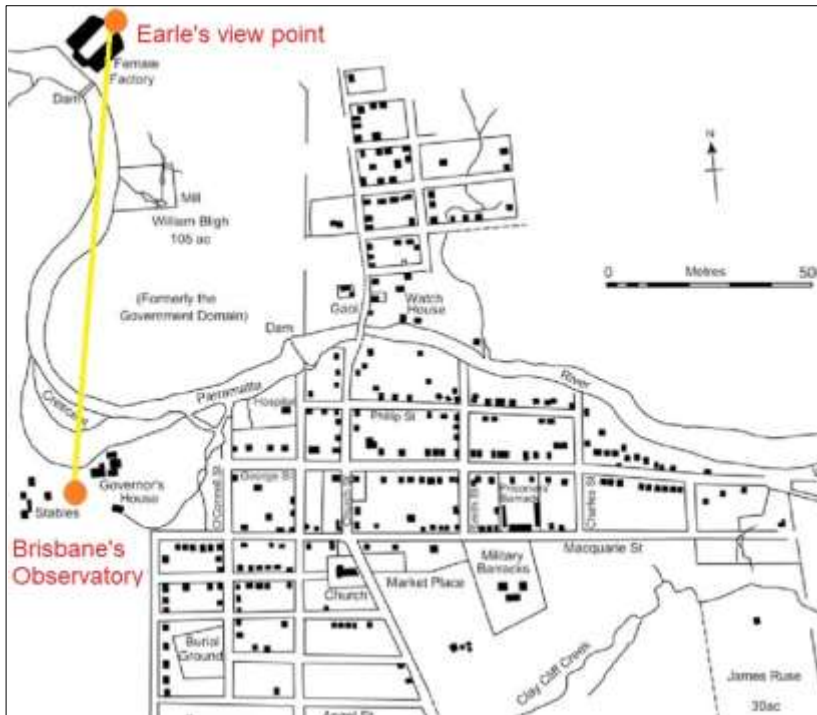


Figure 3: A stylised depiction of Earle's view to Brisbane's Observatory

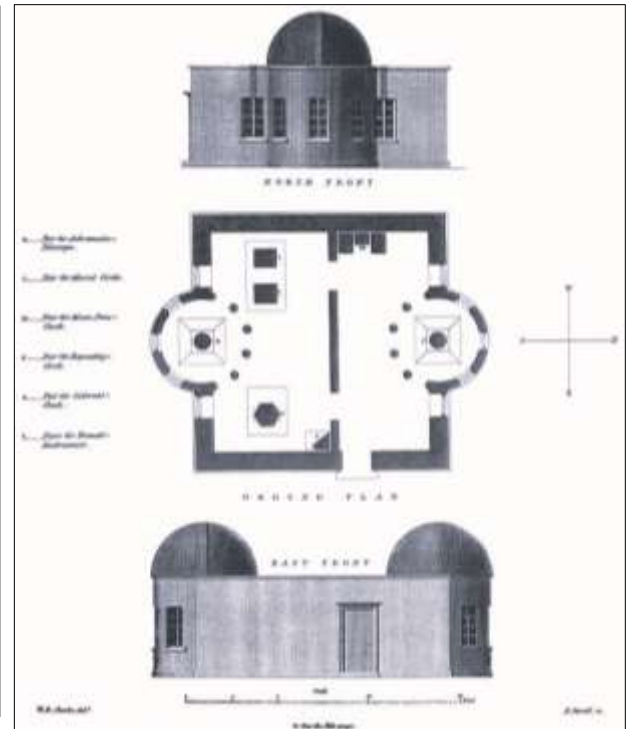


Figure 4: Plans for Brisbane's Observatory c1822

NSW & ACT ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES

- ANNUAL CONFERENCE September 25 - 'They Came From Where?'

The NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies Annual Conference was hosted this year by the Illawarra Family History Group Inc. at Fairy Meadow.

The Conference was so well organised and the venue was an excellent choice. The weekend was jam-packed with many enthralling presentations and offered a great opportunity to network, share stories and promote 'the Friends'. * Congratulations to all involved - it was an absolute success.

Lorraine Henshaw, Lyn Watkins and Ronda Gaffey



Photograph: Conference dinner - courtesy Mel Woodford. Screenshots - selection of Conference Presentations 2025 - R. Gaffey

*Lyn and Lorraine tell me they have lined up a couple of speakers from the Conference for PFFF in 2026 - excellent networking! Ed.



PFFF joined Parramatta Heritage Partners (PHP) for a memorable spring day at Old Government House. The Regency Fair was a well-attended event and once again, PFFF had the opportunity to network and promote Parramatta heritage with our colleagues (and we always welcome the chance to dress-up!).

Ronda Gaffey



STOP PRESS! CONGRATULATIONS to Judith Dunn OAM



Judith, a well-known and highly regarded social historian, speaker and tour guide, was recently awarded the inaugural IATG* 2025 Tour Guide of the Year. Judith has been recognised for her 'outstanding contribution to tour guiding, history and heritage in Australia'. Congratulations Judith - this Award is so well deserved!

*ITAG - the Institute of Australian Tour Guides promotes the recruitment and training of guides, establishment of industrial benchmarks and representation for tour guides. Judith is a Foundation Member of PFFF, a past Vice President and currently serves on the PFFF Committee. She is also a tour guide at the Factory. Judith is a long time member and Fellow of the Parramatta & District Historical Society.

REGULAR & BESPOKE SITE TOURS - BY APPOINTMENT. CONTACT: TOUR COORDINATOR: contact@parramattafemalefactoryfriends.com.au
 MONTHLY COMMITTEE MEETINGS 11AM. BI-MONTHLY MEMBER'S MEETING 12PM FOLLOWED BY AFTERNOON TEA. GUEST SPEAKER 1:30PM.
 PFFF RESEARCH CENTRE IS OPEN 9AM - 2PM every Friday. Research assistance by appointment.

2025	PFFF MEETINGS - EVENTS &	ANNIVERSARIES
October	<p>Friday 17th Bi-monthly Members' Meeting Guest Speaker: Sue Castrique - Gentlemen and Convicts on Cockatoo Island.</p> <p>Sat 25th RIOT DAY - 198th Anniversary Event The Annual Thomas Keneally Lecture - Guest Speaker: Dr.Siobhan Lavelle OAM - Archaeology of Parramatta</p>	<p>Riots: 27.10.1827; 11.10.36</p>
November	<p>Newsletter 21st Committee Meeting Friday 14th - Workshop - Library Thing with Kevin Dodds Saturday 22nd November - Members' Morning Tea</p>	<p>Parramatta Foundation Day Festival - Hambledon Cottage Reserve - PFFF stall Saturday 1st November Riot: 29.11.1831</p>
December	<p>Friday 12th Bi-monthly Members' Meeting PFFF Christmas Party</p>	