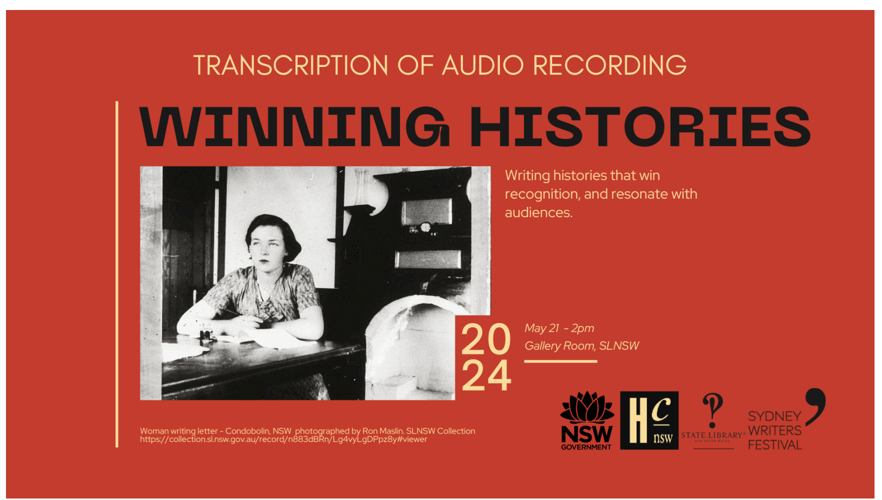

Presenters:
A/Prof Jan Láníček (Chair), Dr Margaret Cook, Nicole Cama and Dr Shannyn Palmer

Catherine Shirley: 0:04
So hello and welcome from the History Council of New South Wales to this Winning Histories session. My name's Catherine Shirley and I'm the Executive and Strategic Development Officer at the History Council of New South Wales. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge that we're meeting today on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. Today's session is a continuation of the History Council's support for and participation in many cultural activities in New South Wales, including the Sydney Writers' Festival. So now I'm going to hand you over to the chair of our session, associate Professor Jan Lanicek from the University of New South Wales, who's also a counsellor on our General Council and chair of our annual awards subcommittee.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 1:15
Thank you. Thank you for having the panel organised by the History Council of New South Wales on Winning Histories. We have three great historians today who will talk about their projects and about their journey while researching the project. And I would say they achieved something that most of us, most of their colleagues, including myself always strive for. Not only that they win awards and big money, which everybody wants, but they receive recognition that their research is of value, that there's an impact, that somebody from their peers, other scholars, recognize their work, but also that the general public, as you can see, is interested in their work and want to hear more about what they do. And just an example, Margaret Cook, who

I will introduce in a minute but she sold about 3,500 copies of the first edition of her book on floods in Brisbane, first edition of her book on floods in Brisbane. That's updated now edition with new floods and hopefully we will need to update it anytime soon. But, based on the conclusion of your book, you probably eventually will have to do that.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 2:43
It's really interesting for me, as an historian of modern Europe, to engage with a completely different field of Australian indigenous or local Sydney history and basically I've been thinking about how to approach the panel, to link all the papers, or the papers, the books and research together research on local street in Sydney, in Darlinghurst, that many of you probably have visited or maybe live in. Research on Brisbane, in Queensland, and then on Outback in Australia, in central Australia, in northern territories, and there are some common themes that emerge from that which we shall discuss throughout the panel. So, before we move on to the discussion and the questions that I prepared the topic starting with Dr Margaret Cook, a historian who is fascinated by water and its interaction with humans, animals and environment. Over time she writes about climate-related disasters and a particular focus on rivers and floods in southern Queensland and the book on a river with a city problem a river with a city problem, which I really like as a title A History of Brisbane Floods. Margaret is a Research Fellow at Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith Institute and La Trobe University.

Dr Margaret Cook: 4:16
Thank you very much. My book, on the surface at least, is about floods in Brisbane, so I used the narrative arc of three main floods the 1893 floods, the 1974 floods and the 2011 floods and I'll come to the fact that then we had another flood in 2022. So I then revised it and added another chapter, which is an interesting thing we can perhaps discuss later. So, on the surface, the book is actually just a narrative of the floods, but it's not really, because what it is is that's the tool that I use to interrogate the way that people relate to our environment and how we relate to rivers. So I wanted to think about how Aboriginal people have thought about rivers and how they've lived with the rhythms and patterns of nature, but how, when settlers came here, we had a totally different approach that they would control the river and tame it and use it as a resource and, rather than live with the river, it's been a bit of an antagonistic relationship where we've tried to tame it with dams and levees and so on. And, again, while it's a story about Brisbane and those cultural attitudes that came on the boats from Britain largely, it's also a story that translates to a lot of imperial rivers, if you think about Brisbane, we've got Wivenhoe Dam and we've got Somerset Dam, and that's been the way that we've really thought about how we would control the water. And by controlling the water, my argument is that we've

been able to just have a bit of a free reign on the floodplain and, as a result, we've created the hazard.

