

Writing History

Presentation by Patrick Ferry at the SEHA meeting held Sunday February 10, 2019
at the Berwick Pakenham Historical Society.

(Talk summarised by Heather Arnold)

Patrick is the author of

- *A journey of faith: the stained glass windows of St Paul's Bentleigh, Holy Trinity Parish* (2015, with Mario Mirabile)
- *The history of the stained glass windows of Holy Rosary Catholic Church Kensington* (2015 with Max Vodola and Bronwyn Hughes)
- *St Brendan's, Flemington: architecture & art Flemington 125th anniversary 2016* (2016 with Cynthia Bartolo)
- *Together as one: the St. Patrick's Pakenham WWI honour board* (2016)
- *St Patrick's, Pakenham: from the wilds of the Australian bush to outer-suburban Melbourne, c. 1840 to 2016* (2016)
- *A century after the guns fell silent: remembering the Pakenham district's World War one diggers, 1914-1918* (2018) You can read an on-line version here <https://www.pakenhamww1.com>

Background

Patrick has a history background and worked at the National Archives in Canberra and is now the Archivist at the Bureau of Meteorology in Melbourne which includes paper records dating back to convict times right through to 'born digital' records. Patrick has an interest in Ecclesiastical architecture and a connection to the Parishes which is how he started his writing career and then one book led to another. In his 'spare time' Patrick and his lovely wife are the parents of five lovely children.

St Patrick's, Pakenham

When Patrick took on the job of writing the history of St Patrick's Parish in Pakenham there was some concern that as he wasn't 'a local' it would be an issue, however that was an advantage in some ways as he had no preconceived ideas. Patrick started his research by researching official sources such as the Church notices column in the *Pakenham Gazette* to create a skeleton of the Church history, which he then used to add 'meat to' This skeleton was useful as he had a context for events; it gave him some credibility and it helped when he was interviewing people as he could ask specific questions and they could focus their answers. Patrick also sought to put the Parish into the context of the wider community; thus, it is both a church history and a local history.

A century after the guns fell silent

These are the sources Patrick used for the *A century after the guns fell silent* book

- The AIF project <https://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/index.html>
- National Archives www.naa.gov.au
- Australian War Memorial www.awm.gov.au
- Trove <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

These sources give official/ public information but as he wanted to add personal information about the soldier he also used other sources – Ancestry database was especially useful in tracking down descendants; he rang people with the same

surname in the phone book and the local paper, the *Pakenham Gazette* was also useful in finding connections with local families.

What has worked

- Link back to the wider social history of the community
- If you tell people you are writing about the history of their family, they are usually very interested and are more than willing to help.
- Remember you are writing a story not just a list of events of some life - so focus on a part of someone's life.
- What do you say or not say. Sometimes you discover something the family don't know. Patrick decided that it was not his role or the role of the Berwick Pakenham Historical Society, under whose imprimatur the book was published, 'to let the skeletons out of the cupboard'. If the family raised the issue and were happy with the information being made public, then that was fine, otherwise it was left out.
- Family stories may not have any basis in fact – Patrick's solution was to tactfully tell both stories.

Next project

World War 2 Soldiers of the Pakenham area. The remaining WW2 soldiers are getting on, so he needs to get on with interviewing them. Other issues in researching WW2 soldiers is that the records are not digitised; there may be too much information as the children of WW2 soldiers are still alive and there is a lot more published information.

Publishing

The early works were commissioned works so they took care of the publishing, but he used the same printer for the St Patricks' Parish book and the Great War book. The books were designed using 'iBooks Author' an Apple product

<https://www.apple.com/au/ibooks-author/>

The Great War book was published using a Veteran Affairs Centenary of Armistice Grant. This didn't allow them to sell any copies so if you are using grant money be aware of the limitations/ terms of the grant.