

FRIENDS OF THE
NATIONAL LIBRARY
OF AUSTRALIA INC.

WINTER 2018

Friends

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends

Welcome to our June 2018 newsletter. It was good to see so many of you at the Friends events held this year: the exciting *1968: Changing Times* exhibition preview, the thought-provoking Papers of Jessie Street with Dr Lenore Coltheart and the fabulous White Gloves event: 50 Favourite Things of our Library volunteers.

The Friends will be playing their part in events scheduled to mark the 50th anniversary, including the Library open day on 12 August. Stay tuned for details.

On 12 February, long-serving Committee member and former treasurer Bill Geering passed away. Bill was a generous Committee member and Library supporter. He was also a Library volunteer for eight years, working behind the scenes in the Maps Collection. We extend our deepest sympathies to Margo, who has also made a major contribution to the Committee.

We were also sorry to learn of the death of Sue Ebury, Countess of Wilton, on 12 April. Most recently, Sue will be remembered by Friends for her wonderful talk on Lancelot 'Capability' Brown last July. She is well known for her marvellous biographies of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop and Kenneth Myer AC, DSC, and was a great supporter of the Friends annual Kenneth Myer lecture.

Dr Susan Ford has resigned from the Committee due to her move interstate and we thank her for her work. We are delighted that Howard Murray joined the Committee at our April meeting and look forward to his contribution.

On 16 April, I represented the Friends at a farewell for long-serving National Library Assistant Director-General Margy Burn. She has been a great supporter of the Friends and is also a Friends member.

Friends membership has once again exceeded 2,000 and we are working to find innovative ways of attracting even more members. Thank you for your ongoing support and we hope to see you at a Friends event soon.

Best wishes
Gary Kent
Chair

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NLA BUILDING

50

opening our doors
creating the future

On 15 August 1968 at 2.30pm, Prime Minister John Gorton officially opened the stunning National Library building on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. 2018 is a special year of celebrations for the Library, with many events planned for the building's 50th anniversary.

An exciting program is planned for the Library open day on Sunday 12 August, almost 50 years to the day since the Library building opened. A fascinating and fun day is planned with tours, talks and festivities to interest and entertain all. Not to be missed will be the many tours through areas not usually accessible to the public. The Friends Lounge will also be a centre of activity as we celebrate our close and continuing relationship with the Library and, we hope, attract new members.

Have you worked for the National Library any time in the past 50 years? Inside this newsletter, you will find a wonderful recollection from a former staff member who started work at the Library just days after the building opened.

To reconnect with the many people who have worked for the Library since its opening, the Library is inviting former staff to a special cocktail and behind the scenes evening on Friday 20 July. To receive your invitation, please register by Saturday 9 June at nla.gov.au/content/back-to-the-library.

These are just some of the events that are part of the Library's celebrations, so please join us to help make our anniversary memorable.

Lyn Adams



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STARTING WORK WITH THE LIBRARY—1968

I was not long out of graduate studies at library school in England when I saw the National Library's ad in *The Times Literary Supplement*, where all good library jobs were advertised. And just look at the salary! I checked my conversion calculation—almost twice what I was earning.

I chased it up and soon received details, including a delightful leaflet with artists' impressions of a magnificent new building. I remember that this leaflet, which I still have, won my heart. I was hooked, applied and was summoned for an interview with the Library's UK liaison officers, Bill Thorn and Judith Baskin, and a man from the Public Service Board, who, I was told recently, was initially very disparaging about male librarians.

Some months later, and almost 50 years ago, we boarded the *Arcadia* in Southampton for a five-week trip to Sydney travelling first class, as public servants did in those days, and earning money all the time as my salary commenced on the day I left! This was not only the best holiday I have had, but it also provided a great transition period and the chance to learn much about Australia from my fellow passengers. Canberra was not really Australia, I was emphatically told, and the flies were a terrible nuisance.

