



Friends

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2026

FROM THE EDITOR

A big thank you to the contributors to this Spring issue. I know you are busy and it is very kind of you to write an article for the Friends Newsletter. Your time and expertise are much appreciated.

The range of subjects in this issue is wide, from a Cape to Cairo trek in 1922, to a brief outline of the Dryer collection, to repurposing flora and fauna paintings, to one man's 50 years researching in the NLA, to the School of the Air, to Women's suffrage in South Australia in 1894, to Oral History, to an 18th century Diderot donation. This eclectic mix mirrors the breadth and depth of the NLA collection and the activities managed by the dedicated staff. Please take the time to read the articles. I think you will be surprised and delighted.

The reason I am urging you to read the articles is because your help and ideas are solicited for the issues to come.

Do you have a favourite item in the collection you would like to see highlighted? What articles have you found particularly interesting or not? Are there parts of the NLA'S work you are curious about?

The Committee would like to hear from you at friends@nla.gov.au.

Happy reading!

FIFTY YEARS, FIFTY BOOKS: ONE LIBRARY

I recently realised that I had used the National Library of Australia as a reader and researcher for fifty years. I remember how in mid-1975 a fellow resident at John XXIII College told me (an 18-year-old in first year at ANU) how he had visited a library with no books! 'You look in this card catalogue,' he said (in John's dining room) 'and you order a book with a call slip, and it comes to you a bit later'. Magic! A few weeks later, I realised that I could use the National Library's collection to write my first research essay.

I was enrolled in John Ritchie's course on Victorian Britain, which offered a wonderful introduction not just to a significant and absorbing period (then still barely a lifetime in the past!) but which obliged students to do original research and learn the rudiments of academic writing. Already interested in British military history, I decided to base the essay on one of the Parliamentary 'Blue Books,' on the 1858 report on

The Sanitary Condition of the Army. Remarkably, I was allowed to find the volume (which really was blue!) in the Library's stacks, and I sat at a handy desk making notes. I must have done alright though my footnotes came under John Ritchie's severe scrutiny, corrections which made a lasting impact on my notetaking and foot-noting technique.

Inspired by a misplaced evangelism for secondary history teaching, in 1978, I dropped out of Honours and enrolled in a Grad. Dip. Ed. At what was then Canberra College of Advanced Education (in 'Integrated Studies, an archetypal 1970s subject). Despite my commitment to the idea of history teaching, I failed at 'classroom management.' While I got the diploma, I never taught. Crucially, I sought refuge from the uncongenial course by returning to the familiar stacks of the National Library as often as I could, enjoying the distraction of noting more Blue Books, and especially the 1863 Parliamentary report on the *Sanitary State of the Army in India*. These notes (which I still have) formed the basis of career-long research in British imperial military history, and I still use the Library's rich holdings – for example of nineteenth-century illustrated newspapers, the main source for a future book.

But if I was not to teach, what was I to become? The answer was, for much of 1979, 'one of Mr Fraser's dole bludgers'. Most days, I walked from O'Connor to the Library, sitting in the Reading Room, becoming familiar with the Library's holdings, now on the British Army in colonial Australia. This produced my first real book, *The Remote Garrison* (1986). There too I met Brigadier Maurice 'Bunny' Austin, a pioneer in the subject, who encouraged me to take up the field, the first of many such productive encounters in the Library.

By then, thanks to a friend's serendipitous suggestion, I had joined the Australian War Memorial, fortuitously on the brink of its (first) era of expansion. Though classified as a 'clerk' (later 'research officer') I seized the opportunity to research and write history, encouraged by superiors who either saw my potential or tolerated my enthusiasm. Over the next 27 years at the Memorial I wrote my PhD (on British India, with the Library a source of sources second only to the British Museum, as it then was) and seventeen books, some part of my job, most in my own time. Almost all involved research at the

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FRIENDS EVENTS

Three Worlds Oak

7 September, 6pm

Join the Friends of the National Library and the ACT branch of the Australian Garden History Society for their annual joint lecture, as they present Professor Tim Entwistle to discuss the extraordinary diversity of the humble oak.

Visual Journaling for Library Lovers

7 October, 10am

In this relaxed, hands-on workshop you'll discover how to combine simple sketches, handwritten notes and colour to create your own visual journal.

Friends annual collection viewing – Birds

4 November, 6pm

Join us for a viewing of some of the Library's most unique, beautiful and intriguing bird-related collection items. Curated by Dr Penny Olsen and Library staff, it's an event not to be missed!

Friends AGM

26 November, 5pm

Join us for the Friends of the Library Annual General Meeting to hear an overview of the year and to vote for your 2027 committee members.

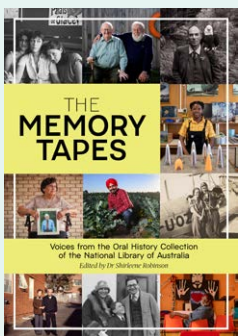
The Craft of Science Fiction

26 November, 6pm

The annual 'craft of' series returns, this year focussing on science fiction. Hear from award-winning sci-fi writers as they discuss the ins and outs of a sometimes-misunderstood genre!

NATIONAL LIBRARY BOOKSHOP

The Memory Tapes



The National Library of Australia's Oral History and Folklore Collection is the largest in the country, containing more than 58,000 recorded hours of interviews. Captured in the collection are memories from the mid-nineteenth century to today—deep time to deep space and everything in between.

The Memory Tapes brings

together hundreds of interview excerpts, which describe major moments of social change, cultural creativity, political struggle and everyday experience. Through the voices of Elders, prime ministers, migrants, scientists, athletes, centenarians, artists and more, this is our national memory. Pick up your copy today!

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the Spring edition of your Newsletter!

Spring is an extremely busy time at the Library with two of the Friends signature events. On 7 September, in a joint event with the Australian Garden History Society, Professor Tim Entwistle will speak on *Three Worlds Oaks*, about a dying hybrid oak in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens that leads to a discussion on the diversity of the genus *Quercus*. Dr Penny Olsen will lead the *Collection Viewing* of material related to birds on 4 November.

