A Life of Leisure:
Kicking Back in Belmont

BELMONT · CITY OF OPPORTUNITY
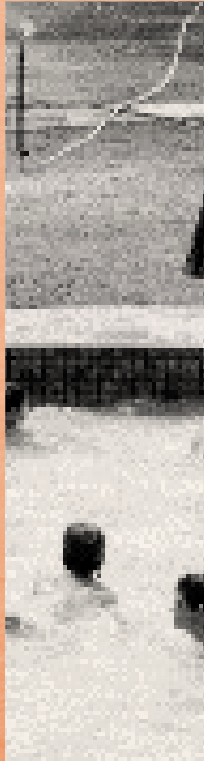
A Big Day Out

Towton Beach, near Thompson Street, Ascot (1931). Swimming was one of the most popular leisure activities in Belmont throughout much of the 20th century.

After a hard day's work

Like today, people have always looked forward to relaxing after a hard week's work. However, for residents of the early Belmont district, pleasures were often limited to what could be found near to home.

When A. C. Waddell was interviewed about his childhood, he recalled:

Redcliffe in those days was mostly heavy bushland and one could get lost within a short distance—that is any outsider could—as most Redcliffians somehow quickly learnt bush sense. Snakes were plentiful, as were most bush creatures and the Swan River held an abundance of fish waiting to be caught. A bucket of prawns was a ten minute exercise. Horse riding through the bush, camping out weekends, shooting possums and many other outdoor pastimes…

Miss M. Duncan remembered the 1930s:

As a family, our social life consisted of singsongs round the piano. Mother was a qualified pianist and music teacher, Dad a singer. Alternatively, when the weather was suitable and farm work permitted, we enjoyed picnics in the hills or along the river beaches. As we grew up, we hiked through the bush to one of the many lakes, now all claimed by the Airport and a network of roads.

For adults, there were regular films and dances. Saturday night silent pictures started in the Road Board Hall, on the Great Eastern Highway. Another Saturday movie venue was Riversdale Hall, on the corner of Norwood Road the Great Eastern Highway. Meanwhile, Redcliffe residents would walk to see picture shows at the Regent Theatre, James Street, Guildford.

For the more energetic, Miss Eva Betts conducted dancing classes in Belmont Hall with dances held at South Belmont Hall, on the corner of Wright Street and Belmont Avenue. Parents usually took the whole family, and if the weather was fine older children were left outside in charge of their younger siblings.

Senior Citizens playing Carpet Bowls.

Relaxing at home in Belmont

Six acres of tomatoes

Tomato Lake was originally called Smith's Lake, then later Craig's Swamp after a local poultry farmer.

A local story says an attempt to sink a well in the 1920s accidentally struck a spring and turned the swamp into a lake.

In 1971, as a result of a local campaign to save the lake, reclamation began. Don Tyler, a Belgravia Street pharmacist, stood for the council on the issue and won a seat.

In the mid-1970s, aquatic weeds covering the lake had to be removed by the council and volunteers made up of local residents. It was at this time that the place was officially renamed Tomato Lake.

In 1982 the Lake was expanded towards the President Street side, doubling its size. In the 21st century, there was further improvement, with award-winning trails, a boardwalk, seating and signage.

T. Robinson later recalled working for Stephen Craig at the Swamp:

By the end of 1910, green feed for the poultry was getting scarce, so Craig and I went down to the Swamp and fixed up some fences and sowed some maize.

Back in Perth in March 1914, I met Craig in Wellington Street and he asked me to come and pick tomatoes and also to camp on the Swamp to look after them.

In 1916, Fred Cox met me on the Causeway and told me that Craig wanted me to come back to work. So, as my horse was costing me a lot to feed, I took him with me to the swamp and there I fed him on the maize, as Craig did not need it.

When they had put in six acres of tomatoes, two acres of pumpkins and some maize, a new law came in stating that we had to put the tomatoes into new cases each time. We had made the cases ourselves, so it was no longer economical.

Clean up of Tomato Lake (1974)

Cracknell Park

Swimming and signals

Cracknell Park

Cracknell Park has always been a popular bathing site for Belmont residents. Originally known as 'The Springs', it was later called 'Hawksburn Road Swimming Baths' and then 'Riversdale Baths'.

