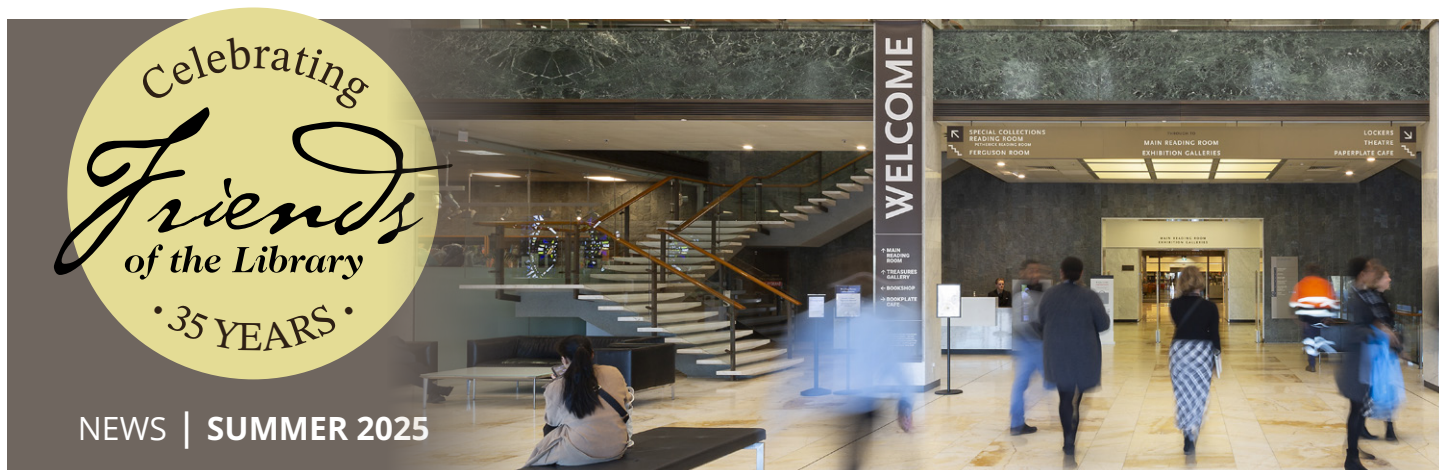




MAINTAINING OUR HERITAGE BUILDING

Friends may be aware of the extensive building works that in recent years has seen the Library adorned with scaffolding and forced to relocate or close various public spaces (including the Friends' Lounge). Behind the scenes, Library staff have moved their workspaces either within our building, or out to temporary office space in Barton. Kilometres of shelving (and the collection items stored here) have also been relocated, with staff across the Library working hard to maintain public access to our building and the collection throughout these works.

So far, we have completed the restoration of 334 ageing (and leaking!) windows. The whole window system is now restored, including the bronze frames and spandrels from the level-one balcony up. While the scaffold was up, all the travertine walls were washed. We have also completed the replacement of waterproof membranes in many critical Library locations, including the protection of our electricity supply. We're continuing to remove and replace the Library's old heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, which will provide a more comfortable Library environment for all. This project will also allow us to better control the humidity in our collection storage areas and protect our irreplaceable documents. The latest building work challenges involve improving the safety of the Library, with new fire and emergency alert systems, upgraded fire stairs, and other compliance improvements underway.

There is still some way to go before we can restore all the spaces that staff and Library patrons enjoy. In the months ahead we will be replacing the Library's entry doors and glazing, and one of the Reading Room bay-windows on the ground floor will receive some much-needed maintenance. We will also be repairing and modernising the public bathrooms on multiple levels. We have found that many of these projects are interrelated, and a delay or challenge affecting one area inadvertently affects another. Because of this, and to avoid disappointment, we are reluctant to provide a firm date for the reopening of all the Library's public spaces, however we thank the Friends of the National Library for your continued support throughout this busy (and trying) period and we will let you all know as soon as we can.

