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NEWS



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## STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS



### Australian College Of Midwives

#### National Office

Unit 12, 222 City Walk  
Canberra City, ACT 2601 Australia

PO Box 965, Civic Square  
ACT 2608 Australia

Phone 1300 360 480  
Fax +61 2 6230 6033  
members@midwives.org.au

#### Chief Executive Officer

Caroline Lamb

#### AMN Editor

Victoria Forrest  
Marketing and Communications Manager  
midnews@midwives.org.au

#### Editorial Team

Lyn Byers, Lisa Charmer, Lily Fetter,  
Heidi Williams and Hilary Rorison

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four times a year by the Australian College  
of Midwives.

#### Graphic Designer

Regina Mari

#### Advertising enquiries to

Gabby Earls  
sales@midwives.org.au

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ACM would like to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodians across the nation on whose lands our midwives reside and work and honour the collective elders past and present.



# THE BIRTH OF THE ACM AUSTRALIAN MIDWIFERY HISTORY PROJECT

by NICKY LEAP, Adjunct Professor of Midwifery, University of Technology Sydney  
and Inaugural Chair, ACM Australian Midwifery History Project



The Australian College of Midwives is about to launch a very exciting new project in the form of an accessible, online website to promote knowledge and appreciation of the history of midwifery and childbirth in Australia. The gestation of this project began in the early 1980s with the efforts of a group of midwives to form the National Midwives Association (NMA) - which changed its name to the Australian College of Midwives in 1987.

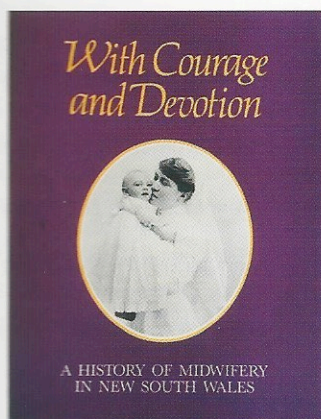
*First conference of the National Midwives Association, Adelaide 1979. Left to right: Jen Cooling SA; Margaret Peters VIC; Pam Hayes NSW; Lesley Barclay ACT; Judi Davis WA*

## In the beginning....

The new ACM Australian Midwifery History Project has its origins in the History and Archives Committee of the NSW Branch of the College. In 2004, the late Pam Hayes (a founding member of the NMA) published the story of how a committee came together in the 1980s to develop and protect precious archival material:

*'It was the eighties. It was a time of upheaval in NSW midwifery, a time of excitement and of depression, of acute anxiety and of professional pride. It was a time of maternity unit closures, the formation of a national organisation [which would become ACM] and the promise of an international congress to be held in Sydney [ICM, 1984]... Here in NSW we had about 80 members out of a total of 200 members of the new national organisation. We were faced with financial difficulties and massive plans to be contemplated and carried through.'*

*'In about 1981-1982 we commenced the History and Archives Committee and began to assemble the material needed to launch a book. Among all the incredible tasks we had to undertake, we decided to compile a history of midwifery in NSW. In producing the book 'With Courage & Devotion' [RANF, 1984] an amount of reference material and photographs were collected.'*



*Founding members of the NSW History and Archives Committee. Standing left to right: Cath Robinson, Lorraine Doyle, Hazel Woolston, Pamela Mulholland, Pam Hayes. Seated: Dorothy Rogers, Ina Thornton*



'In the early 1980s, doom had descended on three major maternity institutions: The Women's Hospital (Crown Street), St Margaret's Hospital (Darlinghurst) and the Mater Misericordia (North Sydney) ... With the closure of these three maternity units in Sydney, some equipment, photographs and texts were available... Pat Sparrow and Ina Thornton had been 'putting aside' bits and pieces since organizing the 75th Anniversary of Crown Street display in 1968.... Where to house all this accumulating material?'

'We were given access to a spare bedroom in St Margaret's Hospital Nurses Home that we filled quickly. A home needed to be found. Remember this was the time where we had no premises. We operated from spare rooms in our homes, a corner of a committee member's office, and held meetings alternating in different hospital venues...'