Dr Margaret Cook: 5:47
The problem isn't actually the floods. We always frame floods as a problem, but in fact the problem is is that we have built on the floodplain, and that's what I took for my title. I was given this wonderful quote while I was writing and you know every writer has these epiphanies and you go, wow, and it's always framed as a flood problem. But in fact, the problem is is that we built on the flood plain, so it's actually a river with a city problem. The river got there first. It's been there for thousands and thousands of years and when humans leave this planet, the river will still be there, and so I really wanted to reframe the way we thought about that.

Dr Margaret Cook: 6:25
And for people in Sydney, you can think about it like Warragamba Dam. There's always the discussions about raising Warragamba or whatever. But whatever you do, it changes the way we think about the environment and Warragamba gives Sydneysiders a complacency that we have controlled floods, and what happens is people then move on to the floodplain, thinking, thinking ha ha, we're safe. So I really wanted to interrogate that. And after the floods in 2011, there was lots of words buzzing around like unprecedented, a word that historians have a really big problem with, and also it must be somebody's fault, somebody must be to blame for this. So I wanted to interrogate those myths that are deeply embedded in floods and think about who's to blame and the naivety we've really got about trying to live in this environment with which we live, and a changing environment at that. So that's sort of, in a nutshell, what the book is about.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 7:18
Thank you, Then from Sydney. Nicole Kammer is a historian with the City of Sydney Council, with experience in museums, heritage and public history. Her work has been published across a range of platforms, including radio websites, print publications, social media, mobile applications and exhibition displays. In 2023, she was awarded the History Council of New South Wales Macquarie University PHA Applied History Award for her work on Liverpool Street in Darlinghurst.

Nicole Cama: 8:06
So my project probably more unusual for Sydney Writers' Festival you won't see a book out there. My project is a website and it's at darlostoriesau. I thought I'd choose a really easy URL to remember. The project is called Liverpool Street, darlinghurst, and it was actually a digital history project just mapping the development of the Sydney Street over a century. So the sources that I drew from were actually from the City of Sydney archives and they're called the assessment books and, for anyone

who's unfamiliar with them, they're an amazing resource for the researcher because they actually cover all sorts of details like landlords, the type of building constructed, the materials used, the value, all sorts of. It's just a sort of real boon for the researcher.

Nicole Cama: 9:03
So I based the entire project on that data set and it actually covered over 4,000 assessment book entries and that was between 1848 and 1948. So the website actually draws on all that data and at the centre of the website is actually a map and a timeline which maps some of that data and it also includes data visualisations and actually seven long form feature stories which I drew from those assessment books and basically explored the people and the places of Darlinghurst. And so the project was actually supported by the Australian Centre for Public History, uts and the Paul Ramsey Foundation, which is actually the headquarters located on Liverpool Street in Darlinghurst. So the challenge with this project was to basically illustrate that massive data set in a creative and accessible way, and I really felt one of the most the easiest ways to do that and most accessible ways is through a website and really wanted to encourage people to explore those records further and maybe do their own research and make their own discoveries. So that's really the background for my project and the final panelist, dr Shannon Palmer.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 10:34
And Shannyn is a community-engaged practitioner, cultural consultant and award-winning writer, and actually the list of awards is very long and another one was added already last week, as late as last week, so I'm glad that we don't have it on Friday. There'll be another one in the meantime. So Shannyn works with cultural institutions and communities to facilitate ethical community-engaged practice and enabled meaningful intercultural collaborations. She is particularly interested in community-engaged practice as a methodology for disrupting settler colonial systems and knowledge. She has a PhD from ANU in Canberra in history, and the first book Unmaking Angus Downs, Myths and History on a Central Australian Pastoral Station won a long list of awards, including 2023 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Australian History, 2023 Northern Territory Chief Minister's History Book Award and, most recently, the Ernest Scott Prize as well.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 11:46
Unmaking Angus Downs traces the history of Angus Downs Pastoral Station in Central Australia. Angus Downs is located about 300 kilometres southwest of Alice Springs. It's actually sort of smack bang in the middle of Alice Springs or Mabantua and Uluru. So if you've ever driven from Mabantua, alice Springs, to Uluru, you will have driven through Angus Downs Cattle Station and it sort of stretches all the way out to Wataka, the place now known as King's Canyon. So if you've ever travelled out