Floriade, one of the highlights of the Canberra year brings many visitors to the Library, choosing Bookplate as a contemplative spot for a restorative coffee and bite to eat.

The Canberra Writers Festival is on 15–18 October 2026. Last year it was fabulous to see so many people in the Library enjoying the diverse speakers and topics.

Spring is also the time the Friends committee prepares for the annual general meeting on Thursday, 26 November 2026 at 5pm. Nomination forms for membership of the committee have been sent to you. I am happy to talk to prospective committee members about what is involved. You can contact me through friends@nla.gov.au.

I cannot renominate as I will reach the maximum four years tenure on the committee provided by the Friends Rules. Margaret Nichols, deputy chair, has also decided to retire after multiple terms.

It is important to renew the membership of the committee, so please give a thought to nominating.

As you know, the Friends Lounge in the Rex Nan Kivell Room is now closed for an extended period, with the Ferguson room now operating as a temporary Friends Lounge. I would like to sincerely thank Director-General Alison Dellit and her team for this positive outcome. I appreciated being given the opportunity to work through options. The Ferguson room has a lovely outlook over the lobby, with a view to the Leonard French windows and the Matégot tapestries.

I know that the Friends Lounge is important to members, and its recent extended absence was a disappointment to many.

Looking forward to seeing you at upcoming Friends events, particularly *Visual Journaling for Library Lovers* with Bobby Graham on 7 October.

The AGM will be followed by *The Craft of Science Fiction* with Professor Tony Eaton (ANU) and Dr Sean Williams, the award-winning author with multiple New York Times bestselling books.

Enjoy Spring!

Catherine Anderson | Chair, Friends of the Library Committee

National Library. Its holdings of Australian and later British Indian books proved to be somewhere between useful and vital.

I've now published fifty books. At least 37 of them used the National Library's holdings of books, manuscripts and especially the Special Collections. While Australian material has been central, the Library has also informed research on such diverse subjects as mesmerism in the 1850s, classical Greek epics, the Santhal rebellion in Bengal, the Qajar dynasty of Persia, and even the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982.

Several books, notably *Invading Australia* (2008), drew almost exclusively upon the Library, and one of them, *The Crying Years: Australia's Great War* (2017) was based entirely upon the Library's collections. *Beyond The Broken Years* (2024), the first history of the writing of Australian military history, depended upon trolley-after-trolley of books (a service for which I thanked the Library's stack staff in the book's Acknowledgments).

The Library no longer allows readers to help themselves to Blue Books in the stacks, (unfortunately) but it remains the nation's best research library, making available its collection, and providing a service, that I and a fellowship of researchers rely on and appreciate.

Prof. Peter Stanley, FAHA, FRHistS | Friends member

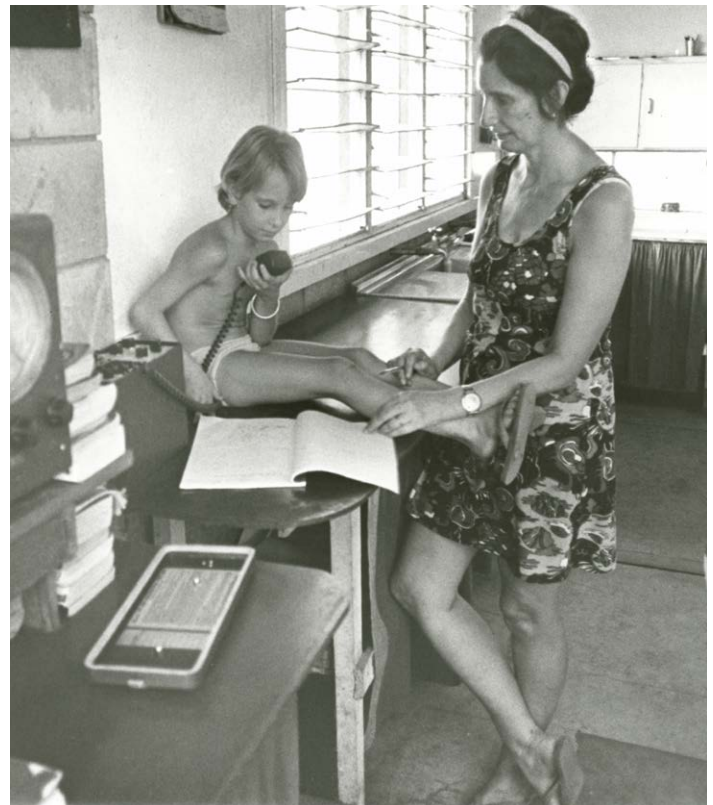
SCHOOL OF THE AIR

Now a days, it's very common for student lessons of all kinds to be delivered 'online'. But clearly this hasn't always been the case. Contemporary communication capabilities have changed dramatically, and all of those capacities were pushed 'on' by COVID-19 restrictions on group gatherings and movements.

A similarly dramatic change in delivering student correspondence lessons started almost 76 years ago in Australia with the foundation of the School of the Air (20 September 1950 in Alice Springs). Earlier examples of distance and correspondence education existed but mostly these were the undertakings of radio-pioneers. These examples usually consisted of broadcasts which teachers/schools tuned into and listened to in their classrooms.

In contrast, *School of the Air in Australia*, allowed students to engage with the content presenters and other students.^{1,2} This was facilitated by the fact that as the service was conceived, it was dovetailed onto the existing Flying Doctor Service (FDS), so that students had voice receivers (to listen to the presentation) as well as voice transmitters. The latter encouraged much more engagement with the lesson. Until relatively recently, *School of the Air* used that same radio equipment as the FDS. This has been replaced with the increasing availability and reliability of internet services.

Most of the establishment groundwork, both conceptual and actual, for the establishment of the *School of the Air* was undertaken by Adelaide Miethke (1881–1962)³. She was an educator and the first female Vice-President of S.A. Public School Teacher's Union. As a part of the Women's Teachers' League, she was both a teacher and a school inspector.



In 1936, Miethke, through the Women's Centenary Council of South Australia, (a memorial to pioneer women), raised £5,000 to help establish the Alice Springs base of the Australian Aerial Medical Service (later Royal Flying Doctor Service).

