

Winter 2020

# SL

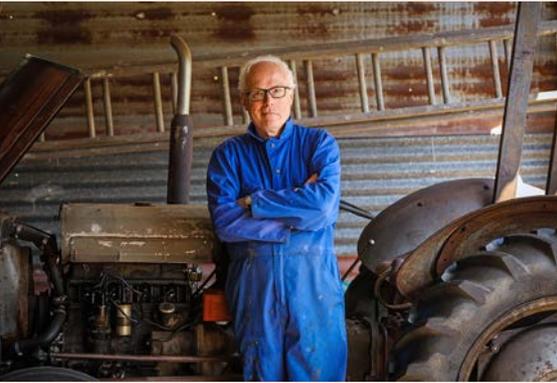


STATE LIBRARY®  
NEW SOUTH WALES



NSW at home

# ‘ Message



Visitor numbers were falling steadily through March. People were becoming more and more anxious. By the weekend of 21/22 March it was clear that we would have to close. For a time I felt very low about it; the first State Librarian to close the Library. Then my colleagues pointed out that the same thing had happened (twice) in 1919 during the Spanish flu epidemic and we recovered strongly. (Read about that in this issue.) We will recover strongly again, but this edition of *SL* magazine is very much the child of our current predicament, with a mix of reflection, historical context and optimism.

On 23 March, when we closed our doors, the digital portals were flung open wider than ever before, and I'm delighted that so many of you have been able to continue to enjoy the Library from home. We've had a very pleasing rush on Library membership, a huge increase in ebook loans, and strong support for our online public programs, educational services, catalogue enhancements and exhibitions.

Before this year arrived, the plague I'd heard most about was the one described in the second book of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Around 430 BCE a terrible disease began, so the records suggest, in 'Ethiopia beyond Egypt' and spread quickly through the north of Africa. In Athens it was originally thought that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the water supply. Some of Thucydides' account sounds chillingly modern. 'The doctors were not able to deal with the disease,' he wrote. 'From the start they had to treat it without really knowing what it was. They were the first to die because they were most in contact with it.' This is one of the earliest references to contagion in the written history of pathology. Two and half thousand years later, the calamity is not dissimilar.

I am writing this in isolation at St Albans, north of Sydney, with a trio of wallabies feeding in the paddock in front of me. Aristotle liked to say that if you want to learn something new, break a habit. I've broken quite a few over the past two months and I'm sure you have too. There's been plenty of time to reflect on all manner of things, and at the Library we are now busy planning how and when to reopen. As soon as we possibly can, we will be welcoming you all back here to share the results of our reflections and, standing on the shoulders of our ancestors, continue to use the Library to work out our own place in all of this.

Today I don't know exactly when we will reopen. But I am sure that the dispiriting decline in visitor numbers we saw in March will be rapidly reversed when we do. No one will be more pleased to see you back here than I. In the meantime, enjoy this special viral edition of *SL*. Enthusiasm can be contagious too, and we don't need a vaccine for that.

**DR JOHN VALLANCE FAHA**  
State Librarian

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Winter 2020

## SL

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### EDITOR

Cathy Perkins  
cathy.perkins  
@sl.nsw.gov.au

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Simon Leong

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### STATE LIBRARY OF NSW

Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone (02) 9273 1414  
Fax (02) 9273 1255  
enquiries.library@  
sl.nsw.gov.au  
www.sl.nsw.gov.au

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Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation case worker Kim Bell delivers groceries to 73-year-old Ivan Wellington, photo by Kate Geraghty, *Sydney Morning Herald*

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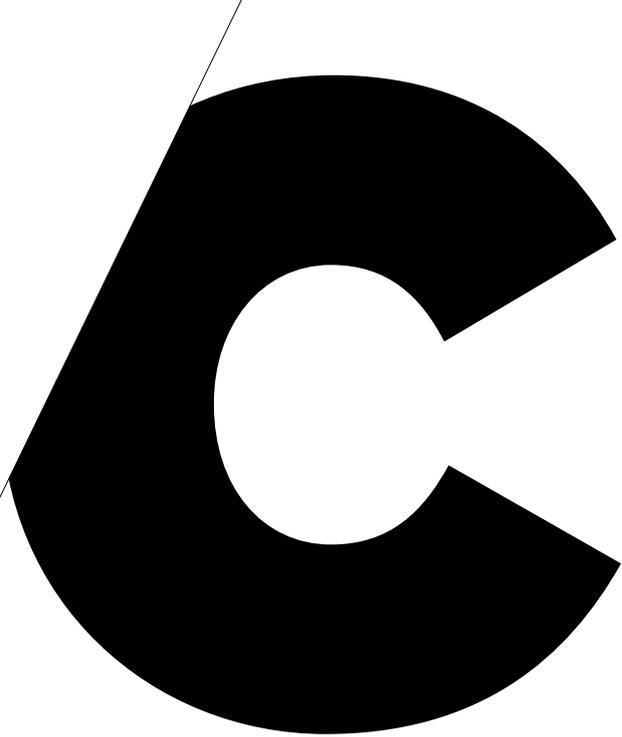
## *Eight days in Kamay*

You can preview our new exhibition *Eight Days in Kamay* online, before it opens in the galleries after the lockdown. On 29 April 1770 the Gweagal people of Kamay (Botany Bay) lit fires to signal their discovery of James Cook and his crew as they sailed into the bay. 250 years later the events of the eight days that followed, and their continuing impact, are still being contested. The exhibition takes a fresh look at this pivotal moment in Australia's history and its continuing legacy.

[sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay)

Photo by Joy Lai



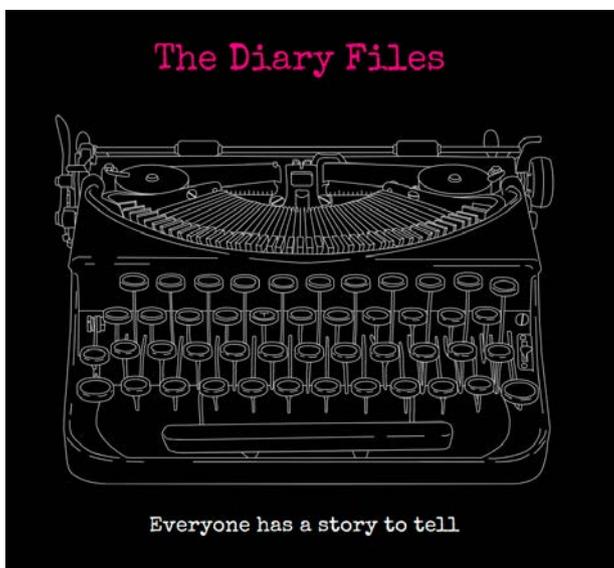


## Collecting pandemic

The Library is collecting images of life in NSW so we can help tell the story of Covid-19 to future generations. Get involved by taking a photo of your life right now – how you work, learn, eat, stay fit, keep informed and stay entertained – and post it to Instagram or Twitter with #NSWatHome. You can also send us flyers and posters from businesses affected by Covid-19, and post photos of pandemic-related signs with #CovidStreetArchive.

[sl.nsw.gov.au/nswathome](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/nswathome)

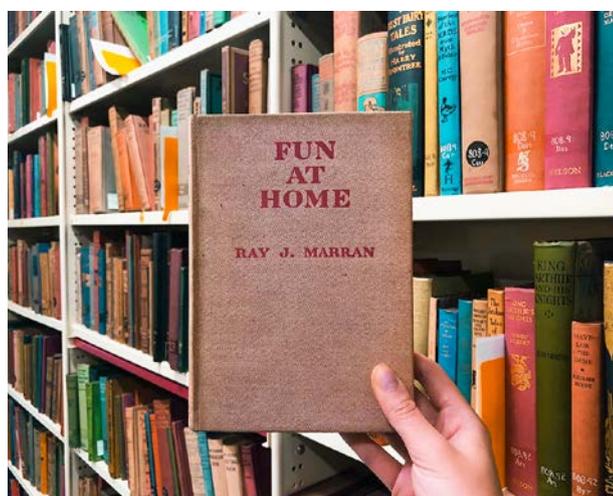
Photographer Joy Lai working from home  
(see p 52 for more #NSWatHome pics)



## The diary files

The Library has a long tradition of collecting diaries – from First World War soldiers to famous literary figures like Miles Franklin. Now we want your diary entries to become part of the collection. The Diary Files is a new online community experience created by our DX Lab to collect the thoughts and reflections of the people of NSW and beyond who are living through the Covid-19 pandemic. Hundreds of people have already shared their diary entries, including author Tony Birch, and media identities Gretel Killeen and Tim Ross.

**The Diary Files is proudly supported by ABC Radio Sydney.**  
[dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/diary-files](http://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/diary-files)



## Your library at home

Whether you're looking for a new book to read, a binge-worthy podcast, inspiring stories, or a fun activity to do at home – your Library is still open online. Access thousands of free ebooks, newspapers from around the world, journals and other resources from home using your Library card. If you're looking for something to sink your teeth into, you can become a digital volunteer by helping to transcribe our oral history collections, get tips on researching your family history, or learn from Collection Care experts how to preserve your family photos.

[sl.nsw.gov.au/your-library-home](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/your-library-home)



## Long-distance winners

At an online ceremony on 27 April, the NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian MP awarded \$295,000 in prize money to Australian authors across the 12 categories of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. State Librarian John Vallance announced the awards in an empty Mitchell Library Reading Room, and the winning writers gave short but powerful speeches from their homes in north Melbourne, western Sydney, rural France and elsewhere. Visit our website for the full list of winners and to watch the ceremony.

[sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/nsw-premiers-literary-awards](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/nsw-premiers-literary-awards)

NSW Premier's Literary Award winners



## Learning at home

With more time at home, many of us are taking this opportunity to learn something new. To make it easier for students and researchers to find all the online resources the Library has to offer we have created two new sections on our website — Researching at Home for academic and personal research and Learning at Home for school-aged students. Both sections include handy links to make it easier to navigate the Library's huge range of online resources, as well as helpful guides and activity suggestions. All you need is a Library card to get started.

[sl.nsw.gov.au/learning/learning-home](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/learning/learning-home)

[sl.nsw.gov.au/research-and-collections/researching-home](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/research-and-collections/researching-home)

# NEWS



## Interrobang

*The following is one of approximately 350 questions answered each month by the Library's 'Ask a Librarian' service.*

**? I'm a television researcher working on a documentary about Australians and the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–19. I'd like to see some first-hand accounts of the pandemic from your collection.**

**!** Many First World War soldiers' diaries mention the Spanish flu — either their own experience or how it affected the troops. Private John Owen Maddox, a law clerk from Eastwood, enlisted at 19 and served as a stretcher bearer with the 1st Field Ambulance division. His 1918 diary gives several glimpses of the unfamiliar disease spreading through Europe.

In October he writes: 'there is a peculiar disease flourishing throughout all Europe & has been for months past. It is a severe influenza, or in French, "Grippe Espagnol". It is more than influenza but how much more the medical men cannot say. England, France, Germany & Spain have been very severely afflicted & the troops are also suffering from the epidemic. The % of mortality is very high & American soldiers arriving in England are liable to it.'

You can view digitised images and transcriptions of Maddox's five war diaries through our catalogue. Other first-hand accounts of the pandemic include the diary of 15-year-old Thomas Herbert, who records being sprayed with disinfectant at school in 1919, and a collection of condolence letters and cards received by Elizabeth Butler on the death of her teenage son Keith from influenza.

# Take

# 5

## BIRD ARTISTS

Compiled by Maria Savvidis,  
Curator, Research & Discovery



### John Lewin

Australia's first free professional artist, John William Lewin, emigrated from England to Australia in 1800. He was also Australia's first printmaker and the first person to publish an illustrated book in the colony, *Birds of New South Wales* (1813). This watercolour drawing of a jabiru is attributed to Lewin.

V\* / Bird / Aus / 7



### Neville Cayley

Ornithologist and illustrator Neville Henry Peniston Cayley was known for his meticulous and popular watercolours of iconic Australian birds. His son Neville William Cayley followed in his father's footsteps, publishing Australia's first comprehensive field guide to birds, *What Bird is That?*, in 1931. Neville Cayley snr painted this watercolour of black cockatoos in 1894.

XV\* / Sp Coll / Cayley / 1



### Louisa Atkinson

This watercolour drawing of a parrot is part of a large collection of natural history illustrations at the Library attributed to Louisa Atkinson. Home-schooled and then privately educated in the NSW colony, Atkinson became a keen naturalist and self-taught artist. Her mother, Charlotte Barton, is credited with writing Australia's first children's book, *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (1841). At 23, Atkinson became the first Australian-born woman to have a novel published in Australia, *Gertrude, the Emigrant* (1857).

PX\*D 640/43



## Sarah Stone

English natural history illustrator and painter Sarah Stone produced some of the earliest European images of Australian birds, including this watercolour of a small paraquet (now known as the little lorikeet). Stone painted from reconstructed specimens brought back to England. Engravings based on her original work feature in John White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (1790) and other books from the period.

SAFE/PXA 909



## William T Cooper

After beginning his career in Newcastle as self-taught landscape and seascape artist, William T Cooper became internationally recognised for his natural history illustrations. He preferred drawing birds from life rather than photographs, tracking species like the azure kingfisher shown here (1951) in their natural habitats. (See 'Recently Digitised', p 44)

PXE 1696/Box 5/3

**All the birds shown here, and many more, can be viewed and downloaded from the Library's catalogue — also available as fine art prints from the Library Shop.**



"Fiu"  
BESA  
1919

# ‘UNPRECEDENTED’

\* WORDS Elise Edmonds

The extraordinary events of the past few months are unprecedented in our lifetimes, but our response to the Covid-19 pandemic contains echoes of the 1918–19 influenza outbreak. The Library is one of many institutions following the lead of our forebears.

When the Library announced its closure on Sunday 22 March 2020, it felt as though we were in uncharted waters: for the first time in memory the Library was closing its doors to the public and staff indefinitely. We would all be ‘self-isolating’, a term that had suddenly entered our vocabulary.

In the week before the Library closed, staff had begun to prepare for the inevitable shift to working from home by practising virtual meetings and saving files to the ‘cloud’. Reading room staff were working out how to offer services to readers remotely, and our cataloguing teams were preparing to access Library systems from home. Staff who acquire new material for the collection were monitoring social media and collecting posts with hashtags such as #stayhomeaustralia, #lockdownaustralia and #covid19australia, and archiving emails from businesses and organisations affected by the pandemic.

As ‘unprecedented’ as it all seems, this isn’t the first time the Library has closed for an extended period. For 10 weeks during the last great pandemic – the 1918–19 influenza, known as the Spanish flu – the doors remained shut. Described as ‘pneumonic influenza’, its symptoms included high temperature, aching joints, runny nose, cough and general fatigue,

often leading to respiratory failure. It was highly infectious and frequently lethal.

