

NEWSLETTER

To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful — Ursula LeGuin



SUPPORTING THE PARRAMATTA MEMORY PROJECT

It was an Industrial School for Females, a Girls Training School or Girls Home in Parramatta. It was in operation under one of these names from 1887 to 1974. In 1972, *Mejane*, a Women's Liberation newspaper, published personal accounts and testimonies of girls held in Parramatta and other girls' homes in NSW. It was the culmination of struggle by penal reformer and feminist, Bessie Guthrie, to expose the brutal, humiliating and indefensible incarceration of girls in Child Welfare Department institutions. She had gathered these accounts over many years of providing refuge to runaways.

The campaign waged by Sydney Women's Liberation led to a massive protest rally on 9 December 1973 outside Parramatta Girls Home. The demand was an end to the many oppressive features of state welfare institutions which 'threaten the lives of the underprivileged'. Most significantly, 'those of Aboriginals who are deprived by a system totally lacking in any consideration for their traditions and culture' (from a Women's Liberation leaflet advertising the rally).

Thirty years later in 2003, the Parramatta Girls gathered in a series of reunions after an advertisement in the *Koori Mail*. An ABC Stateline episode in May 2004 visited the Hay Girls Institution, one of 23 across the state in the early 70s. Hay took in the most 'uncontrollable' from Parramatta and was notorious for its inhumane regime of mindless discipline, mental and physical cruelty and abuse. A moving reunion at Hay on International Women's Day 2007 was commemorated with a display in the IWD Centenary Exhibition curated by the Library in 2011.

The reunions and media coverage resulted in a collection of personal accounts and the creation of a Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Association advocating on behalf of Parramatta Girls. In March 2007, the Wesley Enoch production of the play by Alana Valentine *Parramatta Girls* opened at Sydney's Belvoir Theatre to enthusiastic reviews. The Precinct Association received a boost from this dramatisation of a sad period in NSW history. The institutions located in the Precinct over the years included the Parramatta Female Factory from 1821 to 1847 which was reassigned from 1847 as the Lunatic and Invalid Asylum (where these days the Cumberland Hospital is located), the Roman Catholic

Orphan School 1844 - 1886, the Parramatta Girls Home and the Norma Parker Detention Centre, a women's prison which closed in 2008.

The Association's work, now formalised as the Memory Project, addresses the continuous institutional care of women and children at the Precinct since 1821. The project brings together artists, academics, social historians, traditional owners and former occupants to



Bonney Djuric in front of the Bethel Building, former admissions section of Parramatta Girls Home

document, interpret, preserve and promote the Precinct. Its aim is to raise awareness of the institutionalisation of women and children and to develop a creative and cultural hub and heritage tourist destination in western Sydney. The overall aim is to revitalise the entire site as a women's place. The support of UrbanGrowth NSW and other agencies of government has been enlisted to this end. The Australia Council and Arts NSW have funded artistic components.

Bonney Djuric, a survivor of abuse at the Parramatta Girls Home, has played a central role in compiling the record and gaining recognition for what have come to be known as the Forgotten Australians. With many former Parramatta Girls, Bonney has embarked on a lifetime project to document the history and preserve the heritage so that lessons from the years of abuse are understood by future generations. Our current treatment of asylum seekers generally, but particularly of women and children, indicates that some decision and policy makers have learnt very little.

The Library hosted a Lunch Hour Talk in 2008 (*Newsletter* July/August 2008) and supported the launch of the Memory Project. Then in 2014 Bonney approached the Library asking that it consider having a presence in the Precinct and, as a precursor, curate a poster exhibition from our extensive and unique collection. The Board has endorsed such involvement in principle and the Library will be identified among the many organisations supporting the Precinct.