Initially transmitting to three areas outside Alice Springs, the first guest speaker to broadcast⁴ was Captain G. White, a pilot with TAA, who spoke about and took student questions about the beginnings of the commercial airline industry in Australia. Uptake access to *School of the Air* was swift and it became in many ways the social media of the time, interestingly, almost exclusively to outback students. An annual magazine⁵ published stories by students, pictures and news items.

The NLA has a vast collection of items relating to the *School of the Air*, more than 3 million newspaper and gazette items, 70,000 magazines and newsletters and 3,000 images, maps and artefacts.

Peggy Horn | Friends member and member of the Friends Committee from 2022–2025

References:

- ¹ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/253534298?searchTerm=School%20of%20the%20Air>
- ² <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3466166633/view?sectionId=nla.obj-3552087976&partId=nla.obj-3466283140#page/n30/mode/1up>
- ³ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fb/Adelaide_Miethke.jpg
- ⁴ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/45726624?searchTerm=school%20of%20the%20air>
- ⁵ <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3466166633/view?sectionId=nla.obj-3552087976&partId=nla.obj-3466236666>

Bruce Howard & John Larkins, *Jane Hopkins and her daughter, Peta, participating in School of the Air, Timber Creek, Northern Territory, ca. 1975* (detail), nla.gov.au/nla.obj-147735965

LIFELONG LEARNING – ORAL HISTORY

During August the National Library celebrated Oral History month. The NLA Publishing team created the beautiful book, [*The Memory Tapes: Voices from the Oral History Collection of the National Library of Australia*](#), edited by Dr Shirleene Robinson. In the Lifelong Learning team, we too were fortunate to work with Dr Robinson who wrote and narrated our brand-new podcast [*The Memory Tapes*](#). The Library held a series of events and workshops to promote oral history, and to get people thinking about ways they can begin to record their own.

It was clever marketing to give the book and the podcast the same name, *The Memory Tapes*, to aid audience recognition. But personally, the impact of our team's deep dive into the Oral History collection has spurred some deep reflection into my own experience with oral history, and with remembering.

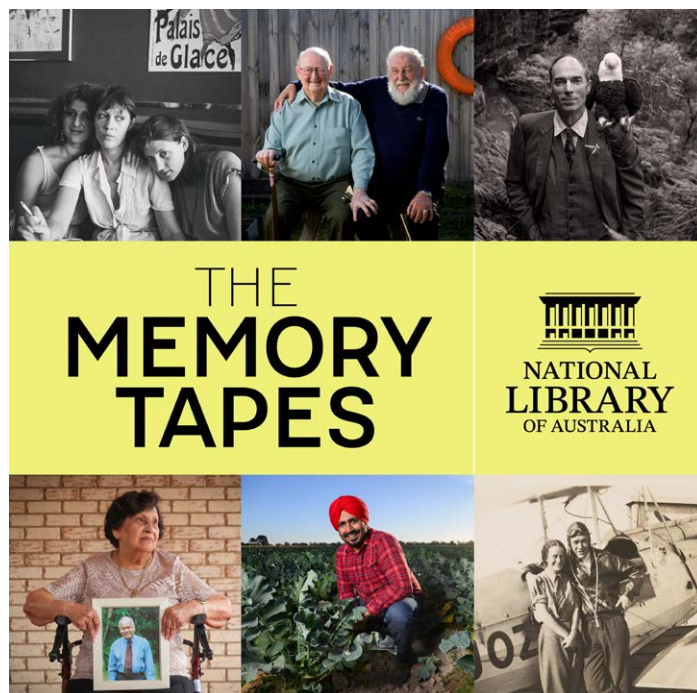
I have an uneasy relationship with that fickle comforter, teacher and muse, Memory. Our family, like so many Australian families, has experienced the grief that comes with dementia. So, like so many family traditions and cultural practices that have kept people connected to each other on this continent forever, we turn to stories.

As Stephen Fry writes in *Mythos*, our word 'memory' comes from Mnemosyne who, in addition to being "busy being unpronounceable"¹ was also the Titan who gained and built experiences. Her responsibility for remembering meant that "as the years passed, her endless capacity for the storage of information and sensory experience would make her wiser than almost anyone."² It is one of the great insults of my life, therefore, that those people in my family who are the wisest thanks to Mnemosyne have also been slowly but steadily forsaken by her.

My grandfather had so many stories that he should have written a book. As a child he was unburdened by caring what anyone thought of him, especially teachers who thought he should be paying attention in class. At home he was fettered only by the golden rule: be home by dark. He says, "I had a good childhood. I never heard my father swear. He would catch fish and rabbits, spear flounder and had a veggie patch. And Mother was a bloody good woman." I know all of this because of our family's oral history tradition. We are a family of story sharers.

Those moments of kindness, or courage, or recklessness, or more often than not, of showing off, shape our understanding of who we are, who my family is, and what we feel is important enough to share.

As a mathematical exercise, I estimated the minutes-worth of stories I have heard of my grandparents' lives. It would be a full day, over cups of tea and Venetian biscuits. Factor in a pause while my grandmother pointed out her favourite shells in the class cabinet, and a 'hang on, it's the maggies' while my grandfather got up to feed bits of mince he had saved for the warbling family waiting outside. Minus the time unstacking the dishwasher or waiting until my grandfather had stopped stirring honey into his cup like the ringing of the Queenscliff shipwreck bell. Divide by three for the repeated tales.



Add 10% for the rare glimpses into parts of their lives that haven't before featured in the usual light-hearted tales. This hypothetical day would be one very well-spent. And I'm sure it still wouldn't cover a fraction of their almost 70 years together, and the quiet 'before times' of both of their childhoods.

I have only ever sat down and asked the questions that would prompt these stories once, and it was too late. The stories ended with stale shifts as my grandmother asked me "and what's your name again?" or "it's lovely to have a nice girl here, are you here to check up on us?" I wish I had interviewed them earlier. I wish I had known what to ask.

