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# HUMANITIES AND...

**Sydney, New South Wales  
2-4 December 2020**

## Welcome

The theme for the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Australasian Consortium of Humanities Research Centres is ***Humanities and...***

Through this theme we will examine the various ways in which the humanities contribute to a wide variety of fields including medicine, law and the environment. ***Humanities and...*** is also about the humanities and the future and, critically, humanities and everyone; how the humanities enrich our lives.

This event is open to academics, students, independent scholars, those working across the cultural sector and anyone with an interest in the important roles that the humanities play in the world today.

All sessions are free.

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### VENUE

This meeting is a three-day event, commencing with a Public Lecture on the evening of Wednesday 2 December 2020.

This will be followed by keynote addresses, panel sessions and lightning talks over Thursday 3 December and Friday 4 December 2020.

Sessions will be delivered via Zoom. Please register online to secure your place:

**Public Lecture** [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-public-lecture-what-price-humanities](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-public-lecture-what-price-humanities)

**Day 1** [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-humanities-and-conference-day-1](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-humanities-and-conference-day-1)

**Day 2** [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-humanities-and-conference-day-2](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/events/achrc-humanities-and-conference-day-2)

## PUBLIC LECTURE, WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER

5.30–6.30 pm

### What Price the Humanities?

**Professor Mark Ledbury**

'You can't put a price on human life' is a truism that has been countered by economists, politicians and policymakers who do precisely set that price, for many social and economic purposes. What if we asked the same question of the humanities? What are the costs and benefits of the humanities? What kind of price, what kind of value, should we set on the intellectual and cultural constellation of humanistic research and scholarship, and how might we begin doing so? And why carry out such an instrumental and perhaps absurd exercise? I will argue that 'running the numbers', is both an effective and a necessary method to demonstrate why all societies should prize and preserve the Humanities research and education.

Professor Ledbury took his degrees at the University of Cambridge and the University of Sussex, and his first academic post was as lecturer in Cultural History at the University of Portsmouth. He then moved to the University of Manchester where he was Lecturer in Art History, until he joined the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Massachusetts in 2003. As Associate Director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark until 2010, he oversaw the expansion of the research program's ambition and reach. He devised, planned and ran workshops, conferences and partnerships and worked to develop and oversee a lively residential scholars' program. As Director of the Power Institute, Professor Ledbury ensures that the Power furthers its research and public engagement mission through talks, conferences and the support of research and publications.

## DAY ONE, THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER

12 noon–1 pm

### Official Welcome and Keynote Humanities and... Interdisciplinarity

**The Inevitability of Interdisciplinarity: Art, Science, Satellites and Slag**

**A/Professor Grayson Cooke**  
**@cookegrayson**

Under the Anthropocene, our cyborg Earth reminds us of the urgency of finding new figures by which to enquire into, represent and communicate about humankind's impact upon the planet – something interdisciplinary enquiry is perfectly situated to do. In this talk, I will discuss some of the recent projects that have allowed me to follow this path between and within art, science and the environment. From creative investigations of the waste product of 19th century copper mining in the Flinders Ranges, to the algorithms used by geoscientists to filter clouds from satellite data, my concern throughout has been to bring scientific tools and urgency to art, and artistic open-endedness to science.

Born in New Zealand and based in Australia, Grayson Cooke is an interdisciplinary scholar and media artist, Associate Professor of Media at Southern Cross University. Grayson has exhibited and performed at galleries and festivals internationally, and published widely in academic journals. He holds an interdisciplinary PhD from Concordia University in Montreal.

1.15–2.15 pm

## Humanities and... Medicine

### Vernacular Medicine in the British World During the First World War

**Georgia McWhinney**  
@GeorgiaMc06

During the Great War of 1914–18, the dirty and mud-filled environment of trench warfare on the Western front spurred the onset of various medical conditions. Yet, when soldiers fell ill, it was not immediately recognised that some maladies stemmed from contamination — soiling and infestations — in their uniforms. With a new focus on preventative medicine, doctors and medical scientists investigated numerous medical conditions that spread through uniforms. It is well known that these medical professionals developed a body of knowledge on the diseases of warfare. It is far less known, however, that soldiers from Britain and its Dominions — Australia, Canada, and New Zealand — also developed their own form of vernacular medicine. Thus, separate medical cultures developed simultaneously during the Great War. This talk asks what constitutes medicine and who can be considered a medical practitioner?