Daniel Gleeson | Director, Community Engagement
David Priddle | Asst. Director, Building Design and Heritage



W.J. HOOKER'S EXOTIC FLORA (1823-27)

In 2023, the Library acquired an illustrated, three-volume book by the famed British botanist William Jackson Hooker (1785-1865), *Exotic Flora* (1823-27). As the title suggests, it is about non-British plants. It describes 233 plants, including 11 from Australia, each with a hand-coloured engraving and scientific description. From April 1841, Hooker was the first full-time Director of London's Kew Gardens, the epicentre of botanical work in 19th-century Britain. Among his achievements was the revitalisation of Kew's collections, neglected since Sir Joseph Banks' death in 1820. With his son and successor at Kew Gardens Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), William classified more than 200 species of Tasmanian plants.

Continued on page 3 ►

Banksia verticillata in *Exotic Flora*, containing figures and descriptions of new, rare, or otherwise interesting exotic plants, especially of such as are deserving of being cultivated in our gardens, vol. 2, Edinburgh: Printed for W. Blackwood, Edinburgh and T. Cadell, London 1823-1827, RB MOD 3037-39, nla.cat-vn10014020

FRIENDS EVENTS

As we near the end of the year, Friends are winding up their 2025 schedule of events. Our last event for the year is a preview of the refreshed Treasures Gallery. In November we welcomed the new Friends committee and began planning 2026 events. Keep an eye on the weekly eNews for updates.

Friday 12 December, 6pm

Treasures Gallery Refresh, exhibition preview

Friends of the Library are invited to preview the new Treasures Gallery exhibition. The exhibition aims to answer some of the most popular questions from visitors – *Where are the books? Where is Trove? Can we see the stacks?* It explores the breadth of the Library's collection including items deposited under legal deposit, children's picture books and some treasures never exhibited before. From the humble street directory to a fragment of Shakespeare's first folio, all collection items are treasures in their own way.

In the meantime, if you have questions about the way the Library works, join a behind the scenes tour. These run daily at 11am, led by our knowledgeable volunteers.



NATIONAL LIBRARY BOOKSHOP OFFER FOR FRIENDS

Friends will receive a **30% discount** on copies of *J.W. Power: An Australian avant-gardist* by Ann Stephen and A.D.S. Donaldson.

This beautiful art book has been published by the National Library of Australia.

Discount applies until 31 December 2025.

Use the code **POWER30** when shopping online.

Use the code **FRIENDSTWENTY** for all other online Bookshop purchases.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRS

Thank you if you attended the Friends' annual general meeting on 27 November 2025. Results of the election have been advised through the Friends e-news. The committee will meet in December to appoint office holders and sub-committee chairs. The committee can co-opt members, so please contact our Executive Officer, Lisa, by email friends@nla.gov.au or on (02) 6262 1824 if you are interested.

It has been wonderful to meet so many members at our 13 events in 2025. Successful initiatives included afternoon events with accompanying refreshments. The Friends 35th birthday celebration was a highlight, and it was wonderful to see so many of you there.

The proceeds from events enable the Friends to support the Library, with a donation being made this year to enable the digitisation of material for the Women Leaders project, giving Friends a small part in the continued success and improvement of Trove.

Friends were offered exclusive access to opening night previews of the temporary exhibitions, *Fit to Print* and *1975: Living in the Seventies* which featured photographer Mike Bowers and gold Logie winner Denise Drysdale speaking with the curators. A preview for Friends of the refreshed Treasures Gallery is scheduled for 12 December 2025.

The Canberra Writers Festival offered a discount and over 170 complimentary tickets for Friends to its events at the Library. Additionally, membership provided discounts from booksellers, on magazine subscriptions and for cultural activities, with reciprocal benefits at State Libraries in NSW, South Australia and Victoria, and at the Art Gallery of NSW. For many members, the most utilised benefits are the generous discounts at the Library's own Bookshop, at Bookplate and Paperplate. Full details of discounts and terms and conditions are available at: <https://www.library.gov.au/give/become-friend/information-friends>

We welcome Margaret Nichols and George Nichols as editors of the newsletter and thank the many friends, staff members, speakers and others for their excellent articles for the Summer edition.

