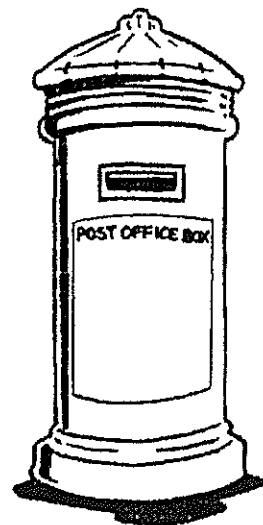
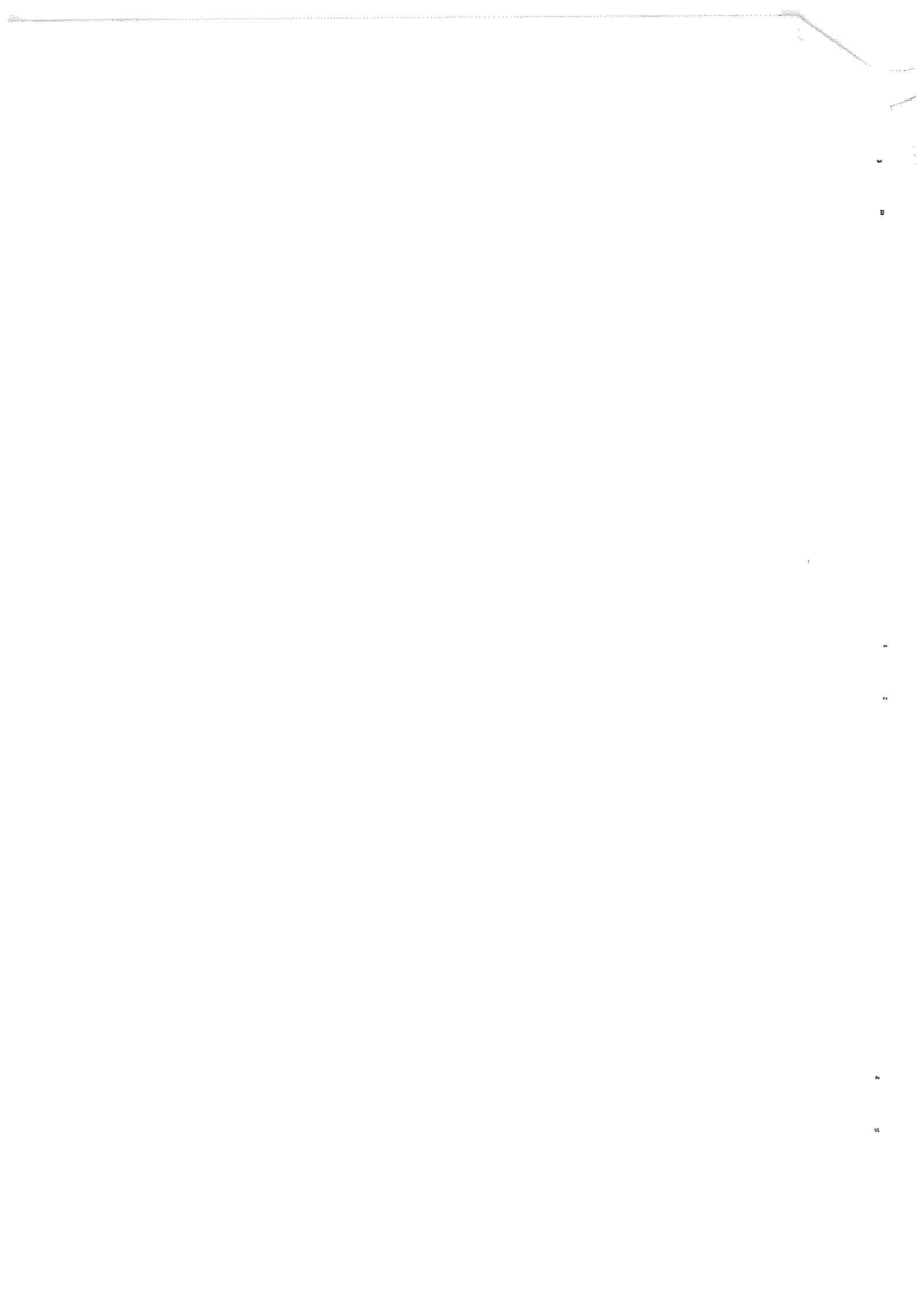




**GUIDES**  
**AUSTRALIA**

## **HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN POST BOX**





## FOREWORD

WILMA TORNEY loved Guiding, and lived the Guiding way. She held many positions in the Movement, being a leader, commissioner and trainer, and serving on committees.