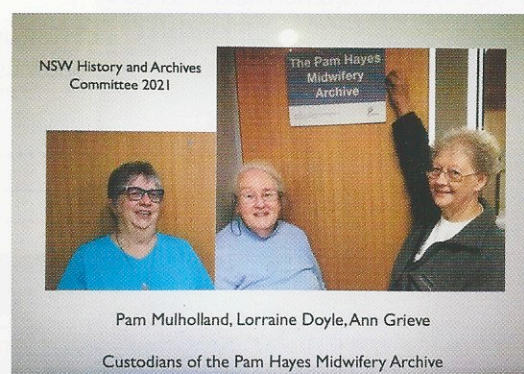
'In 1991 the NSWMA purchased premises in Jones Street Ultimo and we were able to move the collection to a curtained area of this office...' [Adapted from Hayes, 2014, pp.16-17]

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## The Pam Hayes Midwifery Archive

Over a period of several years, the collection benefitted from a lot of sorting and cataloguing by volunteers, under the guidance of two archivists who were employed to work with the committee. Now named after Pam Hayes, the collection is housed in a separate room in the ACM NSW office and is lovingly preserved by the three remaining members of the NSW History and Archives committee: Lorraine Doyle, Ann Grieve and Pam Mulholland.

The Pam Hayes Collection contains over 1,000 historical texts, photographs, College records, uniforms, equipment, badges, memorabilia, early teaching resources and examination papers, registers identifying the first midwives practising in NSW and much more.



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## The ACM Heritage Advisory Group

Following unification of ACM in 2016, the NSW History and Archives Committee continued to meet as custodians of the Pam Hayes Midwifery Archive but were also involved in working with the CEO of ACM, Ann Kinnear, to develop a national midwifery history advisory committee. In 2017, Expressions of Interest were sought for ACM members to join the 'ACM Heritage Advisory Committee' in its task of providing advice on the development and maintenance of a national heritage collection. The members of this advisory group were: Margaret Peters and Rebecca Hart from Victoria; Nola Wong from the ACT; and Ann Grieve, Lorraine Doyle, Pam Mulholland and Nicky Leap from NSW.

## From Heritage Advisory Group to Australian Midwifery History Website

In 2020, Rebecca Hart proposed that we re-think the concept of advising ACM on how to be an agency for the collection, storage and display of historical materials. As well as being a midwife, Beck is a historian with a Graduate Diploma in Local, Family and Applied History from the University of New England; she is also the Education Placement Officer at Museums Victoria. With Beck's guidance, we started exploring how we might develop a searchable, web based, online resource and virtual collection, linked to other websites, rather than helping ACM develop a small 'museum.'

Potential features of the website (not an exhaustive list):

- History of midwifery and childbirth in Australia – publications and links to authors' work
- History of ACM
- Links to relevant collections in ACM Branches, museums, historical societies, libraries, private owners
- Links to online cataloguing systems such as 'Trove' and e-hive  
See, for example, Beck's collection about her great-great grandmother, Hannah Jane (Grannie) Watts on e-hive:  
<https://ehive.com/collections/8592/rebecca-hart>

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- Biographies with links
- Video and audio recorded interviews
- Books, libraries and archives
- Theme based initiatives, online exhibitions, events
- Information about how to care for historic objects
- Information about practicalities and ethical considerations when engaging in oral history interviews/story gathering
- Links to other sites like the UK based De Partu History of Midwifery and Childbirth Group <https://departu.org.uk/about/> and the Australian Women's Register <https://www.womenaustralia.info>
- An ACM members Story Telling Project: 'Tell us your story/your grandmother's story,' 'Show us what you have'



The ACM supported us in changing our focus away from being an advisory group to being a steering group for an important ACM project. Efforts began in earnest to get representation on the steering group from each state and territory; this included co-opting midwives who were known to have expertise in midwifery history. We are also in the process of inviting Honorary Advisors to the project. The first of these is Dr. Mavis Gaff-Smith, prolific author of books about Australian midwifery and childbirth. <https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/gaff-smith-mavis/>

Samantha Tutton, Programs and Member Services Manager in the national office was assigned to work with the steering group to develop the website. Sam has been doing a stellar job in designing a state-of-the-art website and we're looking forward to an official launch when it goes live in the near future. Meanwhile, the following snapshots of draft website pages offer a preview of the sort of links that will be available.

A page on the website 'Meet Our Team' will link to profiles of members of the steering group and honorary advisors to the project. Read on to see who's in the current steering group. We still need representatives from the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Queensland. Please get in touch if you would like to be part of this initiative or if you would like to form a local sub-group of midwives interested in contributing to the project.



## We have important stories to tell

The ACM members' Story Telling Project will be an important place to share stories and honour the lives of midwives and the women they attended in bygone days. The website will have links to articles about the practicalities and ethical considerations when recording these stories.