there you will have also travelled through Angerstown Station. And so in using the station as a lens, it's not just a history of Angerstown Station, it's a history of colonisation in that part of central Australia throughout the 20th century. And in tracing the history of the station and colonisation it also looks at how that cattle station became country over half a century.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 12:48
I worked really closely with two Anangal in particular. So Anangal are Pitangarra, yankunjungarra, speaking people from Central Australia Anangal is their word for personal people and so I worked with two Anangal with really deep and abiding connections to Angostowns Chukki Pumpjack and Sandra Armstrong. And when I first met them they evoked that cattle station as Ngawra, which is the Pitangatta word for country. But their ancestral homelands were many hundreds of kilometres away in the Peterman Ranges in the Western Desert. So the book sort of traces also the story of how animal came to be living on Angostown Station In the late 1950s, early 1960s. There were upwards of 250 animal living on the station at that time and there was only one of them employed in the pastoral industry. So in many ways it's a history of a pastoral station. It has very little to do with pastoralism.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 13:46
So now there are two topics and we can move from the first to the second one. The first one, I kind of, was thinking about some connections and in Shannon's book you write that it offers important insight into changing the relationship between people and space or people and place. And it feels like that all three projects are dealing with this kind of topic with the street, with the city and river and, in Shannon's case, with different groups of people interacting together but also with the place, or space interacting together but also with the place of space. So if you could maybe tell us again in a few, a couple of minutes, how do you, how does your project deal with this question of the relation between people and space across quite a long time period of 100 years in each case, basically, or your case a bit shorter, you could maybe engage with this topic and then we move on to your personal journey as scholars or historians.

Nicole Cama: 14:50
Do you want me to start? Okay, so, as I mentioned, with my project I was sort of dealing with really sort of large data sets which doesn't sound that exciting sort of on the face of it. So one of the things I decided to do was take a real thematic approach with that data and look at two themes. And that was the social data, so the people that lived on the street occupants, landlords and then the built environment. And I decided to then sort of have different research pathways from that which then each

connecting to those two themes, and really those themes are about people and place. I suppose it's sort of a different way of saying that.

Nicole Cama: 15:45
That complex and changing relationship was the story of Obed West and his family's estate which they called Barkham Glen. He grew up basically on the land between Paddington, darlinghurst and Rushcutters Bay during the 1810s and it was the 1880s, I think that he recorded his memories of that area growing up at that time and it was a time of real sort of not just changes in the sort of social and demographic makeup of Sydney but also the built environment. Darlinghurst for a long time was considered they sort of called it. I remember seeing in the newspaper articles people called it a pretty hamlet or you know, obed West himself called it a sort of out in the country homesteads and farms in Darlinghurst and it was that way for a very long time. It wasn't until the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s that that really started to change 1850s, 1860s and 1870s that that really started to change.

Nicole Cama: 16:51
So his accounts really demonstrated what that place, what Gadigal country, was like before those Victorian terraces and commercial enterprises started to encroach. One of the things he described was sort of the undulating lands and the fresh, clear stream of water which was Rushcatters Creek, which flowed through the valley and was basically over time gradually quite sort of terribly polluted, of course, by all the sort of people moving into the area and building. And the other thing was he described the mudflats which were right in front of Rushcutters Bay where this sort of aquatic birds sort of gathered and also, how you know, he used to sort of gather native roses and waratahs on the hills. So it was a very different area. And what happened over time is that despite the the west family staying in the area until about, I think, the 1910s, which was a very long time to to stay on that land, they could see the the sort of inner city suburb developing around them and changing and polluting that freshwater stream.

Nicole Cama: 18:03
So it really sort of was a great way of displaying that changing relationship between people and place. And I think you know there were a few other examples of that. But what I tried to do with that data was to really not just sort of say, okay, so this land was occupied by the West family and it was worth this much. I think it was just about drawing out some of those stories with first-hand accounts and things like that, trying to make it a little bit more interesting.

Dr Margaret Cook: 18:36
My background was as a social historian, so I've always been interested in people. And then I worked as a heritage consultant, so I looked a lot of places where people

play and work. And then I worked as a heritage consultant, so I looked a lot of place and places where people play and work. And then I discovered environmental history and I realised that a lot of what we do is we talk about the human action and the environment's just the stage on which it performs, and I wanted to think more about that stage had grown from a very small city in the 1890s, where there was only 100,000 people there, to a city now that's two and a half million. How did we look backwards? How did we get to the situation that we're in now? So to do that I had to think really hard about a whole lot of records I've never used. I used a lot of engineering reports and I have no science or engineering and I mean no science and so I had to talk a lot to engineers and people and read things like learn the language of cummix and all sorts of different languages. So I had to use a whole lot of records I hadn't used before.