Georgia McWhinney was a Visiting Scholar (2019) at the State Library of New South Wales, and is a PhD candidate in Modern History at Macquarie University. Her work examines medical history and material culture. She is also the social media coordinator for the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine.

### Science, Generosity and Hope: Sharing Medical Endeavour

**Dr Peter Hobbins**  
@history2wheeler

At their best, our dappled healthcare professions offer us science, generosity and hope. They often struggle, however, to operate beyond their own terms of reference. Practitioners are particularly bewildered when lay folk seemingly ignore their most robust evidence and their simplest advice. Yet as 2020 has strikingly demonstrated, our health is never merely technical; it remains intrinsically political, philosophical and personal. Drawing on the vexed histories of vaccination, this presentation asks how the humanities might offer a balm to dogmatism, insularity and hubris. By engaging diverse cultures, our analyses and stories may yet script new models for sharing medical endeavour.

Dr Peter Hobbins is a historian of science, technology and medicine, and a Principal at Artefact Heritage Services. His first degrees were in English literature and biomedical science, and he worked as a professional medical writer before pursuing his love of history via a Master of Medical Humanities. Passionate about public history, in 2018–19 Peter coordinated a project to encourage community historians to research the local impact of the 1918–19 pneumonic influenza pandemic.

### Sharing Culture through Art: The Art of Healing, Australian Indigenous Healing Practice

**Dr Jacqueline Healy**

This paper examines the touring exhibition, *The art of healing: Australian Indigenous healing practice* and the role it has played in introducing students and the broader community to traditional Indigenous healing practices through contemporary art in Australia and overseas. This exhibition is part of an educational program to broaden understanding of Australian Indigenous people and their extensive knowledge and success in healing practices to assist in changing perceptions based on narrow perspectives. The key to this exhibition is revealing that traditional Indigenous healing is a current practice informed by the past and an intrinsic part of the life of indigenous people in Australia through contemporary art.

Dr Jacqueline Healy is Director, Museums, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences University of Melbourne encompassing the Medical History Museum, Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum and the Harry Brookes Allen Anatomy and Pathology Museum. Previously, Director, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre (City of Darebin's Contemporary Art Gallery); Director, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Director, Public Programs, National Gallery of Victoria. Committed to community involvement in museums and innovative programs bringing together the humanities and science.

2.30–3.30 pm

## Humanities and... Law

### Can You Trust a Novelist-Lawyer?

**Professor Kathy Bowrey**  
@KathyBowrey

It is often forgotten that before prolific mystery writer Fergus Hume found success with *The Mystery of Hansom Cab* (Kemp & Boyce, 1886) he trained as a lawyer and wrote for the stage. He loved the drama of words. So when Hume wrote in the 1896 Preface to the Jarrold & Sons edition that he sold the rights for £50, why should we believe that this was the end of the legal story? Hume got far more than £50 for *The Cab*. In explaining how this was discovered, this paper explains why law is always a creative art.

Professor Kathy Bowrey is an intellectual property historian and lawyer, teaching at the Faculty of Law, UNSW. She is also co-Director of the *International Society for the History and Theory of Intellectual Property* (ISHTIP). Her presentation draws upon a chapter of her new book, *Copyright, Creativity, Big Media & Cultural Value: Incorporating the Author* (Routledge, 2020).

### Tales of Innocence and Experience: Lives at the Intersection of the Law and Humanities

**The Honourable Lance Wright QC**

Consideration of the relationship between the law and humanities through an examination of a number of individuals whose lives and careers are found at the intersection of the law and humanities.

The Honourable Lance Wright QC has practiced in the fields of Industrial Relations and then Industrial and Employment Law for over 50 years. He commenced practice at the Bar in 1979 and was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1991. He was appointed President of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission and the New South Wales Industrial Court in 1998 holding those offices until 2008 when he retired because of family circumstances. He has been Editor (then Consultant Editor) of the Industrial Reports (Law Book Company, now Thomson Reuters) since their inception in 1981. Since 2008 he has been Senior Consultant to W G McNally Jones Staff, Lawyers. Since 2017 he has also been Patron of the Industrial Relations Society of NSW.