Our Library holds a wealth of material on the early campaigns for reform of the child welfare system with which Sydney Women's Liberation was involved. It holds all numbers of the SWL newsletter and all issues of *Mejane*, *Mabel* and *Rouge*, newspapers of the Australian women's movement. Our involvement with the Precinct Project will

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**Bonney Djuric is to present the Library's
Lunch Hour Talk on 18 June**

Membership Renewal

Membership is by calendar year – see page 7. Thank you to those who have already resubscribed for 2015

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Jessie Street National Women’s Library

Australia’s National Women’s Library is a specialist library, its focus being the collection and preservation of the literary and cultural heritage of women from all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

Aims

- To heighten awareness of women’s issues
- To preserve records of women’s lives and activities
- To support the field of women’s history
- To highlight women’s contribution to this country’s development

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Katharine Stevenson, Graphic Designer



One of our most popular posts on Facebook (with 540 hits) was published in January about Dorothy Wall, author and illustrator of the children’s books about the adventures of Blinky Bill, a koala. In 1985, Australia Post issued a commemorative stamp honouring the author and her character, Blinky Bill.

Parramatta Memory Project

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deepen our relationship with this important movement for memorialising an era. The Library will embrace the opportunities the Precinct offers for promoting the Library’s important role in preserving women’s history and explore fully the possibility of a presence in western Sydney, a culturally and linguistically diverse region. We have a very important role to play for the future as libraries change and collections become more specialised. Building partnerships and new relationships is critical to maintaining our relevance and reach.

Jozefa Sobski

Annual General Meeting 2015

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 11 April at 10.30am in Littlebridge Hall (near the Library) in the Ultimo Community Centre, corner of Harris St and William Henry St Ultimo, Sydney.

This is your opportunity to visit the Library, meet the Board and other members and join us for morning tea.

Nominations are called for the following positions: Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and no fewer than five and no more than nine ordinary members of the Board. Nominations close on Friday 13 March. Please consider nominating for the Board yourself or suggesting it to a friend. Nomination forms are available from the Library.

Board meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at 12.30pm at the Ultimo Community Centre.

Dorothy Hoddinott honoured

Congratulations to the Library’s inspiring Annual Luncheon speaker in 2014. Dorothy Hoddinott AO has won the 2014 Human Rights Medal in recognition of her lifelong passion for and commitment to education, particularly for disadvantaged and refugee students.

Principal of Holroyd High School in western Sydney, Dorothy received this prestigious award at a ceremony hosted by the Australian Human Rights Commission to mark International Human Rights Day on 10 December 2014.

Donation of Mary Ryan papers

Mary Ryan was born in 1886 in Timaru, New Zealand. She worked as a nursemaid and a domestic servant before training as a nurse in Wellington. After securing a passage to Sydney as a nurse-companion she took up a position as sister-in-charge at Portland Hospital NSW.

In 1921 she married Michael Ryan who had been disabled as a result of his work at the Portland cement mill. Mary continued to work at the hospital when she could and was both well-known locally and well-informed about the social problems of the community. Because they were both active in the local Labor Party, Mary serving as secretary then president of their local branch, they became well known to Ben Chifley who was their local member, later to become prime minister. Chifley thought highly of Mary’s work on behalf of women and children and for education, housing, employment and community facilities. In 1943 Chifley appointed Mary Ryan to the Commonwealth Housing Commission. She came to know others working for similar goals through the ALP, including Jessie Street.

The diaries Mary kept during those busy years form the centrepiece of the collection of her papers recently donated to the Library by her son John, one of the foundation members of staff in History at Sydney’s Macquarie University, now retired. Mary Ryan died in 1968.

Beverley Kingston

Women united: Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand



In Paris in the bustling rue Nationale close to the recently opened Olympiades metro station stands the Bibliothèque Marguerite

Durand. Not knowing what to expect, I found that within this modern building the library occupies two floors, including a generous workstation area for research.

It was founded by its namesake, Marguerite Durand (1864–1936), an actress, comedienne, journalist and suffragette who made it her life's work to fight for the emancipation of women. Marguerite launched her daily newspaper, *La Fronde* (The Slingshot) in 1897 in which she wrote and edited current thinking on women's emancipation and delved into political and literary issues of the time. *La Fronde* is said to be the first of its kind to be written, designed and produced exclusively by women. However, we in Australia know that Louisa Lawson's journal, *The Dawn*, was first published in Sydney

in 1888, using a similar all-female production team. Both these journals ceased publication in the same year, 1905, though *La Fronde* of course would have had a much larger circulation – some 50,000, peaking briefly at 200,000.

