

# NEWSLETTER

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



## ANNE SUMMERS ACTIVIST AND AUTHOR

We are delighted that Anne Summers AO will be the guest speaker at our Annual Luncheon in Parliament House, Sydney on Monday 16 September. Passionate, articulate and eloquent, in 40 years of sustained feminist activism Anne has fearlessly sought to improve women's lot.

Her groundbreaking work, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975) presented a new way of looking at Australian society. The title brilliantly encapsulated her thesis that women were 'service' providers to men or custodians of social cohesion as family makers, and were 'hidden from history'. She argued that this sexism has continued into the present with women's roles overlooked, their horizons circumscribed. Her book soon became a staple of university women's studies courses and school reading lists. Running to three editions, in print for 33 years, it provided a new paradigm for interpreting Australia.

Her views were based not merely on research. Her own family background, and involvement from 1970 as a founding member in Sydney Women's Liberation and then the women's studies journal, *Refractory Girl*, contributed to her thinking. In 1974 she participated as a driving force in establishing Australia's first refuge for women escaping domestic violence: 'Elsie' in Glebe, Sydney. Anne is personally thrilled to have been involved in this practical initiative to provide a service which on reflection she recognises as history in the making: 'truly an Australian original ... not a local version of an American import'. Her bureaucratic work also focussed on practical help for women. She headed Prime Minister Hawke's Office of the Status of Women, and was Prime Minister Keating's consultant on women's issues before the 1993 federal election. She knows, 'constant interaction of ideas and action [is] necessary to my self-development and my struggle against oppression'.

Her political journalism and commentary have maintained a much respected public profile. She began with a Walkley Award for articles in 1976 in *The National Times* about NSW prisons that led to a royal commission. She was Canberra Bureau Chief for the *Australian Financial Review* during Prime Minister Fraser's government and editor-in-chief and co-owner of *Ms* magazine based in New York. In 1989, she received an Order of Australia for services to journalism and to women. From 2000 to 2006 she was chair of the board of Greenpeace International, and she was Deputy President of Sydney's Powerhouse Museum for six years to 2009.



She is an established writer with seven books published since *Damned Whores*. Her best-selling autobiography, *Ducks on the Pond* (1999), traced with wry humour a deeply emotional personal struggle for self-identity amidst emerging second wave Sydney feminism. *The End of Equality* (2003) argued women's status had actually declined over the preceding ten years. She continues to write for many newspapers and journals including opinion pieces for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. These days she still believes that Australian society is marked by gender division in labour, power and status, despite government reforms and fading good girl/bad girl stereotypes.

Interviewed by writer Clementine Ford in February 2013, Anne focussed on the failure to date to achieve equality for women. 'My basic proposition' she said, 'is equality. It used to be liberation but now I'm more pragmatic'. 'I'm not interested in the issue of women on boards, but the fact that women aren't on boards is symptomatic of everything else'. She listed three key elements needed to achieve equality for women: financial self-sufficiency, freedom of reproductive rights and freedom from violence. She believes women should be lobbying and putting 'big pressure' on government: a single professional lobby group could represent all women, act as a think tank doing research, and have a spokesperson like other community groups such as miners, unions and farmers.

Recently, she began publishing a digital magazine, *Anne Summers Reports*. Report No 2 in March 2013 features Anne's profile of Qantas CEO Alan Joyce who is transforming this iconic Australian company into a modern diverse business. Anne cites an observation by Sex-Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick that Joyce, 'sees gender equality as one piece of building an organisation' where that 'key element' — equality — includes race and sexuality. Women are now captains and airport managers and financial officers.

Anne's latest book *The Misogyny Factor* (published in May) expands on her August 2012 Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture at the University of Newcastle NSW — the failure of the 'equality project' (her term) and the 'political persecution' of Australia's first female prime minister. Topical when she gave the speech, this issue as we all know soon became more so in the cut and thrust of federal politics.