Dr Margaret Cook: 19:36
But then because of my background with heritage and social history. I used a lot of newspapers and first-hand accounts and I particularly wanted to capture the stories of the people. So I also drew a lot on oral history. So it was to try and get those different threads and to complicate a voice, because we often get a very strong story of the developer, say, or the homeowner who got flooded. I wanted to try and weave those different stories as much as I could. So it involved a lot of thinking widely about how I might find those stories. And particularly the chance to turn it into a book was the opportunity to people that history more, with more stories and anecdotes, and I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to do that.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 20:32
So Place is really? I mean, it was foundational to the project that led to making Angus Downs and in many ways that project emerged out of my questioning the discipline of history itself. As an undergraduate student at university, studying history, I was encountering stuff in my late 20s that I hadn't learnt growing up as a kid in Dja Dja Wurrung country in central Victoria. I grew up not knowing that I was living on Dja Dja Wurrung country until much later, and so I was encountering stuff as a student, an undergraduate student, that you know I was really troubled and confronted by, and I also had this deep love for the discipline of history and I began to sort of think deeply about the silences and what Tom Griffiths calls white noise that had sort of dominated so much of our history writing in the 20th century and began to think what is it? Perhaps there's something in the discipline of history itself and the methods the historian's craft that has created helped to create these silences or generate this white noise. The cornerstone of the historian's craft is the documentary archive and very much a linear sense of time, and that's just one way of knowing and being in the world and it's, you know, first Nations, australians. It's a really different way of being and knowing. And so I began thinking you know, what does it? What is

possible? When you're a historian in your privileged place you turn to place as an archive and embodied forms of knowledge and memory.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 22:05
And so, to undertake this project, I moved to Central Australia and in working with Chukki and Sandra, I took out a loan, got into a bit of debt and got an 80 series land cruiser cruiser and learnt that station by travelling through. We put about 80,000 k's on that land cruiser over about four years and Chukki and Sandra spoke the history of that place to me and shared that with me. In Pitindata, langwich, we worked really closely with a woman called Linda Riv, a wonderful Western Desert language specialist who interpreted. She went on all the bush trips with us and would interpret in country and that was an integral part of learning to understand this place. Angus Downs, pitindatta. Language is intimately tied to that place and so I mean, yeah, it very much changed the way I sort of think about and research and wrote history. You know, for Anangu history is something that is embedded in place. All of the stories that were being shared with me were being recounted in country. They were itineraries, journeys that were punctuated by place names. Everything was oriented in country. They were itineraries, journeys, that were punctuated by place names. Everything was oriented in country.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 23:23
So you know, privileging place, turning to it more than a stage in a sense, was really sort of critical, I think, to sort of beginning to understand that place from a different perspective. Myths and histories of pastoralism and pioneers have really dominated the way we think about history here in Australia and my sort of being immersed in place I think was pivotal to really sort of untangling or unlearning a lot of those myths and histories. And very much I think one of the biggest sort of revelations was how much the desert landscape shaped colonialism and the relationships and things like pastoralism. We have, you know Baz Luhrmann's A Still Australia that romanticises pastoralism in the north, with these sprawling homesteads and handsome cowboys, and you know lots of Aboriginal people working on the station In central Australia, angostans.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 24:20
They weren't even homesteads to begin with. They would drift, move from waterhole to waterhole. They were ephemeral sites. The whole camp would get up and move after big rains and so that was, yeah, a really sort of place is critical in that relationship between people and places, really critical in the work, critical in that relationship between people and place.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 24:42

It's really critical in the work With Shannon. What I was really stuck by reading your book is that you really challenge this perception of the First Nations people as being passive victims of colonisation, that they are interacting with the owners of the pastoral station. They are sharing their knowledge of the space of the country. So there is interaction. Is this something which you see as one of the main contributions, possibly to the field of indigenous history or Australian history?

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 25:16
With Margaret, what I was stuck by was forgetting. You get the big flood that destroys everything and people forget it won't happen again. What does it tell you about people and mentality? You still, despite all the calamity or disaster that comes every 50, then 20, then 10 years, they still say, well, we can still tame the river, we can still do that. Let's forget what happened, let's move on, build new houses exactly in the area that was flooded several times and with Nicole and this is partly my Central European upbringing I was fascinated by the skating rink, the skating rink in Darlinghurst, and by the images of ladies in long coats on these roller skaters, kind of trampling, falling and enjoying a social life. Could you maybe tell us a bit more about that case study. Thank you. Maybe with Shannon, now we can start from this side.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 26:24
I mean definitely you know the collaborating with Anangu and the thing with when you focus on place. You can't write stories or histories of places without engaging with the people who lived in and made those places. And so in engaging with Anangu, you know, with two people in particular, I sort of came to know that place intimately from their perspective and you know they very much. I mean they're a huge part of the reason why they had their own agenda for our collaboration. Absolutely, both Chukchi and Sandra were older. Chukchi was 85 when we started working together. Sandra was in her 70s.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 27:08
So Chukchi in particular was really aware, I think, that he was coming towards the end of his life and he really wanted his knowledge and his knowledge of that place and his connection to that place recorded, his knowledge of that place and his connection to that place recorded. And so in collaborating with them, you know they were really sort of demonstrating how, you know, angus Downs was so much more than a pastoral station. We sort of have these assumptions that are, you know, sort of shored up by things like Baz Luhrmann's Australia. These myths of pastoralism and pioneers in particular, have been so pervasive in terms of how we think of ourselves and our history here in Australia and then you know, collaborating with Annal and really deep listening over a period of years really revealed to me how they were very much active agents and that they had actually. Angus Downs was so much more than a pastoral station. It was country and it was home for multiple families

