‘I did not know the extent of the Library’s collection’
Out

To disclose and make public; to release or be extended into the open, allowing access.
A night to remember

The Mitchell Library’s 100th birthday on 8 March 2010 was marked by the official launch of a major exhibition, ONE hundred, by the Governor of NSW, Professor Marie Bashir AC, CVO. The gala opening for nearly 450 invited staff and guests saw the Mitchell Library Reading Room bathed in magenta light.

OUT is the theme of the Mitchell Library centenary celebrations in 2010, bringing the Library’s knowledge and its collections into the community in a refreshing and surprising way. The Mitchell Library centenary campaign kicked off on 28 November 2009 with a 100-day countdown to the launch of both a dedicated microsite and the Stranger than fiction display. The microsite <www.onehundred.sl.nsw.gov.au> revealed the Library’s stunning new alphabet, a typeface crafted entirely of pieces from the Mitchell’s collections, deconstructed in short animations, featuring rare footage and stories from the collection and curator interviews. A display in the Macquarie building, Stranger than fiction, showcased just a few of the hundreds of quirky, strange and curious items from the Library’s realia collection.

Behind-the-scenes Inside OUT tours took over 200 people to parts of the Library rarely seen by the public, while the community information day and 702 ABC outside broadcast with Simon Marnie on Saturday 13 March were memorable highlights.
Sharing

To give and circulate; to use, participate in and enjoy jointly, an activity that benefits equally
Fascinating stories, our rich history

What do Roni Levi, Joseph Banks, John Gould, Edward Close and Mary Rieby have in common? Together with 111 other items they formed ONE hundred, the exhibition held for 100 days to celebrate the centenary of the Mitchell Library and David Scott Mitchell’s extraordinary benefaction. Drawn from Mitchell’s original bequest of 1907, and from the vast collections added to it since the Mitchell Library opened in 1910, the items were chosen because they each told a remarkable story about an aspect of Australian or Pacific life.

ONE hundred was not about 100 treasures of the Mitchell Library. Rather it represented the chronological and geographical span of the collection, the emphasis on collecting records of contemporary life as well as those of the past, and the determination to document all aspects of the Australian experience, not just the lives of the famous and notorious.

The exhibition was enormously successful. It attracted 60,000 visits from 9 March to 16 June 2010, including more than 800 students from 21 schools. The companion volume, ONE hundred: A tribute to the Mitchell Library, attracted a positive review in the Australian Book Review (July issue) and the Sydney Morning Herald’s Spectrum published an extract of David Marr’s essay from the volume on 6 March. Two items stood out in the People’s Choice: a watercolour by an unknown artist, A young Mount Pitt bird — natural size, from the 1790s, and a rare engraving by John Savage, Prince Giolo, created in the 1690s.
Revealing

To expose; to lay bare; to communicate information previously unknown
Known for its extensive photographic documentation of the gold towns of Hill End and Gulgong in the 1870s by photographers Beaufoy Merlin and Charles Bayliss, the Holtermann Collection also includes hundreds of glass negatives of Sydney.

With the support of many generous benefactors, the Library began detailed digital scanning of the Holtermann Collection in May 2009 and by May 2010 over 2600 quarter plate sized (8.3 x 10.8 cm) negatives had been copied. Unlike the gold town images, the photographs of Sydney were taken on larger format negatives, each measuring a massive 10 x 12 inches (25 x 30 cm). These are now being scanned and have revealed astonishing detail.

This photograph of the French warship Atalante in Fitzroy Dock on Cockatoo Island, with Balmain in the background, was taken in August 1873. Built in 1865, the ironclad Atalante had a protruding brass bow for ramming lesser vessels. It had taken part in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and at the time of this photograph was flagship of the Pacific Squadron.

Beaufoy Merlin was particularly pleased with his photographs of the Atalante and wrote about them in the *Town and Country Journal*, 23 August 1873:

> Probably there is no one more difficult to please in procuring a picture of this kind than the landscape photographer himself. I may therefore be permitted to say in behalf of the one referred to, that it gave me satisfaction ...