Anne is **Not To Be Missed!** Put 16 September in your diaries, reserve a table and bring your friends.

Margot Simington

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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

### Patrons

Elizabeth Evatt AC; Sir Laurence Street AC KCMG;  
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Katharine Stevenson, Graphic Designer

## Annual General Meeting 2013

Volunteers including Board members gathered on Saturday 13 April. Chair Jozefa Sobski opened the meeting and presented her report reviewing the Library's 23rd year of operation. Library and audited Treasurer reports followed. Members were pleased to hear that total revenue was about 10% higher than the previous year. Increased attendance at Lunch Hour Talks brought a return about 40% higher than in 2011.

The Returning Officer, Audrey Wacks, conducted the election of the new Board. The election proceeded with no positions contested. Jozefa thanked Christine Lees who stepped down, acknowledging all her administrative and technical efforts in cooperation with Lyn Eggins 'whose energy is boundless'. She also made particular mention of the contributions of Secretary Jan Burnswoods and Treasurer Jean Burns for their highly professional approach. Barbara Henery joined the Board to fill the pivotal Librarian position. The Library's 2013 Board is as set out above.

The meeting concluded in 21 minutes to everyone's satisfaction. A convivial morning tea ensued.

## Newsflash: new look website!

We have been very busy working to create a new look website – time-consuming but fun. Collaborating with Rosanne Bersten and Erina Johnson of 'tinderspark', a social and digital media consultancy, has been a great help.

You will still be able to find all the old information. And



we've added interesting articles, lots of pictures, a few new links, and generally made it easier for you to navigate. The new look is uncluttered, modern and fresh. We hope you will use the website to find information, keep abreast of the latest events at the Library and keep in touch.

There is a feed-back form in the 'Contact Us' section of the website. You can also email comments (positive or negative) and any questions to [info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au](mailto:info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au) (please include 'Website Feedback' as the subject). We welcome your letters too. Future editions of the *Newsletter* will publish your comments about the Library's new website.

## Librarian on Board

**Barbara Henery**, volunteer librarian since 2006, comes to the Board with a spread of library experience.

While studying for her library qualification, Barbara had many years experience firstly as a volunteer and then as a paid Volunteer Co-ordinator in a Community Information Centre. She graduated in 1991 with a University of Technology Sydney BA in Library Science, but then found permanent library work was in short supply. She worked as a casual librarian at Castle Hill, Sydney, then as Information & Resource Manager for the Crafts Council of NSW. After a short time as a cataloguer for the ABC Film and Sound Archive, she became research assistant in the NSW Government Architect's Office (Heritage Branch). Over the next 10 years, Barbara completed a Diploma in Public History and joined the Oral History Association, researching and writing historical reports for inclusion in conservation management plans, and other heritage documentation.

Her career and her life experiences have encouraged an awareness of the importance of written records, especially for women who do not always have the means or influence to become part of the historical record though they are equally important in the creation of it.



## Launch of the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project

During a period of some 170 years, the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct in western Sydney was where convict women, orphans, people with mental illness, and Forgotten Australian and Stolen Generations children were incarcerated.

Recently, former residents of this site came together as a group, 'Parragirls', to articulate their link with the past. Following a determined campaign, on 11 February 2013 Parragirls launched a Memory Project. Bonny Djuric, Parragirls' founder, described the Precinct as 'a site of memory' that is



Bonny Djuric (l) and Dr Lily Hibberd at the launch of the Memory Project

'more than [just] a cluster of historically significant buildings': it is where convict women lived and worked in the factory 'to support the building of the colony of New South Wales', and also where

until the 1970s thousands of children worked – many of them had been forcibly taken from their families and sent to the Roman Catholic orphanage on the site.