My recent work coordinating the wonderful *Capturing Your Family Stories* workshops with Claudia Graig and Gerard Callinan has given me a greater appreciation for the skills needed to conduct a successful interview. I am thrilled that the Library will publish a [Digital Lifelong Learning Module](#) with an explanatory video later in the year. This online learning module will provide us all with the opportunity to learn the basics for conducting a successful interview with our family members and loved ones.

The incredible new podcast [*The Memory Tapes*](#) hints at the vast depths of knowledge held by the NLA's collection and the oral traditions that continue to be practiced across our country. The thoughtful curation of glimpses into our oral history collection by Dr Shirleene Robinson has created a podcast series of our collective memory.

Dr Robinson explains that the podcast, "explores the people and moments that shaped Australia, through the voices of people who were there." The podcast proffers stories that anchor us, that suggest commonalities in our communities' resilience, innovation and care. Episodes such as *Episode One: Unfolding Journeys: Migration, Memory and Australia*, *Episode Seven: Imagination Nation: Australia's Artists, Writers and Dreamers* and *Episode Ten: First Nations Australians: Memory, Survival and Country* inspire us through the recollections of families and individuals who have shaped who we are.

¹Fry, S. (2018) *Mythos*, Penguin Random House, United Kingdom, pg. 11.

²ibid

We learn about the big-proud times in episodes such as *Episode Eight: Power and Protest: The Movements that Transformed Australia* and *Episode 6: From Sand to Stadiums: Australians at Play*. Stories of innovation and pulling-together appear in episodes such as *Episode 3: Invisible Enemies: Stories from Australia's Epidemic Frontlines*, *Episode 4: The Land Remembers: Natural Disasters and Resilience in Australia* and *Episode 9: Bright Sparks: The Story of Australian Innovation*. What strikes me about these stories is the warmth and generosity with which they were shared. You can almost smell the tea and honey on the tables as these incredible people recorded their stories. You can sometimes hear doors creak, and noses sniff.

Oral histories seem to me such a warm, human way to share knowledge. And so, instead of a book, my grandfather should have sat down and told his story. It's now up to us to keep remembering and keep listening.

Listen to the *Memory Tapes* wherever you access your podcasts and keep an ear out for news about the launch of the *Capturing Your Family Stories digital learning module*.

Karlee Baker | Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY'S DRYER COLLECTION

Where in Australia could you read an Irish language translation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Alexandre Dumas's *The Black Tulip*, or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? Or, with a more Australian focus, peruse Rolf Bolderwood's *Robbery Under Arms*? The answer, as I describe at length in the forthcoming volume six of *Australian Book Collectors*, is in the magnificent, and extensive Dryer collection in the National Library. But who was Dryer and what is in his collection?

In 1915, with others, Albert Thomas Dryer founded the 'Irish National Association of Australasia' in Sydney. After the 1916 'Easter Rising' (rebellion) in Ireland the INA swiftly moved to support the complete severance of Ireland from the United Kingdom. In 1918 Dryer, aged 30, an Australian born Federal Public Servant, was arrested under the War Precautions Act of 1914. With seven others, all Irish born, he was interned for alleged membership of a proscribed Irish separatist organisation. Released in 1918 and dismissed from the Public Service, he lived a hand to mouth existence for almost the next twenty years. Remarkably, in 1938, he graduated as a doctor and, after his marriage to Elizabeth ('Lizzie') Haynes in 1933, set up a practice in western Sydney. Retiring to Singleton, he died there in 1963. Dryer was the only Australian citizen ever to be interned for support of an independent Ireland.

Dryer was passionately committed to Ireland and its culture. This showed in his single-minded determination to woo Australians of Irish descent to the cause of Ireland and an embrace of their Irish 'cultural' inheritance. To achieve this, he set up a large library of Irish books, and other material, in the Irish National Association building in Sydney while at the same time developing his own Irish collection. The National Library's Dryer collection includes his extensive library, his personal papers, and a large amount of sheet music, much of it Irish, acquired by his wife, an accomplished pianist and as passionately committed to Ireland as her husband. The collection was bought by the National Library in 1980 after 'Lizzie' Dryer's death.

In relation to Ireland Dryer's library is extensive, an initial analysis suggesting over 732 specifically Irish titles. The total collection is much larger as it contains Irish/Australian, Catholic, general literature and medical works. Dryer was not a book collector as such: he bought to educate himself about Irish history and culture.

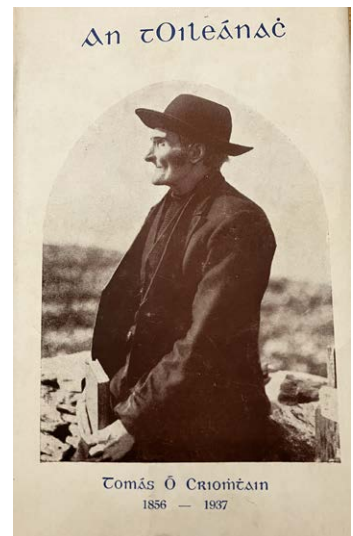
To that end the collection embraces items such as large volumes published by the Irish Manuscripts Commission's printings of ancient Irish texts, commissioned after independence in 1921, the very basis of literate, Irish Celtic civilization. Examples of significant and rare books, certainly in an Australian context, are Irish language editions of *Allgar na h-Inise* (Island Cross Talk), published in 1928, by Blasket islander *Tomás Ó Croimhtain*

(Thomas O'Crohan), and a 1937 copy of the author's even more famous *An t-Oileanách*. This book is also in the Dryer collection in an equally famous English translation by Robin Flower, *The Islandman*. Ó Croimhtain documented the society of this isolated Irish speaking County Kerry community of the Blasket islands and its decline through emigration. Equally rare is a 1913 first edition of *Lyrical Poems* by Thomas McDonagh, one of the executed leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising. In addition to Dryer's books and papers, the Library also acquired Elizabeth Dryer's sheet music.

After the Dryer acquisition other big Irish/Australian collections came to the Library – the papers of the late Professor Patrick O'Farrell, the doyen of Irish/Australian historical studies, and the extensive archives of the Sydney Irish National Association. Taken together, these give the National Library of Australia a prominent position in preserving a significant part of the story of Ireland's social, religious and cultural impact on Australia. In a sense, this ensures, as Irish/Australian Albert Thomas Dryer would have hoped, that Australia's cultural debt to Ireland is not forgotten.