Following stops in Rotterdam, Lisbon, the Canary Isles, Capetown, Durban, Fremantle, Adelaide and Melbourne, the *Arcadia* steamed up Sydney Harbour on a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon. We were met by an employee of the National Archives and transported by not one but two large black Commonwealth cars to Sydney airport for our first ever flight.

Canberra was quite a contrast—a cold winter's evening and a ramshackle airport terminal. Next morning, Monday 19 August 1968, Jack Edwards from the Library collected me and drove me to the building which had so impressed me, the National Library of Australia. I don't remember the formalities, but when they were over I met with John Balnaves, Principal Librarian, Bibliographic Services. He was well into his enthusiastic introduction into the branch where he thought I was to work when a phone call from Bill Thorn, then principal librarian of user services, interrupted him, disputing my placement. Cheekily (and boldly for me) I offered to leave them to it and go to my bank to sort out my financial affairs. When I returned I discovered that Bill had won and I was to work in the general reference area.

I was made very welcome—I remember having tea with Jan Fullerton, then also a base-grade librarian—but I was more than a little disoriented and perplexed that someone so new and unfamiliar with almost everything could be put in the position of taking phone calls from the public needing assistance! I remember listening to an enquiry from a public servant and having to ask him to repeat it more slowly as I hadn't been able to catch a single word spoken with his strong Australian accent.

I soon settled in as I got to know my helpful and friendly new colleagues, the building, and beautiful Canberra. I remained on Library staff until 1979 when I resigned from my position of assistant director of ANSTEL (Australian National Science and Technology Library) and returned to England 'for good'. After only a few weeks it became clear that that was an enormous mistake

and I came back to Canberra again, finding a position in the Parliamentary Library, from which I retired in 2002.

I am proud to have worked in this magnificent institution almost from its opening day and sing its praises whenever I get the opportunity as it goes from strength to strength.

Alan Wilson

THE LIBRARY'S BUILDING ART 50 YEARS ON

Art plays an important role in shaping the atmosphere of the National Library's building. The story of the building and its bespoke art is explored in the exhibition *1968: Changing Times*. Architect Walter Bunning (1912–1977) commissioned several artists to create building art in traditional European media to enhance his classical-modernist design of the Library.

Bunning devised and oversaw the original building art scheme. As he explained, its purpose was 'to enrich the atmosphere of the building both externally and internally in order to heighten the experience of those visiting and working within'. To reflect 'the classical theme of the building', he developed a concept inspired by 'the elements of water, earth and sky' consisting of fountains, tapestries, a lintel sculpture, metal panels and coloured-glass windows. The completed artworks do not strictly follow Bunning's brief, however the influence of the three elements on the building art is evident.

French artist Mathieu Matégot (1910–2001) designed three colourful tapestries featuring Australian imagery for the Library Foyer. The tapestries include symbols such as the Great Barrier Reef, native flora and fauna and the Woomera radio telescope. A fourth smaller tapestry—depicting Uluru—was also commissioned and hung in a reading room; it is on display in 1968. The tapestries were woven with Australian merino wool by the world-renowned Aubusson weavers in France.

Australian artists created the rest of the building art. Bunning himself designed the fountains—which clearly respond to the theme of water—that are located in the forecourt. Sculptor Tom Bass AM (1916–2010) was commissioned to complete a large copper lintel for the entrance. Partly inspired by ancient Sumerian clay seals, the work appears to combine the themes of the earth and the sky; it depicts a winged sun and a tree of knowledge.



A detail from Mathieu Matégot's (1910–2001) *Land of Parrots* tapestry, which hangs in the Library's foyer.



The Apollo program was established in 1961 with the objective of landing the first humans on the moon. In 1968, the program was approaching its climax with two successful missions to space. Australian cartoonist John Frith could not help but compare the soaring ambition of Apollo with turbulent events across the globe.

Knowledge is another artwork located on the Library's exterior. Bunning and Madden architect Arthur Robb (b.1933) designed the seven copper panels located on the lake side of the building. Links have been drawn between the designs on each panel and the symbols in Leonard French's (1928–2017) windows. French's sixteen striking coloured-glass windows—made in the *dalle de verre* technique—line the left and right wall of the foyer and are modern interpretations of medieval stained-glass windows. French's windows feature celestial imagery and were originally intended to form a backdrop to exhibition spaces; Bookplate cafe and the National Library Bookshop now occupy those areas.