The disease arrived in Sydney on 25 January 1919 via a soldier travelling by train from Melbourne. The soldier was quarantined at Randwick Military Hospital, but inevitably the influenza spread, first to the medical staff treating him, and then into the community. Within three days, the state government had announced the closure of schools, pubs, theatres, churches, libraries and other public places, with a proclamation in the *Government Gazette*:

[A]n infectious or contagious disease, highly dangerous to the public health, has broken out in NSW and it is desirable in the public interest and for the public safety to cut off all communication between persons infected with such disease and others of His Majesty’s subjects ...

I, Sir Walter Edward Davidson, the Governor ... do hereby order all libraries, schools, churches, theatres, public halls and places of indoor resort for public entertainment in the Metropolitan Police District forthwith to close and be kept closed during such outbreak or until a further order be made ...

GOD SAVE THE KING!

Adhering to these strict regulations, Principal Librarian William Ifould and Mitchell Librarian

OPPOSITE: ‘The Manse’, Emergency Hospital Influenza Epidemic – the Presbyterian minister’s residence was taken over because it was unoccupied at the time to handle the overflow of patients from the main hospital in Bega, NSW, At Work and Play – 02387



Hugh Wright closed the General Reference Library (then on the corner of Bent and Macquarie streets) and the recently built Mitchell Library from 29 January to 2 March. In late February the regulations were relaxed and services returned to normal through March. But in April, a rise in the number of deaths saw the restrictions reinstated, and the Library closed for another five weeks from 4 April to 15 May.

While the Library was closed to the general public, urgent research could still be undertaken by

approved readers, with numbers limited to 20. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 4 April 1919, these 'special students' were to be 'admitted entirely at the discretion of the Principal Librarian, and to adhere rigidly to the temporary regulations as to length of time for which they may be admitted, position of seating, masking, etc.'

Both libraries had seen steady increases in the number of readers for several years, and this had been cheerfully reported in annual reports. But 1919 was a different story: 'Attendances at both the

All three girls were typists. All wearing masks during influenza pandemic — Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney, NSW, 1919, At Work and Play - 00508

## NEWS FEATURE



General Reference Library and the Mitchell Library were seriously affected throughout the first seven months of 1919 by the Influenza Epidemic and the regulations imposed by the Public Health Authorities.'

About one in three Australians were infected and nearly 15,000 died in less than a year. Those figures match the average annual death rate for members of the Australian Imperial Force through World War I.

The entire Australian population felt the impact of the influenza: wearing muslin or gauze masks

became an everyday necessity and people were urged to wash their hands frequently, stay in isolation and not panic.

'[W]e should not lose our heads,' the *Sydney Morning Herald* told its readers at the beginning of the outbreak, 'we should keep our bodies clean and our spirits up. We should not create centres of contagion and should all remember that we are not only potential patients but potential carriers as well.'

Wise words from a century ago.

**Elise Edmonds, Senior Curator, Research & Discovery**

Two different men, one wearing the compulsory mask, brought in to combat the epidemic of flu in 1919, c 1930s, by Sam Hood, Home and Away - 7851

# *These strange* **DAYS**



WORDS Mireille Juchau

## As writers adapt to a vastly altered publishing landscape, how will they remake themselves in a post-pandemic world?

I've been trying to imagine it — one day during the coronavirus pandemic without the company of writers and artists. In my new lockdown routine, I've come to rely on art to make sense of an altered world or shift me from this constrained present into another dimension.

After absorbing the news at breakfast — the global death tolls, the harrowing reports — I fill the room with music. Among work emails, a poem from an artist friend — an emergency exchange begun weeks back. 'In a dark time, the eye begins to see ... What's madness but nobility of soul/ At odds with circumstance?' These lines by Theodore Roethke will shadow my day. Perhaps this is the only upside to the crisis, it has burned away the superficial parts of life. To maintain the poetry chain, I send off Lisa Gorton's *The Hotel Hyperion*:

I don't hear it.  
I am closed in my life, my machine-  
fed breath, a true ghost haunting  
the loneliest idea —  
walking out  
from the settlement's small world  
of manufactured atmosphere.

By 11 am certain details from the news have gripped the mind: the smiling self-portraits pinned to medics' scrubs so corona patients can see a human face, the abraded cheeks of nurses from protective gear, spotted Sika deer roaming deserted streets in Nara, Japan. By midday I've registered photographs, visual art, my kids' books, the poetry, essays and novels on my desk as I work.

In an afternoon lull we browse restaged iconic artwork in the #gettymuseumchallenge. A friend has posed her daughter in homage to Gerhard Richter's photorealist *Betty*. I like these deliberate substitutions: the camera-shy teenager turning away as Betty; the bearded dude with cheap clip-on as

*Girl With a Pearl Earring*. In the lockdown version of Artemisia Gentileschi's bloody *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, the sword-wielding Judith wears a wily smile.

Later, I glance at another pandemic initiative — Yiyun Li's virtual bookclub on *War and Peace* (#TolstoyTogether). On my daily walk I pass the creche where a teacher is reading from Ursula Dubosarsky: 'out comes the leopard, out comes the goose, out comes the antelope, out comes the moose!'

I think again of those Nara deer searching the streets for food, their pale haunches, those spotted flanks. I can't decide if pandemic rewilding of emptied cities is hopeful or disturbing but I count on writers wiser than me to eventually write about it.

Back home my youngest watches a movie, while my daughter does Zoom drama. By evening we've collectively consumed nearly every artform — movies, books, music, paintings, podcasts, plays, dance and theatre — all while confined at home.

Can you imagine these strange days, these days with their 'sculptural immobility', as Paul B Preciado calls them, unaccompanied by art? Even composing this piece, I turn to other writers to sharpen not just my language and experience, but my understanding of this sudden new world. I'm reminded that making art is a collective experience — and that consuming it is a communal one. Yet a day without art is what filmmaker Lynette Wallworth proposed to highlight the precarious state of Australian artists during the pandemic. While we're part of a \$111 billion dollar industry, contributing more to the economy than aviation (\$18 billion), and an estimated 75% of people in our sector are likely to lose their jobs — a higher rate than in other industries — there has been, to date, no targeted federal government support.

As the pandemic hit, I'd just finished reading fiction as a judge for Christina Stead Prize in the



2020 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards. Fellow judges Felicity Castagna, Michael Sala and I had been immersed for months in the work of writers who’ve spent years honing their craft.

One of the vital aspects of literary awards is how they cast light on work that deserves greater recognition. It was thrilling to discover books that had flown under our radar in the previous year, to read writers we hadn’t yet discovered. In Australia, where writers average \$12,900 a year from writing (and have leaner years with no advances or royalties), a literary prize buys writing time. It can mean the difference between producing another book, and not.

This year, for the first time in their 41 years, the Awards were announced online. Tara June Winch’s *The Yield*, a boundary pushing novel about colonial history, Indigenous language and place, took out

the Christina Stead Prize, People’s Choice Award and Book of the Year. In her acceptance speech, recorded from France, Tara asked the federal government to support the artistic community. ‘The years I was at my least creative were the years I was the least financially stable,’ she said. ‘We can’t tell you the story of what is happening to our society and country if the only thing on our mind is how to afford last week’s rent. There’s nothing artistically romantic about poverty.’

Writers releasing books during the pandemic face a publishing world that has abruptly changed. Mununjali Yugambeh writer Ellen van Neerven spent three years working on a second poetry collection

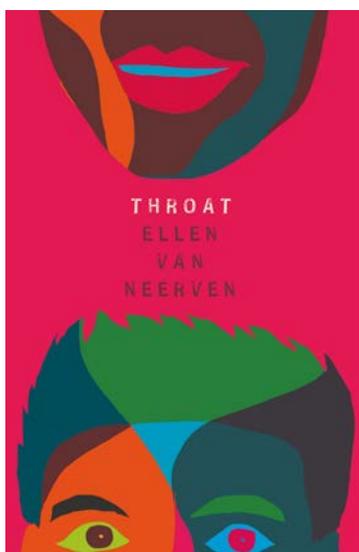
*Throat* (UQP). It was due out in May, but the release was brought forward to ensure the book reached stores before the lockdown.

Ellen, who turns 30 this year, had been looking forward to a ‘celebratory year’, with invites to four international festivals including the Palestine Festival — a two-year engagement with Arabic translations of Ellen’s poetry. All have been postponed. While a bookstore launch for *Throat* wasn’t possible, the Zoom event that replaced it had unexpected benefits — relatives and friends from all over the world could take part. Still, Ellen says, ‘I miss the ceremony [of a live launch]. I miss feeling that the book is really out, getting to hold the book and see it in the bookstores, having dinner with friends after.’

It’s four years since Ellen’s previous collection, *Comfort Food*, was published. In that time, ‘you’ve hidden yourself away to write this, then there’s so much anticipation when it comes out.’ Ellen’s income has also changed significantly, and JobKeeper rules mean some writers and other sole traders are ineligible. After a period of grieving what this year was supposed to hold, Ellen says, ‘Now I’m feeling quite creative, as if things have solidified ... The pandemic has stripped a lot away, interrupting the rhythms of life and revealing the important stories.’

Sydney-based writer Rebecca Giggs was set to promote her non-fiction debut *Fathoms, The World in the Whale* (Scribe, April) in Australia, the UK and US before the pandemic struck. Appearances at Sydney Writers’ Festival, bookstores in Australia and the US, and at Southbank Centre, London, were all cancelled. ‘The loss of those events represents a foregone opportunity to connect with readers who might never have encountered my work otherwise,’ Rebecca says. ‘And that’s a significant loss because, as a debut author, you’re told that it’s important people make a connection not just with your book, but *with you*.’

Her UK publishers have delayed her book’s release till November, and Rebecca now plans to travel to the US for the paperback release next year. Despite these unnerving changes, she says, ‘*Fathoms* is in a bit of a sweet spot: it’s non-fiction, but it’s not hooked to time-sensitive current events ... And the book is



## FEATURE

concerned with where we locate wonder, hope and resilience, in nature: a subject that the pandemic has placed squarely in the public eye, now that so many of us are isolated and hungering for green spaces.'

Some writers who find public speaking difficult have told me that the cancellation of author appearances is a relief. One unexpected benefit of online events is that those with caring responsibilities or disabilities that prevent travel might be more able to participate.

Festival cancellations have made Ellen more conscious about how much air travel is involved in promoting a work. Given the impacts of climate change, Ellen believes this has to change. For now at least, many local writers' festivals have rescheduled their events online and a host of virtual initiatives have sprung up to promote writers who'd otherwise be touring bookshops, libraries or festivals.

Jane Rawson and Kate Harrison set up the Lockdown Reading Group through Read Tasmania to feature new releases. Their line-up includes Robbie Arnott's *The Rain Heron* (Text, June) and Madeleine Watts' debut *The Inland Sea* (Murdoch Books, March). 'We're trying to give a platform to writers who have books out around now and who are missing out on publicity, but also to provide comfort and entertainment to people stuck at home,' Jane says. 'Being read to is — for most people — very soothing.' Other online initiatives include *Together Remotely*, run by writer and former festival director Caro Llewellyn, which presents local and international author interviews as ticketed events — and, importantly, will pay writers festival rates to appear.

There's an apocryphal story circulating that enforced isolation must be ideal for writers, that they are surely churning out work during the lockdown. Writing in the *New York Times*, author Sloane Crosley was not the first to note the problem with this view. 'There's something comfortingly glib,' she wrote, 'about art-shaming in the midst of being told you're a vector for death.'

Apart from the fact that stress is rarely ideal for creativity, few artists are spending lockdown creating — most require an income in addition to their writing.

We are also teachers, lecturers, hospitality workers, bartenders, freelancers, part of the gig economy and often lacking superannuation or savings. We've been busy shoring up work, moving teaching online or adjusting to a new financial vulnerability. Some are home-schooling children while working from home, caring for infants or elderly relatives.

As the pandemic subsides and we survey the longer term impacts of indefinitely delayed or cancelled research trips, residencies, conferences, talks and tours, we're trying to imagine a new way of working. Rebecca says that while writers she knows are finding it difficult to work right now, 'I know that it will be important to record what we're going through — the texture of the lived experience of it. And adapting your practice and process to these new conditions is also necessary: because this isn't a holding-pattern, it's the new order. The 2020s will be a decade of great upheaval and having some elasticity in how and where you work is a skill, not a personality trait, to my mind. So that's what I'm trying to work on.'

