



THE NEW LIBRARY DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Ms Alison Dellit was appointed as the National Library's Director-General on 9 April 2026. Previously, she held the role of the Library's Assistant Director-General of Collaboration since 2017 with responsibility for Trove and other collaborative programs.



Employed as a Graduate Librarian in 2006, Ms Dellit was part of the original working group that developed Trove and advanced through senior leadership roles spanning digital innovation, collections and national collaboration.

Over more than two decades, she has helped position the National Library as a global leader in digital cultural services, including Trove and the Australian Web Archive.

Some of Ms Dellit's significant contributions to the National Library include leading the development of the National eDeposit service, the first automated electronic deposit system across the nine state, territory and national libraries, managing relationships with 900 Trove partner institutions, introducing world-first linked national library data systems, including the first embedded support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Congratulations Alison, from the Friends of the National Library.

Alison Dellit

WANGKA WAKANUTJA

For nearly a decade the National Library of Australia has cultivated a relationship with members of the Papunya community through Community Heritage Grants, digitisation projects, and most recently the publication and exhibition *Wangka Wakanutja: The Story of the Papunya Literature Production Centre*. The book and exhibition tell the story of the grassroots movement to record, transcribe, translate, illustrate and print more than 300 books in Pintupi and Pintupi-Luritja languages. The primary audience for these books is children at the Papunya School, to ensure the continued survival of languages and stories, but through our partnership with the Papunya community we at the Library are proud to share them with you in our Exhibition Gallery.

While the Library first acquired some of the books produced by the Papunya Literature Production Centre in the 1970s as part of the Legal Deposit program, the relationship with the Papunya Community began in earnest in 2017. The Papunya Tjupi Arts Centre received a Community Heritage Grant to carry out a significance assessment for the Papunya Luritja Collection, of which these books are a part, along with manuscripts, objects, sound and video recordings, and photographs. The Library also received a further collection of books produced by the Centre, making ours the largest collection of material produced by the Papunya Literature Production Centre outside of Papunya.

In 2021, Professor Vivien Johnson came to the National Library to work on her fellowship, titled *Writing Papunya: The Making of an Illustrated Vernacular Literature 1974-1991*. This fellowship was supported by the Ray Mathew and Eva Kollsmann Trust for Research in Australian Literature, and laid the foundation for the exhibition and publication, enabling Vivien to explore the contribution of this collection to Australian literature.

With the generous permission of the Papunya community, and the meaningful support of an anonymous donor, the Library took on two significant projects with the collection: catalogue description enhancement and digitisation, all based on community consultation. Carried out between 2022 and 2024, this work means that the publications are now richly described, with detailed summaries, complete lists

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Wangka Wakanutja exhibition space

FRIENDS EVENTS

Don't forget to save the date for these upcoming events!

Ten Novels that Changed the World with Susannah Fullerton

Thursday 18 June | 6pm – 7pm

Which novels have had a universal impact on our world? Author and leading literary authority, Susannah Fullerton, delivers what promises to be an engaging lecture.

Biography Writing workshop with Neera Mahajan Wednesday 1 July | 2pm – 4pm

An experienced writer with eight published books in the past 5 years, Meera can help you to overcome writing barriers to tell your own life story.

The annual Australian Garden History Society joint lecture

Monday 7 September | 6pm – 7:30 pm

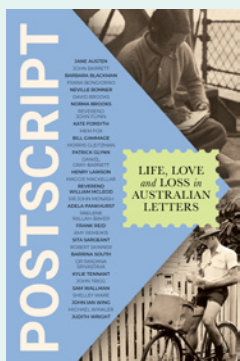
Join Professor Tim Entwistle for a fascinating talk about Oak Trees in Canberra.

Annual Collection Viewing – Birds with Penny Olsen Wednesday 4 November | 5:30 pm – 8pm

Join Dr Penny Olsen AM, Australian ornithologist and author, for her selection of bird-related items in the Library collection, and a fascinating talk about how and why they were selected. Penny was awarded her AM in 2011 for service to the conservation sciences as an author and researcher, and through the study and documentation of Australian bird species and their history.

For further details keep an eye on the weekly eNews or go to the Library's [Events](#) page.