The National Library's original building art is explored in *1968: Changing Times*, which runs until 12 August.

Dr Grace Blakeley-Carroll

RECENT FRIENDS EVENTS

Friends Preview: 1968: *Changing Times*

Where was I in 1968? That question probably crossed the minds of many Friends of the Library gathered for a special pre-exhibition encounter with the curators of the Library's latest exhibition, *1968: Changing Times*. 'Sex, drugs, rock'n'roll ... and a missing Prime Minister. Discover more about the tumultuous year that was 1968 ...' says the ad for the exhibition on the Library's website, but as Drs Guy Hansen and Grace Blakeley-Carroll revealed, the exhibition is about far more than that.

Guy took us on a colourful ride through what was indeed a significant year both internationally and domestically. The Anglo–Western world had actually moved on from straight rock'n'roll to the pointed and aggressive sounds of the Rolling Stones, although Australia was still caught up with the more traditional melodies of the Seekers. Guy showed the Library's collections from the period also reflect the bleaker realities of political assassinations—Martin Luther King Jr and USA presidential candidate Robert Kennedy; the mysterious drowning of our own prime minister, Harold Holt; and a nation increasingly concerned about involvement in the Vietnam War.

On exhibit is one of the banners from the Australian mothers against conscription movement—'SOS ... Save Our Sons'.

Grace revealed why the Library has staged the exhibition in the first place: 1968 saw the opening of the Library building. On display is a fascinating illustrated map, *The Future Canberra*, showing the proposed National Library as a Greek-style temple. What emerged, as Grace informed us, was a modernist building with clear echoes of monumental Greece. Perhaps the most evocative side of the exhibition is the recreation of the Library's original research and reading space, complete with a card catalogue cabinet and one of the unique elevated waste paper baskets.

While the sounds of *Hey Jude* and *Delilah* echo around the period displays, many of us experience a frisson of memory as they recall fingers battling with small cards before the era of instant digital catalogue gratification.

Richard Reid

The Papers of Jessie Street



Jessie Street addresses a peace rally in Trafalgar Square, London, in 1948.

On Monday 26 March, Friends, guests and family members of Jessie Street gathered to hear about the work of this remarkable Australian feminist and human rights activist.

Gary Kent, Chair of the Friends Committee, introduced guest speaker Dr Lenore Coltheart, who is an Australian historian and heritage consultant and editor of *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography* (2004).

Dr Coltheart spoke of the early life of Street, her adventures and the world events that shaped her passions.

As war was declared in 1914, Jessie became secretly engaged to Kenneth Street, who she married in 1916. When she was 26, Street sailed to the USA to find out about the women's movement. This trip was to be the beginning of many, as she became more involved as a human rights activist and champion of the women's movement.

In the 1920s, Street became involved in feminist and social justice issues in Australia. In 1930, she made her first visit to Geneva, and continued to work for women's rights and peace

through various organisations, projects and attempts at a political career. Street's remarkable legacy extends to her work in establishing the UN Commission on the Status of Women, her involvement in the world peace movement and her commitment to assist wartime ally Russia.

She also worked tirelessly as an advocate for Indigenous rights, making history in 1967 when two amendments to the Australian Constitution were approved.

Margy Burn, then assistant director-general, in her thanks to Dr Coltheart, commented that Street was a household name again thanks to the newly established Jessie Street Trust.

Granddaughter of Jessie Street Sylvia Emmett remarked that Street would have been amazed by the digitisation of the collection.

Following the talk, guests enjoyed a special collection viewing to explore the documents and objects up close.

Thanks to a donation from the Friends, the Library has now digitised a significant portion of the collection of Jessie Street's papers, enabling further research into and recognition for this extraordinary Australian. The Friends' donation was made in honour of former director-general Anne-Marie Schwirtlich AM.