There are so many fascinating and inspiring stories to be told. We now have the opportunity to make these widely accessible to anyone whose curiosity or passion leads them to explore our website. Please record those stories (you can use your phones), transcribe them, write about them, talk about them and please send us sound files, videos, transcripts, photographs and pictures of memorabilia so that we can continue to enrich and grow the ACM Australian Midwifery History website.

## Echoes from the past

The history of midwifery foreshadows many of the issues that drive modern conversations about midwifery. Or, to reverse this point of view, modern public debates about midwifery resonate with echoes from the history of midwifery, particularly in its relationship with medicine and the state (Lay 2000. p.43)

There is a temptation to talk about 'herstory' in the interest of addressing gender biased language, but for now I shall refrain. What I do know is that recording the experiences of midwives and the women they attended has the potential to 'sing the songs of the unsung heroines' and foster our sense of community and continuity. The humbling experience of being with elderly midwives as they reflect on their lives can provide valuable material for our own reflections, especially when they come out with little gems like the following:

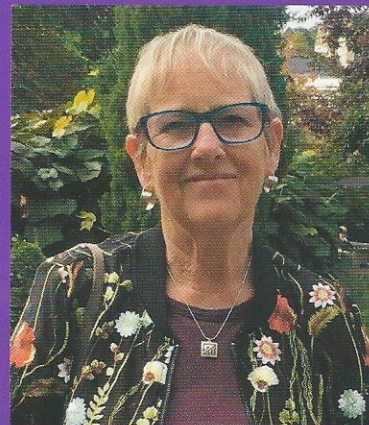
"I don't know whether you go into midwifery because you're a bit of a square peg in a round hole or whether you get like it. Maybe it's a bit of both, but midwifery has always attracted individualists... Over the considerable amount of years that I've been observing, the overall impression is that I'm surprised that midwives do so much and so well in such adverse circumstances."

(Retired midwifery teacher interviewed in 1982, Leap & Hunter, 2013, p.185)

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# ACM HISTORY STEERING GROUP PROFILE



## Nicky Leap

Nicky has been a midwife for over 40 years. Her passion for midwifery history began in the 1980s when she and Billie Hunter started collecting the stories of women who gave birth in the 1920s, 30s and 40s and interviews with midwives who practised in that pre-NHS era in Britain. Later published as *The Midwife's Tale: an oral history from handywoman to professional midwife* you can access the original tapes, transcripts and photographs of those conversations via the Royal College of Midwives archives website:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_YjCpmyEmOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YjCpmyEmOI)

Nicky has been involved with the History and Archives committee of the ACM NSW Branch for 20 years. She is the inaugural Chair of the ACM Australian Midwifery History Steering Group.

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## ACM HISTORY STEERING GROUP PROFILE *continued from previous page*



### Ann Grieve

Over the past 56 years I have worked in a variety of areas including city, regional and rural hospitals and in Papua New Guinea - all interesting and different.

During the same period I have managed to complete a Graduate Diploma and two degrees.

I joined the NSW Midwives Association in 1980 on my return from PNG. I have held all the Office Bearer positions in the Association with the exception of Treasurer, and at the same time represented NSW on the National Executive (forerunner of the Board). I have also been a member of the Board of Directors.

I can't remember when I joined the NSW History and Archives Committee, but I have been involved with it for an extended period. My particular interest is the acquisition and preservation of artefacts and ephemera and working toward the digitisation of the historical material so that it is accessible to the membership.

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### Chris Cornwell

I have been passionate about midwifery since 1970, when I undertook my midwifery education and training at the Crown Street Women's Hospital, Sydney. I worked in the Public Sector of South Australia in various midwifery clinical and managerial roles and was the Divisional Director Midwifery and Nursing, in the Women's and Babies Division of the Women's and Children's Hospital from 1995 until I retired in July 2014.

I have been a member of the ACM, or its forerunner organisation in SA, since 1974. I was a member of the ACM Board from 2002 until 2009, being Vice President from 2004. I was honoured to be awarded a Public Service Medal for services to midwifery in the 2005 Australia Day Awards and to be awarded life membership of the ACM in 2016. My involvement now continues as secretary of the ACM (SA Branch).

The ACM Philosophy has deep meaning for me and continues to guide me in everything I do in relation to midwifery. In my view, the history of the role and status of midwives is interwoven with the history of the role and status of women within our society. I believe it is important to understand where we came from, and how and why we are where we are now as a profession. It is also important to know the stories of midwives and childbearing women who have gone before us, as we stand on their shoulders.