**Mireille Juchau is an award-winning novelist, essayist and critic. Her most recent novel is *The World Without Us* (Bloomsbury, 2015).**

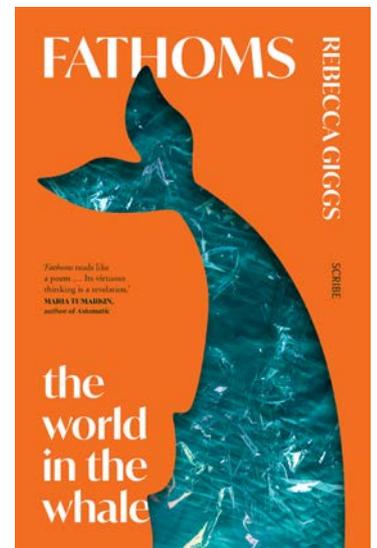
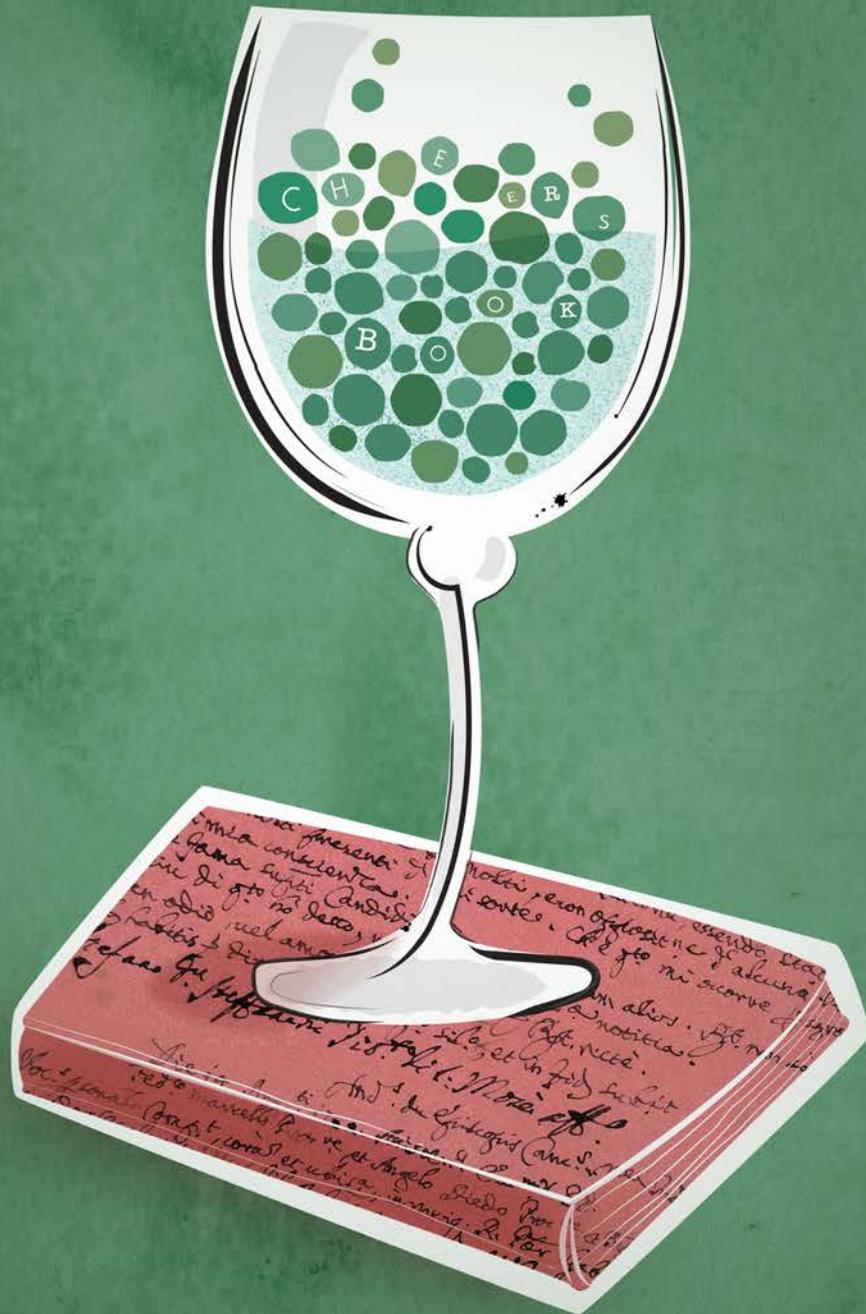


Photo by Leanne Dixon



## FICTION

# P A S



WORDS Heather Rose

Phoebe knew the peas had to go. There was nothing for it. There was only so much room in the freezer drawer.

It's just a bag of peas, she told herself. I can order more online. So why was she crying? Not crying, weeping, as she slid the novel into the freezer where the peas had been. It fitted well, its green cover in a freezer bag replacing the pea packet and reassuring anyone at a glance that Phoebe Nix was a sensible girl who did not forget to eat her vegetables although, at closer inspection, she had strange ideas about books.

Now her face rested on the wooden kitchen bench. The view along its surface was like something from an ad campaign: *Here is the kitchen before the perfect cleaning product. Now, magically, here it is beyond.* But the *beyond* was yet to happen.

She gazed into the glassy reflections of a solitary wine glass that still held a puddle of last night's red something. Had she really consumed two bottles of wine alone? It seemed she had. The cutting board still held the remnants of last night's dinner. Cheese, crackers and the Vegemite jar still open, its yellow lid upturned.

She'd bought all the ingredients for a lasagne a few days back. A group of her friends had begun cooking for one another during lockdown, and over the past weeks Phoebe had been the recipient of lamb and barley soup, a chicken casserole, and a plain cake left on her doorstep. But she hadn't cooked for herself in a week or more, unless you thought of toasties as cooking.

Phoebe knew she had let things slip but there was no one to see. No one to judge. She hadn't showered in days. She was still in her pyjamas at 3 pm.

Once she'd stopped crying, she'd stack the dishwasher and wipe down the benches. Surfaces. Surfaces were essential for a tidy mind. Maybe she'd even strip the bed. But it was harder to stop crying than she imagined. She was sick of things not feeling right. Not in the world. Not in her life. Not in her heart.

Her book launch had been cancelled and she looked like a wreck. Her normally gamine cut had grown long over her ears and forehead. Worse still, the artful textured crop her hairdresser achieved every six weeks or so had thickened and sprouted so she looked permanently electrocuted. Still, if she spent the next few months wearing beanies, no one would notice. What with the beanie, dark glasses and the face mask, no one would recognise her at all. Which had *not* been the idea. She was meant to become famous in 2020. She'd prepared. She'd lost weight. She'd gotten all her social media platforms up and running. She'd even done an online meditation course to manage the stress. And then a bloody virus came along and ruined everything.

They're just peas, she told herself, resting her forehead on the cold green and white packet. It's just a novel. There will still be readers next year. Millions of them the world over keen to read the debut novel of Phoebe Nix, the world's newest crime fiction star. Or there won't, said the other voice.

Phoebe had always hated those two voices. The good, kind, reassuring voice that came like a benevolent mother on one shoulder. And the mean, doubting, fearful voice that perched on the other. It had whispered to her when she woke at midday, 'See what you've become?'

‘What?’ she had asked the wine dark sea of her mind.

‘Nothing,’ it replied.

Last week someone on Twitter had declared that not everyone heard voices in their heads. Some people heard nothing. No voices. No critics. Just silence. There’d been a long thread of people posting comments, most of them in shock that the zen states they tried so hard to achieve were already status quo for certain people. Right now, not thinking would be a whole lot better than falling apart over her lost 2020.

It wasn’t just peas, she knew. The book had become, over time, a love letter to Matthew. It even starred a brilliant but weary doctor in a hollow marriage and a clever young female detective. The story was meant to persuade him that she was the one. She had wanted him to understand that she knew things about life, even if she was younger, even if they came from completely different worlds. She’d wanted him to see her in the spotlight, radiant in interviews, speaking at festivals, her face on the front of the arts section. But instead, she was like peas. Tossed aside, de-prioritised. The last five years of work had been put on hold, frozen until bloody Covid-19 was dead and buried.

Maybe, she thought, most people never fulfilled their destiny.

Wednesday night it had been obvious that it couldn’t go on. She and Matthew had parked in their two cars under the flowering gum which had only recently given up the last of its blooms. They’d wound down their windows to feel closer and talked to each other via their phones. All that summer she’d watched as the flowers formed, bloomed and festooned on their landmark tree. If it could speak, that tree might have said, ‘Here. Here is where they meet every Wednesday and sometimes on Sundays. Here is where they kiss. Here is where they hold hands and talk and never discuss when he is leaving his wife.’

Divorce lawyers were going to have a field day in 2021. Funeral homes, too, conducting delayed memorial services. But for now, the whole world — save for a few Brazilians, and the distant, and possibly

fictional people of Turkmenistan — was in quarantine. In Turkmenistan the ruling dictator had banned the use of the word coronavirus or Covid-19. Phoebe preferred the Belarusian approach. Their leader had instructed everyone to drink more vodka.

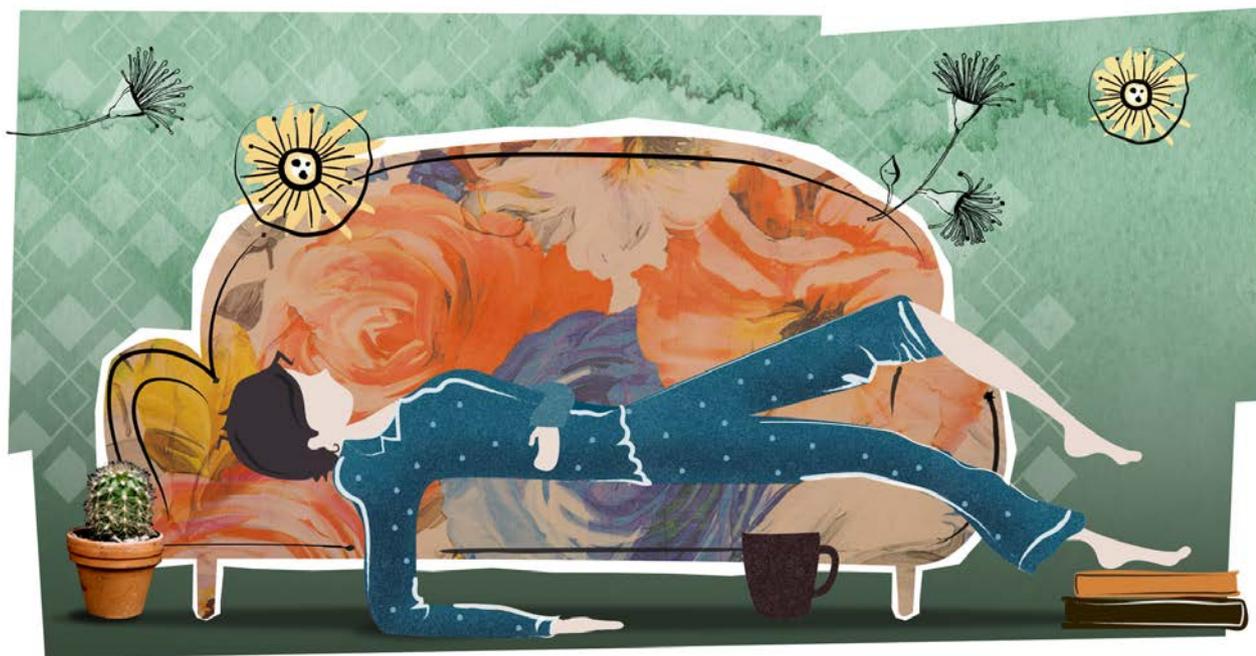
She remembered, as a small child, squeezing herself in between her mother’s dresses in the wardrobe, so no-one could find her. It had worked for a while, until Milly discovered her and ruined it all. Milly had a way of ruining things for her. The older sister who’d always looked right, been a prefect and enrolled in medicine. Then Milly had died. Not just died. She’d been murdered, her body recovered from a stormwater drain. Their parents had divorced and Phoebe had spent many days and nights feeling like she was in that cupboard still, waiting for Milly to find her. But Milly, ghost Milly, never came. Not in dreams and not in life. Perhaps that had been for the best. But the book had come instead, years later.

It had made Phoebe stop writing turgid poetry, and cease the far too regular use of marijuana. She’d finished her degree and then discovered she hated every kind of job except working at Gravity, the bar she’d managed for the past five years as she’d written the novel. It was there she’d run into Matthew, the man who’d loved Milly, the man who might have married Milly if she hadn’t died. Instead, he’d married Zara and had a child. Then he’d started an affair with Phoebe, or she with him. It was hard to tell. One night he was the last one there as she finished up. Taking him home seemed the most sensible thing to do, and neither voice in her head had whispered a word until the next day, after he was gone.

Phoebe speared the packet of peas with a knife and poured them out into the sink. The result looked like an Instagram post. There were only so many things one person could do with a packet of peas. Nurse a bruise. Toss them through a lemony tagliatelle. Pile them beside sausages and mash. But a whole packet?

There were more than 237 peas melting in the sink. She’d given up counting them. Possibly there were exactly 600. Or 599. It was possible she was having some kind of breakdown. She was staring into

## FICTION



a frosted green pattern of legumes grown in a time before the world went mad.

All of life *before* seemed like a fairy tale now. Days when she could go to movies, see friends and linger over Sunday lunches, spend evenings at gigs before Ubering home, fly away with Matthew and have a weekend in a remote Airbnb.

Because Matthew worked in the hospital, he had to be particularly careful. He couldn't risk infecting his wife and child. He didn't want to risk infecting Phoebe. They had separate bedrooms anyway, he and Zara, he'd said. She at one end of the house, him at the other. Since the baby was born, she'd lost interest in sex. Phoebe supposed most men having affairs said that about their wives.

Phoebe decided it was time for a toast. She'd put her book on ice, after all. An advance copy that had arrived yesterday, while thousands more brooded in the warehouse waiting for their big day. The publisher and the publicist had Zoom-called and assured her that spring next year her book would be launched. Yes, the marketing budget would be reduced and the market would be a little crowded given all the other delayed books, but its time would

come. Phoebe was still their newest star and her story, well, the media was going to love it. Phoebe had felt rather sick at this. But the publicist had assured her that very few writers had such a good hook. The crime fiction writer with the murdered sister.

What they didn't discuss was that the book industry might be dead by then, and pre-pandemic art out of date. In a year we might discover that no one had been reading anything in captivity. They'd been watching TikTok and making babies.

She heard her phone ping. Her cooking friends had started a group called Lockdown Love where they posted silly, funny, and — worst of all — inspiring messages to cheer each other up. This one was a link to an article encouraging people to toss away their old consuming selves and invent something new that would work for everyone beyond this.

A noise welled up in Phoebe, an inhuman thing, a banshee wail of loss and frustration, as if it had been waiting years to erupt. I want my life back, she wanted to rage at someone. I want to buy cheap clothing online. I know it's made in some sweatshop that tortures women and small children. I want to eat strawberries from California any month of the year.

I want to buy roses from Ecuador and I don't care about the flight miles and the fucking carbon footprint. I was born to consume. If I don't consume, my existential loneliness will get completely out of control and I will realise that I'm a flea in a population of eight billion fleas sucking on the host and turning it anaemic. I'll realise I'm going to die. I'll die and be forgotten and this bloody planet with its mountains, rivers, sunrises and sunsets will go on forever. Nothing here will miss me. In fact, it would be better off without me.

Phoebe popped the cork and watched the prosecco froth in the glass. She slid open the freezer drawer and saw that already the bag holding the book was frosting over. She tapped her drink on the edge of it.

'Cheers, book,' she said. 'Cheers 2020. Cheers to nature. Rocking it, baby. Starry skies in Beijing. Deer wandering the streets of Japan. Goats in Wales staring at all the people behind glass. Humans? Well, we humans are not doing so well. A few months back Trump was going to bomb Iran just to arc things up in the Middle East before the election in November. Now he's inciting revolution. Weinstein's in jail and it only took 78 women to get him there. Australia was on fire for months. We almost wiped out the koalas. The platypus is on its way to extinction, too. There's weird sea warming near New Zealand, and the kelp forests around Tasmania are dead. The Barrier Reef is bleached beyond recognition. Plans for a giant coal mine, and a copper one, too — that's going to improve things for sure. Our oxygen cylinder, the Amazon, is in the red while the government of Brazil has taken to shooting anyone opposed to deforestation. A 16-year old is our world's visionary and our favourite politician is a smiley, sensible woman from New Zealand. So cheers to the pangolins who sent a virus to save us. Cheers pangolins. Or bats. Or industrial farming. Whatever it was that brought 2020 to its knees. But I want my life back now. Ok? I promise to be better. I think I promise. It's hard to tell.'