The Jessie Street Collection manuscript reference is MS2683 at nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231546119.

A podcast of the talk will soon be available.

Anne Davis

NATIONAL LIBRARY BOOKSHOP SPECIAL OFFER FOR FRIENDS

In conjunction with the Library's Bookshop, the Friends are pleased to announce a special offer for members who make a purchase using the National Library's online bookshop.

For any purchase made by a Friend between **1 June 2018 and 31 August 2018**, they will receive a free copy of the *Richard Woldendorp Card Pack*. This offer is in addition to the usual Friends discount and any other offers advertised on the Library Bookshop website.

To claim your free copy of the *Richard Woldendorp Card Pack*, and your 15 per cent discount with all online purchases, use the promotional code **FR18TER** at checkout. This code is valid from **1 June–31 August 2018**.



FRIENDS DISCOUNT CODE FOR NATIONAL LIBRARY EVENTS

To claim your 15 per cent discount on ticketed Library events, bookings must be made online at nla.gov.au/bookings and the discount code **FRWIN18** entered when booking. This code is valid from **1 June to 31 August 2018** and does not apply to Friends events (select the members ticket option for these) or events that are free of charge.

FRIENDS EVENTS

Cruden Farm Garden Diaries

Cruden Farm Garden Diaries traces the history of the deep friendship and creative partnership between Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC and her gardener, Michael Morrison. Co-author Lisa Clausen will discuss how she drew on Morrison's diaries to write this intimate insight into two extraordinary people.

This is a joint event between the Friends of the National Library and the Australian Garden History Society.

Thursday 14 June, 6pm

Theatre

\$15 Friends and AGHS members, \$20 non-members
(includes refreshments)

Bookings: nla.gov.au/events or 02 6262 1698

Coffee with the Curator: 1968: Changing Times Curators' Stories

Join us for an opportunity to discover the surprising and unexpected things that curators Dr Guy Hansen and Dr Grace Blakeley-Carroll found when deciding on the items to be displayed in *1968: Changing Times* and what criteria they used to select items. The event commences with a gallery tour followed by tea and scones in the Friends Lounge.

Tuesday 24 July, 10.30am

Treasures Gallery

\$15, Friends only (max. 20 guests)

Bookings: nla.gov.au/events or 02 6262 1698

OTHER EVENTS

National Library of Australia Open Day

Join us for a day of special events as we celebrate the Library building's 50th birthday.

Sunday 12 August, 9am–4pm

Free

Further information: nla.gov.au/events or 02 6262 1234

Lake View Book Club

The Lake View Book Club meets in the Friends Lounge at the National Library on the last Tuesday of each month from 6.15–7.45pm. Please send email to kathryncole@grapevine.net.au if you have any questions about joining the club.

- Tuesday 26 June: *The Solemn Lantern Maker* (published 2008) by Merlinda Bobis. Merlinda will lead discussion.
- Tuesday 31 July: *A Long Way from Home* by Peter Carey
- Tuesday 28 August: *First Person* by Richard Flanagan

Feedback

We are looking for feedback from you.

Please send an email to Newsletter Editor Ingrid Moses at friends@nla.gov.au



THE BEGINNING OF THE FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Until 1990, the National Library of Australia was 'friendless', in the sense that unlike some of its counterparts in the states, it did not have an active supporters' organisation.

The first such organisation in Australia was the Friends of the Public (now State) Library of South Australia, which was formed nearly 60 years earlier in 1932. The deleterious effect of the Great Depression on government spending encouraged a group of local citizens to band together to combat what was seen as the starvation of a well-loved cultural institution.

In 1966, a friends organisation was formed to support the State Library of Victoria; it followed an earlier supporters' group, the short-lived Library Society of Victoria, founded in 1951. It was not until 1983 that a supporters group for the State Library of New South Wales came into being as the Library Society. The NSW Library Foundation was formed in 1987 and a similar body now also operates alongside the Friends of the State Library of Victoria.