After World War I the area regularly saw picnics, rowing regattas and swimming carnivals. In 1926, the Belmont Young Men's Club presented the park to the Road Board. Flame trees were planted along Hawksburn Road by members of this club.

During the 1930s, the land around the swimming area was upgraded by the Belmont Roads Board. Additional swimming lanes, similar to ones found in modern pools, were floated in the river in 1938, making The Springs one of the most important metropolitan swimming sites.

After World War II, a jetty was installed for the Belmont Swimming Club, and by 1964 the area was reticulated and renamed Cracknell Park. Cycle paths were added in the early 1970s, and additional cycle lanes installed in 1996.

Signal Hill

Signal Hill was originally part of a 2,000 acre selection (Swan Location 33) granted to James Henty.

In 1831, the land was obtained by John Wall Hardey, a prominent Belmont resident, and owner of Location 33 for the next 50 years. By the mid-1870s, the Hardey family owned most of what is now the City of Belmont.

In 1913, Signal Hill was gifted to the Belmont Park Roads Board for recreational purposes.

During World War II, the hill was used as a signal station by the Air Force, to communicate with aircraft coming into Guildford Airport. After the war, the Commonwealth retained Signal Hill for Air Force, and later Army, use. It was not until the 1970s that the land was acquired by the City of Belmont.

In 1992, the City proposed developing the Hill for housing, but a subsequent referendum overwhelmingly indicated that residents wanted it to stay as natural bushland.

No lack of recreation grounds

Centenary Park

Councillors Les Wheatley, Harry Wheatley and Tom Henderson play mini golf in Faulkner Park (1970s)

As early as the 1920s, Belmont was becoming famous for the number of recreational areas the council was developing in the area. There were eight significant parks and gardens for public use. Three of these was situated on the river bank, affording facilities for bathing, rowing and yachting.

Each suburb in Belmont was well-provided for with parks and playing grounds, and most of these were fenced and cleared between the World Wars. Special attention was given to the provision of children's playgrounds in many of the parks.

Hardey Park was already the major recreation ground, and was well known for being "equipped for all manner of outdoor sport".

Altogether, by the mid-1920s, the total area of reserves in the Belmont district was around twenty five hectares.

Young people riding bikes in Traffic Park.

Over the next few decades, other areas were purchased or upgraded for recreation by the Council, including rough bush. By 1980, more than 240 hectares of parkland had been set aside for recreation, including Forster, Middleton, Centenary and Peachey Parks.

Work had begun on Peachey Park around 1949. This recreation area was named after Bert Peachey, a local butcher and shop-owner who served on the Roads Board for many years. In 1975 a traffic park was added to help local children in learning the rules of the road.

Forster Park, which began life as a makeshift football ground, was turned into a public reserve in 1965. It was named after Roads Board member Clive Forster, who served as chairman in the 1940s.

Tennis courts and a bowling green were constructed in 1963 at the Grove Farm Reserve, and there were changes at Garvey Park as well. A new river channel was cut from the latter around 1970 in order to combat problems associated with erosion, flooding in winter and the build-up of algae in summer. The new cut improved the water flow around a tight bend, and reduced erosion of the banks as well as the smell of rotting algae in the summer months.

Further work was carried out at The Springs, and the area was fully reticulated. In April 1964 it was renamed Cracknell Park in honour of Ron Cracknell, who was a member of the Belmont Roads Board and who had served a term as Shire President in the 1960s.

Faulkner Park was named on 25 January 1965 but, as there were several other distinguished people in the same family, it was renamed the P. J. Faulkner Park several years later, thus honouring 'Paddy' who served in local government during the '30s and '40s. He was also Chairman of the Roads Board and later Shire President from 1961. In 1972 the Shire's War Memorial was shifted from Great Eastern Highway to P. J. Faulkner Park, and an inscription in memory of the fallen of the Vietnam War was added.

Centenary Park was purchased from the Mustica family in 1971 and its very attractive landscaped lake was named Mustica Lake to commemorate the previous owners.