Sadly, this image of Atalante was one of the last photographs taken by Merlin. He contracted pneumonia and died, aged 43, in September 1873.
Enlightening

To give intellectual or spiritual light to; to instruct or impart knowledge to; to illuminate
What was it like?

What was it like to be a young, impecunious but ambitious naval officer and surveyor in colonial Sydney? What was it like to dine with Governor Macquarie, and also with Commissioner Bigge? What was it like to find oneself moving in the best society Sydney could offer? What did it take to ‘manage a career’ in the Macquarie era? What did it feel like to fall eighty feet from the mast of your ship onto the deck (it hurt a lot)?

These are the kinds of questions the correspondence, purchased in 2009, of young surveyor and explorer John Septimus Roe (1797–1878) answers. This extraordinary archive of 201 letters begins with Roe as a 10-year-old London schoolboy, and then takes him into the British Navy during the Napoleonic wars, before service with Lieutenant PP King on his four voyages of exploration of the Australian coast between 1817 and 1822. Roe’s gossipy and informative letters — written mostly to his father — are lively and well-written. Although replete with detail about the largely unrecorded minutiae of colonial life, the correspondence is much more than this: it is the story of a life from schoolboy to young adult, of a boy from humble circumstances making his way in the world with pluck, hard work and sheer enthusiasm.
I am glad to hear that all is well with you. I have received your letter with great pleasure. The news of your arrival has brought me great joy. I hope you have had a successful journey.

Thank you for your kind words. I am always happy to hear from you.

Your sincerely,

[Signature]
Collecting

To gather together or accumulate; increase by addition or growth; obtain or receive
Recording our history

The Library documents publishing in New South Wales through the Legal Deposit provisions of the Copyright Act (NSW) 1879–1952. Abandoned by Jeremy Park was deposited by the publisher Digitalpress in 2009/10. This miniature book, measuring 8 x 6 cm, is a series of photographs of a miniature village built by a man over 15 years to fulfil a childhood dream. A year after opening the village to the public, the builder became ill and was forced to lock the gate and abandon it to the elements. The book chronicles the ruin of the village in photographs the size of a business card: ‘Weeds grew, cracks formed and the plastic inhabitants melted’.

The counterpoint to Abandoned is the largest book acquired by the Library this year, Footpath philosophers, also published by Digitalpress. Measuring 1.03 x 1.32 m, Footpath philosophers is a collection of portraits shot on Bourke Street, Surry Hills, in a single day also photographed by Jeremy Park. Each subject was asked what they had in their mind at the time.

Library collections provide a fundamental record of a country’s history and society. The State Library collects the biggest and the smallest, the academic and the popular, works of greatness and works of everyday Australians. These essentially democratic collections are vital for building an understanding of the history and culture of this nation.

ABANDONED. JEREMY PARK, SURRY HILLS, NSW: DIGITALPRESS, 2009
Surprising

To astonish, to strike with a sudden feeling of wonder that arrests the thoughts, as at something unexpected or extraordinary.
Our vibrant collections

The Mitchell Library’s vast, vibrant and eclectic collections continue to be relevant to contemporary audiences. New acquisitions and longstanding collection materials have informed researchers and inspired writers and artists. In the Mitchell’s centenary year, and as part of the ONE hundred exhibition, we asked renowned artists, historians and writers about the items in the Library’s collections that are significant to them and their works.

Grace Karskens, who teaches Australian history at the University of New South Wales, says:

You can get lost in this painting. Imagine standing in The Rocks, somewhere high above the water, and looking down over the early town of Sydney, spread around the cove in 1802.

Who are the people most clearly, most humanly shown in this picture? Here in the foreground are groups of Aboriginal people, throwing spears, gathered about a campfire, sitting in a circle talking; and there are some white men too, chatting, lounging, watching, completely at their ease.

But look closely: you can see individual Aboriginal men, women and children, even their faces and expressions, you can almost hear the soft rolling words of language. These are the Sydney Aboriginal people, people who ‘came in’ after November 1790, and this artist wants you to know about them.