Dr Richard E Reid OAM.

Editor's Note: For those who wish to see what the Dryer collection holds, a search of the NLA catalogue returns 278 results from the catalogue and 10 results in Finding Aids using the search term 'Dryer Collection'. The collection has been extensively catalogued and listed. Ed.



Cover of *An t-Oileanach* by Tomás Ó Croimhtain

LINKING ARCHIVES – CREATING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC ARCHIVE OF THE LIBRARY AND THE DOMESTIC ARCHIVE OF THE HOME.

About the artist: Louise Saxton is a visual artist living and working in NAARM, Melbourne. After having initially trained in drawing and painting she began working with non-traditional materials sourced from, or linked to, the domestic realm thirty years ago. For the past twenty-one years her practice has centred around rescuing and reimagining discarded and disinherited needlework – embroidery and lace primarily made in the home, for the home. Louise considers this a “silent collaboration with the original, largely anonymous makers”. Her practice with this material is unique in the contemporary art world and in 2024 her self-published monograph of reclaimed textile works, titled [LOUISE SAXTON cut & pinned](#) was launched¹.

Back in 2009 I was browsing a bookstore in Melbourne and came across the National Library's publication, *A Brush with Birds*² (with introduction by Penny Olsen). I have always loved Australian native flora and fauna and, birds in particular hold a special place in my heart, having spent some of my youth in the Blue Mountains and growing up with a brother who was a bird-loving amateur ornithologist. One of my first drawings as a young child was of a blue wren, which I illustrated on a card for my grandfather.

When I opened the book to the page of Sarah Stone's female King parrot (*Alisterus chloroplerus*) my heart leapt and my imagination flew away. I knew that she would become my first large-scale bird work to be created from other people's embroidery and lace. Until that time, I had only represented animals in my textile work as a negative space, to represent their vulnerability and loss, and the finite nature of the material I was working with.

Illustrated by Sarah Stone in 1791 from a skin sent back to the collector Sir Ashton Lever in England, and under-stuffed by the taxidermist who had never seen a live specimen, the (to my contemporary eye) eccentric colonial painting gave the parrot a cheeky expression. I imagined her sitting proudly on the shoulder of a fictional pirate, squawking into their ear. When completed in 2010, I named my reinterpreted King parrot, *Queen Billie*, both for Stone's female specimen that inspired her creation and for Billie Holiday, one of the great “Queens of Song”.

This bird painting, by a relatively unknown colonial-era woman artist, so beautifully reproduced in the NLA's publication, began my journey to reinterpret many others found in library and museum collections around the world. In doing so I have wanted to elevate the needlework, historically marginalised within our cultural hierarchy and dismissed as merely “women's work”, to the same status as fine-art. I was also fascinated by the number of other colonial-era women artists, working in the genre of natural history, illuminated in this NLA publication and other books, which I later added to my library, such as *Women of Flowers* by Leonie Norton.

¹ LOUISE SAXTON cut & pinned is available for purchase through the artist's website. Use the Code: NLA2026 to gain the discounted price of \$50 (RRP \$75) with free postage in Australia

² *A Brush with Birds: Australian bird art from the National Library of Australia*, Olsen, P. (Introduction), National Library of Australia 2008. King parrot (female) painted by Sarah Stone, UK (1760-1844) p39



Queen Billie, by Louise Saxton, 2010, after Sarah Stone 1790 (detail)

Sarah Stone, 1791, Female King Parrot



This discovery was also the beginning of my journey to draw a link between the public archive of the library and museum, where delicate watercolours and prints lay protected, rarely appearing on public display and, the domestic archive of the home where exquisite hand embroidery and lace also lays protected, but now often forgotten and later discarded to the opportunity shop, flea-market or even worse, to landfill.

Other flora and fauna that I have reinterpreted in reclaimed needlework, from the NLA's collection and, all of which are featured in my monograph, include: Lilian Medland's *Little kingfishers* c.1930; Ellis Rowan's *Count Raggi's Bird of Paradise* 1917 and her *Rock lily* 1887; Louisa Anne Meredith's *Black cicada* 1850; Marrienne Collinson Campbell's *Sturt's Desert pea* c.1800; John Hunter's *King parrot* c.1789; George Raper's *Emu of Port Jackson* 1791; John W Lewin's *Lyrebird* c.1815 and Anthony Alder's *Kookaburra* c.1890.

The National Library of Australia publications have been a wonderful resource which have allowed me to draw a link between past and present – through the materiality of heritage textiles, that I collect and reimagine, and early interpretations of our precious flora and fauna.

Louise Saxton

Editor's Note: A copy of Louise's exquisite book is available to browse in the Friends Lounge. Louise donated a second copy, which will be a lucky door prize at the AGM.

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

SPOTLIGHT ON CALOUNDRA LIBRARY

The Sunshine Coast Caloundra Library+ was among the four shortlisted public libraries for the James Bennett Public Library of the Year Award 2026. The other contenders were the Mesa Gateway Library located in Mesa, Arizona, USA, the West Las Vegas Library (USA), and Xiong'An Library (China). The winner was the Mesa Gateway Library, announced at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Congress in Busan, Korea in early August 2026.

Congratulations to the Mesa Library.

The award is presented to a library in any country worldwide which has excelled at combining open and functional architecture with creative IT solutions while at the same time involving digital technologies and local culture.

To qualify for the award, libraries must be newly built, have added a significant extension, or located in a building that has not previously been used as a library.

Special congratulations to Caloundra Library + for being on the shortlist. What an exciting time for the Sunshine Coast library world and what an honour to have achieved this shortlist nomination!

I visited the library whilst holidaying in Caloundra. It is a beautiful space, dynamic, light and airy, spacious overall with many areas set aside for reading, learning and conversation. It was buzzing! The 1960s former Council administration building has recently had an amazing makeover which completely justifies the shortlist nomination.

Watch out for a more in depth look at Caloundra Library+ in a future issue of the Friends newsletter.