A petition to the Belmont Shire in 1974 led to a 'sand heap' near the end of Epsom Avenue being developed into Middleton Park. A pavilion was erected by the Shire and the area was granted reserve status in 1975.
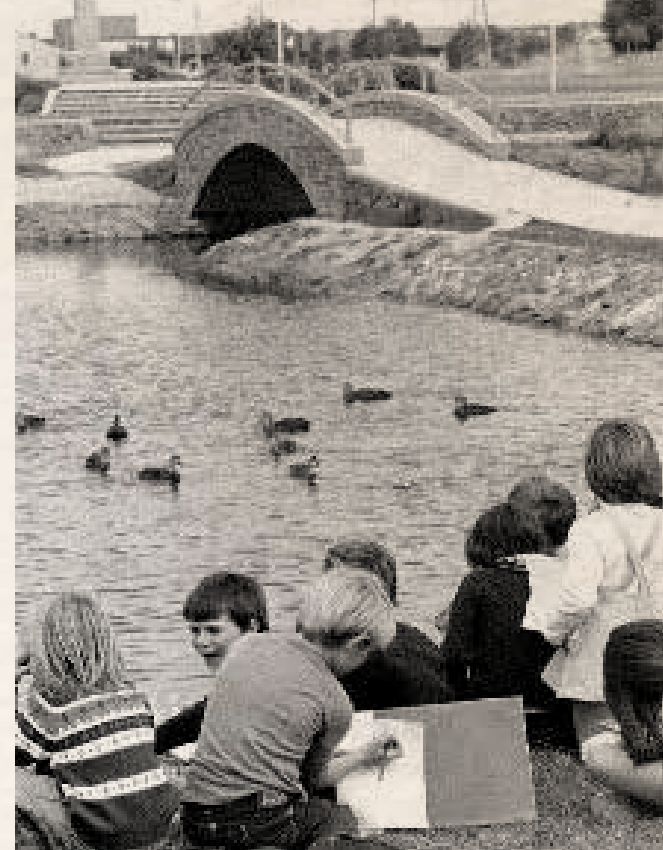
Faulkner Park

Arlunya Park Playground

The Belmont Greys, W.A. Hunt Club (September 1946)

Riders and fanciers

Men in coats of hunter's green with red lapels and white breeches and women wearing tailored black coats, black bowler hats and white breeches, provided a picturesque picture for the opening meet of W.A. Hunt Club yesterday.

About 90 took part in the Parade and Throw-off at Ascot Inn and, with guests, were served afternoon tea in marquees. Those present were excited to know of the success of two of the club's hunters, Yomanagh and Gloamane, who during the afternoon won races at Headquarters.

W.A. Hunt Club president Syd Johnston and Mrs Johnston received guests, Mrs Johnston wearing a tailored brown suit with white blouse and small brown hat trimmed with chartreuse ribbon. They were assisted by Master of the Hounds D. Freecorn and Mrs Freecorn.

Lovely new-look lightweight wool costume of pale blue with matching off the face hat trimmed with fuchsia ribbons was worn by Miss Vivienne Johnston, daughter of the president.

Only two minor accidents occurred during the afternoon. Miss Bennett's horse tripped in a rabbit hole and threw her and Miss Renshaw's mount slipped on the road and came down, bringing her to the ground. Both riders received only a slight shaking.

Sunday Times, 30 May 1948

To cater for pigeon racers in the district, Rivervale Homing Club was formed in 1934. It was housed in a variety of clubrooms, before finally settling down in Hutchinson Street around 1940.

A series of races were held from Kalgoorlie, and a blue chequer hen, from the loft of Ed Ludlow, covered the distance at the "splendid velocity" of 60 km/h.

The 1938 season commenced with a race from Meckering. Eight lofts were represented by forty-four birds and the winner came once again from the loft of Ed Ludlow.

In the 21st century, the club continues to meet once a month at the clubhouse during the May to October racing season.

Splashing around

Ascot Water Playground began construction from 1975 under the Labor government's 'Red Scheme' for the long-term unemployed. It was designed specifically for families and young children as an alternative to the usual children's playground and the conventional 'Olympic' swimming pool facilities of the time.

The leisure complex consisted of five major play areas with pools and water slides, plus a barbecue area, mini-golf course and kiosk. It attracted many visitors from outside the district as well as locals.

Opening in November 1977, the Playground cost the council more than $326,000. Treated water from a natural spring was used for the water supply, which was the first such facility to be established in Australia.