NATIONAL LIBRARY BOOKSHOP OFFER FOR FRIENDS



The Library's newest publication – *Postscript: Life, Love and Loss in Australian Letters* is out now!

The National Library of Australia holds millions of letters in its collections: love letters, reports on scientific discoveries, impassioned pleas, newsy notes about the week that's been, responses from politicians to members of the electorate, letters to the editor and more.

We've selected some remarkable letters from those millions and passed them on as inspiration to a new set of writers to pen their own.

Don't forget to pick up your copy from the bookshop today. Use the code **POSTSCRIPT 20** for your discount if ordering online!

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This autumn quarter heralded a significant change.

Marie-Louise Ayres retired on 8 April 2026 after nine years as Director-General of the Library. A week before her retirement in the Library's beautiful theatre, Marie-Louise reflected on her 30+ years in the library sector. The chair of the Library Council, Professor Larissa Behrendt AO was warm in her appreciation of Marie-Louise's contribution to the Library. I think that this is a sentiment that many of the Friends, myself included, share.

I wish Marie-Louise a happy retirement and look forward to seeing her back at the Library after she takes a break.

I would like to personally welcome and congratulate the Library's new Director-General, Alison Dellit. If you want to put a face to a name, Alison spoke at the Friends collection viewing event on children's literature last year. Margaret Nichols and I had a very positive meeting with Alison about the Friends. Margaret has written an introduction to Alison elsewhere in this newsletter.

I look forward to working with Alison and seeing her at Friends events.

I, and many other Friends, had the privilege of attending the opening of *Wangka Wakanutja: The Story of the Papunya Literature Production Centre* exhibition, and the launch of the accompanying book. Several members of the Papunya community central to this work spoke on the importance of recording language and stories.

Invitations to the openings of these Library exhibitions is one of the special benefits for Friends.

The Friends Lounge is back! It is such a beautiful and welcoming space. In April it hosted a highly successful workshop with Sharon Peoples where a friendly group learnt how to make a concertina book. It was also the ideal place to welcome new members to the Friends in May.

The committee has been busy putting together the program of Friends events for the remainder of the year.

Upcoming events include Susannah Fullerton on *Ten Novels that Changed the World*. The ever-popular joint event with the Australian Garden History Society is set for 7 September 2026, with Professor Tim Entwistle, formerly Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne and patron of the AGHS speaking on oaks.

I am also looking forward to the collection viewing event in November where Penny Olsen will highlight the Library's collection connected to the theme of birds.

Final details of a workshop on biography writing with Neera Mahajan for 1 July are now being settled. The focus will be on participants writing their own stories.

Just a reminder that articles from Friends members are always welcome. Our newsletter editor, Margaret Nichols, with her long connection to the Library, can even suggest a topic.

Catherine Anderson | Chair, Friends of the Library Committee



of contributors, parallel language titles, AIATSIS language headings and accurate transcriptions. They are completely digitised, with each page viewable through Trove. This work has made each of the books and newsletters, accessible and discoverable to all Australians.

All of this groundwork has enabled the NLA Publishing and Exhibitions teams to develop *Wangka Wakanutja: The Story of the Papunya Literature Production Centre*. Both the book and exhibition involved a deep engagement with community, as well as expertise provided by authors and curators Professors Vivien Johnson and Samantha Disbray. Charlotte Phillipus co-authored the publication, and the exhibition was co-curated by Roslyn Dixon, Karen McDonald, Priscilla Brown who visited the Library in October 2025, travelling from Papunya to provide us with the vision and guidance for the exhibition, working with us to select objects, develop themes, and advising on the manner in which their stories should be displayed and told.

“Wangka wakanutja” is Pintupi-Luritja for “The story has been told” which is a fitting title for a project that honours the voices, histories and creative legacy of the Papunya community. It has been a privilege to continue working with members of the Papunya community, bringing First Nations stories to more people across Australia and around the world. It is our privilege to share with you the stories of the Papunya Literature Production Centre.

Wangka Wakanutja: The Story of the Papunya Literature Production Centre is available in-store and online from the Library's bookshop. The exhibition is open daily from 9:00am to 5:00pm, with quiet hours between 9:00am – 11:00am, until the 11th of October.

Allister Mills | Coordinator, Curatorial, National Library



YOUR FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP HELPS THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

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. Gift Memberships can be purchased via [Become a Friend](#).

