



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER & AUTUMN 2026

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Book online at <https://www.rahs.org.au/rahs-events/> or call us on (02) 9247 8001

Date	Time	Event	Presenter	Member	Friend
FEBRUARY					
Wed 4	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Day Lecture – <i>What You Didn't Know About the Letters of Rachel Henning</i>	Angela Phippen	Free	Free
MARCH					
Wed 4	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Day Lecture – <i>The Last Tour: Paul and Eslanda Robeson's Visit to Australia and New Zealand</i>	Ann Curthoys	Free	Free
Fri 6	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Special Lecture – <i>Rock and Tempest: Surviving Cyclone Tracy and its Aftermath</i>	Patricia Collins	Free	Free
Wed 18	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Special Lecture – <i>A Darkened Heart: The life and times of Frank Arkell</i>	Erik Eklund	Free	Free
APRIL					
Wed 1	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Day Lecture – <i>Saffron Incorporated: The first King of the Cross and fifty years of sex, murder, music and mayhem</i>	Stuart Coupe	Free	Free
Tue 14	6pm – 8pm	RAHS Annual General Meeting			
Thu 16	1pm – 2pm	RAHS Special Lecture – <i>Battle of the Banks: Ben Chifley's Boldest Move</i>	Bob Crawshaw	Free	Free
Wed 29	11am – 1pm	RAHS-WEA Workshop – <i>What lies beneath: A deeper dig into the archives</i>	Christine Yeats	\$35	\$39
18 April to 18 May		National Trust's Australian Heritage Festival (NSW)			

Unless otherwise stated, all events are hybrid and streamed from History House, 133 Macquarie St, Sydney.
Joint RAHS-WEA events must be booked through WEA Sydney at <https://www.weasydney.com.au>



**RAHS Day Lecture – *What You Didn't Know About the Letters of Rachel Henning*
Wednesday, 4 February 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free**

In 1951–1952, *The Bulletin* published a series of letters written by Rachel Henning covering her experiences coming to and living in Australia, between 1853–1882. They became a publishing phenomenon with multiple subsequent standalone editions. However, only half of her original letters were ever published and those that were had been edited. In this illustrated lecture, Angela Phippen will explain what was edited and why. The lecture is based on Angela's research as a State Library of NSW Visiting Fellow in 2025.

About the speaker: Angela Phippen has been a professional librarian for over 40 years having worked at the Society of Australian Genealogists and as Local Studies Librarian with City of Ryde Libraries. She has diverse research interests including NSW divorce records; war memorials and honour boards; and the nineteenth-century stained glass artist, pastoralist and surveyor, George Hedgeland – Rachel Henning's brother-in-law.

**RAHS Day Lecture – *The Last Tour: Paul and Eslanda Robeson's Visit to Australia and New Zealand*
Wednesday, 4 March 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free**

Paul Robeson was once the most famous African American in the world. Not only was he a renowned singer and actor, he was also a former professional athlete, lawyer and civil rights activist. Paul and his wife, Eslanda – a notable civil rights activist, author, United Nations journalist and anthropologist – were finally able to tour Australia and New Zealand in 1960, after the US government denied Paul a passport until 1958. The Robeson's tour encompassed concerts, talks to unionists, fans, women's organisations, communists, and peace activists. It involved active engagement with Indigenous peoples and their struggles in both countries. Through the Robeson's eyes we see life on the Far Left, the emergence of new forms of Aboriginal and Māori protest, and the reception and influence of African American entertainers in Australia and New Zealand. Based on extensive new documentary and oral history research, *The Last Tour* explores why the Robesons' trip was such a success and how it exerted a profound influence both at the time and over future generations.

About the speaker: Ann Curthoys AM, FASSA, FAHA has written extensively about race, class and gender in Australian history, with an interest in both its British imperial contexts and its American, especially African American, connections. Influenced by her mother's involvement in pro-Aboriginal political activism and her own participation in the 1965 Australian Freedom Ride, Curthoys established the Women's Studies Program at the Australian National University, taught History at the University of Technology Sydney, and later returned to ANU where she became the Manning Clark Chair of History. She is now Professor Emerita at ANU, an honorary professor at the University of Sydney, and is a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

**RAHS Special Lecture – *Rock and Tempest: Surviving Cyclone Tracy and its Aftermath*
Friday, 6 March 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free**

When Cyclone Tracy flattened Darwin on Christmas Day 1974, it was the worst natural disaster Australians had ever experienced. Stationed in the city with the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, Patricia Collins not only lived through Tracy but was part of the massive clean-up effort. The experience of living through a terrifying natural disaster is chillingly told as she recounts her own dark hours that Christmas, along with those of her contemporaries. In the days after Tracy, the majority of Darwin's population was evacuated interstate as the Navy's Task Force arrived to clean up and rebuild. In this talk, Patricia Collins will share first-person accounts of the terror and uncertainty as well as courage and survival. It is a fascinating and moving story.