I feel excited about this project, a little overwhelmed at all the work to be done and most certainly over awed by the previous work, writings and knowledge about Australian midwifery history shared by other members of the ACM Midwifery History Project Steering Committee.



### Christine Catling

As voluntary Administrator and Coordinator of the ACM Australian Midwifery History Project, Christine has been instrumental in the early development of the project, providing organisational support and liaison between members of the steering group, the national office, the NSW Branch History and Archives committee and other key stakeholders.

Christine has been a midwife for 26 years. Over that time, she has had a variety of roles in research, education, practice and antenatal education. She is a mother and grandmother and likes to sing.

Currently, Christine is an NHMRC Research Fellow within the Faculty of Health at UTS studying Group Clinical Supervision as a supportive strategy for midwives. She is the coordinator of the National Publicly-funded Homebirth Consortium, which acts as a network and resource for managers, policy makers, researchers and all involved in developing and sustaining publicly funded home birth models.





## Clare Davison

Clare Davison is a privately practising midwife and midwifery lecturer from Perth, Western Australia. She has a keen interest in the history of birth and midwifery. Clare is passionate about the frequently untold history of women and this led her to complete her PhD looking at the history of midwifery. Until the early twentieth century birth in Australia was generally at home with a midwife in attendance. The decline of midwifery as an independent profession began in the early twentieth century as nursing and medicine began to encroach on traditional midwifery practice. Midwives as independent practitioners became almost non-existent. These issues are explored further in an article published in the British Journal of Midwifery and in Clare's PhD.

Davison, C. Feminism, midwifery and the medicalisation of birth

Dr Clare Davison examines the perception of women and midwifery through the ages. British Journal of Midwifery, December 2020, Vol 28, No 12

Looking Back and Moving Forward: A History and Discussion of Privately Practising Midwives in Western Australia - Curtin University

The aim of this historical narrative research study was to fill a gap in the literature by investigating, analysing and describing the history of privately practising midwives in Western Australia (WA) from colonisation to the present day (approximately 1830-2018). <https://espace.curtin.edu.au/handle/20.500.11937/77506>

## Gill Hall

Gill has been a midwife for over 30 years in both South Australia and Canberra. She currently lives in Adelaide and works as a midwife in the Women's and Children's Hospital, community antenatal clinics and the postnatal home visiting program.

Gill has a passionate interest in recording the stories of midwifery elders. With Nicky (Leap) she video recorded an interview with Rhodanthe Lipsett, which you can watch on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_YjCpmyEmOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YjCpmyEmOI)

Gill also recorded an interview with retired Canberra midwife Margaret Minnis, which will be available on the website.



## Janice Butt

I am a Midwife and Registered Nurse having completed all of my initial education in the United Kingdom in the 1970's. I have been actively involved with the Australian College of Midwives since immigrating to Australia in 1992 and am a Life Member of the WA Branch. I am currently employed as the Coordinator and Head of the Department of Midwifery & Nursing Education and Research at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women (KEMH) in Perth Western Australia.

I am interested in ensuring that the history of midwifery and the Australian College of midwives is gathered and available to share with colleagues for many years to come. I contributed to the preparation of the book 'King Eddies' that celebrated the 100 year history of King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women since it opened in 1916.

I was also privileged to be contacted by the relatives of Midwife May Flanagan, following her death in 2012, who spent many years researching midwifery in WA, although never finished the book that she hoped to write. All of her work was donated to the ACM WA Branch at the time and subsequently stored in the WA Medical Museum located at KEMH to make sure that this important work was not lost.

I look forward to participating in the ACM Australian Midwifery History Project steering committee on behalf of the WA Branch.



## ACM HISTORY STEERING GROUP PROFILE *continued from previous page*



### Lorraine Doyle

I have been involved with the collection of historical materials (currently housed in the NSW office of ACM) since the formation of the collection in the early 1980's. I was invited to join the fledgling midwives group intent on preserving the history of Crown Street Women's Hospital after its closure: Pam Hayes, Hazel Woolston, Dorothy Rogers, Cath Robinson, Pat Sparrow and Ina Thornton. I am the last remaining member of this original team.

My enthusiasm for the ongoing preservation and development of the collections has not waned. I mostly work on the cataloguing of hard copy materials and we have over 1000 books in the collection. I am a lifetime member of ACM.