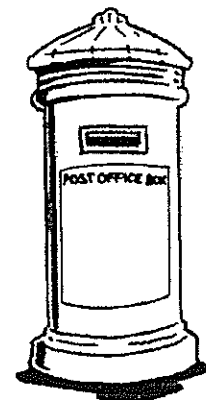
One of Wilma's special interests was the international aspect of Guiding. In 1991 she took on the position of State Post Box Secretary in Queensland, arranging links both interstate and international for Queensland guides in all age groups, units and leaders.

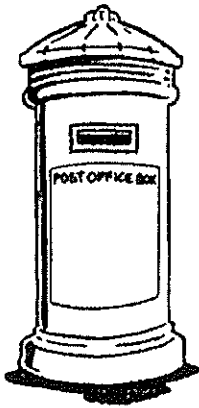
Wilma became Australian Post Box Secretary in January, 1995, co-ordinating the states' Post Box activities and making contact with her counterparts in many countries around the world. Unfortunately, because of ill health Wilma had to resign from the position after a year, but her interest in Post Box continued. She began to delve into records with the aim of compiling a history of Australian Post Box. She worked hard on this, but her failing health prevented her from finishing the task she had set herself.

A few months after her death in March, 1997, Wilma's work on the History of Australian Post Box was sent to me to edit and complete. Information from the states has in some cases been scant. It seems few records were kept in the early days, although Post Box flourished. However, I have set down the information I've been able to glean, and hope that, as time goes by, some readers will remember details and anecdotes which could be included in a revised version, making more interesting reading.

In the meantime, we remember Wilma and her great contribution to Guiding with affection, and dedicate this brief History of Australian Post Box to her memory.

Joan Burch  
June, 1998





## HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN POST BOX

Post Box started in Australia in 1930 due to the enthusiasm and dedication of Miss Lilian Laidlaw, a Queensland guide leader who had been privately corresponding with friends from many parts of the world. Since then the people who have been appointed as Australian Post Box Secretaries are:

1947 - 1949	Mrs Leroy
1950 - 1956	Mrs Foggan
1956 - 1957	Mrs E Tobin , Victoria
1957 - 1961	Miss Margaret Fowler, Victoria
1961 - 1969	Miss Lilian Laidlaw, Queensland
1969 - 1974	Mrs Jean Lazarides, Queensland (Mrs Linda Bull acted as APBS from August, 1973 till Jan, 1974)
1964 - 1979	Mrs Kit Williamson, Victoria
1979 - 1984	Mrs J E Thompson
1985 - 1989	Mrs Hettie Pearce, South Australia
1990 - 1994	Mrs Joan Burch, New South Wales (Mrs Patsy Hughes acted as APBS from February to June, 1991)
1992 - 1994	Mrs Diana Wheeler - Assistant APBS
1995	Mrs Wilma Torney, Queensland
1996 -	Mrs Pat James, Queensland

Corresponding with guides in other parts of the world became very popular with Australian guides, and the International Post Box has become a very important part of Guiding in this country, with more and more guides participating.

As well as linking guides with guides and girl scouts overseas, interstate links were started, mainly for the younger girls. Apart from the obvious difficulties with language when corresponding with guides in other countries, many overseas countries will not link girls under a certain age (usually about 10 years). As well as the younger girls, a number of units as well as older girls and leaders have chosen to have interstate links.

This could possibly be reproduced under the text on page 2. Unfortunately, however, there is no indication as to the publication in which it appeared - we have only the date.

Nov. 9, 1995

# A lifetime of letters

By Corinna Boldiston

**S**HEPPARTON'S Jean Phillips and Annie Schwartz-Strom of Oakland, California, have been close friends for 58 years.

But they only met for the first time on Monday.

The pair, both 73, became pen friends when they were 14, and have corresponded almost monthly ever since.

For almost six decades, the stories of their lives have unfolded through their letters, as they grew from teenagers into women, married, and became mothers and grandmothers, and in Jean's case, a great grandmother.

Through photos and thousands of words couriered across the seas they have shared times of change, happiness and immense sorrow.

There was the excitement and fear of the unknown when Jean moved from homeland Scotland to Australia 46 years ago.

Among the sad times, the sudden death of Annie's first husband, Alvin Strom, and last year her second husband, Isadore Schwartz, lost his fight against cancer.

Jean and Annie's dream to meet and speak to each other for the first time was realised at Tullamarine Airport on Monday.



Penfriends for 58 years, Jean Phillips and Annie Schwartz-Strom.

"We were like ducks to water," laughed Annie.

"We saw each other immediately," Jean added.

"It was very exciting."

She said they hadn't stopped talking since.

The pair started corresponding when Jean, then a 14-year-old Girl Guide, wrote to the Girl Guide Post Box Secretary in Scotland asking for an address of an American pen friend.

She was put in touch with Annie, a Girl Scout in Charleston, South Carolina.