The Marguerite Durand library opened in 1931 centrally near the Pantheon, funded by the City of Paris and holding all Marguerite's original writings and archival materials. During the war some items were removed for safeguarding at the time of Nazi occupation. The library was revived in the 1970s when feminism was spreading worldwide and in 1989 opened in its present location.



Documentation of the French suffragette movement is among the library's 50,000 works on feminists and feminism from the 17th century to the present day. The library holds early writings on equality for women such as Olympe de Gouges' text, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791). Its collection includes the writings of the colourful and influential Madame de Stael, famous for her salons, and of the prolific and controversial novelist Colette.

Director Annie Metz proudly showed me around the library, despite my not having made an appointment. Our own Library's Newsletter was displayed on a shelf amongst a select number of periodicals, which form a small part of the library's large collection of over 1,000 periodical titles since the 18th century. Also in the collection are numerous photographs, posters, manuscripts and letters. This substantial collection of feminist thought is indeed a valuable historical resource worthy of preservation.

Kris Clarke



Left: Marguerite Durand
Below: Kris Clarke with Annie Metz,
Director of the Bibliothèque
Above right: Our Newsletter on the
shelves of the Bibliothèque



LUNCH HOUR TALKS – third Thursday of the month

19 Feb: Dr Meredith Burgmann
ASIO: how do we know we're safe?

**changed venue*

Meredith, former political activist and feminist, questions the need for a secret intelligence service. She examines whether ASIO really fulfills its stated mission to monitor 'subversion', using 1960s and 70s ASIO files on political activists and her *Dirty Secrets Our ASIO files* (2014).

19 Mar: Dr Nicole Teffer
Ladies of the tearooms

Nicole, curator of social and art history, will explore links between food, architecture and social change, focusing on refined tearooms in late 19th century Sydney, especially those of Chinese entrepreneur Quong Tart. We will meet 'ladies who lunched', suffragettes and the waitresses who served them.

16 Apr: Michelle Cavanagh
The changing face of peace activism

Michelle, biographer of peace activist Margaret Holmes, will look at the passionate work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from 1959 onwards. How has peace activism changed in our Facebook era? Were 1960s women better publicists?

21 May: Yvonne Louis
Belongings and belonging

Yvonne migrated from Amsterdam to Australia aged seven in the 1950s. A *Brush with Mondrian – uncovering secrets of art and family* (2010) tells how Dutch paintings brought to Sydney by her family later reconnected her with half-siblings, fuelling her appreciation of Amsterdam's art and culture.

**19 Feb 2015 LHT venue is the Treasury Room, entry via Town Hall main entrance in George St*

Venue/Time: 12.00-1.30pm. Southern Function Room, 4th Floor, Town Hall House, 456 Kent St Sydney.

Cost: \$16 (members) \$22 (non-members) including light lunch. Pay at the door. Book by noon Monday before the talk. Ph (02) 9571 5359

SYDNEY COLONIAL WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Described by Vice-Chair Michele Ginswick as a 'busy researcher' at the Australian Catholic and Western Sydney universities, Catherine Bishop introduced us to entrepreneurial women in Sydney in the 19th century. Michele announced that Catherine came with 'celebrity status', having been interviewed that morning on ABC radio. Catherine hastened to add that to date, this comprised just one 6.20am interview for which she was grateful and that she was 'most willing to share her celebrity status with Jessie Street Library'.

Catherine identified three periods in 19th century colonial Sydney:

1789–1830 A Convict Colony: Legally, convict men had no property rights, could not get land grants or hold pub licenses but their wives could, and women as business proprietors were not unusual.

1830–1870 A Settler Society: With the end of convict transportation, the influx of women immigrants as domestic servants and the coming of responsible government in the 1850s, Sydney was becoming 'respectable', which apparently required that women now accept that their place was 'in the home'. Women had no political rights and limited access to educational and vocational training. Married women could not own property. When Catherine commenced her research she thought she would find that women were in business one minute and at home the next. Her research uncovered a very different story.

After 1870: After 1876 married women gained property rights and education and occupational opportunities increased.