Margaret Nichols | Editor

FROM MELBOURNE TO CAPE TOWN AND ON TO CAIRO IN 1922

Miss Jessie Webb, an Historian and Dr Georgina Sweet, a scientist, both academics at the University of Melbourne embarked on a Cape to Cairo trek over a period of eight months in 1922.

The story of their travels is described in the transcription of Webb's diary edited by myself (a relative), and privately published in 2013. It is in the NLA collection entitled *Cape Town to Cairo, A Record by Jessie Webb of her Journey with Georgina Sweet in 1922*.

What on earth possessed two middle-aged Melbourne women academics to head off to Cairo via Cape Town? Why and how did they undertake such a journey? Were they chased by elephants and rampaging locals and did they have to hack their way through jungles?

Georgie was the initiator of the journey, but it wasn't clear what her motivation was until I read Rapke's interview with her. As was often the case, it was her childhood readings of adventurous books on Africa that had inspired her. Following several very trying years: running the Melbourne University Veterinary School while the men were away at WW1 and the deaths of her parents and only sister, she finally had a chance to take a long holiday and achieve her dream of experiencing Africa. Jessie happened to be heading for the British School in Greece on a sabbatical and was co-opted to travel as her companion.

The record describes how they travelled through South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, the Belgium Congo, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda, the Sudan and into Egypt. The partial fulfillment of Rhodes' dream of a Cape to Cairo railway enabled them to undertake the journey largely by the newly established alternating rail and boat services and included travel on the Congo and Nile rivers and lakes Tanzania and Victoria. It also included occasional vehicle use and seven days being carried in deck chairs by bearers over a track established in southern Sudan to avoid a set of Nile cataracts, complete with thirty-five porters.

The widespread British colonial presence across the routes meant that no travellers faced issues from local tribes and it was perfectly safe for women - they travelled protected in a 'colonial cocoon'. Letters of Introduction were one of the many enabling factors used to facilitate their passage. While wild animals were an occasional threat, even more dangerous were insects, especially those carrying malaria or sleeping sickness, along with the more mundane risks of dehydration and diarrhoea. While being perfectly feasible by rail and boat, and increasingly by vehicle, the route was still not an easy one.

The motivation for undertaking such a long and arduous journey usually had its roots in the prevailing ethos of the British Empire with 'Darkest Africa' being portrayed as being magical, exotic and ripe for discovery by Europeans who would bring it 'light' (read Christianity and commercial benefit to Britain). In addition, African travel was seen as being the ultimate adventure, exciting and exotic, spiced with hints of danger.



My subsequent research on the subject will culminate with a book describing and analysing such journeys. It reveals that a sort of 'collective mania' arose about the journey, with ever-increasing numbers of people undertaking one version of the trek or another. Travellers either walked or rode bicycles or motor bikes, drove cars, caught steam trains and boats or flew. There were three popular routes: the classic was from Cape Town to Cairo being largely through British territory. Alternatively, some started off in Cairo and came south. Others used the desert route across French territories, south across the Sahara from the Mediterranean, then east from northern Nigeria and Congo DR, then south on more or less the reverse of the classic route.

One 1936 author, H. Birch Reynardson, even named his travel book *High Street Africa*, reflecting just how busy the most commonly used route was by the mid-1930s. This popularity has persisted to today, as evidenced by the numbers of entries under 'Cape to Cairo' in a Google search.

The NLA holds books on two other such Australian travellers. Perth journalist, Ronald Monson, then aged twenty-three, walked the route (with a South African mate) in 1928/9. The other Australian was Lores Bonney, who in 1937 at the age of forty, flew herself in a single-engined Klemm. Remarkably, she started off from her home in Brisbane and flew via Asia, India and Arabia, before heading south from Cairo, arriving in Cape Town just over four months later. This account was written by Kristen Alexander and published by the NLA in 2016.

Jessie's record can be read online at <https://margocall.wordpress.com/>.

Margaret O'Callaghan | researcher on all things African

Editor's Note: Both Jessie and Georgie have entries in the Australian Dictionary of Biography and Georgie's biography is included in Julia Rapke's manuscript papers on various Australian women. The latter was digitised with the help of the Friends of the National Library. Ed.

Georgina Sweet, image cleaned with AI, courtesy of the artist

Cape to Cairo timetable, courtesy of the writer

Time Table of the Present Cape to Cairo Route.

6,944 miles in 46 Days.

Distances from Cape Town to Cairo (via Belgian Congo)
6,944 miles; to Alexandria, 7,074 miles.



EGYPTIAN STATE RAILWAYS.

Cairo to Alexandria	130 miles
Cairo to Port Said	149 miles. (1 Day)
Alexandria to Cairo (Egyptian train)	555 miles. (14 Days)
Wadi Halfa to Shellal; Philae-Assuan (Steamer)	308 miles. (2 Days)

SUDAN GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS AND STEAMERS.

Khartoum to Halfa (Sudan train)	579 miles. 1½ Days
Kosti-Sennar to Khartoum (train)	240 miles. (1 Day)
Rajah to Kosti (Sudan steamer)	890 miles. (14 Days)

UGANDA MARINE STEAMERS.

Mabasi to Gondokoro-Rajah (Uganda Marine Steamer)	273 miles.
Stanleyville to Mabasi (Lake Albert, motor road)	683 miles. (8 Days)
Stanleyville to Stanleyville (train)	77 miles.
Kindu to Stanleyville (steamer)	196 miles.
Kongola to Kindu (train)	217 miles.
Bukama to Stanleyville	(10 Days)

CONGO RAILWAYS AND STEAMERS.

Bukama to Kongola (steamer)	398 miles.
To Bukama from Cape Town (by rail, completed 1918, 2,632 miles)	(Travelled in 6 Days by train)

KATANGA JUNCTION RAILWAYS.

Via RHODANIA and KATANGA	
Victoria Falls to Elizabethville (train)	666 miles.
Bulawayo to Broken Hill	666 miles.
Bulawayo to Elizabethville	(8 Days)

RHODESIAN RAILWAYS.

Mafeking to Bulawayo (train)	496 miles.
Kimberley to Mafeking (train)	123 miles.
Cape Town to Kimberley (train)	647 miles.
Cape Town to Bulawayo	(8 Days)

SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS AND PORTS.