In 1996, local residents expressed concerns about traffic, parking, anti-social behaviour and vandalism. At the same time there was a decline in visitor numbers and increasing costs to meet health and safety legislation.

As a result of this, the council commissioned a report which found that the facilities were outdated and deteriorating, and significant works were required if the Playground continued operating.

During 2003 the Swan River Trust expressed concerns that pool water from the Playground was being discharged into the Swan River, and requested a solution.

After considering the costs of modifying the waste water handling and the many other improvements needed, the council decided that the only cost effective outcome was to close Ascot Water Playground.

Where people came together

Riversdale Public Hall

The new public hall, erected by voluntary effort, at the corner of Guildford Road and Norwood Avenue, was formally opened on Saturday afternoon.

The main hall is of brick, and roofed throughout with locally made Wunderlich tiles. With the exception of the brickwork and roofing, all the work was performed by local residents in their spare time, even the schoolboys assisting by constructing the seats.

The hall was gaily decorated with flags and festoons of flowers, and a band of pipers performed during the afternoon.

A social dance terminated the proceedings.

West Australian, 26 February 1919

Riversdale Hall next became Saville's Billiard Saloon, and in 1948 transformed into a cinema.

Picture gardens were built alongside the theatre about 1948, with a corrugated iron fence and canvas deckchairs. In 1958, the theatre was enlarged, and a new facade built. Although it survived the early years of television, 'Rivervale Ascot' finally closed in 1966.

South Belmont Soldiers Memorial Hall

South Belmont Memorial Hall

South Belmont Soldiers Memorial Hall was located on the corner of Wright Street and Belmont Avenue. Originally a church, it was transferred to the community in 1922.

The Hall quickly became the social centre of the area, hosting concerts, weddings, and Saturday night dances.

By 1950 dances were attracting as many as 120 patrons, some coming from as far away as South Perth and Victoria Park.

For those who arrived by horse and cart, horses would be tied to a tree and during the evening men would nip out to the back of the cart for a beer. Others hid their beer under the back of the building.

Clearing up the next day was never a problem, as enterprising children would collect the empties to be exchanged for a halfpenny each.

The hall remained in use until the Shire built a replacement at Forster Park. The old building, then falling apart, was demolished.

Riversdale Hall interior

Belmont Hall

Belmont Hall

Regular picture shows on a Saturday night were started in the Belmont Hall in 1921 by Johnston & Webster, who rented the venue from the Belmont Roads Board. These were silent films at first, since 'talkies' did not come to Western Australia until 1929.

Children also went to Belmont Hall to see movies. Long before television, pupils would see educational films there. In 1929, the West Australian gave an enthusiastic account of this radical new teaching method:

The main picture that afternoon was to be 'Lost in the Arctic.' In preparation, the boys and girls had been instructed in the life and customs of the inhabitants of the frozen regions.

Then followed the filming, the headmaster explaining difficult sub-titles throughout. The Headmaster had prepared 56 questions, including 'To what dangers are whale hunters exposed?' 'What valuable products are obtained from whales'? 'Tell how you caught your first whale?

Redcliffe Hall

With funds raised by the community, Redcliffe Agricultural Hall was built around 1914 on the corner of Fauntelroy Avenue and Great Eastern Highway. The Hall saw many community events, including farewell nights and welcome home parties for soldiers serving overseas.

The Hall burnt down in 1945, so the Belmont Roads Board organised a new hall on the corner of Morrison Street and Great Eastern Highway. Much of the material and labour for the new building came from local residents and businesses, including Bristile Brickworks. It is thought that some material may have come from Dunreath Migrant Hostel and campsite.

The Hall was the venue for many social events, in particular the Pioneer Ball held in 1979 to commemorate 150 years of Western Australia.

Redcliffe Hall was demolished in 2003. At the new Community Centre on Morgan Street, bricks from the old Hall were used to make a commemorative wall.

Picnics and camps

After twelve successful annual picnics organised by Mr A. Harvey, headmaster, Rivervale State School, and Mr A. E. Rowe, Chairman, Belmont Park Roads Board, the management of this year's picnic held on December 10 was handed over to the two recently formed Parents and Citizens' Associations.