and multiple generations of families as well, and all manner of life was playing out and taking place on that station.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 28:22
Yes, thank you.

Dr Margaret Cook: 28:23
So your question was about complacency, really, and why do we forget? That's very central in my book and it's partly because we want to forget. So I look very closely at vested interests. Why do we forget You're talking about? Why do we have these stories about Baz Luhrmann's story? Because they're more palatable often. So it's very romantic. It's very romantic and people in Brisbane don't want to know that the city floods. So if you live beside a river, that's not really what you know.

Dr Margaret Cook: 28:50
I did become known as the nuisance in the city council for a while, about which I'm thinking of putting on a T-shirt, so I'm not very worried, but it's really interesting. I wanted to look at the vested interests. Brisbane's different from Sydney or Melbourne in that for a number of reasons, but one is the real estate is really important because we don't have secondary industries or so on. So the power brokers in Brisbane are the real estate agents, and so I actually found fantastic articles that said we'll just wait till people forget and then we'll sell the house to someone in Sydney Again, gold for an historian.

Dr Margaret Cook: 29:24
But the problem is is there is this complacency and the media cycle really doesn't help. So we move because of our climate of droughts and flooding, rains, we move on to that next cycle of drought or fire or COVID or whatever disaster it is. There's a fantastic diagram that came out of the Centre of Research in America which is known as the hydro-eological cycle, and it is. It's so that it rains and we think about floods for a while, and then we go into drought, so we become complacent and then we start panicking about water because we're starting to lose that water. And then it rains and everyone relaxes again. And the problem for people like me who are trying to work in the disaster space of improving the outcomes each time, is that window where we want to discuss floods is not very big, and politicians particularly say now's not the time. They did that in the fire. It's not the time to talk about climate change. It's not the time to talk about adaptation. People are suffering. When is the time to talk about climate change? It's not the time to talk about adaptation. People are suffering. When is the time? Is the problem? Because you move on to the next thing.

Dr Margaret Cook: 30:25

So the complacency is deeply embedded in our culture and our politics and our economy, and so that's what I tried to do as an historian, is use again those floods to tell that story of the values that we've got. We make choices about what values are important and the decisions we've got. We make choices about what values are important and the decisions we've made is that living on the floodplain is really important, and we've now got a housing crisis, and so the solution is to put more houses on the floodplain, and you know, again as an example of a choice. To finish, we spend 97% of our money on recovery and 3% on planning for disasters. Now, it doesn't take I said I have no maths, but it doesn't take a lot of maths to work out that if you move that dial a little bit, we'd get a different outcome in every flood or fire or famine or whatever disaster we're talking about. We've got to start thinking differently about how we live in this country in the future, particularly as more and more of us choose to live here.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 31:22
Okay, Nicole, please.

Nicole Cama: 31:24
Yes, so I'm actually really glad you asked me about the Darlinghurst Skating Rink. It was one of my favourite stories to discover. It was a building that was built in 1889, and one of its frontages was on Liverpool Street, but it took up an entire block and it was established as a skating rink. So roller skating was actually really popular in Australia from about the 1870s, and so this place was actually styled to emulate the Imperial Palace of Japan and it took in something like 2,000 to 3,000 people could fit in this building. It had sort of mirrors placed all around the walls so that people couldn't watch themselves just skating around or falling over, as Jan said, and also there was actually suspended from midair in a sort of circular cage, was a bandstand. Mid-air, in a sort of circular cage was a bandstand which would just sort of play as people skated around and people would have skate cards that you know like dance cards. So it was a really interesting sort of study of how people were sort of spending their leisure time in Sydney at that time, I suppose.

Nicole Cama: 32:37
But it wasn't actually. It was actually quite short-lived. It closed the following year, so a hugely expensive undertaking. I think it took something like 300 men to construct the building in 10 weeks or something like that Really interesting building. And it sort of hosted a variety of other events, like there was a baby show which people sort of entered their children to be sort of on display and get special awards. So twins, I think, got 25 pounds and triplets got 50 pounds, so something I think it was something between 12 and 15,000 people attended this show over a two-day period.