Members of the Papunya Community at the Library. From left to right: Watson Corby, Roslyn Dixon, Professor Vivien Johnson, Kulata Dennis Nelson, Priscilla Brown, Dr Samantha Disbray, Karen McDonald



A GIFT FROM BALI

The above painting used to hang in the Asian Collections reading room at the National Library until that room closed in March 2020.

The National Library catalogue entry for the painting describes the scene as a Balinese Hindu festival by Kentjana. It is a large painting at 89.5 cm by 138.5 cm and is therefore too large to be taken to a reading room. However, to see it, you can be escorted to the pictures collection area for a viewing.

The colours are muted and the scene is crowded in the style of Balinese paintings of the period. The figures are stylised with their gazes fixed on the ceremony taking place. A priest in white is blessing a kneeling man and woman, frangipani flowers abound, girls are gently dancing, a gamelan orchestra plays to the side. Others are distributing food, carrying the laden fruit baskets on their heads. Everyone is dressed in special festival clothing in colours of light brown, beige and green. Flags are flying, masks are displayed and the mood is one of quiet reverence and peacefulness.

For those who have visited Bali, especially Ubud, the scene, the activities and the details would be familiar. The Balinese Hindu calendar is crowded with ceremonies such as; religious ceremonial days like Kuningan, Galungan; full moon or dark moon days; special days for planting, harvesting, digging ditches etc. and the prevalent cremation ceremonies. These ceremonies are of intense interest to and attendance by the Balinese Hindu. Even the humble daily offering in front of shops and businesses is undertaken with the quiet and strict adherence to custom.

This painting encompasses the respect the Balinese give to their ceremonies, big or small.

How did the National Library acquire the painting? For three weeks in 1963, an Australian Parliamentary delegation of thirteen members of Parliament and two executive staff visited six south east Asian countries, which included Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore. The purpose was a friendly visit. In this postcolonial phase for some of the visited countries, there was much general unrest. The Vietnam War was looming, there were problems in Malaysia, the Indonesian government was angling for control of Western Papua. A good-will visit was perhaps seen as a strategic political move.

The painting was a gift presented to the Delegation in Indonesia on 8th of July and was brought back to Australia. The Delegation's Report does not specify where the gift was received, only that it was a gift of the Gotong Rojong Parliament, their hosts during the visit. The Delegation was in Indonesia for 5 days from 4th – 9th July. The last stop was Bali, so it is possible that the painting was gifted there. The report comments; "The trip to Bali emphasised particularly the antiquity of the culture of that island with visits to temples and cottage industries and displays of traditional dancing and drama".¹

Quite soon after the visit, on 16th September 1963, David Sadlier from External Affairs, who accompanied the Delegation, wrote to the Joint House Committee stating that "background material of the painting is being obtained from the Australian Embassy in Djakarta".² On 5th May 1964 the Secretary of the Joint House wrote to the National Librarian, attention Mr David Thomas (the Keeper of Pictorial Collections at the National

Library), stating "... that enquiries have failed to provide any further information about this painting."³ The NLA catalogue entry for the painting gives the acquisition date as 1969.

Margaret Nichols | Editor

With grateful thanks to Jane Dunmill and Matthew Stuckings, Reader Services, National Library.

¹ Report of Commonwealth Parliamentary Delegation to South East Asia between 22 June and 14 July 1963, 16 August 1963. Stamped: Department of the Senate, 12 September 1963. Via Parlinfo, the Parliament of Australia website.

² Department of External Affairs to the Joint House Committee, from David Sadleir (for the Secretary) 16 September 1963. NLA file.

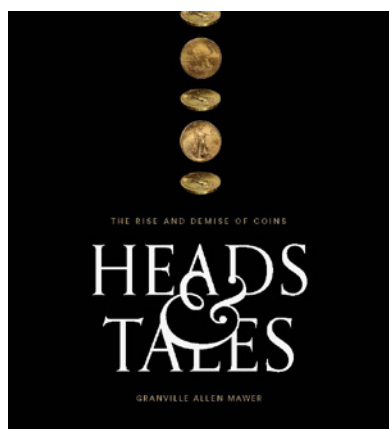
³ Joint House Department to The National Librarian, Attn Mr David Thomas, from W.I. Emerton Secretary, 25 May 1964. NLA file.