She thought of the last time she had touched Matthew. They'd gone away for a weekend, him

supposedly at a conference. They'd walked a remote beach and spent hours in the outdoor bath reading to one another. Then the stay-at-home order was announced.

'I miss you,' he'd said. 'I miss you already.'

In that moment, even without the nasty voice weighing in, she'd known that Matthew was not going to be the man sitting on some verandah with her when they were very old. Not the man who'd make her laugh until their false teeth fell out. But she hadn't been brave enough to end it. It was too easy, too decadent, this relationship with no commitment and luxurious perks.

Her phone pinged again. She picked it up and read the Lockdown Love message. It said: *There is evidence that trees communicate over great expanses, sending nourishment, messages and support. And they do all this grounded in place, unable to speak, reach or move around. We are like that right now, separate, unable to touch, yet deeply connected and sharing our love over these distances ...*

Phoebe sat on the kitchen stool and watched the clouds rolling across the sky. She let the prosecco languish. She knew that what she was contemplating was an aberration, but dark times called for drastic measures. It was a sort of sacrilege, possibly. But then so was putting a book in the freezer, she supposed.

Towards evening, she pulled a fresh lasagne from the oven. While it had baked, she'd cleaned up the kitchen and changed the sheets. Then she'd showered and put on jeans, a hoodie, socks and shoes. She hadn't worn shoes or driven anywhere in a week, and it felt good. Within the hour, each of Phoebe's friends had received a takeaway container labelled *Lockdown Lasagne*.

\*\*\*

Twelve months later, Matthew was long gone and her face was across all the arts media. Phoebe's friends threw her a dinner party. Lockdown Lasagne was the celebratory dish. It's secret? The addition of peas — not in the meat sauce, but in the cheesy sauce, which somehow made it a hit.

**Heather Rose is the author of eight novels. Her latest novel is the bestselling political thriller *Bruny*. Her novel *The Museum of Modern Love* won the Stella Prize and the Christina Stead Prize.**



*RAJA testacea?*

*Eight days in*  
**KAMAY**



WORDS Damien Webb

Common stingaree (*Urolophus testaceus*),  
pencil drawing by Herman Spöring, 1770,  
reproduced courtesy the Natural History  
Museum London, 50.(1:46)

## EXHIBITION

In 1770 the Gweagal people of Kamay (Botany Bay) discovered James Cook and the *Endeavour*. The Library's new exhibition — now online and in the Galleries after the lockdown — explores the eight days that followed.

Pirate? Hero? Both? Neither? The way James Cook is remembered in Australia remains deeply contested.

Countless myths and exaggerations surround the eight days the *Endeavour* spent in Kamay in 1770. The untarnished ideal of Cook as an explorer and skilled navigator has long been a seductive one, but for many he symbolises one of the darkest and most brutal parts of Australia's history.

The Library's exhibition *Eight Days in Kamay* explores these conflicting views, and invites you to consider the cultural, social and political context of the *Endeavour*'s visit from the perspective of the Gweagal people.

### CONTESTED LEGACIES

As an Aboriginal curator, I was at first daunted by the task of trying to commemorate the 250th anniversary of an event that has become so much part of legend it seems to leave little room for correction.

Was Cook the murdering pirate my family and many others blame for invasion and subsequent colonisation? Or was he a genius polymath and the 'father of the nation', as I was taught at school?

He was both and neither. The murders and mutilations perpetrated by the *Endeavour* crew are well documented. But Cook's 'discoveries' and skills as a navigator are usually invoked as a defence.

At the heart of Australia's ongoing racism is our continuing ignorance about the origins of our nationhood, and the brutal cost Aboriginal people paid to establish it.

### PIRATE AND HERO

*Eight Days in Kamay* explores through contemporary artworks the Captain Cook most familiar to



Aboriginal people. He appears as a spectre, who serves as a symbol of colonisation, invasion and the myth of *terra nullius*.

Daniel Boyd's imposing parody of Emmanuel Philip Fox's famous 1902 painting of the *Endeavour* landing, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here* (2006), is a visceral reminder of the fine line between pirate and hero. The post-Federation image of a gentle, patriotic Cook is inverted by Boyd's work, which cleverly reverses the message of this key piece of colonial propaganda.

Works by Michael Cook, Jason Wing and Karla Dickens invite visitors to see 'our' Cook, and to perhaps reflect on how far both versions of Cook's legend have wandered from the scale and facts of those eight days in 1770.

*We Call Them Pirates Out Here*, by Daniel Boyd, 2006, oil on canvas, collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, purchased with funds provided by the Coe and Mordant families, 2006; reproduced courtesy the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia © Daniel Boyd



Through paintings by Vincent Namatjira we see Cook as a human figure, someone we can almost relate to today, but who remains iconic and aloof — his legend persisting in even the most mundane settings.

## SEEING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING

The core of *Eight Days in Kamay* is about bringing together the sketches and specimens collected during the *Endeavour* visit by members of the expedition Joseph Banks, Sydney Parkinson and Daniel Solander, with the original context of Gweagal Country and knowledge.

The detailed botanical illustrations (along with the thousands of plants and animals taken) were intended to represent the sum of knowledge about this newly ‘discovered’ natural world. But 250 years later, with the help of Gweagal Elders, we can see that the Englishmen may have witnessed the local knowledge, culture, science and agriculture, but they didn’t understand it.

What is missing from almost every non-Aboriginal retelling of Cook’s voyage is a sense of Aboriginal agency or humanity. The Gweagal people are reduced to spectators or surprised victims. Reading Cook’s account now, it is clear that he did observe two things: that Aboriginal people were happier than their English counterparts, and that they wanted these strangers gone.

By the time Cook landed at Kamay he was impatient to fulfil his mission and probably still reeling from the violence that had transpired in New Zealand. The *Endeavour* had been thwarted several times in its attempts to make landfall on the coast of Australia, and its movements had been tracked the entire time by different Aboriginal groups, who used smoke signals to communicate with one another.

Cook’s usual methods of intriguing or frightening the local people had no effect at Kamay. The Gweagal people had no interest in the gifts his crew left for them (after looting their spears, and helping themselves to food from the fire). While their defiance didn’t falter from the moment the crew tried to come ashore, the Gweagal never once drew blood from or injured the strangers, despite throwing dozens of warning spears through the eight days.

When I read the European accounts of these events as an Aboriginal man, guided by Gweagal Elders, it becomes clear that the welcome protocols of the local people were roundly ignored.

Two men who stood bravely at the shore were painted in ochre, as described in the journal accounts and seen in Parkinson’s sketches and later engravings. But Aboriginal men did not normally wander around with ochre on their bodies. After tracking the *Endeavour* as it moved up the coast and realising that the crew planned to come ashore, the men must have attempted to follow cultural protocol. Had they been able to stop these strangers at the shoreline, and had they been respected instead of shot at, perhaps the wisdom of the Gweagal people might have been the foundation on which a future nation was built.

## MEMORIAL AND RESISTANCE

The final story of the exhibition uses photographs from the *Tribune* — a weekly communist newspaper, the archive of which is in the Library’s collection — to recall the 1970 Aboriginal protest that marked the 200th anniversary of the *Endeavour* visit. It’s a moving reminder that our resistance to the British invasion, and to the one-sided account of nationhood forced upon us, has been unwavering since 29 April 1770.

# EXHIBITION



The protest began the night before the anniversary, with a rally and silent vigil, and culminated in the laying of wreaths on the La Perouse side of Kamay, at the same time as the ‘official’ proceedings were underway on the opposite shore. There is perhaps no better illustration of the divide between these two Captain Cooks than these simultaneous events: one dripping with colonial jingoism, the other mournful and steeped in 200 years of loss and violence.

How these two perspectives will ever be reconciled is difficult to imagine, but as always we must begin with truth. To acknowledge the cost of colonisation will not reverse it, but truth-telling is a vital step in seriously addressing the darkest parts of our country’s past.

**Damien Webb is Manager, Indigenous Engagement, and co-curator of *Eight Days in Kamay* with Ronald Briggs, Curator, Research & Discovery.**

***Eight Days in Kamay* is now an online exhibition and will open in the Galleries when the Library reopens.**

**[sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/kamay)**

TOP: After casting their wreaths into the bay, Pastor Doug Nicholls (centre) and protesters make their way to La Perouse Point, 29 April 1970, *Tribune* negative archive, FL4567314, reproduced courtesy the SEARCH Foundation



ABOVE: *Rum Runners*, by Karla Dickens, 2018, mixed media, reproduced courtesy the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer Brisbane © Karla Dickens



GEOGRAPHIA  
BLAVIANA

# THE WORLD

## *in a book*

\* WORDS Maggie Patton

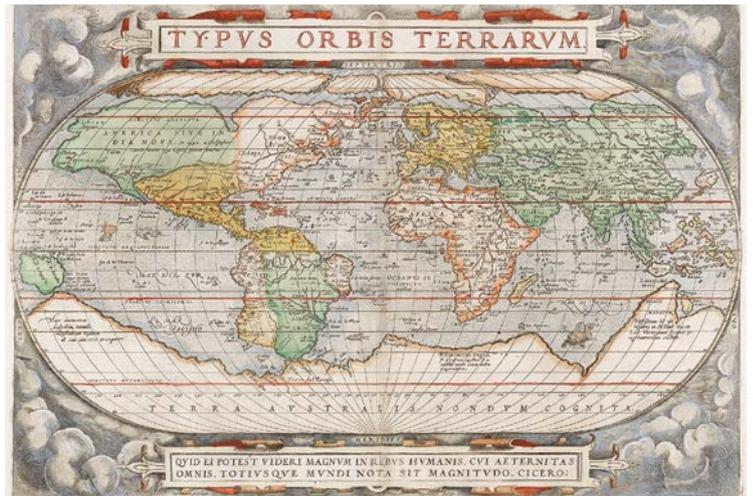
In the Golden Age of Cartography, the first atlases combined the skills of the mapmaker with the ingenuity of the publisher.

In 1595 the Flemish cartographer Gerard Mercator introduced a new word to the publishing lexicon. Having prepared a volume of maps of the same style and dimensions, he used the term ‘atlas’ to describe the finished work.

Mercator was not paying homage to the Titan god condemned to hold up the celestial heavens for eternity. He was honouring the legendary Atlas, King of Mauretania — a man skilled in philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, who was credited with inventing the celestial sphere. Atlas was often pictured measuring the globe with a compass.

In today’s world of digital publishing, ‘atlas’ is still used to describe a collection of maps on a theme, or similar in appearance and design. The Library holds an impressive number of atlases, with the most dazzling volumes produced during the Golden Age of Cartography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Twenty-five years before Mercator introduced the term, another Flemish cartographer and geographer, Abraham Ortelius, published *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the Orb of the World), a collection of 53 maps that is considered the first example of an atlas.

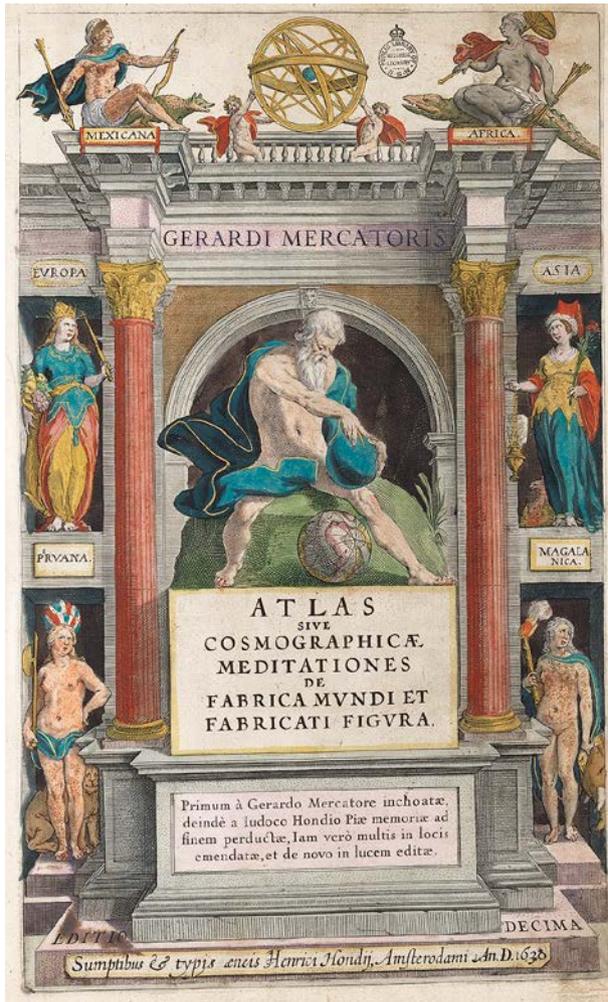


The opening world map in this volume, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, is now iconic. It includes a distinctive Northwest Passage below the *Terra Septentrionalis* [sic.] *Incognita* (‘unknown northern land’). At the tip of South America, the Strait of Magellan sits above a sprawling *Terra Australis Nondum Cognita* (‘southern land not yet known’).

Along the bottom of the map is a compelling quote in Latin from Cicero, translated as, ‘Who

OPPOSITE: Frontispiece from *Le Grand Atlas: ou Cosmographie Blaviane en laquelle est exactement descrite la terre, la mer, et le ciel*, 1667, by Joan Blaeu, RB/RF912/61

Typus Orbis Terrarum (World Map) from *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, 1579, by Abraham Ortelius, MRB/X912/7D



can consider human affairs to be great, when he comprehends the eternity and vastness of the entire world?’

Between 1570 and 1612, there were 31 editions of the Ortelius atlas produced in seven languages. Among the many editions in the Library’s collection is a fine hand-coloured copy from 1579, once owned by David Scott Mitchell and rebound at the Mitchell Library in the 1920s in kangaroo leather with intricate tooling.

The first official appearance of ‘atlas’ in a title was in Mercator’s seminal publication, *Atlas Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et*

*Fabricati Figura*, published posthumously by his sons in 1595. Unlike Ortelius, who repurposed the work of other cartographers, Mercator produced most of the maps himself. The magnificent title page features the draped figure of Atlas holding a globe, surrounded by figures representing the known continents. The Americas are represented by three figures: Mexicana, Peruana and Magallanica.

In 1604 the Flemish engraver and cartographer Jodocus Hondius purchased the printing plates used for Mercator’s original atlas. He and his family were responsible for publishing several later editions, gradually increasing the number of maps to 107 in the 1630 edition. The Library’s copy of this edition was also owned by David Scott Mitchell.

By 1630 *Atlas Sive Cosmographicae ...* had become the most significant geographical work of its time. But this was also the year Willem Blaeu published his first terrestrial atlas, and the Blaeu family would play a leading role in Dutch cartography’s golden age.

