



## The Launch of Past/Present



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Past/Present is a Guardian Australia monthly column which seeks to deepen our understanding of the present world and showcase the value of thinking historically. The AHA is proud to help pitch and bolster the payment offered for the column.

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### **Objective and Funding**

After a three-month trial in late 2025, the Australian Historical Association is deeply proud to announce a new collaboration with Guardian Australia. Roughly once a month we will pitch a column called Past/Present to the Guardian, written by members, that engages with the historical context of today's events, exemplifies the original work we do, and demonstrates our value to a national readership. The selected columnist will be paid \$750, partly funded by the Guardian and partly funded by the AHA. This venture has been made possible by an extraordinarily generous donation made to the AHA. The donation was offered for the purpose of '*publicising and amplifying the value of history and historians to Australians*'.

### **Process and Payment**

Only members may offer pitches to write for Past/Present. Pitches on highly topical matters, that speak to the column's purpose, should be sent to a named representative of the executive (see below). The representative, after consultation, will deliver a selection to the Guardian editors, who will then make the final choice. Once commissioned, a writer will have around one week to write the column. One or two executive reps will undertake the first edit of any submission to ensure it accords with the column's remit. Guardian editors, however, will have final editorial control. They will also decide the heading and any visuals for the column, though are open to your suggestions. Upon publication, writers will receive payment.

### **Australian Scope, Timely Topics**

Guardian Australia is committed to providing Australian perspectives in their stories. This does not mean the chosen issue has to concern Australia only, but if it discusses international affairs, they wish to see what the issue means in and for Australia. Our first columns by [Roland Burke](#) and [Leigh Boucher](#) achieved this well. The Guardian is also of course in the business of news. Columns should speak to timely issues in the news that month, or to an issue expected to be salient next month. Our column by [Frank Bongiorno and James Watson](#), for example, spoke successfully to predicted reader interest in the fiftieth anniversary of the Whitlam dismissal. *Writers must be prepared to submit and to approve edits in short timeframes.*

### **The Column's Remit: context, contingency, and possibilities**

Our hope for the column is not only to provide expert historical knowledge about a contemporary issue. We wish to demonstrate the unique perspective that historians bring to understanding the present, distinct from that of any other kind of professional. This involves *explaining context* and *revealing contingency*. That is, our historical accounts should be situated in time and place, so readers can appreciate the distinction of the conditions that produced the

given issue. They should also highlight the contingencies behind effects that might otherwise appear natural or eternal. If readers grasp how historical forces have created the present they might better see ways to re-create the future. As [Tamson Pietsch recently summarised](#) of the historian's perspective: "This is an orientation to time and power and agency that is quite distinct from that which underpins many other [forms of expertise]... And it is one that our society desperately needs, as we seek to make lives and envisage futures in the face of forces that are so often cast as inevitable." Finally, we wish to work within the spirit of both Guardian Australia and our donor by ensuring each column manages to suggest *possibility over doom*. By emphasising both specificity and non-inevitability, we hope to offer galvanising if not always easy visions for readers. We wish to show that critical thinking is not always pessimistic thinking, and history can be a pathway to proactive and productive citizenship.

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### **Tone, length, and later audio**

GA asks that contributors familiarise themselves with the tone of most long-feature Guardian essays: informed, clear, plain-speaking. GA editors warn to avoid either 'infantilising' or 'dense' writing. They also favour short sentences and relatively short paragraphs. The column should be around 1000 words. After publication, you may be invited to discuss or read your column for the AHA-sponsored HistoryLab Studio podcast.

### **Pitches**

Only members may pitch to write for the column. Membership offers many benefits: [go to this page to sign up!](#) Pitches should be no longer than 200 words (bio included). Rather than tell us about a series of revelations, tell us:

1. The *timely topic* you will address
2. What is the *historical story* you wish to tell
3. Why your historical story is *significant* today
4. *Who* you are in one sentence, and any single example of your public writing.

Guardian Australia adds: Remember to do a search on the Guardian for the subject you're pitching on. Have we covered this issue before, are you bringing a fresh idea or moving the story on?

Send pitches at any time to Vice President Kate Fullagar, [kate.fullagar@acu.edu.au](mailto:kate.fullagar@acu.edu.au)

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