

Queensland Family History Society Inc.

Annual Report for 2024-2025

On behalf of the Management Committee, it is a pleasure to report on the 46th year of operation of Queensland Family History Society.

This year could perhaps be characterised as a period of some consolidation after a couple of very hectic years involving the establishment of the Family History Research Centre in Seventh Brigade Park, Chermside. The strategic planning of 2023 that had identified priorities for 2023-2026 was fully respected.

Notably on 6 February 2025 we were pleased to welcome our Patron Professor Graeme Nimmo RFD to our premises for the first time since his acceptance of patronage some four and a half years ago. On his visit he presented certificates to three newly appointed Fellows of QFHS and had the opportunity to meet with all but one of our living Fellows, and other society members.

A few months earlier on 24 October we were delighted to host a visit from Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner, and Councillor for the Marchant Ward Danita Parry. This was a great opportunity to acquaint them with our facilities and activities, particularly considering our lease of Community Facilities from Brisbane City Council that was in the process of being registered.

Volunteers and Awards.

The success of every activity of the Society is dependent upon the efforts of members who volunteer. Some 80 members are currently regular volunteers, and many undertake a variety of tasks in different aspects of our operations. We can truly say that there is a way for each member to give of their time for the benefit of the Society. Certainly, it is pleasing that at some time during their membership a high proportion of members do volunteer. We fully understand how circumstances change overtime for each of us. The initiative of establishing the role of Volunteer Co-ordinator was definitely beneficial. Unfortunately, the position remained vacant for most of the year but has recently been taken up by an enthusiastic volunteer.

A highlight of the year is the Volunteers Morning Tea; an event hosted by the Management Committee to thank our all our volunteers. For the last three years we have been greatly assisted in hosting this event through the generosity of Kedron Wavell Services Club Inc., which has subsidised these events to the full extent of the venue hire. The event held on 9 December 2024 was particularly notable for the outstanding contributions to the Society and Family History in Queensland that were celebrated.

Each year the Society recognises the contribution of its volunteers by the Award for Services to Family History. The worthy recipients of this award in 2024 were Wendy Angliss, Alex Daw and Dale Fogarty. Wendy and Alex were present and received their awards, whilst Dale's was presented to her at the Irish Research Group meeting of 12 April. Following those awards, was the awarding of Honorary Life Membership of the

Society to Maureen Arthur. Capping off the celebrations was the announcement of the awarding of Fellowships of the Society to Bev Bonning, Jackie Buttress and Mary Geiger. As already mentioned, they received certificates from Professor Nimmo in February. As is our practice, the citations detailing the work of these volunteers have been published in the *Queensland Family Historian*.

We were saddened by the death of Dorothy Jeffrey, Fellow of QFHS and President from 2004 to 2007, on 29 September 2024. She was loved by all members who knew her. Her passing means that the Society now has ten living Fellows.

The thirty-second awarding of the QFHS Family History Book Award was made at the 2024 Annual General Meeting. Sylvia Bannah received the Award for her book *What's in a Name, and Where Did We Come From? The Louis Family from 1778*. Our thanks go to Gayle Thomsett who after many years in the role has stepped down as Convenor of this award. Clem Ditton, a previous recipient of this award, has taken over as Convenor. The presentation of the award this year will occur in conjunction with a Local and Family History Writing Bookfest to be held on 6 August.

Library and Resources

Provision of most meetings online and increased access to resources of the Society from home is serving our members well. However, very few members are now choosing to visit the library for research or to attend meetings held in hybrid mode. This is of concern to the Management Committee primarily because much of the success of the Society can be attributed to the fellowship gained by coming together. So much of our volunteering effort and financial resources are directed to making the full range of resources available to members and the community many days of the week in addition to our online presence. Since moving to Chermside, the Research Centre is open to all members and the public 191 days a year. We are very grateful to currently have some 34 Library Assistants devoted to helping visitors maximise their use of physical and digital resources. We particularly thank Dette Glenday for her contribution in the demanding role of Library Assistants Roster Coordinator.

There has been no let-up in the enormous amount of work done by individuals and teams of people working at the centre on Mondays and Fridays and behind the scenes to deliver the full range of resources and facilities provided in the Library and online. Space constraints and a backlog of donations have meant that we have had to suspend acceptance of offers of research materials from members. However, increasing efforts are being made to digitise materials to provide accessibility.