HEADS AND TAILS

My most recent book, *Heads & Tales*, is subtitled *The Rise and Demise of Coins*. It tracks their trajectory through time and space. If at this moment you do not have one in pocket or purse you are slightly ahead of the curve, but the rest of humankind is hot on your heels. Think of it: for nearly three millennia we have used coins to pay our debts and claim our dues, but they will almost certainly cease to circulate sometime this century. The future is electronic.

It has been a remarkable journey. Starting with a local initiative in Lydia 2700 years ago, state-certified coinage eventually found a place in every corner of the globe. Coins have been struck in their trillions, from the most precious of metals and the basest. They have come in all shapes and sizes and carried inscriptions in hundreds of languages, some no longer spoken or written. As such, they are hardcopy that chronicles our doings and their disappearance will be deeply regretted by the archaeologists of tomorrow.

The challenge was to contain so much history within a single pair of covers. My approach was to sample, taking one coin from approximately each human generation since the beginning. I looked across continents and cultures to find examples that illustrated the rise and fall of civilizations, the marking of great events and the portrayal of significant personalities. I also kept an eye out for folly, melancholy, megalomania and failure.



Room. For those even more curious, the book is available at the NLA Bookshop and the Royal Australian Mint.

G A Mawer | Petherick Reader of the National Library

When launching the book Assistant Minister Andrew Leigh was most generous, describing it as 'a book that transforms currency into history, and history into something richly human'. That was my objective. For Friends interested in having a look at the finished product, the NLA's copy is for the time being on display in the Petherick

THE WATZON

My boyfriend and I moved to Watson in 1997, renting a place behind the Majura Primary School. Our rental witnessed life — a rescue (Stuart Diver's), a death (Princess Diana's), an engagement (ours) and a wedding (also ours) — but I recall it feeling lonely. In 2000 we bought a place, and moving day involved a TV in our rental blasting life: the Sydney Olympics opening ceremony, the same program also blasting in our new place 500 metres away.

The Watson Community Association's life was also grounded in place when a group was formed in 1993 to lobby over a local site's proposed change of land use from native woodland to housing, eventually becoming Justice Robert Hope Park. The association birthed a newsletter, originally with a functional name, *What's On In Watson*, delivering reports on various sub-committees. It's name changed in 2005 to *The WATZON*. (By me, funnily enough, as editor, after having birthed two kids).

As Watsonians began contributing snippets beyond advertisements, our newsletter grew into a rambunctious toddler.

I stopped editing when life ramped up, a promotion coinciding with school drop-offs and pick-ups. But *The WATZON* shot up through its own gangly teenage years, adding poems, bee-inspired tales, 'Welcome to Watson' invitations.

In 2023, I stopped working just as one kid started. Realising I'd existed in Watson without really living, I began coordinating *The WATZON*'s distribution.

I believe Watson is the final Canberra suburb still printing a community newsletter: 3,200 copies are delivered every Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer. My kids give me a funny smile when each new delivery of boxes of *WATZON* arrives, but I know that behind each delivery sits a great delivery squad ready to chip in.

The NLA's catalogue contains an entry for the hard copies, and I'm hoping to fill the gaps. An online *WATZON* now supplements the hard copies, providing space to tell stories of working bees, playground openings, Watson's annual Community Day.

If only I had a dollar for every time someone said: 'Oooo, I love *The WATZON*!'

Simone Abbot | Friends member and NLA volunteer.



Copies of *The Watson*, courtesy of the author



SPOTLIGHT ON BELINDA JESSUP

Belinda is the friendly person you deal with if you have occasion to call the National Library with a Friends query. Belinda is a tireless worker and has been an asset to the Friends for many years. It is time to celebrate Belinda and her work at the NLA and outside. On behalf of the Friends, thank you to Belinda for all the time and effort that she gives to the Friends.

Belinda, how long have you been at the NLA?

Since 2013, as a front of house member for the *Mapping our World* exhibition. I was asked to work on the information desk in the foyer in the afternoon when it was manned full time. Early in 2014, Sharon O'Brien, then EO of the Friends, employed me as the Friends Membership and Administration officer. I have worked with the following EOs: Sharyn O'Brien, Kelly Turner, Katherine Crane, Melanie Olde, Isabella Simonvski, Judith Roga, Lauren Conron, Lisa de Santis and Mirelle O'Mara (current).