Great credit is due to the organisers in the past for, through their efforts, approximately £750 has been collected for the benefit of the children's outing. The first picnics were held at the Zoological Gardens, but in latter years the longer river trip to Point Walter has greatly appealed to both young and old.

Leaving the 'Springs,' Rivervale, launches conveyed 400 children and over 150 adults along the picturesque Swan River to the picnic grounds at Pt. Walter, where the children were liberally catered for with races, ice-creams, cordials, and bags of fruit, lollies and nuts.

This year's races of honour, the championships, were won by (boys) Charles Rowe, of Rivervale, and (girls) Gwen Rowlands, of South Belmont. The outings are red-letter days for the district, and it speaks well for the organisers that for 13 years not a single mishap has occurred.

Daily News, 20 December 1928

The Girls Brigade, Girl Guides and Scouting movements were all very active in the Belmont district.

The Guides had two active groups, in South Belmont and Cloverdale, as well as several Brownie packs. Scout groups included the 1st Belmay Group and another at Rivervale. Cloverdale Scouts met at Peachey Park from the 1970s.

Sunday School picnic at Perth Zoo

248th Scout Troop, Belmont

Girls Brigade at camp (1962)

Belmont Ugly Men's Association (1922)

Clubs and societies

A Belmont branch of the Ugly Men's Association was formed in 1918. An Ugly Woman's Club must have followed soon afterwards, as they used the Belmont Hall for their monthly sewing bees in the early 1920s. The Ugly Associations were charities that helped families who had lost their main breadwinners.

Other avenues through which people could enter into community life were the various clubs in the district such as the Lions and, if they had been in the services, the two RSL branches.

A sub-branch of the Returned Services League was established in Belmont in 1929, with early meetings held in Fred Corlett's bakery. The League was offered a block of land near Hardey

Park, but could not afford to erect a brick building on the site. Eventually, they relocated to Leake Street, in the meantime holding meetings in the Belmont Hall.

The Belmont Lions Club was started on 23 July 1966 with twenty-five foundation members. Numbers increased rapidly and it became a very active club, providing services to the community and two new parks: Lions Park in St Kilda Road and Hoffman Park in Hardey Road. The Lions also organised the Belmont Industrial Fair each year at Hardey Park. This provided local businesses an opportunity to show off their products, offered entertainment for Belmont residents, and raised funds for the Save Sight Foundation.

In 1978 the Bentley YMCA Band was reformed into the 'City of Belmont Brass Band'. Council helped with funds—$12,000—for the purchase of instruments, and the families raised the money for uniforms. It could be a real family affair, since among its members were Robert Godsell, who played the cornet, and his brother Mark, who played the tenor horn. Their mother, Jackie, looked after the books while father Mike was the drum major.

From the movies to the TV

Outside Riversdale Hall. The film 'Helen's Babies' is advertised. (1920s)

Eastway Drive-in

Before television one of the most popular entertainments was to see a film. As early as 1915, continuous picture shows were established around various venues in Belmont to take people's minds off the war and unemployment.

Community Halls were the most common place to see movies, and Riversdale Hall had always shown them, even before it was converted to a full-time cinema in 1948. The 'Rivervale Ascot', as it was called, was the Belmont district's only dedicated theatre for many years.

The first television programme was broadcast in Western Australia in 1959. Gradually more and more families began renting sets or purchasing them on attractive installation plans—the 'never-never'.

During the 1960s those Belmont residents in steady work saw a period of higher wages and better living standards than ever before. Workers could now afford washing machines, refrigerators, television sets, and even a family car.

The introduction of television signalled the beginning of the end for local picture shows. Riversdale Gardens closed, and the building was converted into a shop.

However, in July 1959 Ace Theatres constructed Eastway Drive-in Theatre on the site of today's Ascot Waters estate. Despite the competition from television, the drive-in flourished until 1988. Drive-ins were something of a novelty in the Belmont district, and just experiencing the new phenomenon may have been as appealing as the latest film.

However, the attraction of Eastway may have been more than just the movies they showed at the venue. Many Belmont residents will own up to having their first kiss in the privacy of a back seat there.