The library cataloguing team have continued to grow the Kiosk facility. The concept of this facility is that all available PDFs and scanned publications (such as journals) are loaded as files. There are now many thousands of PDFs within its database. Indexing engines run in the background to facilitate fast sophisticated searching. This initiative is available in the library and as an assisted service for members not able to attend the centre. Carolyn Grimward reports that to date there have been 28 requests for information and 212 files have been sent in answer to those requests.

Time has caught up with the V-Library software that has provided our Library Catalogue for many years. The selected replacement of Koha is a popular open-source

product that is growing and developing. It is a good fit for our requirements. This change project has involved an enormous amount of work for the library cataloguing team. It is now almost complete, and new cataloguing activity is only being done in Koha.

QFHS computer equipment is aging, and we have started to apply for grants for replacement equipment. However, it is quite competitive, and we have been unsuccessful to date. In the meantime, John Perryn is performing miracles in keeping the existing network in good repair. We also have used our own funds for specific purchases where there was an urgent and/or obvious benefit in new equipment. New equipment such as PCs will necessarily force upon us an upgrade of Operating Systems, and in turn the software which was developed in-house to run on those systems such as the menu system needs attention to make it more resilient in the new environment.

The existing website continues to service the needs of the Society. Our data sets have steadily grown over the past year but there are compelling reasons why a new approach is needed. Debra Ricks is continuing to build a new website based on the Wordpress Content Management System. Its initial functions will be Membership Management (joining, renewal and contact details maintenance), Shop and eCommerce. There will be functions to manage members interests and SIG preferences. Calendar and Event management will also be functions that are expected to be available in the early days of the new website. With this being undertaken as a volunteer project, a date on which this will be available is uncertain.

We are grateful to Peter Gehrke in expertly preparing a number of Grant Applications. The Lord Mayor's Safer Suburbs Grant Program for 2024 provided funding to support projects that strengthen security for Council Community leased facilities. We were successful with our application for funding to improve security lighting on the Research Centre and were granted \$2,326 for this work. We gratefully acknowledge the Council's contribution to enable this improvement.

The number of books available for loan in the Lending Library continues to grow through donations. In the last year 24 members have been borrowers, some using the Lending Library on more than one occasion. In all, 43 books have been borrowed and returned.

The online resources continually grow through the efforts of the Digitising Team. Their work has accomplished a significant increase in the number of entries in the *QFHS Books: Name Accumulation Index* that now totals 556,800 entries from a total of 841 books indexed. In addition, the Indexing Group has grown the *Queensland School Pupils Index* 7 to an outstanding 3,125,131 entries from 1,569 schools.

Membership

As at the end of May 2025 the Society had some 892 individual members, including 49 life members. We had 2 Associate members. There were 16 Journal only subscriptions. In addition to 98 new members joining this year, 17 former members re-joined. In May 2024 we had 917 individual members and 2 Associate members. Thus, we have seen a 2.7% decline of individual members. Looked at slightly differently, some 140 members or approximately one in six of our ordinary members did not renew their membership.

Notably, it has become rare for new dual memberships, with just one this year and one last year. Very likely this is related to most new members joining on line and having the majority of their contact with the Society online.

Thanks are due to Leanne Donovan, now into her fifteenth year as Membership Secretary, for her continuing contribution to the efficient management of member applications and renewals.

New Members' Welcome and Orientation sessions are held each month (February to November). These play a vital role in helping new members become aware of the Society's wide range of physical resources and their use; and of the Society's special interest groups, education events and other activities which can help them with their research. Through their interactions with others at the sessions they also quickly appreciate the value of talking through problems with other members and of being part of, and contributing to, the Society; they feel genuinely welcome. From June 2024 to May 2025 the nine sessions, seven in person at the research centre, and two online, were attended by a total of 41 new or re-joining members. We are thus welcoming a healthy proportion of new members in this way. For that we are grateful to Anne Long, Ann Swain, Tony Swain and Marie Stewart.

Education

In the past 12 months we have held two *Finding your family: the fundamentals of research* courses conducted online over six sessions. These attracted a total of 16 people, and five of the participants joined the Society. Our thanks are due to the tutors who present these outstanding courses year after year.

Six *Learn@* presentations sessions attracted a total of 50 members, and six Talking About online discussions a similar total, with one topic attracting 30 and the other five an average of 5 members.