About the speaker: Patricia Collins was a member of the WRANS, the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, based at HMAS *Coonawarra* in Darwin when Cyclone Tracy destroyed the city on Christmas Eve 1974. Patricia wasn't evacuated but stayed and worked on clean-up duties for months. Patricia wrote the book *Rock and Tempest: Surviving Cyclone Tracy and its Aftermath* in her 60s, to record the achievements of her fellow Navy women and men at that time. *Rock and Tempest*, published by Hachette Australia in 2024, won the Anzac Memorial Trustees Military History Prize in the State Library of NSW History Awards in 2025.

RAHS Special Lecture – *A Darkened Heart: The life and times of Frank Arkell*
Wednesday, 18 March 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free

In the 1970s and 1980s, Frank Arkell dominated Wollongong politics. His irrepressible energy and relentless advocacy for the city won him widespread popularity. But there was growing disquiet over his private life which many said involved anonymous assignations with young men and even boys. In 1997 these rumours culminated in police charges of sexual abuse. Before legal proceedings could be concluded, he was brutally murdered by a young man on 26 June 1998.

Erik Eklund's work on Arkell tries to make sense of these extremes of civic engagement and private perversion all cut short by a dramatic fall from grace and then a shocking murder.

About the speaker: Erik Eklund is an award-winning historian and Adjunct Professor of History at the Australian National University. He was Professor of History and Head of School at Monash University from 2008 to 2013 and the Keith Cameron Visiting Professor in Australian History at University College Dublin, Ireland, from 2015 to 2016. He is currently working as the Deputy Director of Research at the Sea Power Centre in Canberra.

RAHS Day Lecture – *Saffron Incorporated: The first King of the Cross and fifty years of murder and mayhem*
Wednesday, 1 April 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free

Wherever you find entertainers performing in neon-lit pubs and clubs, chances are you will find a wannabe gangster or two hanging around. Selling sex and drugs has always been a way to make a fast buck. Abe Saffron figured all this out very quickly. He was a chancer who kickstarted his criminal career SP bookmaking and receiving stolen goods. While he earned himself a quid or two, he wanted much more, and he was ruthless enough to seize any moment to get it ... no matter what he had to do.

In *Saffron Incorporated*, music industry legend Stuart Coupe shows how showbusiness and the underworld are intrinsically linked, and how the original King of the Cross lay the foundations for more than fifty years of intrigue, murder and mayhem.

About the speaker: Stuart Coupe is an author, music commentator, independent artist publicist and radio broadcaster who has been involved with music all his life. Amongst the books he has written, edited or collaborated on are *The New Music* (1980), *The New Rock 'n' Roll* (1983), *The Promoters* (2003), *Gudinski* (2015), *Tex* (2017), *Roadies* (2018) and *Paul Kelly, the Man, the Music and the Life In Between* (2021), which was shortlisted for Biography Book of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards.

RAHS Special Lecture – *Battle of the Banks: Ben Chifley's Boldest Move*
Thursday, 16 April 2026, 1 pm – 2 pm at History House (hybrid). Cost: Free

Bob Crawshaw will explore the dramatic story of Prime Minister Ben Chifley's 1947 attempt to nationalise Australia's banking system. It sparked a furious clash between government, the High Court, press barons and business interests, revealing how ideology, law, media and communications and financial power collided in a defining moment for Australian democracy. This episode shaped Australia's economic future and is among the most contested political struggles in our history.

About the speaker: Bob Crawshaw is a writer, former soldier, diplomat, and award-winning marketer with a sharp eye for history and politics. He specialises in Australia's postwar history, blending rigorous research with engaging narrative.

RAHS-WEA Workshop – *What lies beneath: A deeper dig into the archives*

Wednesday, 29 April 2026, 11 am – 1 pm at History House (hybrid)

Cost: RAHS Members \$35 | Non-Members \$39

Bookings through WEA (02) 9264 2781 or online at <https://www.weasydney.com.au/course/RAHS26.01>

This course will offer practical guidance on how to unlock the rich resources of the NSW State Archives Collection, now part of Museums of History NSW using a selection of case studies. This session will highlight strategies for navigating and interpreting archival records, focusing on stories of individuals, communities, and institutions. Participants will learn how to combine traditional archival research with online tools and resources such as Ancestry and Find my Past, gaining insights into records ranging from immigration and convict history to land, education, and family life. The presentation will empower researchers to confidently trace and contextualise the past.

About the speaker: Christine Yeats is an archivist and historical researcher with 35 years' experience, including senior roles at Museums of History NSW (formerly State Records NSW). She managed access to the State's archives, outreach, and public programs until her retirement in 2012. A past President of both the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, she is also a member of the Australian Dictionary of Biography's Revision Sub-Committee. In 2023, she was awarded a RAHS Fellowship for her outstanding contributions to Australian history.

Updated 1 December 2025