London to Cape Town (by Union Castle Line)	6,201 miles.
	(18 Days)

Imperial railways: the abortive Cape-to-Cairo (33, 35 bottom left, opposite).

UNBRIDLING THE TONGUES OF WOMEN

An international network of suffragettes working to advocate for their equal place in society led to South Australian women gaining the right to vote and stand for parliament.¹

In 1894, South Australian women became among the first in the world to gain the dual rights to vote and stand for Parliament. This law also gave Aboriginal women in South Australia the right to vote and stand for Parliament.²

The success of the seventh Bill introduced to amend the South Australian Constitution Act followed years of fearless and skilful actions, global cooperation, dogged determination and collaborative campaigning by suffragettes to make their voice heard in a colony dominated by men.

The suffragettes persevered and their influence reached far beyond Adelaide.

The South Australian Parliament admitted women to full rights of political citizenship on 18th December 1894.

Three key women, Catherine Helen Spence³, journalist, educator, advocate for social justice and lifelong campaigner for political reform, Mary Lee, Secretary of the Women's Suffrage League⁴ from its foundation in 1888 and Elizabeth Web Nicholls, President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union⁵ collaborated in the campaign for the new colony of South Australia to achieve a more just society.

Their collaboration saw 11,600 suffragettes' signatures presented to the South Australian House of Assembly in 1894.⁶

The suffragettes⁷ faced bitter hostility and ridicule from opponents and ostracism from church leaders and 'others' held in high esteem in the community. 'Unafraid of controversy and determined', the energetic women campaigned tirelessly.

Many suffragettes drew inspiration from the international anti-slavery movement⁸ which highlighted women's exclusion from political life and strengthened calls for reform.

South Australia's 'new free colony' was significantly financed by prominent individuals connected to the slave trade, using British Slavery Compensation⁹ money.

The beneficiaries of slavery compensation monies possessed power and held prominence. They included governors, jurists, politicians, clergy, writers, graziers and financiers.

The determination of the suffragettes and their global movement supported campaigns across many countries. The suffragettes called for enfranchisement of women for full admission to political life, enabling them to shape legislation, run for government and participate in the democratic process on equal footing with men.

Catherine Helen Spence's influence and global advocacy extended beyond Australia and reshaped modern democracy.

Catherine Spence declared, "Nothing could be done in social reform without their first being political reform. When Women receive the right to vote, their work would only just begun."¹⁰

Using her pen and voice, she targeted deep seated social inequities advocating for education for women, campaigned for proportional representation and co-founding boarding facilities for destitute children.



The Australian feminist declared, "I am a new woman, I know it. I am an awakened woman in the sense of capacity and responsibility, not merely to the family and the household but to the state; to be wise, not for her own selfish interests, but that the world may be glad that she was born."¹¹

In Adelaide, a bronze statue of Catherine Helen Spence stands in Light Square, and a wing of the State Library of South Australia is named in her honour.

Spence's portrait appeared on Australia's five-dollar banknote between 2001 and 2016.

Catherine Helen Spence is buried in a neglected grave in St Jude's cemetery at Brighton in Adelaide.

Patricia Boylan | Friends Committee member

References:

Spence, Catherine Helen, 1825–1910, *Ever yours, C.H. Spence: Catherine Helen Spence's An autobiography (1825–1910), diary (1894) and some correspondence (1894–1910)* (Kent Town, S. Aust.: Wakefield Press, 2005)

Susan Magarey, *Unbridling the tongues of women: a biography of Catherine Helen Spence* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2010)

¹ No 1 P Stretton & C Finnimore, *How South Australian Aborigines Lost the Vote: some side effects of federation* (1991)

² [Indigenous Australians' right to vote | National Museum of Australia](#)

³ [Biography - Catherine Helen Spence - Australian Dictionary of Biography](#)

⁴ [Biography - Mary Lee - Australian Dictionary of Biography](#)

⁵ [Biography - Elizabeth Webb Nicholls - Australian Dictionary of Biography](#)

⁶ [Women's Suffrage | State Records of South Australia](#)

⁷ [Women's suffrage | National Library of Australia \(NLA\)](#)

⁸ [The collection of slavery compensation, 1835-43 | Bank of England](#)

⁹ [British Slavery Compensation](#)

¹⁰ [Spence speaks: rediscovering her annotations | State Library of South Australia](#)