The monthly Presentations continue to have a strong following with an average attendance of 26.

The inaugural *Local and Family History Writing Bookfest* was held in August 2024 with three authors talking about their books and writing processes. This event attracted an attendance of some 29 people. The popularity of the event indicated that it will be a worthy annual event in our calendar.

Journal, Snippets, Communications and Outreach

The quarterly production and distribution of the *Queensland Family Historian* depends on a long serving team of workers. Our editor Lyndal Cosgrove has taken on more tasks as others who were involved in the packaging and posting have stepped down.

The Society's monthly newsletter Snippets distributed by MailChimp serves to remind members of our upcoming events and provides family history news. Thanks go to our editors, Deborah Clark-Dickson and Sheena de Jager Miles.

Even though immediate past President Allana O’Kane has relocated to Cloncurry, she has continued to coordinate the Communications Team for the benefit of the Society.

There were several events during the year where we had an opportunity to promote the Society. On each occasion Ann and Tony Swain generously volunteered to attend. They did so throughout the *Australasian Conference 2025 Connections Past – Present – Future*. Our thanks to them and those who assisted.

Special Interest Groups

The Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are the life blood of the Society, being the major vehicle through which members now come together. Nominally we have 12 SIGs but many of the Members Lounge activities, particularly the Book Club, Talking About and Socials, are akin to SIGs.

SIGs report good attendances at their meetings via Zoom and all have numerous participants, who through distance, would not be able to attend meetings held at Chermside. Those SIGs that do hold hybrid meetings have found that few take up the option of attending at the Research Centre, however there are those that only attend in person so need to be considered.

The detailed reports of group activities are all very positive and commendable. The success of the SIGs is undoubtedly a result of the dedication of the Convenors and their supporting teams who devote countless hours to prepare presentations, and to respond to the needs of individual members. A focus of all the Convenors is educational.

It is worth highlighting a few of the achievements reported on by a variety of the SIGs. The Irish Research Group has 178 contacts on their mailing list, adding 15 new members this year. Six regular meetings were held: five online and one hybrid. The average attendance was 36 with a peak of 49. Additionally, three all-day sessions dedicated to Irish family history research were held at the Research Centre. Total attendance was 44 people, and these sessions have been a source of new QFHS members. Directed at promoting the Irish resources held at the Resource Centre an event was held in May that attracted 21 people in person and eight online.

The Family Tree Maker User Group reports that they held seven online only meetings on Fridays and three hybrid meetings on Saturdays. Average attendance was 23 online and six at Chermside. A very successful one day Seminar was held in October 2024 in conjunction with VicGUM that was attended by some 105, with about half being non-members of QFHS or QFHS members who were not members of the User Group. Seven took the opportunity to join the Society on the day, and a profit of close to \$3,000 resulted.

The Family History Writing Group with six online meetings had average attendance of 14. The Queensland Pre-separation Group with three online meetings had attendances of 8 to 12. Online meetings are also the preference of the Scottish Interest Group, holding four meetings of 15 to 20. The very popular DNA Interest Group consistently accommodates online and in-person attendance, holding 11 meetings with an average of 29 on-line and 8.5 in room.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Management Committee, I am pleased to thank all the volunteers who through their dedication to the Society have contributed to its ongoing success.

Our gratitude, and my personal thanks, are due to the hard-working Management Committee. Notably, the entire team has stayed the distance through 2024-25 and most are willing to continue for another lap. Firstly, the Society is greatly indebted to Lyndal Cosgrove who accepted appointment to the vital role as Secretary on top of the other key roles that she has undertaken for the Society; starting even before she joined the Management Committee in 2016. We are grateful for the assistance in the secretarial role provided by Barbara Richardson as Minutes Secretary and Susie der Kinderen as Assistant Secretary – Correspondence. Graeme Drew has brought great wisdom and experience to the position of Treasurer. In that role he has been ably assisted by Wendy Angliss who has now carried out bookkeeping duties, and more, since our change to Xero six years ago. Grateful thanks are due to committee members Carmel Bell, Greg Crawford, Clem Ditton, Dette Glenday, John Haberecht, Lyn Hooper, and Charlotte Sale, three of whom along with Lyndal Cosgrove provided continuity from Management Committee of 2023-24.

Kevin Haley
President