So despite its popularity it was just too. It's almost like it's too big to be successful in. It's still a city, even though it was a booming population happening at that time.

Nicole Cama: 33:32
So it was then actually converted into the Australian Athletic Club, which essentially functioned as a boxing sort of studio and stadium, so something like 6,000 people could be sort of seated watching these really intense boxing matches which were actually quite controversial at the time. One of the most famous boxers to appear was actually a man called Albert Griffiths, or Griffo as he was known, and he was actually Australia's first world boxing champion, I think so he actually was. He, I suppose, performed, boxed at this at this at this venue, and ironically he it was during one of his matches that sort of spelled the end of the actual club because it just descended into sort of violent chaos. I think he used to be a member of a push gang and they weren't happy with him facing off with a sort of African-American boxer called Jerry Marshall and it looked like Jerry Marshall was going to win and it sort of descended into chaos. Was going to win and it sort of descended into chaos. So at that point it was sort of also hosting things like giant tug-of-war championships and things like that.

Nicole Cama: 34:52
A really interesting place, but again short-lived, and it did function as a wool store for quite some time before it was sort of demolished and made way for housing. Of course, in a block of that size it was inevitable that it would be sort of demolished and make way for housing, but it was really, really interesting. I suppose it's another sort of example of the changing nature of people and place and their relationship to place.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 35:18
Thank you. Thank you so much. Any question you would like to ask your fellow panelists?

Dr Margaret Cook: 35:25
I'm really taken by the fact about immersion in the place that you're in, that you moved there and you obviously know your area very, very well. I actually went kayaking on the river because they kept talking about this spot where the two river systems merge, so I had to go and see it, and you can see rivers best when you're in the river, because they kept talking about this spot where the two river systems merge, so I had to go and see it, and you can see rivers best when you're in the river. And I think that's an interesting thing, because there's that lovely quote about historians need good boots, and I think there's a thing about we often, you know our

tools are the documents, the documents and the archives and the libraries, but with things that are deeply embedded in place, I think you have to go there.

Nicole Cama: 36:05
You have to see the place and walk the place, because the other thing with Darlinghurst is that it's known for it. It's still actually quite hilly and there's sort of parts of the streets that I think there's a few streets that still follow the original creek or one of the tributaries of the creek, so it's sort of getting to know that place.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 36:23
There's still sort of remnants of that sort of time that you're researching, but yeah, yeah, it's such a lovely thing to reflect on because the immersion is, the immersion in a place is so critical and it was really sort of fundamental to my own project. And I can't even begin to imagine how you could go about writing a history of a place like Angus Downs in Central Australia if you didn't spend a significant amount of time in that country in the desert, experiencing the distances, developing a sense for water and how critical it is and how that dictates movements, and so, yeah, I can't even begin to imagine how you go about really sort of conceiving of a project like that if you weren't sort of prepared to go and immerse yourself in the place. And for myself, you know the mobile sort of methodology as well, the act of physically moving through country, because mobility is such an important part of desert life as well. So it was sort of another layer of how to sort of really come to a much deeper understanding of this place beyond this sort of symbolism of the pastoral station. And for myself, I think one of the richest things was that it changed the way I read the archives.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 37:40
I think sort of people assume that I did oral history and therefore there wasn't sort of much archival research, but there's actually, you know it's deeply embedded in archival research as well. But being physically immersed in the landscape, travelling through that country, the way that you have to it, changed the way I read the archives and I began to see stuff in the archives that I absolutely would have missed and never would have picked up on had I not been immersed. And so I think it really just yeah, it just enriched my historical practice at that level as well?

Nicole Cama: 38:13
Can you give an example of what you sort of never would have spotted in the archive?

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 38:19
It was actually one of my favourite parts. I think it was one of my favourite parts of the book. There's a chapter called the Itinerants, and so, as I was sort of explaining

