

CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC HISTORY

RESEARCH SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

FEBRUARY 2026, ISSUE 46



Australian
National
University

Friends of the ANU Centre for Economic History,

Welcome to this issue of the CEH newsletter. It includes a report on the Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference, announcements, new discussion papers and more. Once again, thanks for your interest in the Centre for Economic History.

Tim Hatton, CEH Director

Report: Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference



The Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference took place at Adelaide University of 4th-6th February kindly hosted by Florian Ploeckl. 44 papers were presented and around 60 scholars participated in the conference. The proceedings began with a plenary lecture by Bruce Chapman (ANU) who explained the history of Australia's Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), introduced in 1989. He noted that higher education financed by general taxation is regressive and costly to expand. He explained the key benefits of income-contingent loans as compared with bank loans, which often created hardship, default and credit exclusion. As the principal architect of the scheme he outlined the political obstacles to its adoption and the means by which they were overcome and commented on the development of the scheme in the ensuing years.



In a session on women's lives and livelihoods, Catherine Bishop (Macquarie U) explored the independence of women in business and employment, despite the stigma and discrimination that they faced, and the widening of opportunities from the 1970s as the tide of patriarchy began to ebb. Mélanie Méthot (U of Alberta) examined 3,000 court cases on bigamy in New South Wales. These covered a wide range of gaps in the timing of marriages and exhibited some key features, commonly the abandonment of a spouse and geographical distance. Jennifer Aston (Northumbria U) examined the evolution of the law on divorce which was difficult for women because of coverture (the ban on married women's right to own property). Divorce was also costly especially when spouses were geographically separated; women's rights and financial support gradually improved during the 20th century.



Bruce Chapman,
Jennifer Aston and
Mélanie Méthot

In a session on violence and punishment Kiran Mehta (U of Leicester) focused on the reforms of the English prison system from 1770 to 1850, which increasingly aimed to rehabilitate inmates. New buildings that

APEBH Conference contd.

allowed separation, more regular routines, stricter supervision and a range of employments were introduced although it is not known if this reduced recidivism. Heidi Ing (Adelaide U) examined under-age recruitment into the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during World War I. 5.4% of Tasmanian recruits enlisted under the minimum age of 18, most of whom embarked for overseas; official attempts to restrict underage recruitment were largely ineffective. Shifting the context to post-1960 Africa, Ha Thi Nguyen (Curtin U) found that ethnic-group experience of war and conflict had significant effects on different types of intimate partner violence at the individual level.



Ha Thi Nguyen and Mohd Shazwan

In a session on data exploration Andrew Schein (Netanya Academic College) noted that there was divergence in GDP per capita across countries up to 1999 but convergence thereafter. He suggested that the latter could be due to the spread of electronic communication. Mohd Shazwan Mokhtar (National U of Malaysia) explored the official data on living standards in interwar Malaya. Colonial officials wished to ensure labour retention but the prescribed standards varied widely across three main population groups. Kris Inwood (U of Guelph) used newly digitised census data to examine the growth and persistence of pockets of French population in Ontario from 1871 to 1921. Data linkage to marriage registers revealed high marriage rates and high fertility as key features.

The Butlin Lecture was delivered by Pauline Grosjean (UNSW), based on her forthcoming book on the evolution of gender inequality. She presented an overview of gender wage gaps in the US and France in the second half of the twentieth century, noting that most progress was made in the 1980s, especially for women in the middle of the income distribution. She went on to outline the changing economic and demographic forces that shaped the uneven progress, beginning with the 1950s marriage squeeze, followed by spread of contraception, and then the rise in women's education. As a result, more of the wage gap is now accounted for by differences in occupation, with the unexplained component also increasing. Pauline argued that masculinity norms are important drivers of economic outcomes, explaining 20-50% of the remaining wage gaps, and that these are transmitted across generations.



Pauline Grosjean giving the Butlin Lecture

APEBH Conference contd.