During the hiatus periods when there was no EO, we were helped by the following staff: Stuart Baines, Kathryn Favelle, Sharon Bulkeley and Dan Gleeson.

You work 3 days per week and are employed by the Friends of the NLA through the company Programmed, a staffing and facility management company in Canberra. Your role with the Friends is as the 'Administration and Membership officer'. Looking after the membership is only part of your time though, isn't it?

Yes. I process memberships, send renewals etc, create the weekly eNews, and general tasks like looking after events, email inbox, phone messages and general admin tasks. One of the most enjoyable tasks is processing a gift membership for new members and choosing from a selection of NLA publications to send with the membership pack.

Belinda Jessup in her workshop. Photo by: Fiona Bowring

Pink Cockatoo, 2026, Polyester thread and water-soluble fabric, Image courtesy of the Artist.



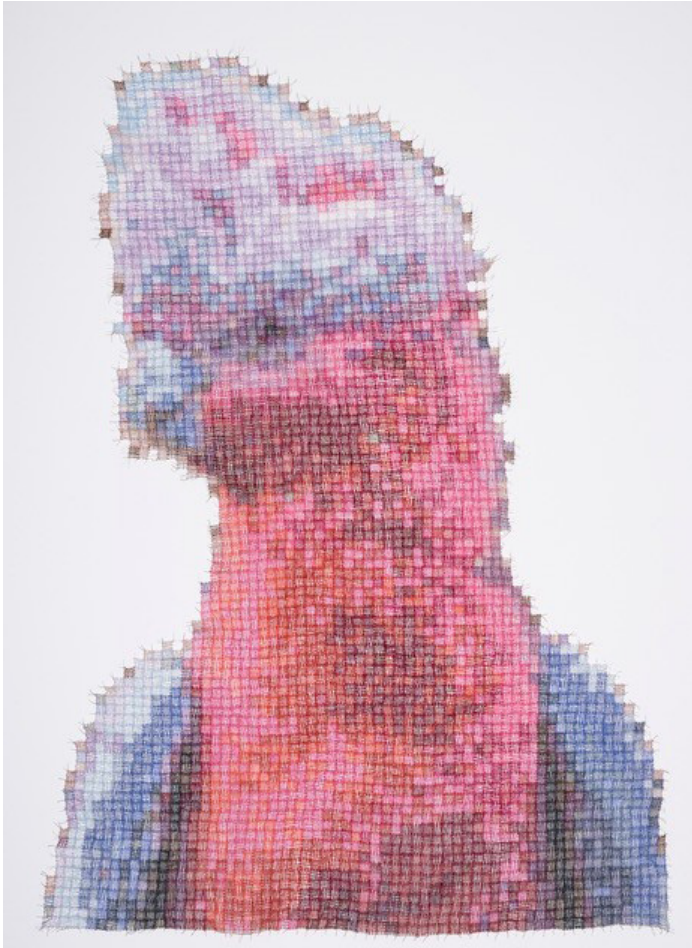
I know that you help with setting up for events and work closely with the EO to ensure all things run smoothly. Can you comment?

It's always exciting when we hold events. The Friends have such a diverse range of speakers, collection viewings, exhibition openings; coffee with our wonderful curators who give their time to talk to Friends Members when new exhibitions open. Collection viewings (formally White Gloves) is a highlight of the year. We get to pull amazing items from the Library's collection.

One of my favourite tasks in working with the Friends is meeting our members at events, workshops etc. Over the years, I have met some amazing people with such interesting backgrounds: ex NLA staff members, politicians, Aust public service workers, authors, artists, regenerative farmers, a cartographer and many more. It is never boring working with and meeting such interesting people.

When you are not serving the Friends so efficiently, I understand that you are a textile artist, a granny and a traveller to family overseas?

I am Australian born but have a lot of family in Canada, Montana and Arizona USA. I travel yearly to spend time with them. Hiking in summer and back country skiing in winter, only taking up these activities in the last 15 years. Back country skiing in Montana is a highlight when I get to go in part of the beautiful Rocky Mountains around Glacier National Park. Hiking in Arizona is fun until you hear a rattle snake and your blood turns cold!