when I first started working with Anangu, there was a particular story that would sort of get told again and again. Amangu would relay this travelling from Ernabella Mission to Arionga, which cut right through Angus Downs, and they were constantly walking backwards and forwards between these two stations and there's different reasons why, like different families, kids had gone to the missions, but everyone's related, so they would sort of travel between these two places. And so it just really sort of struck me that, like everyone is talking about this walking from Ariongo to Urnabella, and they would recount the journeys in such rich detail. And then, quite some time after that, it was sort of a revelation sort of hearing those stories, because it really opened me up to there was this particular way of recounting history which is embedded in country, and in the archives I came across a whole bunch of documents that the welfare branch had created in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the subject title of each of them was the itinerants, and the subject title of each of them was the itinerants and Arnalor, by this stage in the late 50s, had taken on camels. The farmers, pastoralists, no longer needed them after the war because they got the trucks and all the camels that they had went to Arnalor. So Arnalor became really skilled cameleers and the rate at which they were travelling and they were also trading porno with tourists at the time catching dingo scalps.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 40:05
But there's this pile of documents that the welfare branch wrote over a decade, the title of which is called the Itinerants, which documents their concerted efforts to try and get Unalong and the line. The journey that they were travelling was the same journey between the two missions that I had been sort of told about from Anangal. And so these documents just yeah, sort of capture this, the welfare branch sort of doing themselves in tying themselves in knots, trying to get Anangal to stop moving and to relocate to the missions to take on jobs that actually didn't exist, because it was a bad look for them basically to be sort of travelling around and engaging with tourists and so having, I mean, I suppose it just kind of othered that sort of. I could actually sort of see in this way the way in which assimilation policy in particular was operating at the time, this kind of sort of narrative of like we've got to get people into wage labour, we want them in you know nuclear family units, and so we've got to get them to sort of stop, and meanwhile they've got no sort of understanding of the route that people are travelling, why they're travelling this way.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 41:23
There's a whole line of springs that travel that existed between the two missions as well, so it was situated on a road that they'd been travelling for thousands of years and travelling between those two missions visiting families, you know. They enabled them to carry on all kinds of social and cultural practices, but no one in the welfare branch could ever see that, and so I think having, yeah, coming across those documents enabled me to sort of get at what was in them. It sort of like became this

artifact of colonialism and assimilation policy and ideology in particular that I think I just wouldn't have read in the same way.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 42:03
Okay, thank you. I mean we can open the floor for questions. We have about 10 minutes, so if you have any questions, please.

Audience: 42:15
Thank you all very much. It's been fascinating. I'd like to ask Nicole a question how did you find the accounts of the West Mr West? Were they diaries? Were they household records?

Nicole Cama: 42:28
accounts there. Actually there is sort of. I know that one of his descendants published it as a sort of collection and they're actually you can have a look at them in this library. But he also published them in the newspapers and thank goodness for the National Library's trove because they've digitised quite a few newspapers and they're all in there. So he actually wrote not just about Darlinghurst but about all parts of different parts of Sydney. So they are a really fascinating document. I have a question for Dr Margaret Cook, please. Did you face a lot of backlash after you published your book?

Dr Margaret Cook: 43:11
That's a really interesting question. I thought I would get a lot more. Maybe it's secret and I don't really know. I did get a little bit, but one of the things that I did get to do as a result of the book is I got to talk to a lot of different audiences, which was really fantastic, including some radio stations I didn't know exist. There's a One Nation radio station, for example. I didn't know and I thought that could be interesting. But it's actually it's, and I've deliberately gone into places where I'm uncomfortable, and I can sort of blame my father, who's here, for that, because I did say to him oh, when I was invited to some group, I said, oh, but you know they might not like me.

Dr Margaret Cook: 43:49
And he said but if you keep talking to the same people who believe what you're saying, then you're only talking to the choir, and why did you waste your time? Basically, good point, dad, off I go. So I have gone into the lion's den a lot and it's really interesting when you talk to engineers or flight practitioners or real estate agents. The guy I criticised the most in the book I really did criticise him came to a talk and I was terrified and he thanked me and congratulated me because he said they'd never thought about it that way. Everyone looks at the world from their own lens and their own viewpoints and I think even just making them think differently was enlightening. Don't think the behavior's changed and it's not, but even that I can just

make people think differently. I think that's that's worth. That's one of what I wanted to do is to change the conversation a little bit, and to do that you've got to rattle the cage a bit, and I have a bit of a habit of rattling cages. Thank you.

Audience: 44:47
I have a question for Nicole what's your connection? There's two questions really. What's your connection with Darlinghurst and now you've been so successful with this project? Which other part of Sydney have you got your eye on for something similar?

Nicole Cama: 45:04
All of them. No, I don't have a particular connection with Darlinghurst, but actually this project formed part of a much broader project which was focusing on the history of Darlinghurst. So a book actually came out of this project called my Darlinghurst, and there was also a sort of walking tour which was actually published in the City of Sydney's Culture Walk app called Serenade If anyone has a chance, please do it and also an oral history project. So this actually formed part of a quite a sort of multi-platform project. And Darlinghurst, I think it's always fascinated me. It's such a fabulous area. Darlinghurst, I think it's always fascinated me. It's such a fabulous area In terms of sort of thoughts of other parts of Sydney. I would love to expand the project and do something similar, you know, in Surrey Hills or in other parts of the CBD, but at the moment it's sort of like it's open. I'm not sure yet. Maybe one day.

