

Unlock the Past events - past events, a review and the future

10 October 2011

Unlock the Past has organised a number of special events since early 2010. Here we combine a review of these with the feedback from our recent Unlock the Past [Major Events Survey](#) to give you an overview of how they have gone and what we may consider in future. This post is fairly long. It is organised under four main headings:

- GENERAL - History and Genealogy events generally in Australia and New Zealand
- PAST - Unlock the Past special events 2010-2011
- SURVEY - Events Survey - some responses to survey comments
- FUTURE - Unlock the Past - future event considerations

GENERAL - History and Genealogy events generally in Australia and New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand are well served with events.

Most societies and many libraries have regular meetings. Many also run special seminars, workshops, conferences, fairs etc. National and some state and regional associations run conferences or fairs too - at intervals of one, two or three years. Others run special events on a theme on an occasional basis. Most states also have a history or heritage week (or month now in the case of SA). These are the focus for hundreds of special events, open days etc. There is an annual [National Family History Week](#) in Australia and a [New Zealand Family History Month](#). There is a triennial [Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry](#), the next one in Adelaide in March 2012.

Unlock the Past has set up a single register of all known history, genealogy, heritage and related events in Australia and New Zealand. Over 700 special events have been listed there since early 2010, but many more could have been. [Click here](#) to see events currently listed. You can even see what [past events](#) have been listed. We enter a few events that come to our notice, but the great majority are submitted by event organisers.

If you or your organisation are planning an event **we invite you to submit your event yourself**. It is free, easy to do online and, if you register as a user on the Unlock the Past site, you can update this yourself as needed.

PAST - Unlock the Past special events 2010-2011

Unlock the Past has developed a special events program of its own since early 2010. These are intended to fill gaps or meet needs not covered by events run by others or are special events not otherwise offered at all.

We would like to thank societies and others who have partnered with us. This has added considerably to the events and I think they have been a good promotional opportunity for our partners. Many I know have had new members and good product sales.

- Unlock the Past only runs events when and where they **do not clash** with others.
- We usually **only run events** with the active support of a local or regional partner - society, library or association.
- Exceptions to this are our History and Genealogy cruises or a sponsored event or tour such as we did with Findmypast in 2010.

- Unlike most societies, who mostly have volunteers to organise events, Unlock the Past needs to cover the cost of paid staff as well as usual event and promotional expenses. This affects decisions on what events to run, as well as where and when.

Unlock the Past has run the following events since mid 2010:

- **Regional roadshows** - two presenters on the road for about a week conducting meetings on successive days in each of about five towns within reasonable proximity of one another. We did two in 2010 - in North NSW/Southern Qld and Qld Coast from Brisbane to Gladstone. These were well received and feedback was positive.
- **Regional expos** - a large exhibition and wide ranging seminar program over two days. Three of these were held in larger population centres - Coffs Harbour, Cairns and Mt Gambier. They very well received by those who came, but poorly supported by those in nearby towns we thought would welcome the chance to attend a major event in their region.
- **Major city expos** - a large exhibition and wide ranging seminar program over two days. Three of these have been held - Adelaide, Sydney and Geelong (close enough to Melbourne to attract many from there). The expo feedback from all these was very positive overall.
- **National roadshow** - toured six Australian and three NZ cities with a team of three overseas and several local presenters, with one or two day meetings in each city. This was planned as a special one off event, but support in some venues was lower than expected.
- **Special one speaker roadshows** - two of these were held last year at short notice with meetings on successive days in three or four cities - one with Elaine Collins of Findmypast and the other with Scottish expert, Chris Paton. The latter was an add-on to his coming as a featured presenter at the Sydney Expo in 2010.
- **Research & Writing History seminar** - the first of these was held over two days in Adelaide in May 2011. It was promising enough to look at again and in other places in future. Some other themes from our survey attracted similar levels of interest.
- **History and genealogy conference-cruise** - the first of these, held in March 2011, was voted a great success by the majority of the 240 who booked, despite the fact the *Pacific Dawn* was not well suited to conferences. This was the only Unlock the Past event so far that has fully covered event costs. Our second cruise is due in November 2011 and a third in early 2013 is attracting a lot of interest. It is realised that cruises are out of reach of many. However there are nearly 400 different cruises in or to/from Australia every year now - carrying an estimated 700,000 passengers. We simply provide a great value-added option for those who do cruise who have an interest in history or genealogy. We have given a reason to do a cruise for many who had not got past thinking about it before. 50% of those on the March cruise (who responded the cruise feedback survey) said they had cruised before (some up to 10 or more times) and 79% said they would definitely, probably or maybe attend a similar cruise again.
- **War Comes to Australia tour to Darwin and vicinity** - planned for February 2012. This is a one off specialist tour with professional historians to guide us and do presentations. This specialist tour is illustrative of other specialist tours that could be considered - see below for more on this.

SURVEY - Events survey - some responses to survey comments

Our recent events survey is most useful with many suggestions and general comments to add to answers to survey questions.

