

IT'S AN HONOUR TO MEET JUDITH DUNN OAM

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By Virginia Knight, *Catholic Outlook*, March 2011

For some people, history is just in the past, but for Judith Dunn OAM recent recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia it is firmly centred in the present, as vibrant and vital as the day it was lived. On Australia Day this year Judith received the honour for service to the community through the Parramatta and District Historical Society.

Another part of Judith's OAM was in recognition of her life membership to the Our Lady of Mt Carmel Netball Club of which she was president for many years.

In addition to playing netball, she was involved as an umpire in both local and interstate Catholic Schools Competitions and coached a number of teams over the years.



Judith Dunn OAM

As part of the disability program sponsored by Parramatta Auburn Netball Association, Judith coached a team with Down syndrome in the grounds of Catherine McAuley Westmead. "The idea was to give people with disabilities an activity, as exercise is an important part of their development," Judith said.

Born in England, to Eric and Eileen Veal, Judith was right in the centre of their big family of seven children. When her parents made the choice to move the family to Australia in the 1950s Judith was in her late teens.

She had already developed an interest in history and was even then working on archaeological sites. In Australia she continued to pursue her passion, joining archaeological digs in and around Sydney as a member of the Industrial Archaeological Society.

One of her first digs was attached to the University of Sydney on Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta. "You just absorb history. You come across things and you just absorb them," Judith said.

As time passed, Judith became very interested in the history of her new country, focussing in later years in particular on the Parramatta District. In 1964 after a long courtship she married Gregory Dunn and the couple settled in Wentworthville Parish in 1968.

At this time, Judith realised that much of Australia's history was not recorded and that the local history of Parramatta was beginning to disappear. Consequently, she began writing books to maintain these records and preserve local history for future generations.

Her first book was on the earliest Catholic cemetery, St Patricks at Parramatta. "I started on the cemetery of our own faith, as I had an understanding of the faith behind that cemetery," Judith said.

Seven books later, she has broadened her horizons and begun researching some of the local historical buildings and those who inhabited them. Over the years, all of the proceeds of Judith's cemetery series have been donated to the Parramatta and District Historical Society of which Judith has been a member since the 1960s.

Her latest published work, *Colonial Ladies, Lovely, Lively & Lamentably Loose*, traces some of the early women prisoners attached to the Female Factory in Parramatta. The book boasts a glossary of early colonial terminology, which has earned it much acclaim and which saw Judith returning to the study of Classical Latin in order to complete the research task.

"I wrote this book and thought if a teenager picked it up they wouldn't understand a lot of the words; little phrases that people would use in their everyday language. So I went back and researched the origins of all these early words and phrases. It certainly broadened my mind!"

For many years Judith has been working in the tourism and hospitality sector and runs a very successful tour guide company, Past Time Tours, which runs historical tours in the greater Parramatta area. She has also been one of the regular guides at St Patrick's Cathedral.

For the past 10 years Judith has been teaching TAFE courses on tour guiding as well as conducting regular on-site courses for staff, by special request, at historical places of interest.

Judith is also a regular guest speaker at schools, seniors groups and conferences on Australian history, exploring "fun" heritage topics. She says it is all about sharing your passion and broadening the horizons of those in the community.

In her precious down time Judith likes to absorb peace rather than history; going bush on camping trips, often taking a number of her eight grandchildren with her. "You just feel so refreshed when you get back to a natural place," Judith said.

But before visions of a sedentary R&R begin to formulate, bear in mind that these days Judith has traded netball for waterskiing and can be seen churning up the waters of the South Coast behind a speeding boat when the rest of us are lying about on the beach. I guess some people are just born to be fascinating historical figures, even in their own lifetime.

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