An early start

Jenni Woodroffe, president, WA Local Studies Section

Off to an early start to celebrate Australian Library Week, the WA Local Studies Section travelled to the town of Harvey on 2 May. Our first stop was Stirling's Cottage, which is a replica of the hunting lodge built in the mid–1800s on the estate of Captain James Stirling, the first governor of Western Australia. It was here that the renowned artist May Gibbs spent her 'two happiest years' as a child.

Warmly greeted by councillor Norena Manning and Keith Leece, chief executive officer for the Shire of Harvey we were given a tour of the precinct, which included the Harvey Tourist and Interpretative Centre, Stirling's Cottage and the five-hectare landscaped gardens based on a seventeenth-century style, and, a short distance away, the Internment Camp Memorial Shrine.

As we looked through the windows of Stirling's Cottage, it felt as if the spirit of May Gibbs was indeed close. In an adjacent room, a replica of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie with a reclining Mr Lizard are a reminder of the much-loved charac-ters May Gibbs created. Outside, the cottage gardens, bordered on three sides by the Harvey River, were once the site of the local dump. They are now an inspiration of the transforming power of a community working together.

During World War II, Italian internees of the Harvey Nº 11 Internment Camp built the only roadside shrine of its kind in Australia. Listed by the National Trust of Australia (WA), the shrine originally stood in a paddock. It was constructed of local field sandstone and selected pieces of granite. In 1992 a Chapel was erected around the shrine.

Our lunchtime was enhanced with reminiscences by Len Knight, a second cousin of May Gibbs. It was while May was staying at the original Stirling's Cottage that she was frightened by a convict carpenter, who became the prototype for the Big Bad Banksia Man.

We then visited the Harvey Historical Society Museum, which is housed in the old Railway Station and the Stationmaster's House. Marion Lofthouse had prepared some excellent photo-graphic displays depicting the early days of Harvey at three different locations, including the Harvey Hotel.

Kerry Davies met us at the Harvey Public Library and showed us the Oral History Collection. As part of the collection a group of children have been interviewed each year from pre-school to Year 10.

Councillor Manning showed us the War Memorial Town Hall, also listed with The National Trust of Australia (WA). The restoration had been completed without recourse to Shire funding. Adorning the walls were framed film posters that had been found under a carpet of a Harvey home. Restored and framed, the posters advertise Warner Brothers and First National Pictures films, shown in the Town Hall between 1928 and 1935.

The pride, commitment and dedication shown by councillor Manning and Keith Leece in preserving and presenting the heritage of their district left a lasting impression on the group as they reluctantly returned to the city. ∎