Catherine's graphic powerpoint slide presentation provided visual depth – how women, typically and too often, are hidden from history despite being a visible part of mid-19th century Sydney and other towns. A photo shows a woman and three young girls standing in front of a dressmaker's shop in Hill End NSW. But nowhere are the dressmaker or the girls identified. Records show a man, a barber Mr Myer, eventually occupied the building and a Chinese male trader owned the shop next door. This



is typical of how businesswomen have been forgotten or only identified in relation to men. The exception is Mary Reibey, whose fame is not because she was female but because she succeeded in making a lot of money, which was as unusual then for men as it was for women. Could this be why she features on our \$20

banknote? The majority of small businesswomen were running enterprises which were not vastly profitable and hence have been forgotten.

We remember 19th century Australia as a man's country. Catherine's slides of memorials to the period show men as pioneers blazing the national trail through work, their women sitting by as faithful helpmates and mothers. Even Sydney's Jessie Street Gardens monument celebrates motherhood, when in fact women's roles extended well beyond that.

To uncover businesswomen's stories meant looking beyond the usual sources of census data and diaries. Census records list women as wives and mothers, making no mention of their myriad roles as laundresses, midwives, boarding-house keepers, teachers. Catherine anticipated women's diaries would be a valuable source but found that these were kept mainly by upper class women, who barely mentioned working women.

Shipping records identified women as domestic servants, but sometimes women misrepresented themselves to get a free passage. Through Trove (Australian newspapers on line) Catherine found stories providing evidence that many of these women rapidly transitioned from domestic servants to businesswomen. Their industries included needlework, millinery, food, retail, property and inherited businesses; and they were also active in theatre and the arts.

Women were strongly represented at Sydney Markets, where they organised petitions to the City of Sydney mostly about men behaving badly, thus positioning themselves as 'respectable' although it was said that no respectable woman would frequent the markets. Family histories fleshed out individual biographies revealing marriages, children, business, church and charitable activities. For example, Hannah Wiley ran a basket-making business with her husband David while raising their four children; she also found time to help organise a church fete – clearly, running a business did not preclude being respectable.

Bank accounts and insolvency records held evidence of women's entrepreneurial activities, although it appeared that men were more subject to bankruptcy than women and did it 'more spectacularly.'

Catherine's talk was replete with examples of individual women's enterprising activities, challenging the conventional view that 19th century women were limited to being domesticated creatures of hearth and home. We can look forward to delving further into the riches of her work when her book telling the stories of some enterprising women is published, planned for late 2015.

So far her research has uncovered few Aboriginal businesswomen and she asked to be informed should we know of one, or of any other entrepreneurial mid-19th century women.

Report by Suzanne Marks

A warm welcome to our new members

Francis Aspinall
Elizabeth Clarkson
Jennifer Fisher
Gay Hendriksen
Mary Spongberg

Jean Beveridge
Carol Condon
Jessamy Hawkins
Dianne Ottley
Jennifer Tousuta

TONY ABBOTT AND ABORTION POLITICS



Before the 2013 federal election, Prime Minister Julia Gillard warned that under a Tony Abbott government abortion could become ‘the political plaything of men who think they know better’. Commentators like ex-Labor Minister Graham Richardson might slam Gillard’s ‘misjudgement’ but Dr Kate Gleeson firmly

agrees with Gillard: at the time of Gillard’s speech not only was there a bill before Parliament to limit Medicare funding of abortions, but Tony Abbott’s views on abortion contributed to his so-called ‘women problem’. Moreover, from his political record we can see women’s right to decide what happens to their bodies can still be subject to political deals. Kate explained why.*

By 1976, the electoral pendulum swinging right had brought in Malcolm Fraser as Liberal Prime Minister. At Sydney University, teenager Tony Abbott was becoming recognised as the ‘leading light’ of the NSW right wing. Abbott was active in the Democratic Club, an on-campus offshoot of his heartland – the Democratic Labor Party. The DLP, inspired and funded by Victoria’s Catholic ultra-conservative B A Santamaria, loathed ‘permissiveness’. Anathemas included abortion on demand, communism, immigration, gay rights, Women’s Liberation, no-fault divorce etc. And of this array, abortion in particular symbolised divides in the Australian polity: feminist/patriarchal; left/right; progressive/conservative. When Abbott’s girlfriend became pregnant in 1976 (faithful Catholics used ‘Vatican roulette’, not the contraceptive pill) they decided to relinquish the baby for adoption.

Elected President of the Students’ Representative Council for 1979, Abbott promoted the DLP agenda. He targeted Sydney University membership of the Australian Union of Students, dominated by far left activists: the annual AUS \$2.50 student levy *inter alia* funded AUS national campaigns including for Women’s Liberation, abortion and gay rights. After a successful SRC referendum in 1979 against ‘compulsory student unionism’, Abbott led the University’s defection from AUS, precipitating its national demise (by 1984). However, although he threw himself into protests against abortion on demand, he could not prevent the SRC supporting it. One campus graffiti item read, ‘Abort Tony Abbott. His mum don’t [sic] have the choice’.

Fast forward to John Howard’s prime ministership when Abbott became Minister for Health from 2003. In March 2004 Abbott addressed Adelaide University’s newly re-established Democratic Club, lauding 1970s Democratic Clubs as ‘part of a grand coalition ... which eventually destroyed the far-left AUS’. He called for public debate on abortion, embryo experimentation and euthanasia – with abortion as part of the ‘permissive society’ representing ‘irresponsibility’: the consequences of sexual life not taken

seriously. Various conservative politicians, columnists and activists following Abbott’s lead linked abortion to a declining birth rate and echoed cold-war fears of ‘race suicide’ dovetailing with post-Twin Towers concerns. In 2006 Liberal MP Danna Vale declared, ‘we are aborting ourselves almost out of existence’, despite Australia’s abortion rates being stable at least since the 1970s, (level with New Zealand, UK and US). Among his notable achievements as Health Minister Abbott would cite getting abortion back on the national agenda and producing a ‘new consensus’ that the abortion rate was ‘far too high’.

The government did not fully control the Senate, and perhaps anti-abortion was helpful in handling Church leaders then publicly denouncing government refugee policy. Certainly a deal on anti-abortion measures with ex-DLP Independent Senator Brian Harradine banning use in Australia of the abortion drug RU486, and removing funding of international abortion services and of some family planning programs ensured his support for the government.

Anti-abortion policy also helped promote related DLP strategic objectives affecting both women’s right to choose and population policy. The government sought to rehabilitate adoption as a public good. Adoption domestically in Australia had tapered off, especially since the Human Rights Commission report, *Bringing them Home* (1997), on the ‘stolen children’, and other reports like the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee’s *Releasing the Past: Adoption Practices 1950-1998* (2000) which found earlier NSW adoption practices ‘misguided, sometimes unethical and on occasions illegal’. In March 2005, Liberal MP Michael Ferguson requested an inquiry into overseas adoption, accounting for over 75% of all adoptions. The resulting House of Representatives Standing Committee report in November 2005 recommended the States standardise processes and better support adopting parents; Chair Bronwyn Bishop expressed surprise that health professionals, social workers and government departments viewed adoption so negatively.

As Kate observed, this government approach could flourish only in a climate with adoption de-stigmatised and women portrayed as ‘particularly vulnerable to being harmed by abortion’. And ‘miraculously’, she remarked, Abbott’s own ‘good news’ flooded the media at much the same time. In February 2005 his relinquished son Daniel had contacted him for the first time. Abbott denied he was using Daniel as a political football but the media made much of his statement that Daniel’s first words to him were, ‘thank you for having me’. Abbott later remarked, ‘I am disappointed there are so few babies adopted these days because there are plenty of parents willing to adopt’. Then, in Kate’s words, an ‘unscripted Shakespearean twist’: on 2 March it was revealed that Daniel was not Abbott’s child but that of a flatmate of Daniel’s mother in 1976.