“ If someone had said to me you will be in Australia in 58 years time I would have said ‘You are crazy’ ”

While not all letters have been kept by the pair, Jean still has the first letter sent from Annie.

In it, Annie describes what she looks like, her town, her family and writes "I hope I can be your friend from now on".

"We were dirt poor when I grew up in South Carolina," Annie said.

"If someone had said to me you will be in Australia in 58 years time I would have said 'You are crazy'.

"I am so grateful to be here. I keep pinching myself."

Jean and Annie are born a day apart, married around the same times, and both had a son born in March, 1946.

The similarities don't end there.

Jean once was a Girl Scout leader and worked as a tailoress, while Annie has been a Girl Guide leader and worked in a men's clothing store.

"We just enjoyed each other's letters and we just kept it up, and hoped one day we would meet," Annie smiled.

*Jean - Girl Scout Leader Australia*

*Annie - Girl Scout leader & worked in men's clothing store!*

## LILIAN LAIDLAW



As a keen correspondent with her own pen friends, Dorothy Hawthorne, Queensland State Secretary and a Diploma'd Trainer, suggested Lilian start a Queensland Post Box, which she did in 1930. She held this position for 32 years. She continued this even after becoming Australian Post Box Secretary in 1960, a position she held for 9 years. In this capacity she attended Australian Council Meetings in Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

Much could and should be written about this wonderful lady, who devoted her life to Guiding - even to the end. She was still Guiding in 1994, the year in which she died at the age of 96. A full and remarkable life, indeed!

The following are some notes that were written about Lilian Laidlaw and the early days of Post Box in Queensland and Australia. The author is unknown.

*1930            Post Box has lately been organized at Headquarters under the capable supervision of Miss Laidlaw, and by this means, guides desirous of corresponding with guides of other States and Countries, can be put in touch with each other.*

*1931            Miss Laidlaw reports that the Post Box is becoming more widely known among the Companies. During the year Miss Laidlaw linked up approximately 250 Guides with various places, overseas being more popular than Australia. Miss Laidlaw was unable to report if any letters had come to the Guides, as she has no replies from them.*

*America, Canada, The Netherlands, Gibraltar, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, New Zealand and to other Australian States.*

1938 Miss Lilian Laidlaw reported 250 Guiders, Rangers and Guides have sent in their names to be linked up with Guides in other countries. Miss Laidlaw has also received lists from Post Boxes in England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, the United States of America and Norway.

Obviously a break appears in the following years which were the years of World War 2, 1939 to 1945. Communication with countries overseas was very difficult during these years.

Since August, 1945, 590 guides and guiders had been linked with guides in other parts, ie. England, Scotland, New Zealand, Canada, USA, and a few in Belgium, as well as other states of Australia, NSW, SA, and WA. The ban on pen friends had been lifted - it had been introduced due to the problems of communication during the War Years, 1939 to 1945. Some of the guiders and guides had sent parcels of food to their pen friends in England during these years.

So Post Box really began to flourish again.

1946 - 1947 The International Friendship Scheme did not appeal to Guides as did the individual pen friends. Moreton Bay linked with Milwaukee, USA. Four other companies asked to be linked up, one with a company in USA, two with France and one with a company in England. (Lilian Laidlaw, QLD PBS)

1947 - 1948 Regular links from Post Box Secretaries in England and Scotland and some names from USA, Denmark and Eire. Charters Towers linked with a company in France, and Enoggera with a company in London.

1948 - 1949 286 links were formed. It appeared it was the older guides in other countries who wanted pen friends as the younger ones did not learn English until they were about 13 or 14.

1949 - 1950 There was a big demand for pen friends during the year. 274 names were linked, a credit to Lilian Laidlaw.

## POST BOX IN THE STATES



## QUEENSLAND

This is where it all began! When Dorothy Hawthorne asked Lilian Laidlaw to begin Post Box in Queensland, she may not have visualised how big it would grow, and what an important part of Australian Guiding Post Box was to become.

Post Box has operated continuously since its inception in 1930, under the enthusiastic and capable handling of its Post Box Secretaries -

1930-1962	Miss Lilian Laidlaw
1962-1969	Mrs Jean Lazarides
1970-1974	Mrs Linda Bull
1974-1978	Mrs Marjorie Newton
1978-1983	Mrs Ruth Bowles
1984-1989	Mrs Heather Bedell
1990-1994	Mrs Wilma Torney
1995-	Mrs Kath Hodges

## MISS LILIAN LAIDLAW

These notes were written many years ago about Lilian and her wonderful work with Post Box. Even though the author is unknown I am sure they are worth recording. Some of her annual links with Post Box are recorded as well as other memories.

Year	Number of Links
1930	
1931	
1932	360
1933	184
1934	over 500
1935	400
1936	over 300
1938	250

War Years - no figures available for these years, nor for the years 1945-1955.