We would like to thank our three Executive Officers over the year – Lauren Conron, Isabella Simonovski and Lisa DeSantis. Lauren was our steady hand for many years, and Isabella and Lisa quickly picked up the many facets of the position. Belinda Jessup, our membership officer, contributes her experience and creativity to her role.

Planning is well underway for 2026. We look forward to returning to the Friends Lounge, and hearing ideas from the membership for possible events or the newsletter are always welcome.

We look forward to meeting new Friends in 2026.

Catherine Anderson and Michalina Stawyskyj | Co-Chairs

Ishijima Yae (publisher), *The cat's bathhouse* (detail), 1884, Japanese woodblock print collection, nla.obj-151438826

Exotic Flora is one of Hooker's most spectacular illustrated works. It dates from a prolific period early in his career, when he was Regius Professor of Botany at Glasgow University (1820–1841). He outlines how Australian plants were collected and grown in Britain. The text is conversational in style, typical of natural history works of the period.

Finally, though uncredited, Hooker was likely the original artist on whose work the book's engravings were based. The 11 Australian plants include a banksia from Western Australia, *Banksia verticillata* (granite or Albany banksia) (pictured). It was drawn from a live plant Hooker received in 1813, which grew in Liverpool, England. After extensive description, Hooker writes: 'The blossoms yield a smell which is rather powerful, and by no means agreeable.'

Hooker was hardworking and well-connected in the botanical world, and the book's text details his extensive network. Early supporters include names closely associated with Australian botany: longtime president of the Royal Society Sir Joseph Banks, and banker, antiquary and botanist Dawson Turner (Hooker married Turner's eldest daughter). Sir James Edward Smith, who acquired Carl Linnaeus' superb herbarium and botanical library (now at London's Linnean Society), and wrote the first standalone book about Australian botany, was also a supporter.

Aside from his tenure at Kew, Hooker's fame rests on his work on mosses and ferns, and his long editorship of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (from 1826).

This acquisition strengthens representation of Hooker's botanical career and interest in Australian plants at the Library. It is an important addition.

Susannah Helman | Senior Advisor, Collection Research

THE COLOURIST

When I was growing up in the Sydney suburb of Turramurra in the 1960s I had no idea that a couple of streets away, at 43 Kuringai Avenue, there lived an artist, Grace Cossington Smith (1892–1984), who was about to become a household name. The National Library has unique resources which reveal the personal history of this enigmatic artist and throw light on her many contradictions.

Cossington Smith's family moved to Turramurra in 1913. In 1915, when she was still an art student, she painted *The Sock Knitter*. With its eye-catching use of colour and its take-it-or-leave-it absence of contextual detail, it is now often regarded as Australia's first modernist painting. At the time, however, it was exhibited only briefly, then returned to Cossington Smith. There it remained, as her biographer Drusilla Modjeska wryly observes, for nearly 50 years (*Stravinsky's Lunch*, Picador, Sydney, 1999).

In the 1920s Cossington Smith became very taken with Beatrice Irwin's book, *The New Science of Colour*, and laboriously copied out its entire text by hand. She essentially held to its metaphysical, almost spiritual, approach to colour for the rest of her life. She pressed on with her work, stacking the paintings in her studio by their hundreds. "My paintings



were thrown out of exhibition after exhibition" she said. "I was disappointed but not discouraged."

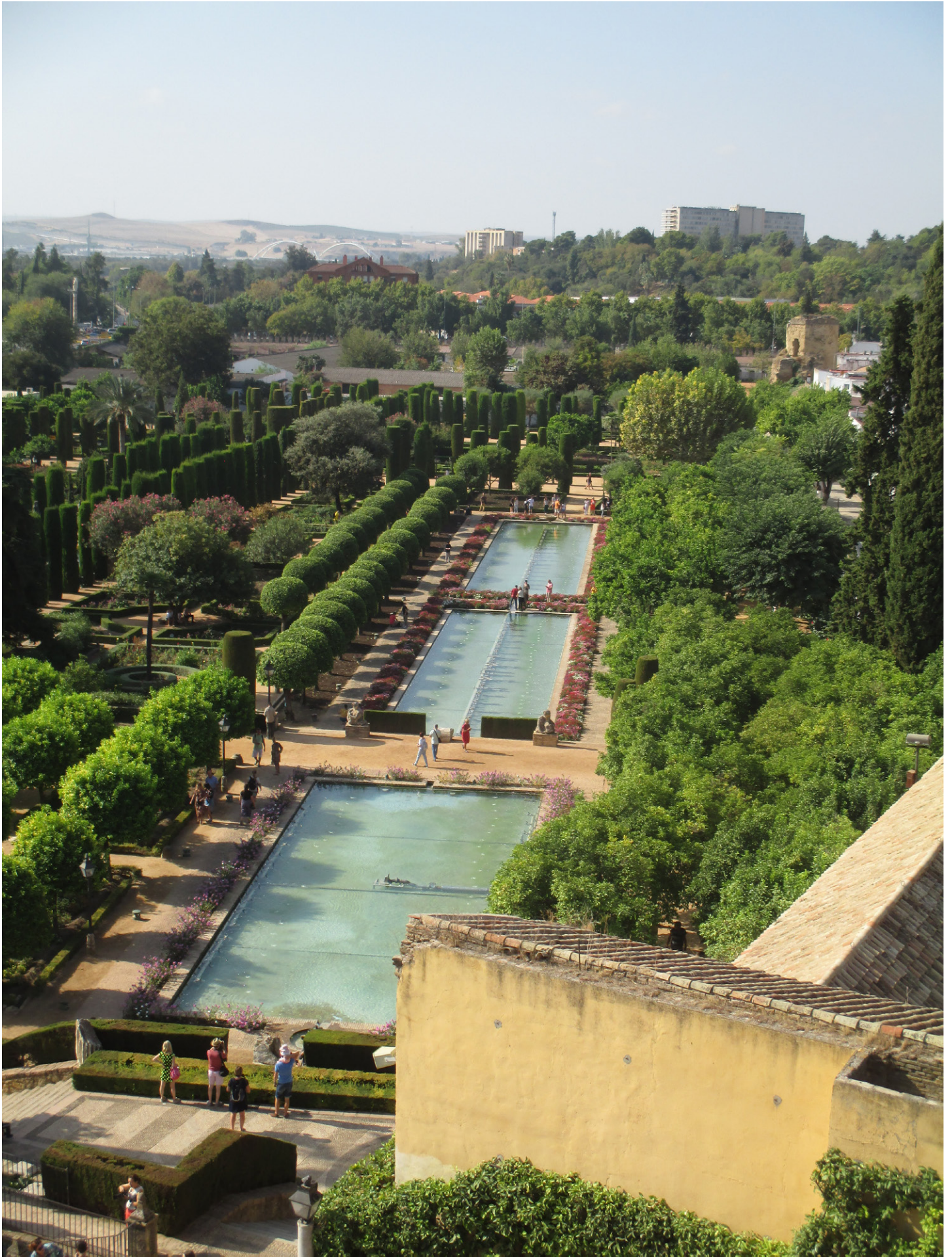
There were some successes along the way, although not necessarily of the sort she longed for. *The Canberra Times* reported on 14 May 1932 that Cossington Smith was staying at Government House in Canberra. She spent a fortnight there giving painting lessons to Lady Isaacs. She also found time to paint a remarkable picture of a towerless Black Mountain. Using watercolour and gouache, she depicts the mountain as almost treeless, dominating its rural setting, while streaks of crimson slash the foreground. Cossington Smith knew Canberra well, having stayed frequently at Lanyon Station and attended its many balls and parties. The National Library has a cache of her letters to Lanyon's owner, Mary Cunningham, spanning the years 1916 to 1922, in its manuscript collection (NLA MS 6749).

In the 1960s curator Daniel Thomas turned up at 43 Kuringai Avenue and saw the now-iconic paintings. He arranged a retrospective exhibition in 1973 which toured Australia and secured her name in Australian art history.

I never got to meet my illustrious neighbour. Towards the end she moved away from Turramurra into a nursing home. Her eyesight had begun to fail and she was devastated when she couldn't see the paint squeezing out of the tube. But she will always be remembered for her contribution to Australian modernism - and for her arresting use of colour. "My chief interest has always been colour," she said in an oral history she did for the NLA. "But not a flat, crude colour. It must be colour within colour. It has to shine" (NLA ORAL TRC 1/122).

Elizabeth Nelson | Friends Member

Self-portrait of Grace Cossington Smith, 1951, nla.obj-136492467



Castle Gardens, Cordoba. Image courtesy of Dr Chris Carter



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATER

Dr Chris Carter delivered an entertaining and thought-provoking talk on 18 October 2025 as the joint annual event between the ACT Monaro Riverina Branch of the Australian Garden History Society and the Friends of the National Library of Australia. This is the latest in a series starting from 2007.

Chris is a practicing archaeologist with over 25 years of experience as a teacher, researcher, heritage consultant and tour leader working both nationally and overseas, including over 30 tours to South American countries. He has a BA (Hons), MA and PhD from the Australian National University.

‘You can see the impact on the landscape of the management of water wherever you go’, Chris finished, after a talk supported by photos from his global archaeological and pleasure travels. His photos ranged from Baaka Fish Traps in NSW to storage cisterns in Andalusia.

He demonstrated that to live, humans have needed to manage water over time in progressively more extraordinary ways. Feats of engineering captured, stored and delivered water to populations not only for survival and for agriculture, but also to generate power and for ritual and pleasure. In short, ‘no water, no life’.

Chris showed photos of: gnamma—meaning ‘hole’—where rainwater is collected; well walls lined with stones; and springs being covered to minimise evaporation. All to improve access to water. Innovations implemented to control water include where stones were placed in a river to catch fish and where stones, later concrete, were used to alleviate drought by damming a river. Constructing a mill race also helped control water as energy to operate grinding mills. Agricultural terracing created by building retaining walls that were backfilled with soil were engineered to drain water for dry land farming or, in the case of paddy fields, to hold water.

Archaeological digs also expose methods of water storage and delivery to cities or homes. Cisterns large and small, many covered over or roofed, were constructed, to retain water and the water delivered in initially open channels, but also via underground channels. The qanat systems—long sloping tunnels drawing water from aquifers—are well-known for covering hundreds of kilometres. Roman engineers used closed pipes with terracotta sockets to pipe water into



homes and downpipes to direct water vertically. Viaducts and aqueducts also covered hundreds of kilometres and closed pipes with one end lower than the other used to move water uphill. Water-powered wheels with jugs could lift water to higher ground from rivers, as well as grind grain.

Muslims and Romans were keen on bathing as a form of ritual as well as for pleasure. They developed large bathhouses, often with highly decorated interiors—for the well-to-do at least—that remain the delight of current-day tourists. These involved moving heated water. The Inka Baths in Peru involved a series of baths in steps going down a hill, with water flowing through them continuously. Istanbul is home to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque which had a significant ablutions block, still there today, so the faithful can wash before going into the mosque.

Closer to home, the Murray-Darling Basin is home to massive engineering works that since the early 1900s have changed watercourses, allowing for water storage so that irrigation areas like the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area can exist. Massive dams have been built around the world in the 1900s that seek to control water and change the landscape.

Chris’ talk was thoroughly enjoyable and informative. He convinced me that water systems record human ingenuity, social hierarchy and spiritual beliefs. But, having just visited the Alhambra in Granada, Spain last month, I needed no convincing that water systems enhance the beauty of gardens.

Joanne Maples, 21 September 2025

Top left: Cappadocia, Turkey. Image courtesy of Dr Chris Carter

Top right: Palacio Real Sevilla, Spain. Image courtesy of Dr Chris Carter



COLLECTION ACQUISITIONS

In mid-August I had the treat of viewing a selection of recent collection acquisitions. As Friends, you know that the Library's collection thrills and inspires. The items I saw did that, and more. The items are testament to the Library's far-sighted and patient collecting about Indigenous Australians, multicultural Australia, the environment, culture, technology, politics, and social life to name but a few of its areas of interest. Items come to the collection by donation, through purchase, having been commissioned, and by legal deposit and are in a variety of formats.