Galah, 2005, Polyester and water-soluble fabric, Photographer Brenton McGeachie

Mulga Moon, Polyester and water-soluble fabric, Photographer Brenton McGeachie

Can you give us an idea of the textile work that you do and what inspires you?

I have a home studio for my arts practice. I focus on Free Machine Embroidery on water soluble fabric. I also have a large computer doobby loom for weaving household and wearable items. I weave large kinetic installation works for exhibitions. I have been fortunate to exhibit locally, nationally and internationally and am currently working on large bird portraits with the machine embroidery technique on soluble fabric. When using soluble fabric, the stitching has to be precise or when you wash away the fabric you will wash away all the stitching and be left with a tangle of thread!

I grew up at Bourke in Western NSW. I hike around Canberra regularly with Mount Painter as a favourite spot for a quick early morning hike. There are many birds to inspire my portraits from both locations.

I know you have exhibited locally at Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG). Are there any other venues where your work is displayed?

I don't have any work exhibited at the moment. Locally I have also exhibited at selected galleries including Craft ACT, ANU Gallery, M16 and the Australian Botanic Gardens gallery. Internationally I have exhibited in Japan, Italy, Switzerland, New Zealand, Holland and the USA.

What are you currently working on?

Bird Portraits, sized between 100cm-140cm tall and approx. 100cm wide. I have completed a Galah, Budgerigar, Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo, Pink Cockatoo (Major Mitchell) and am working on a Wedgetail Eagle at the moment. Each portrait takes months to design and stitch.

How many grandchildren do you have? Do they live in Canberra?

3 Grandsons (Henry, George and Edward) and 1 granddaughter (Charlotte) with another granddaughter due in June. They all live in Canberra.

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. Formatting and length are flexible.

Please reach out if you have an idea:
The editor via friends@nla.gov.au



HOW THE NFSA CAME ABOUT

The National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) was created by a Cabinet decision on 26 March 1984, detaching the Library's film and sound archive units and reconfiguring them as the core of the new institution.

It was the fourth 'new' body separated from the National Library: the others were today's National Archives of Australia (1957), Parliamentary Library (1957) and Canberra Public Library Service (1981).

Fifteen Library staff transferred to the NFSA on 11 May 1984 and soon moved to its new home, the former Australian Institute of Anatomy building at Acton. Collections progressively followed: 430,000 disc records and 20,000 other sound formats, 60,000 film and television titles and 300,000 stills, posters, scripts and other documentation. Staff quickly grew from this core, and the NFSA was formally launched by Prime Minister Bob Hawke on 3 October 1984.

The rationale for the NFSA was international best practice. Audiovisual archiving is a different profession to librarianship, requiring specialist skills, knowledge, methods and sensibilities. Within the Library, the film and sound archives were self-contained operations with their own programs, clienteles and sources of collection development: there was no essential connection with the rest of the institution. They needed the space to develop their own character, facilities and policies.

Separation was first mooted back in 1951. By the 1970s wider cultural developments were putting the Library under pressure from the film and sound communities and industries to follow international norms, increase resources and improve services. This led to calls for independence which the Library opposed, fearing the precedent could cause the loss of other collections. In 1983 the issue culminated publicly in an extended 'war of words' in Parliament and the media. Prime Minister Hawke and Home Affairs Minister Barry Cohen intervened to resolve the matter, and the NFSA became an independent institution.

The National Film Lending Collection of 16mm films – the other self-contained operation in the Film Section – stayed with the Library for several years, before finally gravitating to the NFSA.

Dr Ray Edmondson OAM worked in the Library's Film Section from 1968 to 1974, becoming its Director in 1978. He then served as Deputy Director of the NFSA until 2001. He is President of the Friends of the NFSA. For more on this topic: <https://www.archivefriends.org.au/index.php/history/history>

Ray Edmondson, Mike Cordell and Mike Lynskey, circa 1982 at the NLA



**NATIONAL
LIBRARY
OF AUSTRALIA**

*Friends
of the Library*

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The Friends of the National Library of Australia acknowledges First Australians as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and pays respect to Elders – past and present – and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.