The PFFP Memory Project calls on former inhabitants to share their histories through various art forms, utilising the Precinct space to evoke the past and thereby preserve generations of social history in a relevant and meaningful way. Among ideas for doing this, creation of a Children's Garden is the brainchild of well-known artist, Elizabeth Day. Dr Geoff Lee, NSW Member of Parliament for Parramatta, and Dr Adele Chynoweth, curator of the 'Inside: Life in Children's Homes' for the National Museum of Australia, are strong proponents of developing the site for tourism. In 2014, Camilla Rountree, Parramatta Riverside Theatre producer, plans to stage Alana Valentine's play 'Parragirls', developed in conjunction with some of the Parragirls. This will further promote the significance of the site. More information about the Memory Project and its creative interpretation can be found at [www.pffpmemoryproject.org](http://www.pffpmemoryproject.org).

## From the Archives

Six members of the former Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force visited the Library on 15 March 2013, 72nd anniversary of formation of the WAAAF. Organiser and former Sydney Branch Secretary, Val Wakefield, could not attend. Val and the other women had served in Australia from 1941 to 1946. The WAAAF Sydney Branch in 2011 closed and donated videotapes, sound cassette tapes, newsletters, minute books, banners, posters and other ephemera to the Library.

Christine Lees talked about the Library and showed visitors their collection. I spoke about the Archives and showed them the WAAAF collection. I then played a CD of a 2012 interview by Library volunteer Bridget McKern of Megan Rutledge, former WAAAF wireless telegrapher. Megan spoke about her experiences in Townsville Qld 1943-1946. I encouraged the women to record memories of their wartime experiences, which would be a valuable addition to our archives.

Beverley Sodbinow, Archivist

## Euphemia Bostock: oral history project

From growing up in the remote Box Ridge Mission in Coraki NSW to being part of demonstrations to save the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972, Phemie has lived through many significant events in Australian history. She speaks of the different levels in her life. Family is the dominant force. Her artwork is second:

she became an artist at 50 and has been highly successful, her works gracing major Australian galleries. Community is the third level of



her life. She is an active and respected member of her Aboriginal and local community. Phemie pays tribute to her parents and the support of family and friends. Her approach to life has always reflected her belief in taking chances, giving things a go and learning new skills. Phemie at 77 still sees the future as full of exciting challenges. Hers is an inspirational life.

Consolidating her story from many interviews is virtually complete. We hope to publish by the end of the year.

Jenny Reeves, Oral Historian

### LUNCH HOUR TALKS – third Thursday of the month

**16 May – Marlene Arditto**  
**Women's work in Jane Austen's writings**

*Pride and Prejudice* was published two hundred years ago. Marlene, Jane Austen Society Vice-Pres, will examine how Austen in her six novels uses needlework and related crafts (called 'work' in Regency times) to develop character and plot. Rare Georgian work tools will be on display as well.

**20 June – Charline Emzin-Boyd**  
**Expectations**

Charline's talk addresses who we are as Australians – upon whom heroes, champions and trailblazers have bestowed their knowledge and strength. A Bundjalung woman, Charline will reflect views of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians planning for future generations with high expectations for a great Australia.

**15 August – Dr Bernice Lee**  
**Change in the status of women in twentieth century China**

During the twentieth century, major political, social, ideological and legal changes in China transformed the position of women from an inferior status long enshrined by custom. In this talk Bernice will examine how and why these changes took place and their effects on the lives of Chinese women.

**Note: 18 July - The speaker and subject will be advised in our next newsletter and on the website.**

**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

# MEMOIRS: BLOOD, SWEAT, TOIL AND TEARS

Having researched and published nine history texts and one book on ancient cultures, Pam made her first foray into memoir writing with *Nefertiti Street* (2008). It is the story of her mid-life journey. Although comfortably married with three grown sons and a steady job teaching history, her life, she felt, was like standing in the transit lounge of an airport, waiting for a plane that never came! She took her first trip to Egypt in 1989, and then made five visits in four years. Despite her lack of knowledge about modern Islamic Egypt and mixed feelings about her first trip, she was drawn back, each time using the excuse that she was writing a book on Egypt. It was very difficult for a middle-aged woman travelling on her own as she was often outside her comfort zone, but each time she returned to Australia she re-evaluated her relationship with her husband of 25 years, eventually deciding to leave the marriage. While not looking for another partner, aged 50, she fell in love with a Muslim man 28 years younger than herself. They married in 1994 and settled in Australia.