Illustrating the diversity of formats was the vivid emerald gown, by costume designer Barbara Matera, and worn by Dame Joan Sutherland for her farewell gala at the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in December 1990. The gown is but one item in the enormous Richard Bonyng and Dame Joan Sutherland Collection, one of the most significant cultural collections to have been acquired by the Library.

The exquisite lithograph, *Yarabindja Budjurung II*, made in 2021, by Quandamooka artist Megan Cope, in collaboration with the Australian Print Workshop, was an equally striking piece. A large work in vivid blues, it represents Cope's Ancestral Country in South-East Queensland, asserting the significance of saltwater and land to her people. The Library has a long tradition of documenting Australia pictorially and recently commissioned the portrait and documentary photographer Abigail Varney to photograph Little India in Dandenong, Victoria. Her arresting colour image of Mr K P Singh behind the counter of his textile shop forms part of this project.

Barbara Matera, *Opera Gown* worn by Dame Joan Sutherland during her farewell gala at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 1990, synthetic fabric, beads, sequins, Richard Bonyng and Dame Joan Sutherland Collection

The Library's collection reflects grand public occasions, such as Dame Joan's gala farewell, and the private and quotidian. Speaking to the latter were three of Thomas Brandon's diaries. Maintained over almost eight decades, until 2008, they document the rhythm of life on the family farm in the Yorke region of South Australia. The entries touch on events on the farm, national and international occurrences and expenditure on machinery and maintenance. This included human maintenance as an entry for June 1953 shows £3.3.0 spent on 'attention to wife's ears'.

Every collection item can prompt a question, a memory, a feeling or a connection. A letter from Colleen McCulloch, written in 2009, to Dr Helen Brittain made an immediate connection between today's public discussion about artificial intelligence, social media and the extent to which Australia's creative, intellectual, industrial and medical output should be protected from these technologies. The letter touches on McCulloch's health, on preparations for presenting the premiere of *The Thorn Birds* in musical form in Cardiff (and on the inadequacies of Cardiff's accommodation). It also articulates McCulloch's trenchant views about why she had no intention of abandoning the typewriter for a computer. These included refusing 'to employ as a tool' something which insists on 'telling me it's smarter than I am'; feeling no obligation to assist publishers by doing all the 'type justifying, setting and arranging' of her manuscripts; and pre-empting the risk that 'if one's work is on disc, hackers steal it and put it out on the net'. The collection is indeed a cornucopia as even these five items from the items I viewed illustrates.

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich | Former Director-General and Friend



A TREASURE TROVE OF TALES: THE LIBRARY'S CHILDREN'S LITERATURE COLLECTION

The books that we read and love as children are the ones that stay with us into adulthood. The characters in both the text and the illustrations become a part of who we are, and we share these beloved stories with our children and grandchildren. These are the stories that shape us as both people and as a nation.

The children's literature collections in the National Library of Australia contain a treasure trove of tales, a banquet of books and a cornucopia of curiosities – the Library is indeed the repository of our childhood. Here you'll find everything from first editions of Australian classics such as *The Magic Pudding* and *Snugglypot and Cuddlepie* to the latest titles of contemporary authors and illustrators.

There's also a wonderland of ephemera and realia, including bookmarks and bookplates, stuffed toys and boardgames. You'll find original artwork from the likes of Hans Christan Andersen Medal winner Robert Ingpen, and the manuscripts and papers of everyone from Norman Lindsay and Ethel Turner to Nadia Wheatley and Tim Winton. Ingpen's original artwork includes an image from *The Magic Bookcase*, as well as his illustrations from the two books, written by Jane Jolly, which he illustrated for NLA Publishing, *Radio Rescue* and *Tea and Sugar Christmas*.

The Library also holds the first children's book published in Australia in 1841, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* by 'A lady long resident in New South Wales', and the first picture book, *Who Killed Cockatoo?*, published in 1862. The collections also

include artwork, ephemera and papers from early illustrators of Australian children's books, including the queen of the fairies, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, and May Gibbs and her now iconic gumnut babies.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what the Library holds in the area of children's literature. And, of course, there is also a plethora of material in other collections to inspire children's authors to write and illustrate books like the historical novels in my Heritage Heroes series or environmental picture books such as *Peculiar Parents*. Go forth and explore this marvellous collection!

Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder | Children's Author, Friend

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

As this is the Friends' Newsletter we are hoping that some of you will have some thoughts you would like to share.

We would welcome contributions of up to 400 words on any topic that you think might be worth sharing especially about the Library, matters biblio or any of the topics inspired by the Newsletter.

Please address your thoughts to: **The editor** via friends@nla.gov.au. We are very keen to hear from you!

ASK A LIBRARIAN? ASK GRAEME.

In October this year, one of the National Library's most fondly remembered librarians, Graeme Powell, turned 80.

NLA friends, and certainly many researchers, will recall Graeme from his time leading the Manuscripts Section or in other roles. He joined the Library in 1967, a pivotal year which also welcomed several other later renowned recruits, including future Director-General Jan Fullerton. The following year was the new building opening, and a close colleague of Graeme's, Ivan Page, was appointed the Library's first Rare Books Librarian. By the time Graeme retired in 2006, he had served as the Manuscript Librarian twice (1969–75 and 1987–2006). There had also been terms as Principal Librarian, Australian Reference (1975–78) and as Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) Officer, London (1979–87).

Few people today would understand what such dedicated work involved. There was considerable direct interaction with scholars and prospective donors, the valuation of material and direct 'hands-on' familiarity with collections. There were specialist reading rooms, personal negotiations and clarifications over access and rights, and close working relationships with pictorial and oral history units (the latter initially part of the Manuscripts Section). Being AJCP Officer was equally a role demanding perseverance, knowledge of history, considerable travel and an ability to persuade.

Such job titles alone give no hint of the person and the regard he earned among staff, professional colleagues and especially researchers. They have their own memories; others will have noticed how often Graeme was acknowledged and thanked in theses, articles and publications, especially works of history. As well, testimonies and tributes were gathered to acknowledge his retirement and accessioned by the Library as MS 10000 and titled *Festschrift in honour of Graeme Powell, Manuscript Librarian, National Library of Australia, on*



the occasion of his retirement, March 2006. The Library has preserved the papers of other staff, including Directors-General, but this small collection adds to the many factors which, to me, makes Graeme very special.

Another factor concerns Graeme's effort during his career and into retirement to publicise the Library collections and the events and people they document. He produced content for guides now online including updating the Burmester guide; he wrote for the professional journals *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* and *Archives and Manuscripts*; and he was one of only two Library staff commissioned to write chapters for the Library's centenary history *Remarkable Occurrences*. Both before and following retirement, he wrote for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and the *Australian Book Review*, and helped with assessments of applications for fellowships.

In retirement since 2006, Graeme has worked on several projects, including a detailed work-related memoir, enhancements to AJCP film series descriptions and, in 2015, a guide to records relating to post-war reconstruction published by the National Archives of Australia – the fruits of assisting Professor Stuart Macintyre who the same year published *Australia's Boldest Experiment; War and Reconstruction in the 1940s* (NewSouth). Perhaps his most significant work however has been what Graeme calls a 'reverse Mander-Jones'. Unpaid and unheralded, he has worked systematically through thousands of the Library's manuscript boxes to identify sources of possible interest to scholars of UK history. Clearly MS 10000 will need a second edition!

Michael Piggott | Former Manuscripts Section staff member & retired archivist

Peter Batho, *Graeme Powell opening Ferguson Collection (detail), 1970*, nla.obj-150114583



YOUR FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP HELPS THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Looking for a Christmas gift idea? Consider a Friends membership. Friends members are part of a community of passionate National Library supporters and advocates. Members benefit from on-site and online events and presentations that promote our cultural heritage and scholarship. Friends support various Library programs including fellowship and digitisation projects. A Friends membership is a perfect way to encourage support.



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