Audience: 46:10
Thank you. A question for Shannon Is there anything in particular that led you to Angus Downs in terms of picking a pastoral station to work on.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 46:19
It's a great question. There's actually a book that led me to Angus Downs Station. A book that led me to Angus Downs Station. There was an anthropologist called Frederick Rose who spent four months on the station in 1962. Frederick Rose is a really interesting character in and of himself. There's a great biography that was published a couple of years ago called the Red Professor, and he had sort of started his anthropological career on Groot Island um in the 1940s and ended up being.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 46:55
He moved to East Germany. He was living in Australia, born in England, wanted to come back to Australia to finish off his ethnographic field work and the government had a huge ASIO file on him so he couldn't get into any of the settlements. He really wanted to go out to Yuin Dumu but the government weren't having a bar of that, and so he was friends with a man called Bill Harney. Some of you may have heard of him, quite a large character in Northern Territory history, and he was friends with Bill

Harney. So Bill Harney sort of wrote to him and said you should come out to Angost Downs Station. You probably won't get sort of much in terms of traditional ceremony or anything like that, but it's a great sort of example of culture contact and so you should come out. And so he went out in 1962 and lived on the station for four months and then wrote a book called the Wind of Change in Central Australia the Aborigines at Angus Downs, and I came across. It's an incredibly rare book. It was published in East Germany. It's really expensive to get a copy it costs upwards of $400, $500 to get a copy and I saw I had spent time out there, I was familiar with the area and came across the book, and photography was a key part of Rose's methodology.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 48:12
And so in the back pages of the book there were 150 black and white portraits of all the unlawful who were living on the station at the time. They were numbered from one to 150. They didn't have names of the portraits but there was a page that corresponded with each of those photographs. And then there were also lots of photographs of everyday life on the station, so people having haircuts, people buying stuff from the store, people playing cards, making punu, cooking kangaroo, and so it was just the most unusual ethnography I'd ever seen, especially from the 1960s. And looking at the photographs I knew that a lot of people in those photographs would still be alive today and wondered if they'd seen the book and number one the person who was number one in those photographs was Chuggy Pumpjack. So he was number one out there in 1962, and he was still number one when I went out in 2012,. Because when I started asking questions, everyone said if you want to talk about Angus Downs, you need to go and find Tricky Pump Jack. So he was still number one then. Sandra was in those photographs as well. She was number 90.

Dr Shannyn Palmer: 49:20
And it started from there. I became the conker with the book. Conker is picked out for unmarried woman. So I was just the young unmarried woman with a Greenland cruiser who had the book and they would see me and they'd be like, hey, conker, you need to get that book. And everyone would want to sit down and go through those photographs and they would go through them all and find themselves, find their family members, tell me where everyone was living. And that's how it started. People started talking about the station and I cottoned on really quickly that it was this incredibly fascinating and important place out there and so, yeah, that's how come Angus Downs came to be the focus of the book.

Audience: 50:00
Thanks. A question for Dr Cook. You mentioned that you've done a bit of cage rattling and you also mentioned that we don't see much change in attitudes After all the work you've done. Where is the best hope for change? Federal, state, local governments,

city planners or the real estate businesses that seem to run most of Sydney, let alone Brisbane? I mean, how do you get to a point where the rivers don't have city problems anymore?

Dr Margaret Cook: 50:32
The interesting thing with having gone back to write the more recent chapter is I did actually see a shift and that's really encouraging, particularly in Queensland and needs to be in Queensland, because we actually are the most flood prone state. New South Wales is second. Sorry to tell you that, but we actually have the Queensland Flood Reconstruction Authority, which has now become federal. New South Wales is getting one off the ground. There are some moves towards buyback schemes and there is some movement towards redesigning homes. So I am actually seeing a change.

Dr Margaret Cook: 51:05
What is going to happen is capitalism is going to work in that until recently, people would be able to rebuild and reinsure and just continue business as usual. We're not getting insurance, we're not going to be able to rebuild, so unfortunately, we're going to have to make a change, whether we like it or not. So I'm trying to encourage people to be proactive and do it when it suits them, because otherwise they will be doing it kicking and screaming later, when they have to. There are already climate refugees in some parts of the world that's the phrase they use and we are going to see that in Australia. So I can't solve the problems of the past, but I'd really like to stop making them. So stop building on the floodplain, start putting some moratoriums down and stop building where we shouldn't be building. We've got enough science. We have enough knowledge now there aren't any more excuses. So I am seeing a change. I'm just impatient as well as a cage rattler.

A/Prof Jan Láníček: 52:09
So, unfortunately, we are coming to the end and I'd like to thank all our speakers Nicole Cama, Dr Margaret Cook and Dr Shannyn Palmer, for sharing their expertise and insights into their work, and you can certainly purchase their books. They are very affordable, which is really good for historians. I also would like to thank our audience for being here and for sharing these incredible stories of research and publications To the staff of the Historic Council, catherine Shirley, Amanda Wells and Laura Sayle, who do all this hard work behind the scenes to make these events happen and being so enjoyable. Thank you.