### Possessive Love: The Legal Life of Romantic Objects in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

**Dr Alecia Simmonds**

Too often law is considered to be something that is monolithically serious, hierarchical, disembodied and rational; the precise opposite, that is, of frolicsome and rebellious humanities scholarship. This paper rejects this vision by showing the vernacular life of law as seen in a series of breach of promise cases heard in fin de siècle Australia. I wish to present a legal biography of two romantic objects that featured in breach of promise cases, the engagement ring and the trousseau, to show how ordinary people imagine and create law. I seek to trace these objects' life-paths from their origins as commodities in the marketplace, to their sacralisation within the whispered exchanges of the engaged couple, through to the moment when they were diverted from domesticity and marshalled into the alienated sphere of the courtroom. In so doing, I suggest a link between the proliferation of breach of promise of marriage cases in early twentieth century Australia and couples' investment of romantic objects with legal significance. As courtship ceased to be policed by family and kin the courts became a site where the new 'rules of engagement' could be drawn. Judges and juries, following the couples who appeared before them, sought certainty in the 'ocular proof' of commodities. Rings were regarded as proof of contract and awarding damages for the items of a trousseau anchored the fictions of love and the vagaries of emotional injury in quantifiable loss. To this extent, this paper shows law to be something that is made by people as much as judges, that is constantly and creatively adapted to suit the romantic imaginaries of the populous. It is an analysis of how vernacular understandings of the legal life of romantic objects came to have official legal status and a study of how commodity culture intersected with law's epistemology: how law knows what it thinks it knows.

Alecia Simmonds is a senior lecturer in law at the University of Technology Sydney. She has published on the relationship between intimacy, imperialism and law and gender and emotions in a range of scholarly journals. Her current project examines the legal regulation of love through the lens of breach of promise of marriage cases from 1806 to 1975. It will be published by Black Inc/La Trobe Scholarly Press in 2021. Her books include: *Transnationalism and Nationalism in Australian History* (2017) and *Wild Man: A True Story of a Police Killing, Mental Illness and the Law* (2015) which won the 2016 Davitt prize for best crime non-fiction.

3.45–4.45 pm

## Humanities and... the Environment

### Literature's New Frontier: Making Australia's Biodiversity Heritage Literature Truly Discoverable Online

**Nicole Kearney**  
@nicolekearney

The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) is the world's largest online repository of biodiversity literature: a global consortium of 500 libraries who have digitised 58 million pages from their collections. All of these pages are freely accessible online. Yet accessible does not equate to discoverable. Within these pages are innumerable descriptions of new discoveries and new frontiers, treasure that is invaluable to today's scientists and historians. This paper will discuss how we are making this treasure discoverable and fully searchable, and will introduce our new frontier: how we are bringing Australia's biodiversity heritage into the modern linked network of scholarly research.

Nicole Kearney is the Manager of the Australian branch of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL): <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/collection/bhlau>. She works with libraries across Australia to digitise their biodiversity literature in order to make it accessible and discoverable. Nicole is passionate about open access, linking everything (ideally via persistent identifiers) and the importance of historic literature in our understanding of how biodiversity has changed over time.

### Beyond the Spherical Solution: A Framework for Australian Construction History

**Dr Luciano Cardellicchio**  
@Dr\_Luc\_Cardel

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the material (means and people) and immaterial (ideas, skills, cultures) background on which the Sydney Opera House was built. Through the documentary analysis of recently-discovered construction site drawings and by shifting from the historical narrative involving the major actors and designers of the Opera House, the project will examine how the complex tasks, the untested procedures, the unique casting methods were locally delivered onsite following the idea that the documentation produced during the construction of this building should constitute a legitimate part of the country's heritage.

Dr Cardellicchio is a construction historian with a background in building and civil engineering. His research interest centres on the value of the various kinds of expertise involved in the construction process, such as that of structural engineers, contractors and labour, as key contributors to 'making' architecture. His publications gravitate towards the following themes: 1) The cross-national dimension of construction innovation; 2) The technical and intellectual contribution of labour in non-standard buildings constructed in non-industrialised countries; 3) Construction globalisation: the industrial clashes and opportunities that arise when developing locally a building designed by foreign architectural and engineering practices; 4) Failing buildings as pedagogical opportunities to learn the long-term value of construction innovation.