The second day of the conference opened with papers on information services. Youssef Ghallada (London School of Econ), examined the influence of the telegraph on financial markets. Using data on bills of exchange in 1878 and 1906 he found that increased intermediation led to concentration of borrowers in some global regions and dispersal in others. Florian Ploeckl (Adelaide U) examined the possible relationship in the United States between prohibition and savings behaviour. He found that the advent of prohibition had a negative effect on saving, probably due to the high price of illicit grog.

In a session presenting new databases Lisa Hackett (U of New England) illustrated how multi-media linkage provides new insights into the character and development of aviation and aviators in Australia, stressing the importance of preserving the records. John Wilson (Adelaide U) re-examined the determinants of the heights of young recruits into the AIF during the World War I, focusing on how the coefficient on age differs between declared age and age measured from birth certificates. Hamish Maxwell Stewart (U of New England) explored data on criminals from the nineteenth century Tasmanian Police Gazette. Evidence revealed increasing incidence of tattoos up to the 1850s followed by decline from the 1880s and evolution from religious to popular images.

One new perspective on economic history was offered by Kentaro Saito (Kyoto Sangyo U) who introduced lab-based experiments using the hawk-dove conflict game. He then compared the results with data on peasant revolts in Japan in the 17th and 18th centuries and British industrial disputes in the late 19th. Brian Scott (Macquarie U) used accounting data and case studies to emphasise the importance of company incorporation and network building for Australian corporate investment from 1897 to 1914. In the concluding presentation Sumner La Croix (U of Hawaii-Manoa) compared the struggles over rights to tax and to legislate in 1860s US, which led to war and independence, and in New South Wales from the 1840s, which culminated in a peaceful transition to responsible government. Potential contributors to these contrasting outcomes were policies outside the limits of settlement and differences between eras in the economic stance of the British government.



Youssef Ghallada, Lisa Hackett, John Wilson, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Sumner La Croix

Among other sessions there was a strong showing of topics on Asian economic history that covered the economic effects of Chinese institutions such as the sale of offices, the development of human capital, the civil examination system and the rise of clans. Industrial relations and financial history also featured prominently both in Australia and in Southeast Asia. One of the conference highlights was an online session of presentations by three shortlisted candidates for the EHZANZ dissertation prize. The winner in a highly competitive field was Holly Swanson (PhD Northwestern U) for her dissertation on British media exports to Australia, which persisted from 1850 to 1990 despite radical differences in the climatic and cultural contexts. She found that higher quality, weak local competition, strategic business alliances and distribution networks all contributed to the enduring British media presence.

Featured Economic Historian: Lionel Frost

Lionel Frost is Associate Professor at Monash Business School. After completing his PhD at Monash, for which he won the SJ Butlin prize for best thesis in 1982-6, he commenced his academic career at Latrobe University. After rising through the ranks he moved to Monash in 2004, serving first as research coordinator at the Berwick campus and then from 2010 to 2023 as Head of Monash Business School at the Peninsula Campus.



Lionel Frost

Lionel has been a leading light in Australian economic history over many years. Much of his research has been collaborative and has attracted a series of research grants, notably from the Australian Research Council. His work, published in a wide range of books and journals, covers topics ranging from regional development and environmental history to social capital and social inclusion.

But two areas stand out that he has made his own. One is urban history in which he has published widely and comparatively, exploring the dynamics of urban expansion and the provision of water infrastructure, carefully weighing the environmental costs and economic benefits. Indeed, one of his many articles in *Urban History* was awarded the Dyos Prize. The second is the economics and history of sport, notably Australian Rules football, on which he is acknowledged as a premier expert. As if that were not enough he has coauthored various editions of an award-winning introductory microeconomics text (with John B. Taylor).

Lionel has made significant contributions to the economic history discipline in Australia. He has served as editor of the *Asia-Pacific Economic History Review* in 2013-15 and, since 2007, as editor of *Sporting Traditions*. In addition, he has edited special issues of several journals of which he has been an editorial board member. From 2017 to 2024 Lionel was President of the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand, expertly steering the society through turbulent times. He continues as secretary of the society and so, fortunately, his accumulated wisdom and experience will not be lost.

APEBH Conference contd.