We can't respond to all these, but I will respond in general on some categories of comment and suggestion:

- **Location of events** - it is understandable that most people would like an event in or near their town or city. We have in fact had more Unlock the Past events in country and remote cities (seminars in Darwin and other places as well as regional expos) than we have in capital cities. The numbers

needed to cover the expense of the event itself and the cost of bringing expert presenters from a distance limits the places we can go:

- major expos - likely now only viable in larger capital cities
- regional roadshows - the best way to reach a larger number of places
- regional general seminars - with one or two Unlock the Past experts
- themed seminars - mainly in major cities to attract enough interest
- **Number of events** - Unlock the Past has limited staff, so can only be directly involved in a limited number of events per year. Some in our team can extend this though without our own presence. This will be explored further from here on.
- **Themes** - our question on "what themes would you like a seminar on" showed a strong interest in three themes - enough to encourage us to look at all three of these in major cities at least:
 - research and writing history
 - immigration
 - history & genealogy on the internetLesser interest was shown in military, convicts and mining - maybe enough though to consider at some time
- **Other themes** - numerous other suggestions were made. Some were in wider interest areas like Ireland, Scotland and the UK, which could warrant consideration for a seminar largely on one of those themes. The great majority of suggestions however would not support a whole one or two day seminar on that theme. Many could be considered as a topic within a seminar or expo if there is a qualified speaker available. Many have been given already at one or more events - including DNA, brickwalls, organising, BDMs, website comparisons, care and preservation of your records, education, health, European research, land records, local records, India, photograph identification, Tasmanian research and others.
- We are limited in what topics we include at events by:
 - the number of talks we can fit into the available time
 - the need to have many of the talks on popular subjects
 - the availability of an expert in the subject
 - the fact that some great, but special, topics don't attract enough to meet speaker expenses
 - the cost of bringing too many speakers to an event

Other ways of learning about a specialist topic if you can't get to an Unlock the Past event:

- A number of our presenters develop their talks into a booklet you can purchase. [Click here](#) for current list.
- Our exciting new publication, [History and Genealogy 2011: Australia and New Zealand](#), has 66 articles on numerous special topics.
- Some of our presenters put their talk outlines on their web site or ours. [Click here](#) to see what is there.
- Remember that there are numerous events put on by others - see Unlock the Past Events calendar
- Online webinars are now becoming available.
- There are numerous online forums now on many topics.

FUTURE - Unlock the Past - future events

Many of you will be aware that Unlock the Past is a commercial entity. Unlike many organisations which can call on volunteers, we have significant extra staff costs organising and managing events. We aim to cover these costs - or come close to doing so - for the events to be viable. To date only the March 2011 cruise has fully covered the event cost.

We feel however that with careful choice of events to take on, planning with longer lead times, better marketing and cost management - and most of all working with supportive local partners - we can bring unique, quality events to complement those put on by others.

Watch our web site or subscribe to the [Unlock the Past](#) and/or [Gould Genealogy & History](#) email newsletters to see what is planned in 2012-13.

Committed

- [2nd History and genealogy cruise](#) - 21 November - 5 December, 14 days from Auckland to Sydney featuring Scottish, Irish and General themes (still a few cabins left)
- [Scottish, Irish and general themed seminars](#) in Auckland, Sydney and up to seven other places the cruise stops at - November - December 2011
- [War Comes to Australia seminar](#) - Sydney 16 February 2012 (very likely, but to be confirmed)
- [War Comes to Australia tour](#) of Darwin and vicinity - 17-22 February 2012
- [3rd History and genealogy cruise](#) - early 2013 - 3 cruise options (all Sydney - Melbourne and Tasmania) being considered. [Vote for your preference here](#) (by 12 October)

Others that may be considered

- **Major Expos** - possibly one in 2012 and one or two maximum in 2013. It is likely we will only get adequate numbers to major expos in eastern states capital cities.
- **Special one speaker roadshows** - with an international presenter we may have here for a major roadshow or cruise.
- **Regional roadshows** - open to expressions of interest from societies where there is good prospect of others in the same broad region participating. We are considering one from the Sunshine Coast northward as far as there is interest.
- **Themed seminars** - open to interest from host partners, probably on *research and writing history, immigration or history & genealogy on the internet*
- **One or two day seminars** - open to expressions of interest
- The possibility of **one-off special tour groups** in future. Some suggestions that have come to us are hosted research tours to Ireland, Scotland, the UK, Western Front battlefield tours, Canberra, Sydney, Tasmania (and other states), mining or convict areas, New Zealand and Salt Lake City. These could possibly be timed around major events such as the Who Do You Think You Are Live! (London), National Family History Fair (north of England), Rootstech (Salt Lake City) or the New Zealand Family History Fair. We have no particular plans for these at this stage, but are open to comments or expressions of interest.
- **Further cruises** - possibly one main general cruise each year from 2013 on. We may also consider a shorter, smaller cruise from a non-Sydney base or alternatively a shorter, smaller themed cruise in between the main annual cruises - even a specialist UK/European cruise.

Some of the above are new ideas, yet to be tried. We are open to comments and expressions of interest from possible event partners - and from others who may be interested in some of the special tours or cruises. The latter would need considerable lead time - for both us and potential participants to plan ahead. See contacts number and email below.

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