### The Urgency of Environmental History

**Associate Professor Nancy Cushing**  
@ncushing12

Environmental history emerged as a sub-discipline in the 1970s, as pollution and the exhaustion of natural resources became issues of concern in the West. It has greatly expanded as these issues have intensified in the 2000s, with both the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic forcing a recognition that we are now living in the Anthropocene, a new epoch that humans have made. Focusing on choices around meat eating, I will demonstrate that the study of animal human histories can advance understandings of how norms of diet and of the treatment of animals used for meat were formed, and how they might be altered for the benefit of animals and the planet.

Nancy Cushing is Associate Professor in History at the University of Newcastle, on unceded Awabakal and Darkinjung country. An environmental historian most interested in animal human relations, she is co-author, with Kevin Markwell, of *Snake-bitten, Eric Worrell and the Australian Reptile Park* (UNSW Press 2010), and co-editor of *Animals Count: How Population Size Matters in Animal-Human Relations* (Routledge 2018). She is on the executive of the Australian and NZ Environmental History Network and Vice President of the NSW History Council.

12 noon-1 pm

## Humanities and... Everyone

### Publics and Podcasts

**Dr Tamson Pietsch**  
@cap\_and\_gown

How can Humanities scholars contribute to building better public conversations; conversations premised on the notion that doing the work of thinking and making meaning together is central to building a good society?

Tamson Pietsch is Director of the Australian Centre for Public History and Associate Professor in Social & Political Sciences at UTS. She believes that the ways we make sense of who we are and how we got here helps to shape the societies we are striving to build. Tamson's research focuses on the history and politics of universities and knowledge in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### Curating with Community

**Damien Webb and Melissa Jackson**  
@MellyJay6585

We often hear about engagement strategies and ways to bring Indigenous perspectives into programs and exhibitions, but what does this actually look like? How do we balance institutional agendas with community needs and expectations, and how much of our authority are we really willing to surrender? Through two recent exhibitions the Library has undertaken new ways of co-curating which go beyond simple consultation, and seek to prioritise and platform local Aboriginal knowledge and authority. This process is not always easy, and it challenges long-held assumptions about our collections, legacy and relevance.

Damien Webb is a Palawa man (South-East Tasmania) and Aboriginal liaison/library professional currently managing the Indigenous Engagement Branch at the State Library of NSW. Damien previously coordinated the State Library of WA's Storylines Project and has a passion for decolonising archives and library collections. He has extensive experience working with researchers in trying to understand the legacies of white explorers from an Aboriginal context and return authority over heritage materials to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal families throughout Australia. His academic background has been focused on human rights and developing frameworks within Australian libraries which embed international Indigenous protocols and frameworks.

Melissa Jackson is of Bundjalung descent with family links to the Baryulgil area near Grafton. Born in Crown Street Women's Hospital she has spent her whole life in Sydney. Melissa worked in various government departments, including Department of Housing and Attorney General's Department before starting work at the State Library of New South Wales in 1991. One of two Indigenous Services Librarians, she has a background in teaching and obtained her librarianship qualifications from University of Technology Sydney. Melissa is a past President of ATSILIRN, the national body representing Indigenous library workers.

### A Strumpet for History

**Dr Lisa Murray**  
@SydneyClio

Placing history at the centre of contemporary life provides a strong grounding for a community's sense of place and belonging. The existence of the History Program at the City of Sydney Council and the employment of two public historians full-time is a powerful statement of the City's confidence in the value of history for enriching everyone's lives. History's social values and audiences are articulated through the City's Cultural and History Policies. This provides the framework for the history program's output and performance measures. Dr Lisa Murray, the City Historian, will share some of the ways the City applies history to inform council services and enhance community wellbeing.

Dr Lisa Murray is a public historian that engages with multiple audiences through her work at the City of Sydney Council — from elected politicians, council staff and local ratepayers, to journalists and film producers, academics and students, family historians, architects and artists. She is an award-winning author of planning and community histories, a curator of physical and digital exhibitions, and producer of walking tours, activations, podcasts and smartphone apps. Lisa is a self-proclaimed 'strumpet' for history.

1.15–2.15pm

## Humanities and... the Future

### When Reality Becomes Taboo: Humanities and the Future of Museums

**Julie Baird**

This COVID year, 2020, has turned the concept of museums as experiential, socially engaging places of learning about science, art and the humanities from a positive to a negative. As other members of our community become objects of disgust or fear, and touch is taboo, how can museums adapt for the long-term future of our sector? What has been learnt in our industry about audience engagement whilst we are all smelling of alcohol wipes and plexiglass? Will we ever be the same in our role as the most human touch of the humanities?