Acclaimed as the largest and most splendid atlas of the seventeenth century, the *Atlas Maior* or *Geographia Blaviana* was published by Willem’s son Joan Blaeu in 1662–65. This multi-volumed atlas contains 594 copper-engraved maps and 3368 pages of text. It presents the comprehensive state of geographic knowledge in the mid-seventeenth century.

The expensive *Atlas Maior* was a collector’s item for the cartographers’ powerful and wealthy clients and an influential gift for potential sponsors. The Library holds two editions: a black and white copy of the first edition in the Mitchell Library collection; and a sumptuous 12-volume French edition from 1667, hand-coloured and bound in cream vellum with gilt tooling. This edition was acquired by the Free Public Library of Sydney in 1884.

In an illustration on the frontispiece of the French edition, with gold highlights, the title of the atlas is held aloft by a group of putti (cupids). Below them, the crowned figure of Cybele, the earth goddess, sits in a chariot led by a pair of lions. Holding a large key to unlock the world, she is surrounded by four female figures and their companion animals, representing

Title page from *Atlas Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura*, 1630, by Gerard Mercator, X910/6A

## FEATURE



the known continents: Europe is seen with a horse, America has an armadillo at her feet, Asia stands beside a camel, and Africa leads an elephant.

The double-hemisphere world map at the beginning of this atlas, *Nova et Accuratissima Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula*, shows the latest knowledge of the world, including the results of Dutch explorer Abel Tasman's voyages circling the Australian continent and sailing to New Zealand in 1642–44.

Classical gods can be seen in the map's upper margin, representing the planets orbiting the heavens: at the centre is Apollo, the Sun god, closely attended by Mercury and Venus; the moon as a cherub clammers between the two hemispheres; to the far left is Jupiter, king of the gods; to the

far right are the warrior gods Mars and Saturn. The hemispheres are flanked by images of the Astronomer, holding an armillary sphere, and the Geographer, taking measurements of the globe. Allegories of the seasons decorate the lower margin, a common feature in world maps of this period.

These three atlases are among the highlights of the Library's outstanding collection of maps, charts, atlases and globes. They will be on display in 2021 in the major exhibition *Mapping the Pacific*, celebrating the beauty and science of mapping.

**Maggie Patton, Manager, Research & Discovery**

*Nova et Accuratissima Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula* [World Map] from *Le Grand Atlas: ou cosmographie Blaviane en laquelle est exactement descritte la terre, la mer, et le ciel*, 1667 by Joan Blaeu, RB/RF912/61



# OUR *whole world spun*

When we put out a call to see how readers were using the collection from home, a fascinating story came to light.

On the first day that isolation restrictions forced her three children home for school, Frances McLeod decided they should do something fun at lunchtime.

Thirteen-year-old Jemima and ten-year-old Lotte dressed up in their music teacher mother's shirts and skirts and arranged themselves near the verandah of their heritage home outside Bathurst. They covered their mouths and noses with cloth masks. They were re-enacting a photo of two women during the 1919 flu epidemic, seated beside the very same verandah.

The Library collection contains two photographs taken on the Avoca property near Bathurst. One features a Sullivan family picnic by the Macquarie River in 1904. The other features Lillian Lamph and

Eleanor Sullivan together in a garden, wearing protective masks during the 1919 flu epidemic. The Library acquired both photographs as part of the 'At Work and Play' collection, a Bicentennial project to collect images of 24 NSW towns between 1880 and 1940. The project's co-ordinator, former Curator of Photographs and now Emeritus Curator Alan Davies, described the basic selection criterion as: 'Will this photograph be of interest to other Australians?'

Frances and her husband Rob discovered the two photographs of their property 14 years ago, when they moved into Rob's family home. Frances was pregnant with Jemima. The house had no inside bathroom — only a bath on the verandah fillable

ABOVE LEFT: Jemima and Lotte re-create a photograph from the Library's collection, March 2020

ABOVE RIGHT: Taken during the influenza epidemic after World War I in 1919, Bathurst, NSW, At Work and Play - 05120



through a small window next to the laundry copper and ‘outhouses up the back paddock’. Frances’ parents researched the house and found the two photos in the Library collection. Frances says the image of the flu epidemic is now well known in Bathurst. The Bathurst Base Hospital used it in the Emergency waiting room during their renovations as part of a large collage of health-related photos.

Jemima and Lotte’s re-enactment not only brought this historical image to life but gave them a broader perspective on their own experience. ‘What took us all by surprise was the suddenness with which our whole world spun,’ says Frances. ‘One minute the kids are busy going to school and doing all their sport, music and activities. Then everything stopped.’

For Jemima and Lotte, inserting themselves into the women’s images was a moment of realising that they understood how these people must have felt and that they were living through a similar historical event. As Frances puts it, ‘It doesn’t matter that those women didn’t have technology or that their world was a different pace to begin with, everyone’s day is full of something and all those somethings had to stop and be re-thought.’

Frances’ family is uncannily attuned to history repeating. Some years ago, during her fifth or sixth lesson with a new violin student, the student revealed that she was playing her grandmother’s violin. Frances shared her pleasure, remarking that she too played

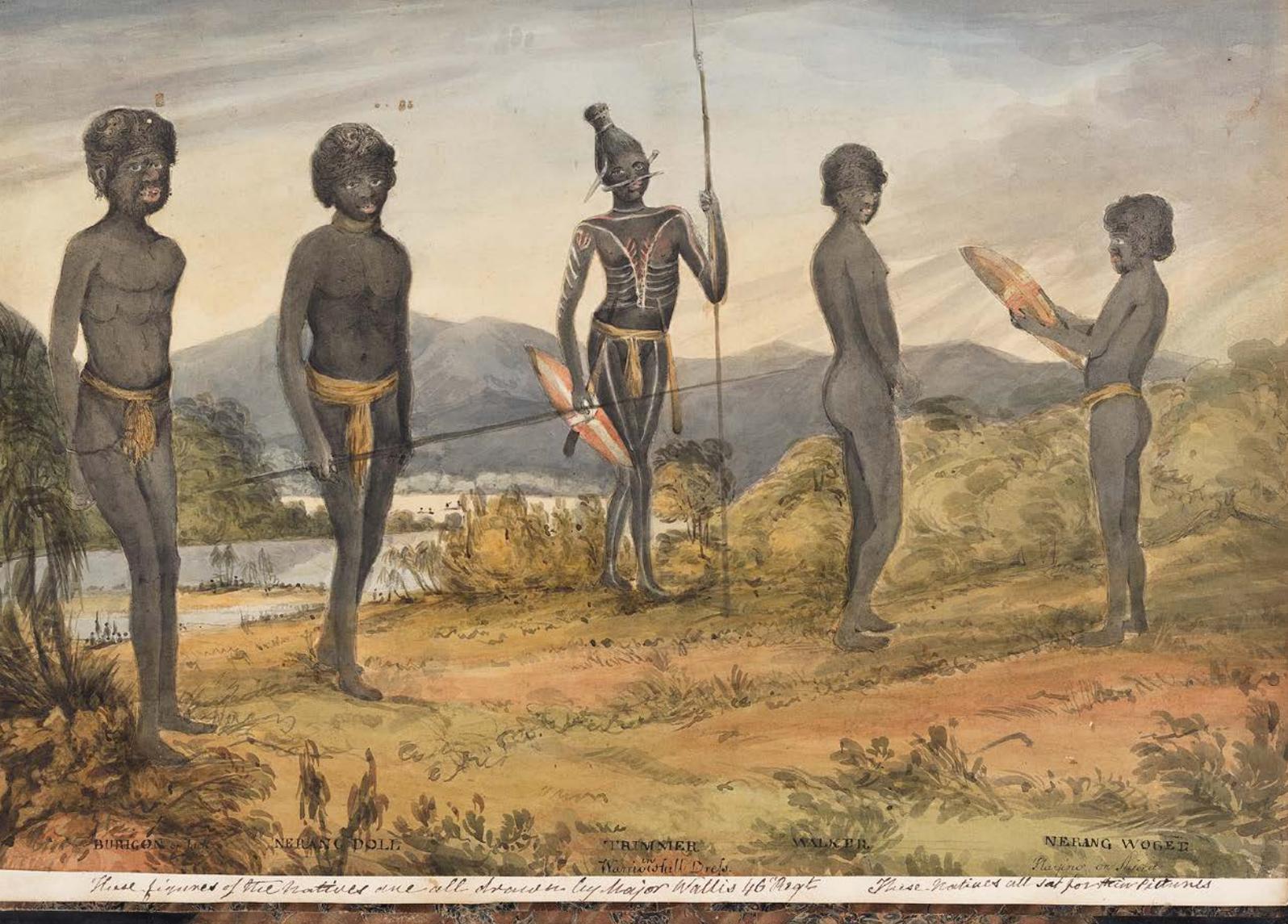
a family instrument — her grandfather’s violin. What the student then revealed was that her grandmother was a Sullivan. Her family had sold the house to Frances’s husband’s family. The Eleanor Sullivan of the photograph was not her grandmother but a great aunt — and the last time the student’s violin had been played was in Frances’ house. If that weren’t coincidence enough, the incoming Head of Strings at the Mitchell Conservatorium Bathurst revealed that her ancestors had originally come from Scotland to Bathurst to start the gasworks. The house they built was Frances’ house. It so happens that descendants of all three owners of Avoca are now living in Bathurst playing the violin!

Frances’ mother has already suggested that, when the self-isolation is over, they should re-create the second Avoca photo — the picnic by the Macquarie River. Frances laughs that they can wear their Easter bonnets. But while the image of Eleanor and Lillian was easy to replicate, the other might be more difficult. ‘I know where it was taken,’ says Frances, ‘but it’s a funny spot to have a picnic these days. Every time the river floods, things shift. The banks and trees have changed considerably over the years.’ Some things are bound to the past by history’s indelible changes.

When friends are finally permitted again, they may indeed head down to another spot by the river. If not a re-creation, they can create a new moment in history for a future archive.

**Mathilde de Hauteclouque, Library Assistant,  
Information & Access**

A Sullivan family picnic on the Macquarie River on their property ‘Avoca’, Bathurst, NSW, c 1910s, At Work and Play - 05128



# Art of NEWCASTLE

\* WORDS Mark Dunn

Group portrait of Newcastle Aboriginal men and women, Burigon on the left, from 'Album of original drawings by Captain James Wallis and Joseph Lycett', c 1817-18, SAFE PXE 1072

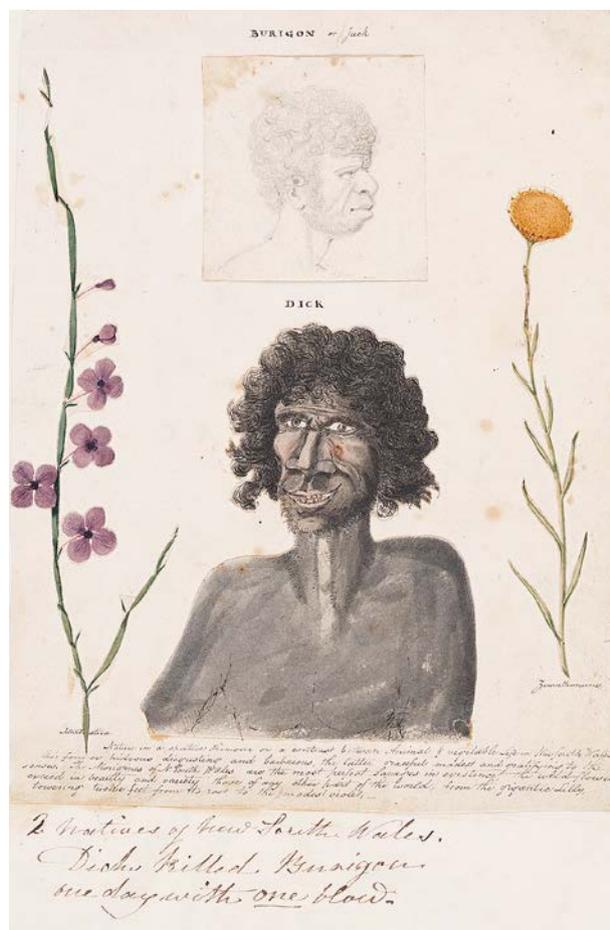
# An Aboriginal leader's assistance to the artists of the Newcastle penal settlement led to an unprecedented visual record of the local Indigenous people.

Newcastle, just two hours north of Sydney, is a city emerging from a post-industrial slumber. With a thriving university, strong arts community and glistening beaches, the city is an increasingly popular choice for those escaping the hustle and bustle of Sydney.

Industry has shaped the city and its surrounds since the first years of the British settlement. At the mouth of the Hunter River, Newcastle has been a major coal port for more than 200 years and was, until the late 1990s, a steel production centre for BHP, its steelworks dominating the harbour.

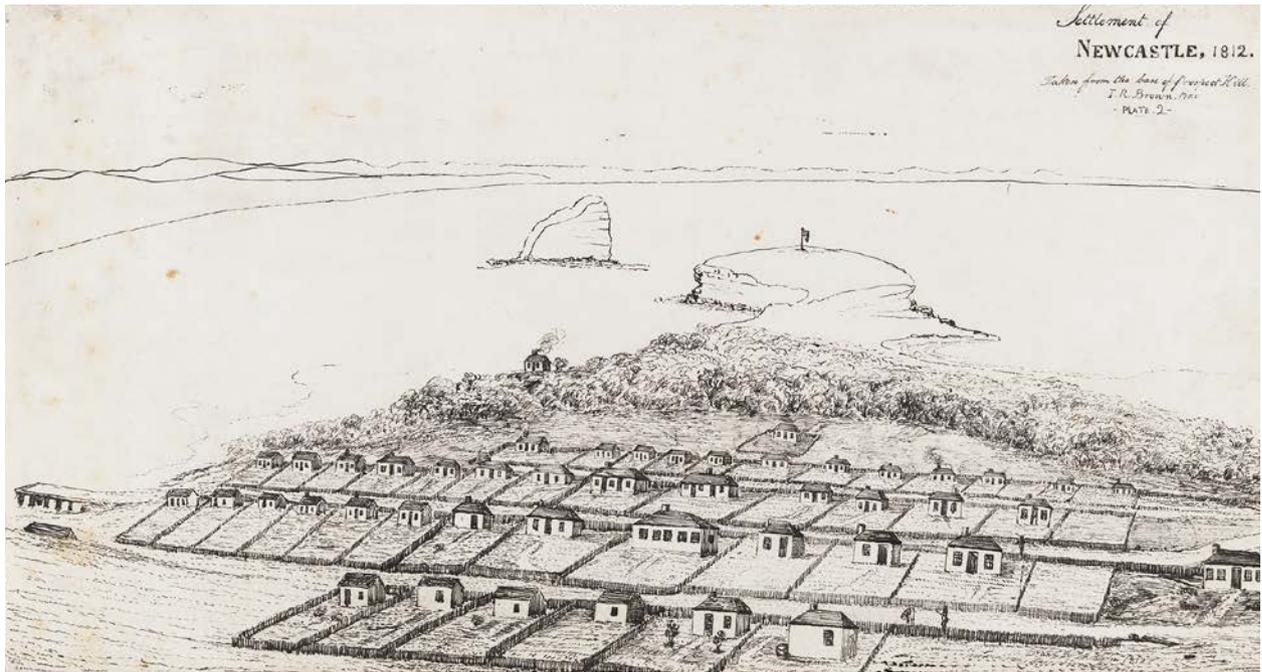
Between 1804 and 1822, thousands of men and some women convicts were sent to Newcastle as punishment for transgressions in Sydney and elsewhere. The men laboured underground in the coal mines, cut trees in remote timber camps or dug up shells and burnt them for lime to feed Governor Macquarie's building boom in Sydney. Newcastle gained a reputation as a dreaded place of excessive punishment, hard labour, isolated conditions and roaming bands of Aboriginal warriors on the lookout for escaping convicts.

