The State Library’s importance to the people of New South Wales was highlighted in the strong support for its Foundation’s 25th Anniversary Appeal to renew the Mitchell Library. Not only is the Library a Sydney landmark, but the Library, its collections and its services are prized by both locals and many across the state, nation and globe.

RENEWING THE MITCHELL
The Mitchell Renewal initiative aims to restore the heritage of the Mitchell building and to open as much as possible to the public, providing more extensive galleries to show the State Library’s outstanding collections and places for reading, research and encounter with knowledge. The first stage, restoration of the Mitchell Library Reading Room, will be completed by the end of 2014 with the assistance of generous donations to the State Library of NSW Foundation. Restoring the original Mitchell Reading Room, now the Friends Room and adjoining Gallery Room, will follow, together with improved facilities for the Library’s wonderful volunteers and fellows.

A GROWING COLLECTION
The collection continues to grow with the addition of peerless historical items as well as contemporary digital publications including Tweets, blogs and other social media — prolific examples of today’s cultural expression. Among major acquisitions in 2013–14, a standout is the journal and letters of Rose de Freycinet, probably the first woman to circumnavigate the world in a single voyage and to write about it. We are engaged by her perspective on the voyage of the *Uranie*, commanded by her husband Louis, and her observations on Sydney in the time of Governor and Mrs Macquarie.

SHOWCASING THE COLLECTION
The excellence of the Library’s growing exhibition program was demonstrated this year in *Artist Colony: Drawing Sydney’s Nature* (1 March – 11 May 2014). This exhibition was a culmination of the 2011 acquisition of the TAL & Dai-ichi Life Derby Collection of 745 of the earliest Australian watercolours, conservation by the Library’s expert team and deep research by Louise Anemaat and colleagues. The exhibition and accompanying book, both authored by Louise, illustrated the extent to
which art was being made from the beginning of the European colonisation of Australia in the 1790s despite the privations experienced by the colonists.

Also manifesting the Library’s pre-eminence in Australian colonial study, Macquarie the Governor, 1810 to 1821, a collaborative project between the State Library of NSW and the Macquarie Group, finished its run in the historic banking chamber at No 1 Martin Place. In contrast, Born to Concrete showed contemporary collecting through visual poetry from the collections of Heide Museum of Modern Art and the University of Queensland from the 1970s through to the present day with additional material from the State Library.

A feast of photographic exhibitions exposed the strength of the Library’s photographic collections as well as exhibiting the work of photographers from Australia and around the world: Kings Cross, 1970 to 1971; Photographs by Rennie Ellis; Sydney Morning Herald Photos1440; World Press Photo 2014; Into the Line of Fire, featuring images by Fairfax Photographers of the October 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires and Selling Dreams: One Hundred Years of Fashion Photography from the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Curator of Photographs Alan Davies retired during the year and his achievements were recognised by the award of an Emeritus Curatorship.

REGIONAL OUTREACH

Articulating its commitment to regional areas, the Library continued to tour exhibitions with Flashback: 160 Years of Australian Fashion Photos and Crossing the Blue Mountains continuing to travel the state and Behind the Truth, which invites viewers to consider the veracity of famous photographs, beginning its tour following a successful run at the State Library.

The Library was active in regional areas with author tours, family history master classes, the Far Out! schools program and visits by public library and Indigenous Services consultants. The Library Council of NSW and its Public Libraries Consultative Committee visited a number of public libraries in both metropolitan and regional areas.

Support for public libraries was marked by the NSW Government’s establishment of the Public Library Infrastructure Fund to provide a new approach to stimulating infrastructure investment across the 369 public libraries of NSW.

DIGITAL EXCELLENCE

A major achievement of 2013–14 was to develop the NSW Government–funded Digital Excellence Program into ‘business as usual’. At the end of its second year, the program was running smoothly and has delivered a host of digital content to NSW residents: a dramatic increase from 0.5 million digital objects created from 2002 to 2012, to 5 million between 2012 and 2014.

The ICT infrastructure upgrade has almost been completed, with SAP finance and human resources, email, telephone and data, desktop and multifunction printers and other systems installed for staff and clients. The final element is well advanced — the procurement of a state-of-the-art library management system and a web and online services platform. Establishment of the ICT Services Scheme G02 Digitisation procurement panel is testimony to the Library’s commitment to strengthen the digitisation industry.

Digitisation of the Library’s peerless collection of First World War diaries was undertaken in preparation for its program to commemorate the centenary of the war. The Library is leading NSW cultural institutions and the national and state libraries of Australia with its centenary program, supported by partnerships with News Corp Australia, Australian War Memorial and National Archives.

All of these achievements draw on the talents of the Library’s staff including those who select and acquire, curate and interpret, preserve and digitise, assist, teach and provide administrative and organisational support. During the year, the Library undertook a comprehensive series of reviews of its branches and functions which resulted in considerable organisational change and refocusing. While there has been an overall reduction in staffing, some areas have been expanded including preservation, to be called Collection Care, and interpretation, now led through the Research & Discovery branch.

Dr Alex Byrne
NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive