

[A montage of objects, photographs and letters showcasing the library's collection.]

[Lost & Found - Australia's hidden treasures]

[Views of the State Library facade, and of a shadowy wooden chest.]

[WARREN BROWN]

0:20 – 0:41 Deep in the high-security section of the State Library of New South Wales lives a chest with an extraordinary story. If it could talk, it would tell us a magical tale worthy of Pandora. And it all starts with a spooky Scottish castle.

[Old photograph of an elaborate stately home. The same building is shown in the present day.]

[WARREN BROWN]

0:46 – 0:57 In 1986, Alan Davies was studying in the UK when he received a tip-off about a chest of possible significance to Australia sitting idle in Strathallan Castle.

[Alan Davies, Curator of Photographs, speaks to Warren Brown at a table covered with papers and photos.]

[ALAN DAVIES]

0:58 – 1:06 I'm yelling out for somebody to come down and basically you could have expected some guy to come out... It was...it was a very surreal experience, I have to say.

[WARREN BROWN]

1:07 – 1:08 Where was it?

[ALAN DAVIES]

1:08 – 1:13 It was in a room quite towards the rear of the castle. This junk room.

[WARREN BROWN]

1:14 A junk room?

[ALAN DAVIES]

1:14 – 1:15 Absolutely a junk room...

[WARREN BROWN]

1:15 Right.

[ALAN DAVIES]

1:15 – 1:19 ...just piled to the ceiling with 19th-century mahogany furniture.

[Old photograph of an elaborately furnished room.]

[WARREN BROWN]

1:19 – 1:24 Did you realise that it was something particularly valuable for Australia's history?

[ALAN DAVIES]

1:24 – 1:28 Oh, absolutely. This was very early. This was early 19th-century.

[Illustrations of early colonial Sydney.]

[WARREN BROWN]

1:32 – 1:39 Back in 1818, New South Wales was little more than a jail without bars for Britain's overflowing criminal population.

[Illustration of a man being whipped bloody by two men while a crowd looks on.]

[WARREN BROWN]

1:41 – 1:57 It was renowned for its brutality. But amid the pain and despair, something unexpected happened. In Newcastle, a banknote forger and two convict cabinetmakers began work on a secret project.

[Re-enactment of a convict planing wood, and painting with a crude brush made from a twist of rope.]

[WARREN BROWN]

2:01 – 2:07 With the most rudimentary equipment and materials, they created an exquisite cabinet.

[Portrait of Governor Macquarie.]

[WARREN BROWN]

2:08 – 2:12 It was presented to Governor Macquarie as a way to win his favour.

[Warren prepares to open the chest.]

[WARREN BROWN]

2:15 – 2:37 And here it is. I cannot wait to show you this. Now, at first, you might think, "What's all the fuss about?" Looks like a fairly unassuming travelling chest, the sort of thing military commanders in the early 19th century might drag around on campaigns. And that's what it is - a piece of campaign furniture. But when you open it up, this box takes on a life of its own.

[The chest is shown being progressively unpacked. Internal compartments are opened to reveal collections of fauna and flora, as well as handpainted scenes of nature.]

[WARREN BROWN]

2:45 – 3:02 The chest is a museum in miniature that has perfectly preserved the natural world of colonial times. It's filled with birds so vibrant, you'd swear they were put there yesterday, as well as displays of shells and seaweed and, of course, insects.

[Trays of insects and shells laid out in geometric patterns.]

[WARREN BROWN]

3:03 – 3:37 Have a look at this. We have butterflies and moths and a dragonfly and a Christmas beetle, and there's even a huntsman spider here, who looks like he's been freshly knocked down from your laundry ceiling. I bet this big Aussie spider gave a few Scots the heebie-jeebies when he got there. So, how on earth did such a unique national treasure end up abandoned in a Scottish castle? Well, in 1822, Governor Macquarie returned home to the Isle of Mull in Scotland.

[Views of the Isle of Mull, including a cow grazing near a deserted shore.]

[WARREN BROWN]

3:39 – 4:10 When he died, all his worldly possessions passed to his only son, Lachlan Jr, a gambler and a drunk, who squandered the lot. To pay off his debts, the entire Macquarie

family fortune, including the chest, was then given to the Drummond family of Strathallan Castle, which was later sold to Englishman Sir William Roberts. And there it lay for over 150 years until it was discovered by Alan Davies.

[Alan shows Warren his photographs of opening the chest for the first time.]

[ALAN DAVIES]

4:11 – 4:28 I sort of dragged it across to the window to try and get a bit more light on it. And then, as I started to open it up, it just got more and more complex. And I realised, if I'm to document this thing, I have to do it piece by piece. At the same time, I think, "Oh, I don't have enough film. This is extraordinary."

[WARREN BROWN]

4:30 – 4:36 So, do you think Sir William Roberts had any idea what this was, this bizarre piece of furniture?

[ALAN DAVIES]

4:36 – 4:41 No, not at all. Not at all. I mean, to him it was just some colonial piece of furniture that he used to jump on and off as a kid.

[WARREN BROWN]

4:42 – 4:43 He jumped on and off it as a kid?

[ALAN DAVIES]

4:44 – 4:47 Absolutely. And he's the reason it's got a crack across the top of it.

[View of the damaged top of the chest.]

[ALAN DAVIES]

4:47 – 4:48 He apologised to me for that.

[WARREN BROWN]

4:49 Is that right?

[ALAN DAVIES]

4:49 – 4:52 Absolutely bizarre, isn't it, when you consider how much it's worth today.

[Close-ups of a tray of butterflies and a drawer of brightly coloured birds.]

[WARREN BROWN]

4:58 – 5:18 The German word for these cabinets is 'Wunderkammer', 'cabinets of wonder', and I think that describes the Macquarie Collectors' Chest brilliantly. But it's not just the contents that are wondrous. It's the fact that this work of art was born out of such despair and brutality.

[State Library, New South Wales.]

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