At the same time, there's no denying that the area's beautiful natural setting made its penal establishment seem somewhat bucolic. The camp was bounded on the north by a large harbour dotted with islands, and mountains could be seen in the far distance to the west. Cleared areas of grassland on the hills around the settlement – named Sheep Pasture Hill and later Shepherds Hill by the British – were the product of thousands of years of work by local Aboriginal people. To the east, the sea rolled onto sandy beaches and rugged sandstone cliffs shot through with seams of black coal. It was a landscape captured in early paintings by John Lewin, Ferdinand Bauer and other colonial artists.



The penal station had been thrust onto the Country of the Awabakal and Worimi people, whose land covers what is now Newcastle, Stockton and the coast up to Port Stephens. Aboriginal people came and went through the embryonic town, fished on the harbour and along the river, and hunted in the nearby forests and grasslands. Some were employed by officers and ordinary soldiers as guides or hunting companions, or as trackers in pursuit of absconding convicts.

Dick and Burigon, from 'Album of original drawings by Captain James Wallis and Joseph Lycett', c 1817-18, SAFE PXE 1072



While surviving historical records suggest that clashes between Aboriginal people and the British around Newcastle were infrequent, soldiers were stationed at the remote camps to protect against potential attack. Groups of men working in the bush cutting timber or at lime burning sites were particularly vulnerable. As well as being isolated, these work parties wreaked the greatest destruction on Aboriginal Country as they felled trees and dug out ancient middens.

Along with this underlying tension, there was some co-operation and a measure of friendship, particularly between successive commandants and the local Aboriginal leader Burigon. The Library holds several paintings and sketches that attest to this bond. But these extraordinary images also prompt us to question how and why these relationships developed in a place of punishment and harsh labour.

In 1813 the convict artist TR (Richard) Browne assisted the Commandant Thomas Skottowe with the illustrated publication *Select Specimens from Nature of the Birds and Animals of New South Wales*,

compiled at Newcastle. Browne had arrived in Sydney as a convict from Dublin in 1810 and within a year had been sent to Newcastle, arriving in the penal station the same year as Skottowe.

Between 1811 and 1814, during Skottowe's command, Browne illustrated the birds, fish and insects the commandant collected. Evidence of Skottowe and Browne's connection with the local Aboriginal people can be found in *Select Specimens from Nature*. Its title page includes a scene at an Aboriginal camp, and the local Aboriginal names are included for each of the natural specimens Browne painted.

Remaining at Newcastle until 1817, Browne also contributed to an album of watercolours put together by Commandant James Wallis, who was in charge of the settlement from 1816 to 1818. And when he returned to Sydney, the artist made a series of naïve portraits of Aboriginal people, including the local Newcastle leader Burigon or Burgun and Cobbawn Wogi of Ash Island in the Hunter River estuary.

Burigon was well-known around the Newcastle camp. Wallis counted him as a friend and companion,

## FEATURE



and they often went out hunting and fishing together. He had kinder feelings for him, he wrote, than for many of his British kin. Burigon performed in a corroboree for Governor Macquarie and his party on an official visit to Newcastle in 1818.

As well as appearing in Browne's painting, the Aboriginal leader features in a group portrait by Wallis of Aboriginal people of Newcastle and is portrayed by convict engraver Walter Preston standing to the side of a corroboree.

Burigon was probably a guide and companion to convict artist Joseph Lycett. Like Browne and Preston, the convict Lycett was taken under the patronage of James Wallis and asked to paint the penal camp and its surrounds. Lycett was put to work recording the town as it evolved through Wallis' building program and capturing the life and customs of Aboriginal people. He painted at least 14 scenes that show Aboriginal people fishing, hunting, at play, at rest, and participating in corroborees and other traditional practices in and around Newcastle.

The details of cultural and traditional practices in Lycett's paintings make them invaluable, as Professor

John Maynard points out, for lifting the veil on an otherwise hidden past. It is unlikely that Lycett could have come so close to the local Aboriginal people without an invitation of some kind, and it is likely that Burigon was responsible for arranging it.

Burigon was a confidant and intermediary for Commandant James Wallis and it was Wallis who acted as Lycett's patron in the camp. Burigon is shown in at least one of William Preston's engravings, based on Lycett's work. Wallis probably arranged for Burigon to work with Lycett to capture the life of the people who continued to live around the penal station.

However it was arranged, Lycett's work shows a flipside to the harsh reality that he and other convicts experienced at Newcastle. Along with the work of Browne, Preston and Wallis, his portrayal of Aboriginal life in and around Newcastle is more detailed and revealing than any other depiction of a British outpost in colonial New South Wales.

**Dr Mark Dunn was the Library's 2016 CH Currey Fellow. His first book, *The Convict Valley: The Bloody Struggle on Australia's Early Frontier* (Allen & Unwin, June 2020), is available now.**

Community Letter 5-

Belsen No. 1.

Belsen Camp  
the W. Germany.

27. 7. 45.

Dear Friends,

I am sending this account of Belsen for I know you will all be interested in the early history as well as the present state of this extraordinarily community.

The figures quoted are authentic and I am hoping to procure some photographs which I will send you.

My information has been collected from official documents, gathered from the survivors of the actual camp and the prisoners who have experienced the terrible...

# LETTERS from Bergen-Belsen

\* WORDS Louise Anemaat

Australian nurse Muriel Knox Doherty recorded her experiences and insights after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

When we imagine the liberation of Nazi concentration camps 75 years ago our minds tend to fix on the moment when the gates were opened and Allied forces moved in to behold the immense human tragedy. But the real liberation went on for many months and, of course, involved the medical profession as much as the military.

In the final months of the Second World War, the British, American and French Allied forces moved east across Europe, and the Soviet forces moved west,

opening up the concentration camps spread throughout Nazi occupied territories.

Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviets in January 1945. Buchenwald and Dachau were reached by the Americans, and Ravensbrück by the Soviets, in April. In May, Mauthausen was liberated by the Americans and Theresienstadt by the Soviets. Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, near the German city of Hanover, was liberated by British forces on 15 April 1945.

Muriel Knox Doherty,  
'Community Letter 5', 27 July 1945,  
MLMSS 442/Box 11/Folder 1

## COLLECTION SPOTLIGHT

Australian nurse Muriel Knox Doherty arrived at Bergen-Belsen three months later, on 11 July, and took up the position of Chief Nurse and Principal Matron. A clinical nurse, nurse teacher and administrator, Doherty had begun her long and influential nursing career a world away at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 1921.

During the Second World War, she had served with distinction in the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service. In 1945, when 'the plight of the millions of displaced persons in the former occupied territories became increasingly compelling' to her, she applied for a position with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and was assigned to Bergen-Belsen.

By 1945 thousands of people — including Jews, Roma or Gypsies, political prisoners, prisoners of war, homosexuals and other groups considered to be undesirable — had been transported to Bergen-Belsen, which had been established two years earlier as a transit camp for prisoners of the Nazi regime. Held in appalling conditions, many thousands died of starvation and disease. It was at Bergen-Belsen that Anne Frank and her sister Margot died of typhus in March 1945, only weeks before liberation.

When the British arrived at the camp they were unprepared for the scale of misery, cruelty and utter desolation. They found more than 40,000 desperately ill and starving prisoners, and the unburied bodies of 10,000 men, women and children. The death toll continued to rise in the weeks following liberation. The true number of deaths may never be known because, despite an agreement with the British, all remaining camp records were destroyed by the SS soon after liberation.

When Doherty took up her position she faced the mammoth task of establishing a hospital and nursing the thousands of survivors. Her nursing staff was drawn from many nations, including Germany. One of the major difficulties was formulating a suitable diet for people who had been almost starved to death.

Doherty's meticulous 'Community Letters', written to family and friends in the early morning or late at night, often by candlelight, record her experiences at Bergen-Belsen and her sometimes

critical observations of the nursing profession and military establishment.

Addressed to 'Dear Friends', her letters describe the horrors of the camp where, she wrote on 27 July 1945, there were 'some 25,000 living sick who were dying at the rate of 4% (about 1000) per day. In many huts the living were packed on the floors amongst the dead, oftentimes naked. Owing to illness & despair, corpses were often not moved from the bunks which were shared by the living ... Faeces were 6" deep on the floor of the huts ...'

Surrounded by illness, misery and suffering, Doherty also found moments of joy. Following liberation, Bergen-Belsen became a centre for Jewish and other displaced persons, and on 21 July 1945 Doherty attended a wedding between a young Polish displaced person and a British ambulance driver.

On 1 October she attended the Luneberg Trials of war criminals from Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz. Survivors from Bergen-Belsen gave evidence against the camp commander, Joseph Kramer, who was hanged in December 1945.

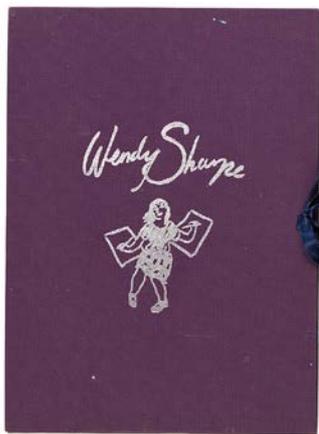
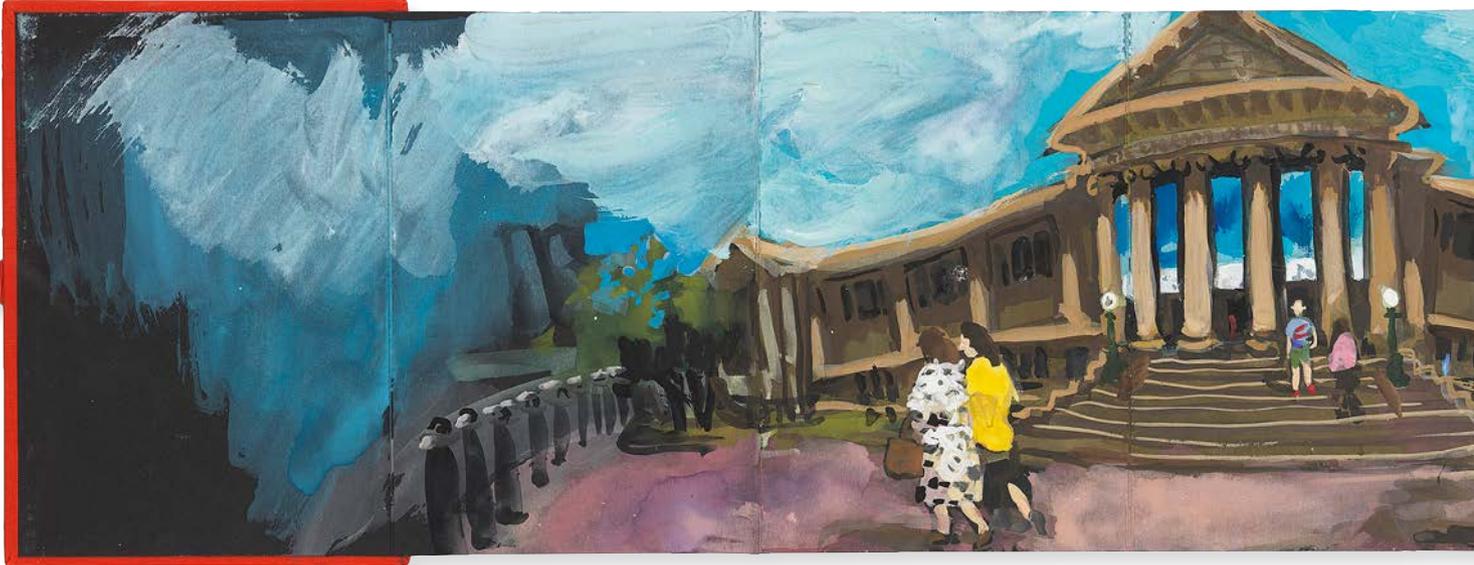
Doherty's letters offer a woman's perspective on the war and its aftermath and document a rarely discussed facet of Australian wartime involvement. They record the extraordinary suffering of the inmates and the plight of displaced persons tormented by the hopelessness of their situation, many unable or unwilling to return home.

Doherty remained at Bergen-Belsen for seven months and was awarded the Royal Red Cross Medal (1st Class) for her work at the camp. In 1946 she worked in nurse education in Poland before returning to Australia.

Muriel Knox Doherty died in 1988 at the age of 92. In 1960, she had donated copies of her wartime letters and diary to the Mitchell Library with instructions that they not be opened until 2000. These pages capture her insights into what she described as 'the then unknown, but greatest, yet most tragic experience of my life'.