By the end of the 1980s, the National Library was ready to initiate the formation of its own supporters' group. This followed the determined efforts over a number of years of a number of library users and staff members for the creation of such an organisation.

Perhaps the most persistent advocate of the need for a Friends organisation was well-known Canberra public servant and prolific historian, Donald Ian McDonald (1923–1990). Don was a frequent user of the Library and a man of strong views who penned sharp letters to those in authority on matters dear to his heart, including the welfare of the National Library of Australia.

John Thompson, a senior library manager of the time, remembers that Donald McDonald 'was very keen that the Library should capitalise on the friendly support of its users to establish a formal Friends of the National Library organisation ... he wrote on this subject in the letters column of *The Canberra Times* and I am aware that he spoke with successive directors-general arguing the case for a friends group.'



The Friends of the National Library was launched by the Hon. Gough Whitlam AC, QC at the inaugural Kenneth Myer Lecture on 5 April 1990.



Ruth Cracknell AO at the Friends Welcome Day on 7 April 1990.



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In late 1989, the Library Council appointed an interim Friends Committee, comprising Library Director-General Warren Horton (chair), Ian Castles, Professor Ian Donaldson, Dr Dorothy Green, Marion Halligan, Professor Bill Mandle, Peter Sekules, Richard Stone and Frank Thompson.

The initial aims of the Friends were:

- to encourage public and private support for the National Library of Australia through education about its aims and therefore to foster among the Friends a sense of involvement with, and understanding of, the objectives and operations of the Library
- to educate the community at large about the Library's collections, activities and functions and to extend the education and lifelong learning of members
- to assist the National Library of Australia through the development of a volunteer program and to provide funds for selected Library acquisitions and projects.

Beatrice Brickhill was appointed the first executive director of the Friends, having previously worked with the Danish Royal Ballet, the English National Opera and the Bolshoi Ballet and several Australian arts organisations.

The Friends was officially launched by the chair of the Library Council, Sir Ninian Stephen, on Thursday 5 April 1990. A highlight of the evening was the inaugural Friends Kenneth Myer Lecture, delivered by Gough Whitlam AC, QC to a capacity audience in the Library theatre, on national collecting institutions.

Two days later, on 7 April, the Library opened its doors to an estimated 3,000 visitors in celebration of the launch of the Friends. Actress Ruth Cracknell delivered a commemorative address and the afternoon featured several exhibitions of Library treasures, including the *Endeavour* journal of Captain James Cook, the Hunter sketchbook and the Bligh notebook. The festivities also included book readings and signings by Marion Halligan, Nadia Wheatley and Paul Jennings, and music and street theatre.

Sadly, Don McDonald passed away in August 1990, but he had lived long enough to see his dream of a Friends of the National Library come to fruition. Then work began in earnest to realise the high hopes for the new organisation.

Gary Kent

50
opening our doors
creating the future

This edition of the Friends Newsletter features the first instalment of our history of the Friends, as part of our contribution to the 50th anniversary of the National Library's building—we hope you enjoy it.



Lily Brayton as Iseult in 1906.

HELP PUT LILY BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The Library is raising funds to support stabilisation and digitisation of fragile performing arts scrapbooks held in the PROMPT collection. Currently they are not available to researchers, due to their fragility.

The ephemera within the ageing scrapbooks is an irreplaceable record of social customs and major events in our history, such as popular entertainment during the First World War. They include records of performances by Dame Nellie Melba, Essendon Musical Society concerts featuring violinist T.J. Buckland, and photos of circus and vaudeville performers. Some of the earliest scrapbooks date from the 1850s.

One of the scrapbooks contains many records and references to Geelong-born Oscar Asche and his wife Lily Brayton. The celebrated stage couple were renowned for their performances in musical comedy *Chu Chin Chow*, written and directed by Asche. The musical ran uninterrupted in London from 1916–1921, totalling 2,238 performances.

The scrapbooks hold many hidden gems and are a rich source of information for researchers and theatre fans everywhere. An appeal brochure has been posted to all Friends. You can also find out more and donate online at nla.gov.au/support-us/PROMPT.

Donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.