Her forthcoming second memoir, *Through Different Lenses*, explores and re-evaluates her relationship with her father before he died. It examines him from a distorted adolescent perspective and compares it with her more mature appraisal. In this memoir, she has woven threads about coping with ageing, the loss of a spouse, and her feelings about putting her father in a nursing home. She learnt to lighten the sadness with humour.

Mindful that memoir writers often encourage us to take risks, face things honestly and be prepared to expose themselves, there were two difficult incidents Pam wrote about in *Nefertiti Street*. Firstly, her marriage was unable to be consummated on her wedding night and the next morning she was in a specialist's office, having her hymen cut away, being 'ravished' by a man in a white coat. Secondly, in Egypt, a drunk Egyptian assaulted her in a seedy hotel in Luxor. He spilt beer all over her and vomited. Furious, she said, 'How dare you! I have never experienced such behaviour in all my life.' You just don't speak to an Egyptian man like that in public. He belted her around the face and head; she was too shocked to react. These two events were integral to her story, the first showing a possible reason for the lack of intimacy with her first husband, the second showing the growing relationship between Sha'ban, her second husband, and herself.

Pam attended writing workshops, hoping to become more creative, but although she found most quite useful she realised that those in which her writing was to be critiqued did not suit her while writing a first draft. At one workshop, a woman who thought Pam's 15-minute fragment about her wedding night incident was disgusting, verbally attacked her. Also, Pam found that writing for an audience meant she rewrote and edited her work so much it lacked individuality: she felt she lost her 'voice'. Many people are not honest, objective or specific when they critique, preferring to be 'nice' and sometimes those who are offered honest feedback refuse to accept it.

In writing memoir, other things to consider concern privacy and possible defamation. Pam related several stories including that of a woman's story about a legal issue involving herself, her husband and high profile people in Sydney was written out of revenge. Although a very interesting story, the

publisher wouldn't touch it, suggesting she rewrite it as a novel. She refused, and has never written since.

In *Nefertiti Street* Pam wrote sensitively and humorously about her first husband, showing his quirks and foibles. When she showed him, he said, 'I can really understand why you left me now.' Her three adult sons had no problem at all with her story, but admitted to never having heard of a hymenectomy. To protect her friends, Pam changed their names and in some cases made composite characters, carefully keeping the essence of the original people. She also wrote about a well-known woman whose workshop had had a bearing on her own journey. That woman wanted parts of Pam's story rewritten to suit herself. Pam edited it and left quite a bit to the reader's imagination.

Concerned what her Egyptian husband would think if she wrote about their first intimate time together, she wrote in metaphor, relating it to the steamy heat outside, likening their flat to a Turkish seraglio and his body to a classical Greek statue. On reading it, his response was, 'That's lovely.'

But it was the publishing business that really brought the tears. When her publisher New Holland Australia read the manuscript, they said that they'd like more sex scenes and some Egyptian recipes. Pam felt they'd misunderstood the story – 'it's not a juicy story about a woman desperately looking for a younger man.' She refused to add more sex but placated them by weaving in some material on Egyptian food. Then they arranged an interview with a magazine she had never heard of. When it was published, she was horrified! There she was – splashed across the front page: 'Pamela Bradley and her toy boy' and inside were more photos with the 'toy boy' label and the headline: 'How I found love in Luxor'. It was very poorly and inaccurately written. Three humiliating weeks followed while she ran around convenience stores, supermarkets and newsagents, hiding the magazines or buying them up. She hid the articles from Sha'ban but then came Facebook comments from friends. It took him some time to get over it.