Julie Baird is the Director, Museum at the City of Newcastle

### 'What Can't You Do with a Humanities Degree?' Resetting the Terms of the Debate

**Professor Simon Burrows**

Facing the simultaneous challenges of the COVID crisis, likely educational reforms, and a financial crisis across much of the sector, the Humanities may appear to be in turmoil and crisis. Indeed, on the very day I intended to sit down to write my abstract for this conference, Minister Tehan announced his higher education funding reforms. In the hours, days and weeks that followed, the media was abuzz with colleagues, commentators and business people reiterating the case I had intended to make, and reviewing the overwhelming evidence that a Humanities training is a future-proof investment. By December, when the conference takes place, hopefully some of the dust will have settled. But whatever the outcome, there has never been a time to reset the terms of debate about the social, cultural, civic and economic value of a critical humanities training. This paper will reflect on how we might collectively attempt this.

Simon Burrows is a Professor of History and Digital Humanities at Western Sydney University, Australia, where he is Leader of the Digital Humanities Research Group. He is Principal Investigator of the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe (FBTEE) database, a project which was awarded the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Digital Resource Prize in 2017. He is the author of *French Exile Journalism and European Politics, 1792-1814* (Royal Historical Society, 2000), *Blackmail, Scandal and Revolution: London's French Libellistes, 1758-1792* (Manchester UP, 2006), *A King's Ransom: The Life of Charles Théveneau de Morande, Blackmailer, Scandalmonger, and Master-Spy* (Continuum, 2010), *The French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe II: Enlightenment Bestsellers* (Bloomsbury, 2018), and co-editor with Glenn Roe of *Digitizing Enlightenment: Digital Humanities and the Transformation of Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Oxford Studies in Enlightenment, 2020).

### Understanding History is Good to Understand the Present

**Dr Naomi Malone**

Knowing our past is critically important so as to discern what has happened that has shaped, influenced and determined how our Australian nation has come to be what it is today. Guided by this historical knowledge, which covers all social, cultural, indigenous, economic, legislative, policy, political and educational histories, we stand a significantly increased chance of an enhanced societal understanding of our past for approaching and addressing issues being faced by the Australian community, especially during these increasingly complex times. Ultimately, history helps us to work towards how to best live in the future.

Naomi Malone is an experienced advocate in the field of disability inclusion, a consulting historian and an access specialist. Born profoundly deaf, in 2017 Naomi completed her PhD research at UTS, under the supervision of Professor Paul Ashton and with support from Shopfront.

## DAY TWO, FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER

2.30–3.30 pm

### Closing Keynote Humanities and... the Public Conversation

#### Humanities and... the Public Conversation

**Dr Meredith Lake**  
@meredithlake1

Religion is a fraught theme of public discussion in Australia. Even in our so-called ‘secular age’, the sheer strength of feeling on the topic is not to be underestimated. I learned this the hard way, writing about the history of the Bible in Australia. To me, it seemed a rich theme for historical enquiry. Australians have had all kinds of reactions to the Bible — from ignoring it to embracing it, from quiet reading to open preaching, from copies gathering dust at home to passages tattooed onto the body. The cultural history of the Bible is bound up with that of the nation itself — and, from the outset, just as complex and contested. When my work was suddenly thrust into the spotlight, it was met with everything from outright hostility to collegial camaraderie. This talk will reflect on the reception of *The Bible in Australia: A Cultural History*, to explore the key role of the humanities in broaching polarising subjects, as well as the importance — and the difficulty — of good public conversation.

**Dr Meredith Lake** is an historian, broadcaster and award-winning writer interested in how Australians understand the big questions of faith and meaning. She currently hosts *Soul Search* on ABC Radio National — a weekly show about the lived experience of religion and spirituality. She is an Honorary Associate of the Department of History, Sydney University, where she did her PhD on religious ideas about the environment in Australian colonial history. Her most recent book, *The Bible in Australia: a cultural history* (NewSouth, 2018) won the Australian History prize at the 2019 Prime Minister’s Literary Awards and the 2019 NSW Premier’s History Awards. She tweets at @meredithlake1.

3.30–4.15 pm

### ACHRC Annual General Meeting; All Welcome