**Louise Anemaat, Executive Director, Library & Information Services and Dixon Librarian**

**These letters have been digitised and can be read through the Library's catalogue.**

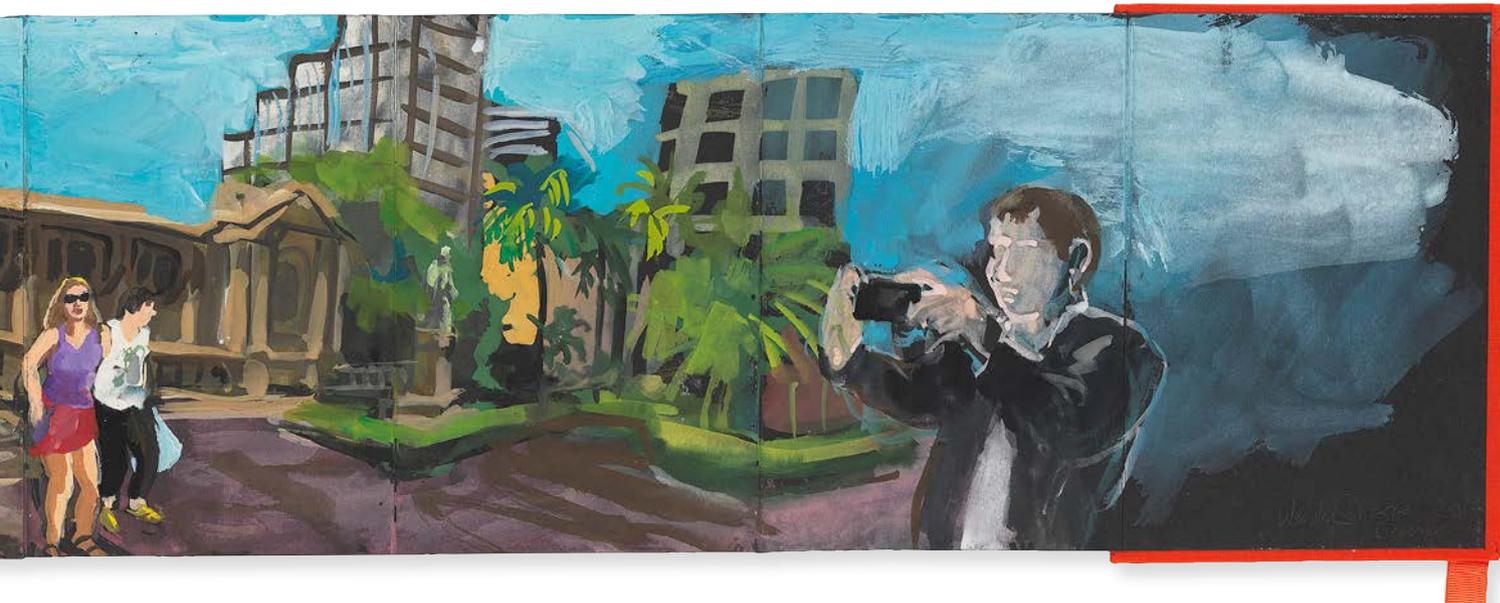


# WENDY SHARPE

*artist's books*



## DRAWING IN THE LIBRARY



Stunning artworks are the result of an award-winning artist's residency at the Library.

Leading contemporary Australian artist Wendy Sharpe completed a residency at the Library in 2018 as part of our Drawing in the Library program. During this time, she produced 13 unique artist's books, which were recently acquired and digitised by the Library.

Sharpe's 12-month residency coincided with the transformation of the Mitchell Building to create beautiful new galleries and a state-of-the-art learning centre. She documented the work going on behind the scenes, producing drawings and photographs that show interiors and exteriors of the historic building, and activities of readers, visitors and staff.

Sharpe developed this work in her studio to produce expressive charcoal and gouache drawings in a diverse set of artist's books, ranging in format from miniatures to Chinese scrolls, concertina volumes and handmade books. A selection of these intricate and highly crafted pieces was on display when the new exhibition spaces opened.

**Maria Savvidis, Curator, Research & Discovery**

**Wendy Sharpe's artist's books can be viewed through the Library's catalogue.**



TOP: Front of Library, 2017-18, by Wendy Sharpe, PXE 1738/7

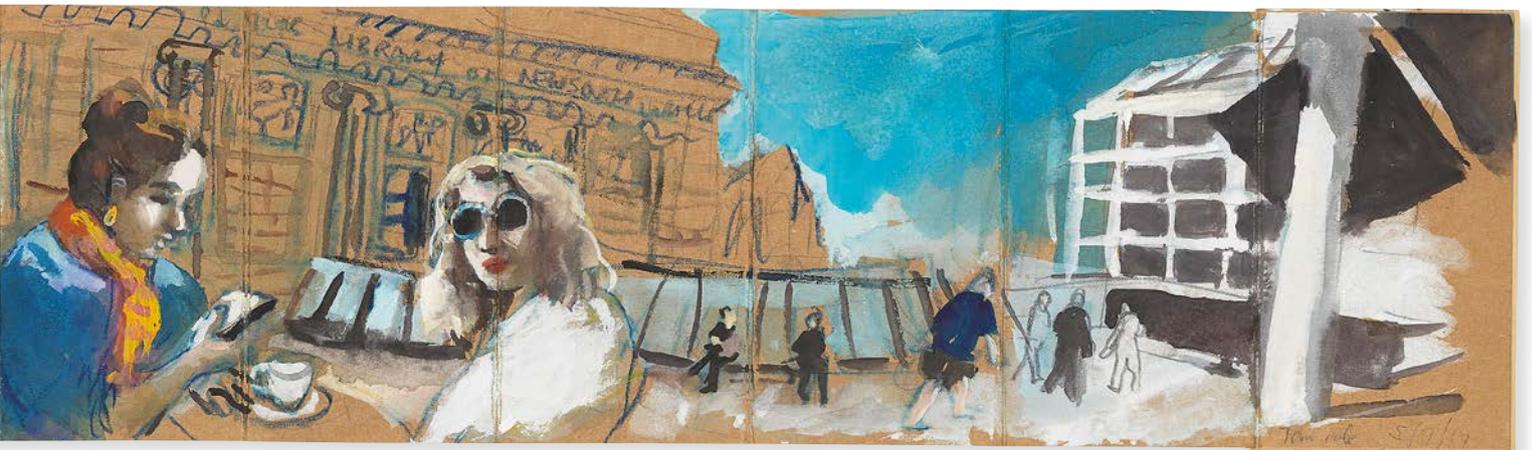
ABOVE: A Few Things from the Collection, 2017, by Wendy Sharpe, PXE 1738/9

WENDY SHARPE'S ARTIST'S BOOKS



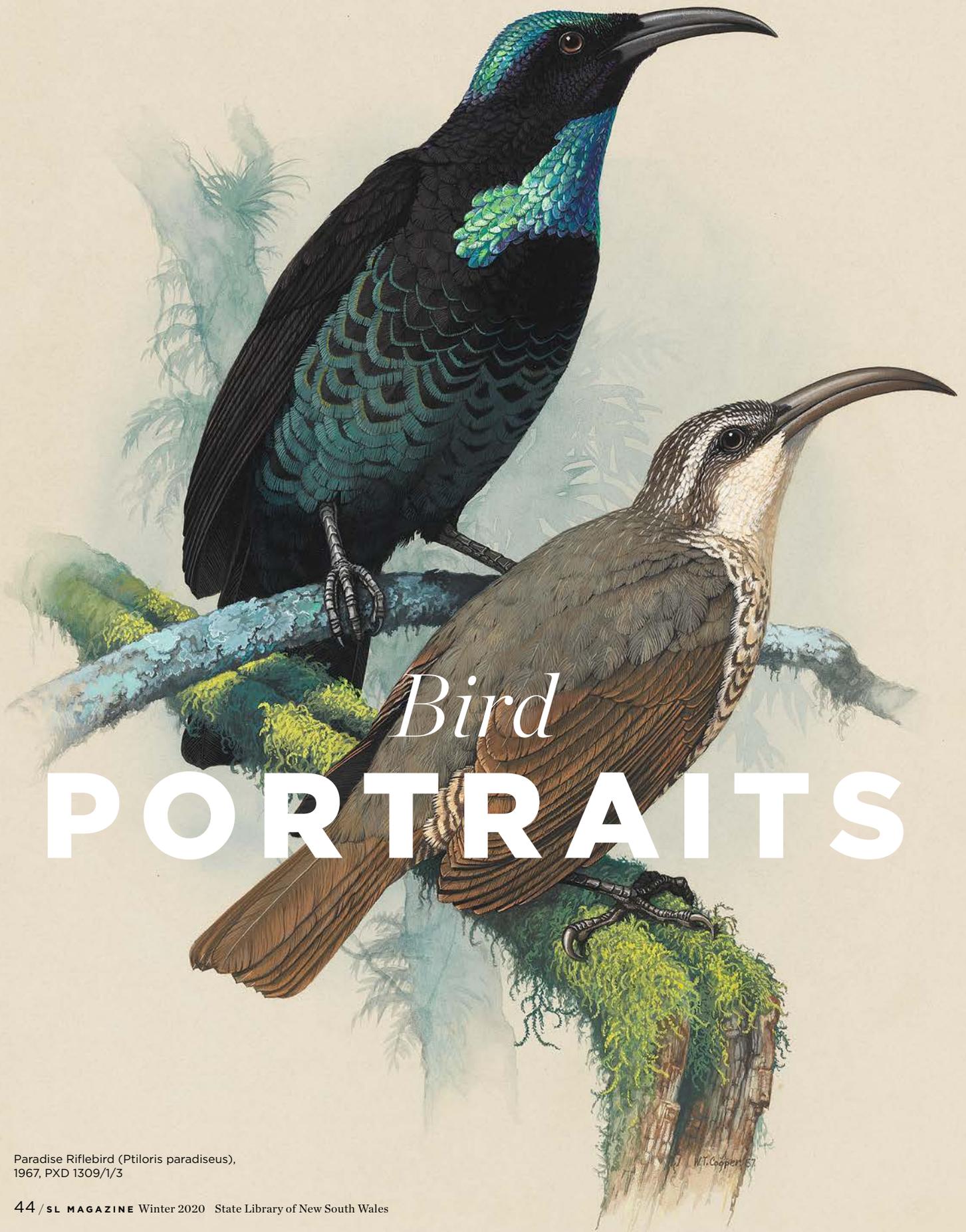
TOP: Gold Chinese Scroll (State Library),  
2017-18, by Wendy Sharpe, PXE 1738/2

# DRAWING IN THE LIBRARY



CENTRE: Trim Cafe, 2017,  
by Wendy Sharpe, PXE 1738/8

ABOVE: Back of the Library with Crane,  
2017-18, by Wendy Sharpe, PXE 1738/3

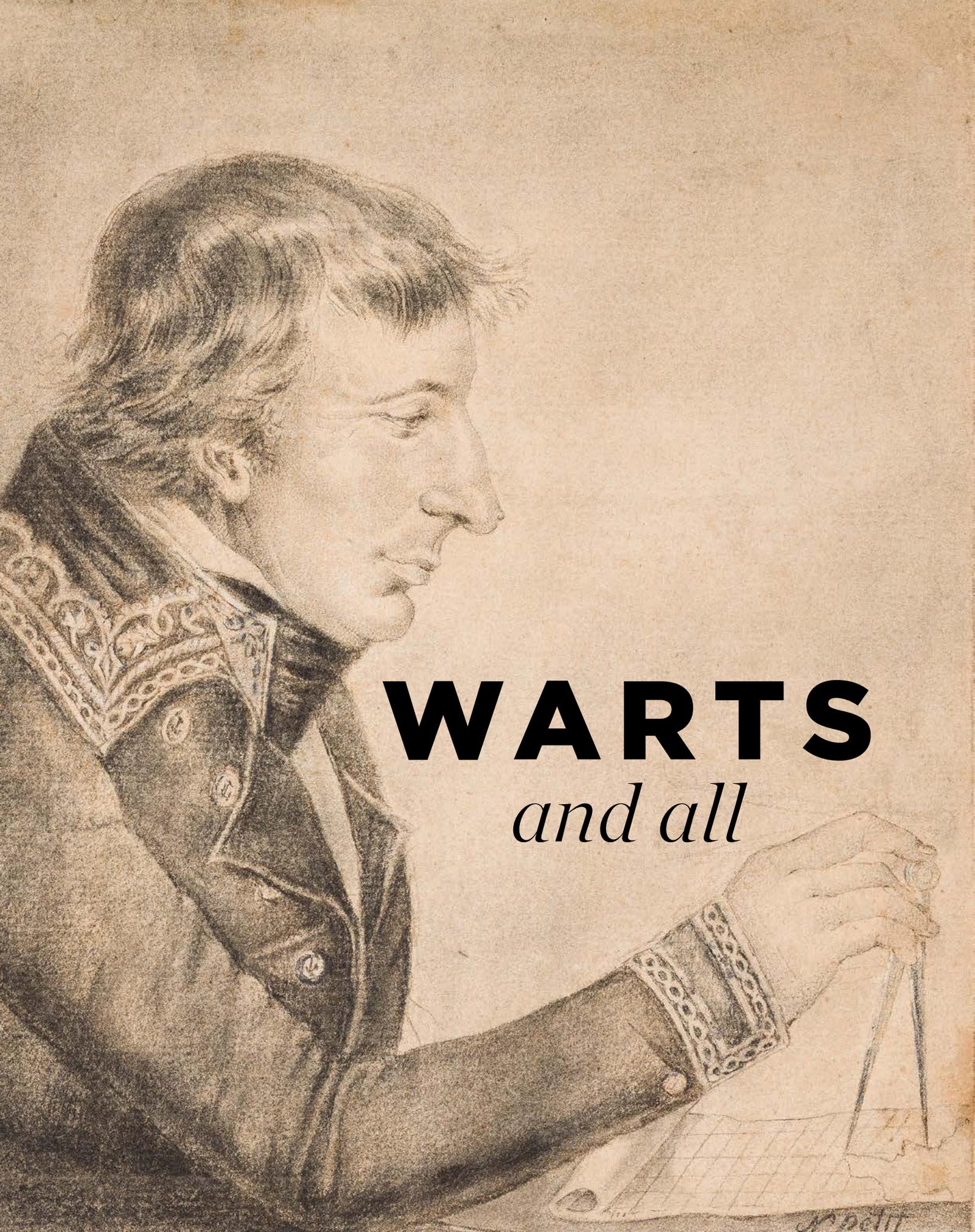


*Bird*  
**PORTRAITS**

Paradise Riflebird (*Ptiloris paradiseus*),  
1967, PXD 1309/1/3

W.T. Cooper '57





# **WARTS**

*and all*

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

### A sketch of French explorer Nicolas Baudin joins a long-held copy in the Library's collection.

More than half a century ago, in the 1960s, the owner of an intriguing pencil portrait contacted the Library to see if our staff could identify the subject. A librarian immediately recognised him as French explorer Nicolas Thomas Baudin, who led an expedition to the southern parts of the Eastern Hemisphere between 1800 and 1804. Many years later, the portrait has been acquired by the Library.

The sketch is almost identical to a portrait titled 'Commander Baudin 1802', attributed to naval officer Phillip Parker King, which has been in the Library's collection since 1933. All the physical features match – the flourish of Baudin's hair at the front of his head, his finger resting on the top of a pair of dividers, his eye downcast, and a wart or mole on the end of his nose.