References

p. 3: M. Duncan, 'A Poultry Farm: Mayfield', *Memories of Belmont* (Belmont Historical Society, 1986); A. C. Waddell, 'I recall Redcliffe', *Memories of Belmont*, Vol. 2, (Belmont Historical Society, 1987); WA CinemaWeb, www.ammpt.asn.au (accessed 15 July 2014); Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward: The Story of Belmont* (City of Belmont, 1999)

p. 4: T. Robinson, 'Tomato Lake—Swamp', *Looking Back* (Belmont Historical Society, 1983); *Sunday Times*, 12 September 1954; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward;* Department of Sport and Recreation News, 11 December 2008.

p. 5: Information supplied by City of Belmont; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward;* Information supplied by State Heritage Office of Western Australia.

pp. 6-7: Information supplied by City of Belmont; *West Australian*, 4 June 1932; *Daily News*, 12 July 1938; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward; West Australian,* 11 April 1925; *Daily News*, 24 May 1924.

p. 8: *Sunday Times*, 30 May 1948; City of Belmont 'Municipal Heritage Inventory'

p. 9: City of Belmont 'Municipal Heritage Inventory'; City of Belmont Minutes, August 2013; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward*

pp. 10-11: Redcliffe Hall: Greenwood, Rob, 'Redcliffe Hall History', *Victoria Park Post,* February 2004; Laurie, Maxine, *Ever Flowing Forward* (City of Belmont, 1999); 'Hall. Reserve 22857 Swan Location 5229 Redcliffe. City of Belmont', State Records Office of Western Australia (1915/1391 v1, cons 3640); 'Redcliffe Agricultural Hall',

State Records Office of Western Australia (1921/4919, cons 689); 'Redcliffe Agricultural Hall', State Records Office of Western Australia (1938/0531, cons 689). Belmont Hall: Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward; West Australian*, 20 September 1929. Riversdale Hall: West Australian, 26 February 1919; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward.* South Belmont Hall: Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward*

p. 12: City of Belmont Museum archives; *Daily News,* 20 December 1928; Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward*

p. 13: Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward*

p. 14: *WA CinemaWeb*, www.ammpt.asn.au (accessed 7 August 2014); WA TV History, www.watvhistory.com (accessed 7 August 2014); Maxine Laurie, *Ever Flowing Forward; West Australian*, 2 March 1915

Images (in order as shown in book)

p. 2: Towton Beach: City of Belmont M0223-01

p. 3: Senior Citizens playing Carpet Bowls.& Relaxing at home in Belmont (location and family unknown)

p. 4: Tomato Lake: City of Belmont M0034-04; Clean-up of Tomato Lake

p. 5: Cracknell Park: City of Belmont M0059-15

pp. 6-7: Mini Golf: City of Belmont M0250-43; Centenary Park: City of Belmont M0034-14; Traffic Park: City of Belmont P0011-01; Faulkner Park: City of Belmont M0250-37; Arlunya Park: City of Belmont M0232-01

p. 8: W.A. Hunt at Ascot Inn: State Library of Western Australia 017503PD

p. 9: Water Playground: City of Belmont M0349-01 & M0349-20 & M0349-24

pp. 10-11: Belmont Hall: City of Belmont M0322-01; Riversdale Hall: City of Belmont M0189-01; South Belmont Hall: City of Belmont M0082-01

p. 12: Sunday School: City of Belmont M001-01; Scouts: City of Belmont M0085-01; Girls Brigade: City of Belmont Museum

p. 13: Ugly Men: City of Belmont M0016-01

p. 14: Eastway Drive In: Courtesy of Western Australian Cinema Web (www.ammpt.asn.au); Riverdale Hall: City of Belmont M0132-01

Front Cover Images (top and bottom)

Students riding from school using bicycle path P0012-01

Water Playground: City of Belmont M0349-20 & M0349-24

Back Cover Image

Belmont Greys: State Library of Western Australia 195347PD

Each part of the coat of arms symbolises an aspect of the City of Belmont. The kiln and stack represent brick making and the cog is a symbol for industry. The wings symbolise flight and the airport, while the horse is the racing industry. The green stands for public space; silver, the sky; and blue is the Swan River. The black swan is the State emblem, and the ducal coronet around its neck symbolises Belmont's relationship to WA.

For further information on the City of Belmont Heritage Series, please contact the Belmont Museum on 9477 7450 or email museum@belmont.wa.gov.au or visit 61 Elizabeth Street, Belmont WA 6104