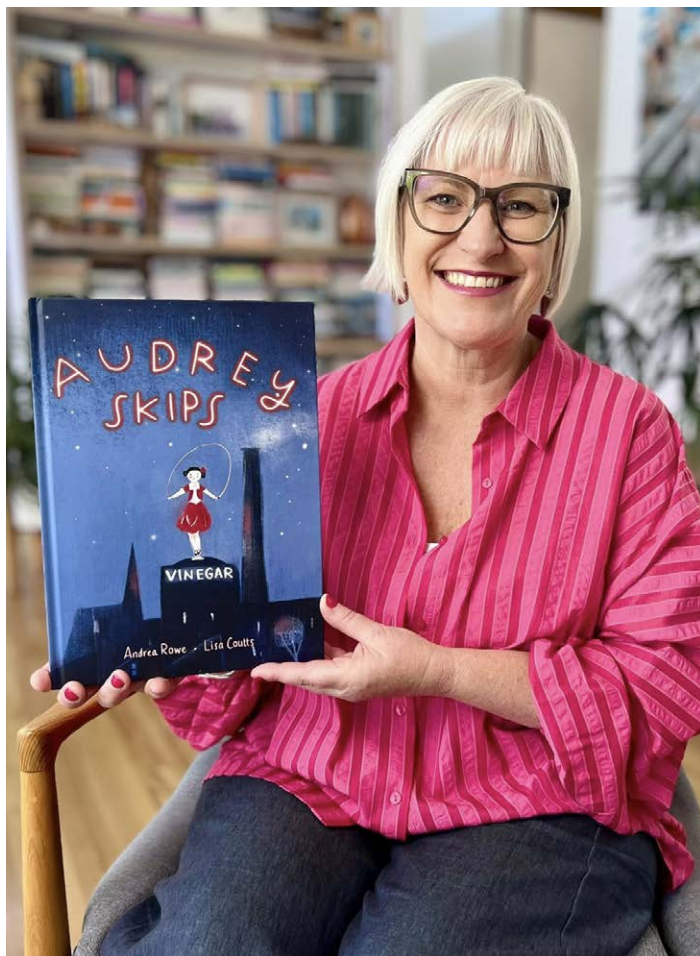
¹¹ Ibid

The grave of Catherine Helen Spence, courtesy of the writer

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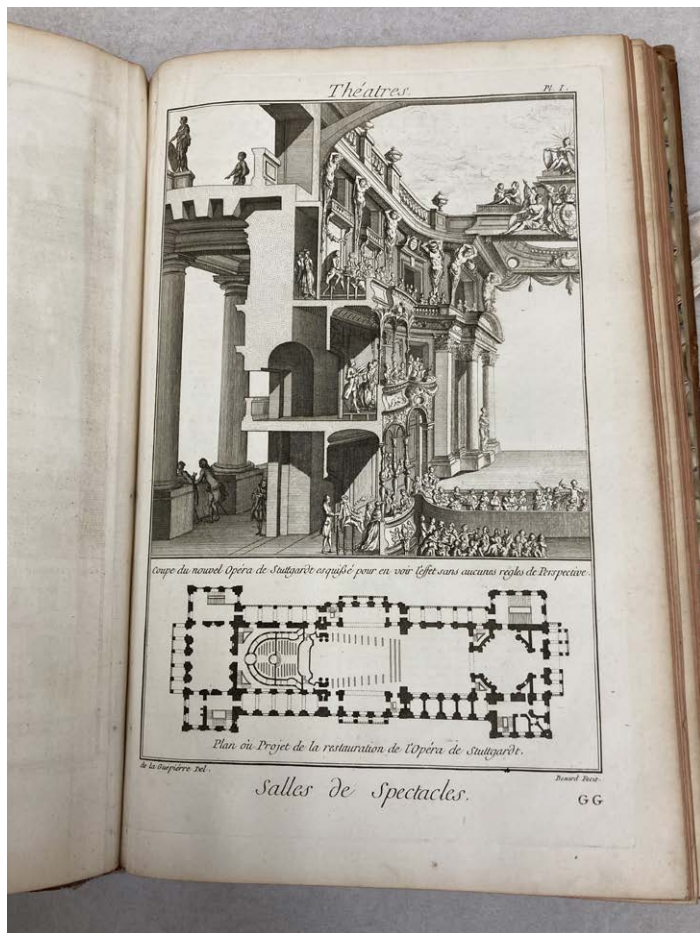
On a more personal level it is wonderful to hear from so many people about what Trove means to them. Just a few examples: "I am now 80 and love Trove", "My thanks go to Trove for this enlightenment and without Trove I would still think my grandmother was an only child born in Ballarat (she wasn't).", "And generally speaking, Trove is such an incredibly important database for any historical research. And a big thanks to the volunteers who correct the texts too (I have done that a few times myself)."

Trove Stories is the first way we have been able to systematically collect and share people's stories. If you have used Trove for anything great or small we would love to hear your story. To be part of this project, go to the front page of Trove and scroll to the bottom right. Enjoy browsing the gallery to explore the stories of others and be part of the project by sharing yours.

Liz MacKenzie | Assistant Director, Trove Community Services

Andrea Rowe, Inspiring young readers to look up and discover Melbourne's Skipping Girl, [Trove Stories](#)

Joey Chung (Holmesglen) and Alice Chik (Macquarie University), Connecting Communities Through Trove Lists: Discovering Translated Australian Books, [Trove Stories](#)



DIDEROT'S THÉÂTRES VOLUME 1777

When Dr John Golder died in November 2024, his close friend and fellow theatre academic, Dr Geoffrey Borny, was overwhelmed to discover that John had bequeathed him the *Théâtres* volume of the eighteenth-century *L'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts, et des Métiers* (*The Encyclopedia, or Classified Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Trades*). This original edition of illustrations and notes was published in about 1777. It contains 80 plates depicting elaborate theatre buildings, complicated stage machinery and exquisite stage settings.

The publication was part of the 35 volume *Encyclopédie* published between 1751 and 1780, edited by Denis Diderot, a key figure in the French Enlightenment. This monumental undertaking "courageously set out to classify and record knowledge in a rational manner, free of political and religious bias" (Dover etc).

John Golder was an eminent theatre historian at the University of NSW and undertook extensive research into French theatre from the 17th to the 19th centuries. He focused on performance rather than dramatic literature, exploring theatre

records in order to bring to life the experience of actors, designers, set builders, backstage crew and audiences from the boxes to the gods and from the foyers to the toilets! The *Théâtres* volume contributed to this research.

After Geoffrey received the leather-bound book and spent months enjoying the detailed engraved plates, he decided that it was time to make this treasure permanently available for a wider audience. With formal permission from John's family, he offered to donate the publication to the National Library. He knew that it would be well looked after and contribute to the Library's holdings in both theatre and French culture.

Some limited information about the book's provenance includes John's purchase in 2008 at the cost of £611 pounds (about \$1,400) from Theatre Shire Books Ltd, a London bookseller. A rubber stamp inside the cover indicates that the volume once belonged to Richard Leacroft an eminent British theatre historian. Beyond that, who knows? Certainly, it has been well looked after with no signs of insect damage or mould.

The process for donating material to the Library is both careful and straightforward. After the Library agreed to accept the book, a date was set for delivery. Library staff from the conservation team and collections team met Geoffrey on 6 September 2025, and he signed the Transfer of Custody form and formally handed over the work. The long journey from Paris to the National Library in Canberra was concluded for this precious publication.

Gabrielle Hyslop | Friends member



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R. Bénard (engraver) after Philippe de La Guépière (artist and architect), 'Cut View of the New Opera at Stuttgart', plate 1 in Diderot and d'Alembert, eds, *Théâtres* [*Theatres volume of The Encyclopedia*], c.1777, nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn10242832



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