

LAST MEETING

A Change of venue and meeting time resulted in a very enjoyable July meeting. Thirty two members gathered at the Museum to hear Penny Ferguson speak about author and illustrator May Gibbs.

Penny kept her audience enthralled as she spoke about May's life and work. Born in

England, May came from a family not always constrained by the conventions of the 19th century. May's father wanted to regain his rural past so the family emigrated to South Australia. They later lived in Western Australia before May returned to England to attend art school.

Her love and appreciation of Australian flora and fauna developed during her early years in Australia. Although she earned her living for many years working as an illustrator for newspapers, May was best known for her children's stories. Generations of children thrilled to the adventures of Bib and Bub as well as to the antics of the Banksia men.

So beloved are May's works that they are regarded as essential parts of the national heritage. When May dies, developers planned to demolish her house at Neutral Bay. It was at Nutcote that May created the books, cartoons and other works that charmed so many.

Dismayed that such a significant historical site should be destroyed, a 'Save Nutcote' group was formed. Among those who campaigned for Nutcote was Penny Ferguson. The efforts of the group led to the purchase of the house by North Sydney Council. The house is now open to the public and provides a focus for the promotion of children's literature.

Penny's enthusiasm for May Gibbs and for Nutcote was infectious. Everyone present at the meeting remembered reading the adventures of the Gum Nut children and other bush dwellers of May's invention. Several members expressed a desire to visit Nutcote and an excursion will be considered later in the year.

John Shipp