Pam advises that if there's a story inside that's crying out to be told, take the risks and write it. Jump in at the deep end and face your 'monsters'. Write your first draft without any interference and don't show anyone. If you write truthfully what is in your heart and understand the craft, although it might get knocked back umpteen times, it will be published eventually.

*Report by Kris Clarke*



This article has been further edited since its original publication.

# MAYBANKE ANDERSON: A WOMAN FOR ALL TIMES

These days, Maybanke Anderson is scarcely known. Yet when she died in France aged 82 in 1927, Sydney newspapers and university and kindergarten journals were full of grief for a notable Australian woman. Why is it not widely known now that she was instrumental in having the vote for women enshrined in the Constitution?

Jan Roberts first came across Maybanke in the 1980s, when women were still virtually invisible in the great male-centric histories like Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958). Teaching under a new schools syllabus, Jan was revelling in an Australian women's history course pioneered by Dr Beverley Kingston and other university women, and she noticed Maybanke's name often appearing in activist contexts. But the women's history course was phased out and the Bicentenary brought back World War 1 and the trenches, so Jan abandoned teaching, consulted with Beverley (who had done Maybanke for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*), and then began on enthralling research. Her biography, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* appeared in 1993 (and quickly sold out), followed in 2001 by *Maybanke, A Woman's Voice. The Celebrated Work of Maybanke Selfe-Wolstenholme-Anderson 1845-1927*, jointly edited with Beverley, and containing poems, speeches, letters to newspapers and writings including studies of Sydney areas she'd lived in (Pittwater and Hunter's Hill).

Maybanke was proudly English middle class, born to educated parents in Kingston upon Thames. Her mother believed a woman should be capable of being independent. At nine, Maybanke with her father read books extolling Australia's virtues by the 'immigrant's friend', Caroline Chisholm. In 1855, her family migrated to Sydney, settling in The Rocks. There she saw tough life – slums, child prostitution, beggars. Her first marriage in 1867 to a friend of her brother eventually unravelled. Of seven children four died young (probably tuberculosis). Her husband began drinking and deserted the family in 1884. Maybanke as breadwinner drew on her schoolgirl experience as a pupil teacher in establishing a girls' school, Maybanke College, at Marrickville, Sydney and launched her activist life by working to change the law.

Desertion was no ground for divorce, and deserted wives though permitted to work and have income could not leave property to children, and were vulnerable because deserting husbands could reappear, demand conjugal rights and take their money. She began with letters and articles (hard to trace – women could not be published so newspapers omitted names). Her popular speech, 'Laws to which Women Take Exception', influenced people like Supreme Court Judge William Charles Windeyer (later knighted). Reform-minded women in Sydney got together supported by men – Maybanke always recognised men's support was essential for getting reform. The group gained momentum, meeting in private houses discussing books like Mary Wollstonecraft *Vindications of the Rights of Women* (1792). Maybanke was often President or Vice-President with Lady Windeyer; Maybanke's friend, Rose Scott, was Secretary. Some women worked (like Maybanke and Louisa Lawson), so the group met at night, often in the city – quite daring without chaperones, given only women of 'ill repute' frequented city streets after dark. They campaigned to have grounds for divorce expanded to include desertion and for women to have the right to make wills. Following legislative

change in 1892, Maybanke got her divorce.

The 1890s were dynamic and exciting for her, a woman who made things happen. She often assumed a leadership role though not particularly seeking it. Morally courageous, she dared to talk about sex education, take on unpopular causes, and to publish and edit her own newspaper, *Woman's Voice* 1894-5. In 1893 she



founded the Australasian Home Reading Union, then in 1895 helped found the Kindergarten Union and as President opened Australia's first free kindergarten. A suffragist in the Womanhood Suffrage League NSW (founded 1891), she became President in 1893, convinced the vote was the 'kernel of all reform'. Contrary to views of respected academics like Professor Ian Turner that the vote was *given* to women, WSL women with men in support worked for it in NSW over nearly a decade to little avail. But then Maybanke's clever strategy of linking suffrage to Federation helped deliver it. In 1897, her adroitly-worded petition sought that 'the right to vote for representatives to the Federal Parliament shall be presented to women and men without any distinction or disqualification on the grounds of sex.' The petition signed first by Maybanke, then by thousands of others, was presented in Adelaide to those drafting the Australian Constitution, and she managed to have a clause inserted to prohibit taking the vote away from women who already had it – already, women had the vote in South Australia. Thereafter Maybanke campaigned to get the Constitution ratified. She formed the Women's Federal League to persuade women across the colonies to push their men into voting 'yes' for Federation.