Even when from July 2005 the government controlled the Senate, anti-abortion continued to be useful. In December 2005 Education Minister Brendan Nelson did what Fraser had been unable to achieve – mandate

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Celebrating women writers: Barbara Jefferis Awards



L to R: Angelo Loukakis, Rosalind Hinde, Fiona McFarlane, Margo Lanagan

The Barbara Jefferis Award is offered each year for ‘the best novel written by an Australian author that depicts women and girls in a positive way or otherwise empowers the status of women and girls in society’. It is hosted by the Australian Society of Authors. This year the ceremony was held at the reconstructed St Barnabas Church on Broadway in Sydney, and presided over by Angelo Loukakis, Executive Officer



of the Society. The Award is a generous \$50,000 and is supported by a Trust Fund established by John Hinde, Barbara’s husband, honouring her commitment to the writer’s craft and the advancement of women as writers.

I attended the ceremony with Michele Ginswick on behalf of the Library which in the past has been the beneficiary of novels submitted for judging, including those on the short list. This list, apart from the winners, included Amy Espeth *Sufficient Grace*, Tracy Farr *The Life and Loves of Lena Gaunt*, Jacinta O’Halloran *Pilgrimage*, Margaret Merrilees *The First Week* and Drusilla Modjeska *The Mountain*. Laura Buzo *Holier Than Thou* was highly commended.

The 2014 guest speaker was author Tara Moss who chose to be interviewed rather than deliver an address – an entertaining format.

The judges Margaret Barbalet, Georgia Blain and Dorothy Johnstone chose two winners for 2014. They were Fiona McFarlane *The Night Guest* and Margo Lanagan *Sea Hearts*. Rosalind Hinde, Barbara’s daughter, presented the cheques to the Award winners and David Day, President of the Society, to the short-listed authors.

Both award winning novels are now held by the Library. Having read *The Night Guest*, I can recommend it as a sensitive treatment of aging with sinister or dark moments. Though portions of the remembered past of Ruth the central character will be familiar territory to many of us, they also contain unusual elements linked to her father’s missionary work in Fiji. It is a very accomplished debut for a young Sydney writer.

Jozefa Sobski



Kate Gleeson *continued from page 5*

voluntary student unionism. Nelson's VSU legislation, though opposed by Nationals Senator Barnaby Joyce, won the vote of a strong anti-abortionist, new Family First Senator Steve Fielding. The 'deal' emerged in March 2006 when Howard, flanked by Abbott, announced \$51 million for '[anti-abortion] pregnancy counselling'.

Kevin Rudd and Labor, successful in the 2010 election, reversed Howard's anti-abortion measures and legislated to restore a version of compulsory student unionism. But 2010 also brought the DLP back into federal politics. Neither Labor nor the Liberals would be drawn during the 2013 election campaign on DLP Senator John Madigan's draft bill to prohibit Medicare funding for so-called 'gender selection' abortions. The bill, still extant, can be re-introduced.

Kate had very convincingly demonstrated how abortion policies, symbolic of enduring divides in Australia's political landscape and exposed to Senate manoeuvring, continue to be the 'political plaything of men who think they know better'.

Report by Margot Simington

* The published version of Kate's talk is "The Political Plaything of Men": Tony Abbott and the Enduring Significance of Abortion to the Christian Right' in Nick Walker (ed) *Essays 2014: Politics* (Australian Scholarly Publishing 2014). The Library holds a copy of Kate's script for her talk.

Annual Luncheon raffle 'thank you'

Winners of the Annual Luncheon raffle first prize, Ardyce and Patrick Harris, have sent a grateful 'thank you' for their overnight package at the Park Hyatt. They conveyed their appreciation to the Committee and the sponsors Teachers Mutual Bank and the Park Hyatt.

General donations since November 2014

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Since it was launched in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has reached \$212,383. Our target is \$500,000, the interest from which will provide essential support for Library operations. If you would like to contribute, please indicate on the membership/donation form on this page.

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There are several ways to travel to the Library:

- ▶ The Library is a 20 minute walk from Town Hall Station (through Darling Harbour) or from Central Station (via Harris Street)
- ▶ Bus 501 (Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre stop) from Sydney Town Hall or Railway Square
- ▶ Bus 443 (Harris and Allan Streets stop) from Circular Quay or Wynyard Station
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