Mrs Ruth Bowles was one of the first leaders in Queensland to become involved in Post Box. Her first contacts were in 1929 and 1930 at a time when there was no Post Box Secretary. It was the State Secretary who arranged the links.

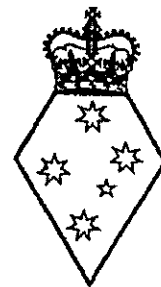




## NEW SOUTH WALES

From information available it appears that Post Box began (officially at least!) with the appointment in 1937 of Miss Wray as Post Box Secretary. Since then, Post Box has been tended by:

1937-1938	Miss Wray
1938-1942	Mrs Lydia Abbot
1943-1954	Mrs Howe
1955-1958	Miss Doreen Paton
1959-1963	Mrs E C O'Halloran
1964-1971	Miss Rosemary Gray
1972-1977	Mrs J S Oxnam
1978-1981	Mrs H B Inglis
1982-1986	Miss Betty Smythe
1987-1992	Mrs Diana Wheeler
1992-1997	Mrs Mary Carey
1997-	Mrs Helen Hargreaves



## VICTORIA

Post Box began in this state in the same year as it did in Queensland - 1930, although the first Post Box Secretary was not appointed until eight years later.

Miss L Bowes Kelly filled the position from 1938 until 1950, with, of course, a break during the war years. As would be expected, a Government order was issued in July, 1941, prohibiting correspondence between Australia and penfriends in Axis and neutral countries. Later Australia suggested that other Post Box correspondence should cease, to help lessen the work of the Censors, as well as for security reasons. This situation existed until the war ended. The copies of relevant correspondence will be of interest! (See Appendix.)

Miss Bowes Kelly set the wheels in motion again after the war ended and in 1951 handed over to her successor. Victoria has had a number of Post Box Secretaries over the years:

1938-1950	Miss L Bowes Kelly
1951	Miss V Rice
1952-1957	Miss V Brett
1957-1962	Mrs F W Faulkner
*	
1970-1974	Mrs Kit Williamson
1975-1989	M/s Cath Blackburn
1980-1985	M/s Patricia Emecroft
1986-1990	Mrs Rosemary Darby
1991-1995	Mrs Margaret Rookes
1995-	Mrs Margaret McNeill

There appears to be a gap in the records covering the period 1962-1970, but there's little doubt that Post Box was operating in Victoria during those years as it was in other states.

Victoria was largely responsible for beginning interstate links, mainly for the younger members of the Movement who wished to correspond with girls of their own age. (See page 1.)

This was done to cater for the younger girls who wished to have penfriends but could not correspond with their peers in other countries as most countries will not arrange penfriends under 10 years of age. By corresponding with girls in their own age group in other states, the girls not only made friends on paper, but had a fair chance of meeting face to face at some national gathering in later years. Interstate links have not only been successful with the younger age

## TASMANIA



Little information has been available from this State, although it does participate well in Post Box. One State Post Box Secretary was so enthusiastic that she approached Australia Post to produce a special postmark for Post Box. Unfortunately she was not successful, but her efforts were greatly appreciated.

Post Box Secretaries' names appearing in the records are:

Mrs Thomas	no dates available
Miss P Roden	1946-1948
Mrs P Shackel	1949
Mrs L B Gardner	1951-1972
Mrs B Gleeson	1994-

Perhaps some more of Tasmania's Post Box history will become available at a later date.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

There's been a lack of information from this State. As with Tasmania South Australia participates well in the Post Box scheme, making both overseas and interstate links.



Perhaps some history of Post Box in this State will be made available.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA



This state has been a keen participant in Post Box and makes many links both within and outside Australia. Although there does not seem to be a great deal of archival material, it has been possible to discover some details of Post Box Secretaries in the State, from 1960, although it is believed that Post Box

activities began there much earlier. These details have been uncovered:

Miss Alice Jeffrey	1960 and 1961, and probably more.
Miss Alison Cairns	1964-1966
Here there is a gap in the records.	
Mrs Lorna Collins	1978-1981
Mrs Margaret Lockett	1982-1987
Mrs June Retallack	1990-1995
Mrs Ann Holland	1995-
Mrs Di Henniker	currently holds the position.

POST BOX has most certainly become an important and interesting part of Guiding. All Post Box Secretaries, whether state or national become very involved and enthusiastic. I have heard this from Post Box Secretaries in this country and overseas. In some countries there is no set term for a Post Box Secretary and I know of a couple who have held this position for over 30 years! It truly is one of the most rewarding positions in Guiding and I and many present and past members of the Post Box Team can thoroughly recommend it.

Those who have read these pages may know some interesting stories that could be included in the History of Australian Post Box. If so, please write them and send them to Guides Australia.

Joan Burch

June 1998.