I became a nurse in 1963. Four years later, I undertook midwifery training at Crown Street Women's Hospital in Sydney. I worked on the labour ward there for several years before practising at Manning River District Hospital in Taree. After further training in intensive care nursing at the Royal Newcastle Hospital, I was invited back to Manning River District Hospital to take over the running of their newly formed Intensive care/ recovery unit.

In 1976 I decided on a career change and moved into library work back in Sydney. I was accepted into the new Faculty of Library Science Bachelor of Arts degree at the Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education (now UTS) and commenced part time study, majoring in law. From working in a public library as a children's librarian, I then took up a position as library manager with Butterworths Legal Publishing. In 1995 I moved to Law Book Company, which later became Thomson Reuters. I retired from there in 2012.

### Margaret Peters

Margaret Peters was a leading midwife in Australia and internationally during the 1960's and through to the 1990's. She was the inaugural president of the Australian College of Midwives, an ACM Board member for 12 years. Her roles have included being President of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), and President of the Australian committee for UNICEF.

Seen here in a photograph with the late Pam Hayes, another founder of our College, Margaret plays an important role as a member of the ACM Australian Midwifery History Project steering group.

You can read an interview with Margaret where she tells the story of how the College was formed:

<https://www.midwives.org.au/resources/international-day-midwife-interview-margaret-peters>



### Marijke Eastaugh

I've recently joined the ACM History group. I am an Endorsed Midwife still practising in private practice providing mostly home birth services in the Adelaide Hills. I am also a registered IBCLC Lactation Consultant. I have had a long interest in the History of South Australian Midwifery and the beginnings of ACM. I am taking care of 17 boxes of archive material, which will be the basis of my book. I have interviewed a number of midwives and know there is still a lot of work to do. If you are a midwife in South Australia and you are interested in helping me with this project, I'd love to hear from you.





### Nola Wong

It's my 50th year of midwifery in 2021 and I'm pleased to be part of this project as I'm fascinated by our Australian midwifery history.

In 2015 I graduated with a Masters of Health Research by thesis after completing a quantitative research project titled: "Getting the First Birth Right: A Retrospective study of outcomes for low-risk primiparous women receiving standard care versus midwifery model of care in the same hospital". This only confirmed what we already knew!

I wrote and edited a book: A Birth Centre for Canberra, which was self-published in 2018. I decided to write about the history of Canberra's Birth Centre because it was such a contentious project and took some years and many tears to come to fruition. The Birth Centre continues to thrive and is in its second location since the Centenary Hospital for Women & Children was completed in 2012.

I have a valuable copy of a book written by a historian in my home town of Crookwell: A Good Pair of Hands, which records stories about the 'granny midwives' in that area in the 1800s'

### Rebecca Hart

My involvement with the ACM Midwifery History Project Steering Group began back in 2017 when I responded to an expression of interest sent to members for the then Heritage Advisory Committee. I saw this as a way to combine my midwifery with my history studies. As a midwife, I graduated from the first cohort Bachelor of Midwifery at ACU in 2004 and then a Master of Health Science (Clinical Education). I worked as a core birth suite/family birth centre midwife at Mercy, and returned to ACU as a midwifery lecturer, Follow Through student mentor, Continuity of Care Experience co-ordinator, and tutor at Jim-Baa-Yer Indigenous Higher Education Unit. I have been a member of the College since 2002, and served the State Executive Committee (Vic) as Student Representative 2002-2004.

As a historian I have a love for genealogy that led me to do a Graduate Diploma in Local, Family & Applied History at UNE. To complete my Grad Dip I wrote a minor thesis on midwifery in rural Victoria 1886-1920. This involved a case study of my great-great grandmother Hannah Jane 'Grannie' Watts and her midwifery practice records. I have recently begun my PhD to develop and extend this research. I am the Education Placement Officer at Museums Victoria.

I have a little online collection of historic objects related to Grannie Watts here <https://ehive.com/collections/8592/rebecca-hart>



### Pamela Mulholland

On Clinical Placement at Royal North Shore Hospital Maternity Unit as part of my Associate Diploma in Nurse Education in 1984, I met Dorothy McLennan and attended a NSW Midwives meeting.

At that meeting plans were being made for an International Midwives Conference to be held in Sydney 1984. From this meeting I became an active member of the NSW Midwives Association now the Australian College of Midwives NSW Branch.

I was an original member of the BFHI committee 1993 and became a Lifetime member of the College.

My interest in History happened after meeting Pamela Hayes who was an advocate for recording History and maintaining photos, books, records and instruments used by Midwives throughout history.