The business meeting of the EHZANZ society welcomed as its new president Edwyna Harris (Monash U). Treasurer John Wilson (Adelaide U) reported on the society's satisfactory finances. *Asia-Pacific Economic History Review* editor Kris Inwood (U of Guelph) reported on the upward trend in submissions to the journal and the award of the Coghlan Prize for best article in 2025 to Rohan Alexander and Tim Hatton for their paper analysing voting for Australian Federation. The E. O. G. Shann award for service to economic history in Australia and New Zealand went to Tim Hatton. Finally, it was announced that next year's conference would be held at the Australian National University.



The assembled company

13th Australasian Cliometrics Workshop Call for Papers

The 13th Australasian Cliometrics Workshop will be held on Friday 13th November 2026, at Australian National University. AusClio follows the established Clio format of short presentations (5 min), discussant comments (10 min) and substantial discussion by the audience (30 min). Accepted papers will be distributed in advance to all participants, who are expected to read them beforehand to ensure engaged contributions and meaningful discussions.

There is no workshop theme, submissions to all topics in economic history are welcomed. The workshop will be hosted by the Centre for Economic History at the ANU's Research School of Economics and supported by the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand.

Extended abstracts or full papers will be accepted now through 13th September 2026. Notifications will be made shortly afterwards, and full papers will be due by 30th October (two weeks before the workshop). To submit an abstract or paper as well as to RSVP to attend (including willingness to serve as a discussant), please send an email to Tim Hatton (tim.hatton@anu.edu.au). Early career scholars and graduate students are particularly encouraged to apply.

Registration is free and lunch and coffee will be provided. All other costs will need to be self-funded, such as travel and accommodation. An informal dinner and get-together will be organized for the Thursday evening before the workshop.

Thanks, and we look forward to seeing you in Canberra.

Centre for Economic History Discussion Paper Series

The CEH website hosts a discussion paper series on a variety of topics in economic history. Recent additions to the series are as follows:

2026-01 ['Shearing the Rams': The Path to Nationhood](#)
by Alison Booth

Centre affiliates and visitors are encouraged to submit working papers to the series. All papers are available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/s/auu/hpaper.html>

CEH news and working papers at: <https://rse.anu.edu.au/research/centre-economic-history>

The CEH welcomes courtesy announcements from affiliates and interested parties for inclusion in our newsletter (subject to editing). Please send news items to:
tim.hatton@anu.edu.au

All CEH affiliates who are registered with RePEc are invited to add the Centre as an affiliation on IDEAS: <https://edirc.repec.org/data/chanuau.html>

Upcoming Conferences

HETSA-JSHET Joint Conference

The History of Economic Thought Society of Australia and the Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought joint conference is to be held at Doshisha University, Kyoto on Monday 28th and Tuesday 29th September 2026.

This special event will bring together scholars and researchers from across the globe to share new insights and foster collaboration in the history of economic thought. Conference highlights will include a welcome reception, gala dinner and reserved time for the HETSA General Meeting and History of Economics Review editorial board meeting.

Key dates:

- Call for papers opens: Early March
- Submission deadline (papers & sessions): Early April
- Notification of acceptance: Late April
- Registration closes: Early August
- Full paper submission deadline: Early September

Economic History and the History of Economic Thought Network

uwaeconhistory@159607438.mailchimpapp.com

Australian Historical Association Conference 2026

The 45th Australian Historical Association (AHA) Conference will be hosted by Macquarie University on Monday 29th June to Friday 3rd July.

The conference theme is 'Changing Minds'. The capacity to 'change one's mind' is a foundational premise in the discipline of history. Upon encountering evidence that disrupts our existing explanations, the story goes, we might adjust, rework or perhaps even overturn our interpretations. And yet, historians do not often describe how and why they have changed their minds. While we are comfortable tracing changes in historiography, it seems harder to narrate our own intellectual alterations or confess that we were once, perhaps, mistaken.

The deadline for submissions is very tight: **20th February**. Full details of how to submit a paper or to attend the conference can be found here: <https://theaha.org.au/aha-conference-2026/>. Economic history authors should select the History of Capitalism stream for their submission.