The aim of Baudin's expedition was to complete a cartographic survey of the coast of Australia and conduct other scientific investigations. Two corvettes, the *Géographe* and *Naturaliste*, were equipped with the most experienced officers in the French Navy and the Institut de France selected some 23 scientists to take part. Among them was François Péron, a young medical botanist and anthropologist, and cartographer Louis de Freycinet, both of whom would contribute to the official account of the expedition.

The newly acquired sketch is signed 'N Petit'. The artist, Nicolas-Martin Petit, had avoided conscription into Napoleon's armies but, desiring adventure and travel nonetheless, had signed up with the Baudin expedition to the Antipodes.

The expedition charted the Western Australian coast before heading towards Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), then along the coastline between Wilsons Promontory and Nuyts Archipelago. On 8 April 1802, Baudin's ships encountered the rival British expedition led by Matthew Flinders at what became known as Encounter Bay in South Australia.

Sickness among the crew forced the expedition to spend a lengthy layover in Sydney between 20 June and 18 November 1802. Over these five months, Petit



produced sketches and portraits of Aboriginal people, two of which are in the Library's collection. Perhaps it was also then that he worked up a portrait of his captain in a contemplative mood.

After the stay in Sydney, Baudin took his fittest crew members back to Van Diemen's Land, across to Kangaroo Island, then up the western coast, surveying as they went. In August 1803, the depleted expedition reached Mauritius, where Baudin died from tuberculosis at the age of 48.

Petit returned to France in 1804, but before he was well enough to complete his expedition drawings he was injured in a street accident and died at the age of 28. His unfinished work was first published in 1807 in *Voyage de Découvertes aux Terres Australes*.

King's sketch of Baudin is a scaled down copy of Petit's work. The paper is watermarked 'Whatman 1810', so he may have made it before or after he returned to Sydney in September 1817, aged 26.

The Petit portrait is a welcome addition to the Library's extensive records of French exploration of the Pacific.

**Elise Edmonds, Senior Curator, Research & Discovery**

# The LIFE,

## And surprising Adventures of Blue-Eyed PATTY,

The Valiant Female Soldier.

Who was the Daughter of Mr. Samuel Freelove, an eminent Grazier, in Essex; but her Sweetheart being sent to serve in the Botanty Bay Rangers, she eloped from her Father's House, and dressing herself in Man's Apparel, entered into the same Regiment, and set sail with her Sweetheart, without discovering herself. At Rio de Janeiro she was assassinated by some Portuguese Runners, and narrowly escaped with Life; a dreadful Storm arose, and the Ship was near being lost; she fell overboard.

*Adventures of Blue-eyed*

**PATTY**

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

A small, ephemeral pamphlet is a superb addition to the Library's rare books collection.

At last year's Melbourne Rare Book Fair, the Library acquired a letterpress printed chapbook, produced in England in the late eighteenth century, titled *The Life, and Surprising Adventures of Blue-eyed Patty, the Valiant Female Soldier*.

John Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors* defines a chapbook as a 'small pamphlet of popular, sensational, juvenile, moral or educational character, originally distributed by chapmen or hawkers'. These booklets circulated in their millions in England between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Long regarded as cheap street literature, poorly made and ephemeral, nowadays chapbooks have become highly desirable items in the rare book trade.

The eight pages of *Blue-eyed Patty* narrate the fictional journey from England to Australia of a young woman named Patty who dressed as a soldier to accompany her lover to New South Wales. The story includes some factual details of life in the colony of Port Jackson in the 1790s, including news of the spearing of Governor Phillip, the shortage of food and other provisions, and the execution of 13 convicts for mutiny.

Of the three woodcut illustrations, one depicts an English village, and two others feature sailing ships. On the final pages a ballad, 'A New Song – Tune the Hardy Tar', retells Patty's tale in verse.

The Library's copy is unique (four copies exist of another edition) – it comes from an edition unrecorded elsewhere of which no example is listed in the *English Short Title Catalogue* (the definitive union catalogue of works published between 1473 and 1800, mainly in Britain and North America). The Library gratefully acknowledges Deborah J Leslie of the Folger Shakespeare Library who helped with cataloguing and adding the Library's holdings to that database.



*The Life, and Surprising Adventures of Blue-eyed Patty, the Valiant Female Soldier* is a superb addition to the Library's holdings of pre-1850 English chapbooks, most of which came from the collections of David Scott Mitchell and Sir William Dixon.

**Nicholas Sparks, Librarian, Collection Strategy & Development**

**The digitised chapbook can be viewed through the Library's website.**

Images from *The Life, and Surprising Adventures of Blue-eyed Patty, the Valiant Female Soldier*, MRB/303, courtesy Douglas Stewart Fine Books Pty Ltd



# AUSTRALIAN

*sport collections*



# BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

A Foundation donor's generosity and passion have helped open up the Library's sport collections to everyone.

Sport is part of the fabric of life for all Australians, therefore providing improved access to the Library's rich sports holdings is a project of great merit *and* will help point the way for broader efforts across the many thematic collections held by the Mitchell Library.

David Anstice AO, Foundation donor

The Library's enormous sporting collections are of great interest to researchers, collectors and sport historians. But for a long time much of this material has been set aside in boxes waiting to be catalogued, placed in archival enclosures, and scheduled for preservation treatment and digitisation.

Dealing with this backlog of collection items is one of the ways the Foundation can support the Library. Last year, we were lucky to find a special donor whose personal passions align with this important work.

Mr David Anstice, a longstanding patron of the Library, is an avid collector of sports memorabilia, with a focus on cricket. Thanks to Mr Anstice, the Foundation was able to fund a special project to catalogue the sport collection.

A particular strength of the Library's sport collection is material tracing the history of cricket – from the colonial era, via the famous bodyline series of 1932–33, to more recent times. Significant moments in cricket highlight the game's influence on shaping the social fabric of Australia.

Over six months Specialist Librarian Ann Peck dedicated her time to identifying, arranging and cataloguing the material, eventually sorting more than 20 different collections housed in 179 boxes (taking up 33 metres of shelf space!).

Ann uncovered more than 1000 photographic negatives, 79 digital photographs, 6 architectural drawings, and hundreds of badges, pins and other objects. She was surprised by the diversity of records of sporting organisations, papers of sportspeople, and personal scrapbook collections of sports enthusiasts among the boxes. The largest of these collections

was the Sydney AFL records, 1885–2006 – 77 boxes documenting 120 years of Australian Rules football in NSW.

One of the more personal finds was a collection of scrapbooks belonging to Robert L Wallace. From 1924, when he was 12, to 1938, Mr Wallace kept scrapbooks of press clippings relating to Australian cricket, including international tours and Test matches, the Sheffield Shield and local competitions. As time passed, he became more inventive in his choice of scrapbooks, filling exercise books, account books and eventually resorting to telephone directories to document the sport.

Another unusual item Ann discovered is a framed montage commemorating English pilot Amy Johnson's 1930 solo flight from England to Australia – the first by a woman – and her visit to the NSW Sports Club. It includes two photographs of the visit, a print by artist Noel Cook and a letter of thanks from Johnson – all in an arched maple frame that looks as though it had a previous life supporting a dressing table mirror.

The research guide that will be developed as part of the Foundation funded project will make it easier for researchers, writers and curators to quickly identify items of interest. It will also help to engage sporting groups and associations that may contribute to the Library's sports collections in the future.

The Foundation is grateful to donors like Mr Anstice for their commitment to the work of the Library. Like-minded donors are also following their passion to support the music collection. We hope to continue aligning our donors' passions with the Library's collections, making more material accessible to our readers.

**Sarah Miller, Partnerships Manager,  
State Library of NSW Foundation**

**If you are interested in supporting the Library's collection projects, please call the Foundation on (02) 9273 1529 or email [foundation@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:foundation@sl.nsw.gov.au)**

OPPOSITE TOP: Amy Johnson, Miss Veronica Mary Murphy (Centre) and friend, before Captain SL Tyler took Miss Murphy for a joyflight over Sydney in his Curtiss biplane, 1927, P1/2037

OPPOSITE BELOW: England takes the field, 1932, Sam Hood, SPG/59

# NSW AT HOME

These images were posted on Instagram during the Covid-19 lockdown with #NSWAtHome



/01



/02



/03



/04



/05



/06



/07



/08

- 01 I-sewing in the garden  
@shecalledme\_lizabet
- 02 Kids at home @bec.carey\_
- 03 'My colleagues are killing me ... I am about to learn how many times you can play the whole *Mary Poppins Returns* soundtrack in a day.'  
@chesterrific\_me
- 04 'Rocking my new @hackthemainframepunk t-shirt as I work from home on @ausmusicshirtday!', Librarian Andy Carr @andygreenpoint
- 05 'I was missing using my hands. Following a recent bookbinding course (and the lockdown), I decided to build my own sewing frame and book press at home.' Conservator Kiki @statelibrarynsw
- 06 'What we read last week: John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* for him, Thomas Moore's *Utopia* for me. One's set in the Great Depression, the other's set in a fictional nowhere. What do they betray about the state of our minds, I wonder?'  
@thegoldencarrot
- 07 Love in the time of Covid-19  
@gemcw
- 08 '... meet Josie and Jean Pierre, an older French couple who are surprisingly untroubled by this very troubling pandemic.' Louise Hawson @52suburbs



/09



/10



/11



/12



/13



/14

09 'One piece at a time', City Historian and Friend of the Library Lisa Murray, photo [@whistling1](#)

10 Art and design work from home [@missydepsey](#)

11 'Art studio in full swing today. The creative angst is real.' [@netrachetty](#)

12 'Bin night in Stanmore. Choose Life and stay home. Deb in her wedding dress for the first time after almost 40 years! Impressive!' [@tony.silvertonestudio](#)

13 Anzac Day. Taken at 6 am in Parsley Road, Vacluse, of the Paykel family, Adene Paykel [@adene\\_cassidy](#)

14 Learning to cut hair, Graphic Designer Rosie Handley [@rosiehandley](#)

To our **FRIENDS**



## Friends of the Library

Thank you to our Friends for continuing to support the Library.

You may be wondering about the status of your Friends of the Library membership in the current Covid-19 shutdown. When the Library reopens, your membership will automatically be extended to cover the period of our closure — once we know how long that is. You will be notified of your new expiry date by email (or by post if you don't have email).

**If you have any questions about your membership during this period, please don't hesitate to contact Helena Poropat, Memberships Coordinator, at [friends@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:friends@sl.nsw.gov.au)**



# ‘Q&A

Tara June Winch



Novelist Tara June Winch is the winner of the 2020 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards’ Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, People’s Choice Award, and Book of the Year for *The Yield*.

—  
**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO WIN THE CHRISTINA STEAD PRIZE?**

Of course, it’s an honour above all, and in some small way I can say, ‘It was worth the time it took.’ But every other response is to the symbols — the symbol of time gifted, the symbol of fellowship in the writing community, even the symbol that Christina Stead passed away the year I was born, that she was an expat, a novelist *and* short story writer — it makes me think of her life deeply.

—  
**WAS THERE SOMETHING IN YOUR CHILDHOOD THAT SOWED THE SEED FOR YOU TO BECOME A NOVELIST?**

I don’t really know! That I wanted the attention of my older siblings, that I’d tell them long tales, that my parents were both talkers ... My mother worked in a supermarket and pubs, my father would go away to work fruit-picking when I was very little and came

back with great stories, later he was a taxi driver. I think my parents both brought characters home and brought me into the fabric of those interesting worlds. Also, First Nation writers just know how to tell a yarn, it’s a birthright.

—  
**HOW DOES LIVING IN FRANCE HELP OR HINDER YOU IN WRITING ABOUT AUSTRALIA?**

I think what happens is that everything that makes it onto the page was burnt in me in some way, it was very important. I couldn’t walk outside and be distracted because there is none of my country in France. I had to remember.

—  
**WAS YOUR PROCESS OF WRITING *THE YIELD* DIFFERENT FROM YOUR PREVIOUS BOOKS (*THE NOVEL SWALLOW THE AIR* AND *STORY COLLECTION AFTER THE CARNAGE*)?**

No different — all sleepless and painful and damaging to the body.

—  
**HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND FICTION IN YOUR WRITING?**

They dance with each other, they complement each other, they speak when there is no understudy to say the thing and then they are silent when the story must move forward, when the novel is for the reader. I wanted to tell the story of a historical artefact — language — that is still alive and beating with a pulse! The decade it took to write *The Yield* was mostly consumed with how to really convince the reader that the land they live on is speaking if they would only listen. I needed to convince the reader to love their history, which is ultimately a black history.

—  
**WHO INSPIRES YOU?**

The usual — family, other writers, artists. But really the person who truly inspires is the writer themselves at a younger age, when they were hopeful and naïve and wanted to say the thing they thought only belonged to themselves. I think I’ll write all my life to try to say that essential and impossible thing.

—  
**WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT?**

A book set here in Europe because this continent has become a part of me also. The novel is about eternal love, class, the ‘meaning’ of one’s life, set in a remote part of the Swiss Alps. It’s a thriller. Afterward, I will write about Australia again, always.

*The Yield* is available online through the Library Shop.



Photo by Tyler Freeman Smith

# The diary files

Add your entry to our new community-sharing website The Diary Files and your response to the pandemic will become part of the Library's collection, alongside this poem by Sydney writer and actor Michelle Law.

[dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/diary-files](https://dxlab.sl.nsw.gov.au/diary-files)

27TH APRIL

Michelle Law  
Dulwich Hill, Sydney, NSW

This is not aloneness

I could bear this pandemic better if  
Right before it struck my sister wasn't  
Eight months pregnant.  
I'd bear it better if my heart  
Hadn't just been broken.  
I'd bear it better if I'd invested in  
A fridge with more freezer space.  
I have no fear of aloneness.  
I've spent much of my life in emotional solitude:  
A childhood alone with a depressed mother;  
School holidays alone suffering from chronic illness;  
Travelling abroad alone to develop skills  
As a writer who works alone.  
Now, I don't need to hold my family and friends, but  
My heart needs to hold the same space as them,  
To breathe the same air.  
And when it comes to love  
I'm not the platonic sort.  
I need to touch and be touched, to rest my head on  
Their chest and hear them breathing.  
Projects are falling to pieces but  
I trust there will be others.  
There is no shortage of ideas,  
But it's the feeling of being unmoored -  
The chance that the ideas  
Will never see the light of day.  
When people online talk about productivity,  
I am being productive!  
I am cooking and cleaning and sleeping  
And that is part of the work too.  
The loss of routine means that days are  
Defined by moments, like  
Fetching toilet paper from my brother's house;  
FaceTiming my newborn nephew, still pink;  
Crying as I walk around the apartment  
Thinking of men inflicting hurt -  
The ones I've slept with, and the ones telling us  
To inject ourselves with bleach.  
Thank God for my cat and the new Fiona Apple album.

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