Her second marriage in 1899 albeit a scandal – Sydney University Professor of Philosophy, Francis Anderson, marrying Maybanke, a divorcee 13 years older than he – did not inhibit her active public engagement, which she continued especially through the University Women's Society and the Kindergarten Union NSW. Also, she and the Professor worked on education reform and getting women into local government. She also wrote about educating children, the cause mattering perhaps most to her personally.

Jan describes Maybanke's language as not tied to any era, having elegant simplicity whether in poetry or political documents. 'Religion is doing what you can for the welfare of humanity and developing your own spiritual life'; 'some ... people think I touch too plainly on sex ... in this special number 'sex' will be rigidly excluded – except ... an open column letter bearing on the subject'; 'Motherhood ... has been long enough a matter of accident. It's utterly wicked to talk of indelicacy. What is necessary is the personal independence of woman'. Her *Australian Songs for Australian Children* (1902) departed from the usual English-oriented kindergarten fare. Jan read from 'Australia Fair' – 'Australia fair I love thee, the dear land

*Continued on P7*

# WHO IS DAISY BATES?

Ernestine Hill *Kabbarli: A personal memoir of Daisy Bates*, Angus and Robertson 1973, ISBN: 0207124787

Elizabeth Salter *Daisy Bates: The great white queen of the never never*, Angus and Robertson 1971, ISBN: 0207122717

Bob Reece *Daisy Bates: Grand dame of the desert*, National Library of Australia 2007, ISBN: 9780642276544

Susanna de Vries *Desert Queen: The many lives and loves of Daisy Bates*, Harper Collins 2008, ISBN: 9781742018676

Not many women in Australian history have been the subject of five biographies and two operas – one with a libretto by Lady Maie Casey and score by Margaret Sutherland. The other, written by Bob Reece for music by Anne Boyd had two performances last October at the Sydney Conservatorium. There have also been several paintings, notably by Sidney Nolan, a ballet, a television series and a couple of plays. An ambitious young woman born in Tipperary in 1859, baptised Margaret Dwyer but known variously as Daisy Bates, ‘Kabbarli’ and ‘Queen of the Desert’, achieved all this by making her life a mystery.

For over 20 years she lived in bush camps in WA and in SA on the Nullarbor Plain, supporting herself by casual journalism. Best known for her Mary Poppins-like appearance, she used distance to create a persona. Her earliest biographers were completely deceived by her version of who she was. Research after her death untangled the facts from her misremembered or embroidered stories especially about the years before she came to camp at Ooldea on the Nullarbor Plain.

Susanna De Vries’ recent life, *Desert Queen: The many lives and loves of Daisy Bates* (2008), builds on the research of previous biographers. The first, Elizabeth Salter in her *Daisy Bates: The great white queen of the never never* (1971), put together basic material and interviewed people especially in Adelaide who had known Bates. Ernestine Hill, herself an impressive writer whose fictionalised biography of explorer Matthew Flinders, *My Love Must Wait* (1941) is a minor classic of Australian literature, became a friend and collaborator after visiting Ooldea in 1932. Without Ernestine’s help, Daisy’s own book, *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1938) would never have been written, let alone published. The later chapters of De Vries’ biography draw heavily on Hill’s colourful and engaging personal memoir, *Kabbarli* (1973). Eleanor Witcombe solved many of the puzzles about Daisy’s early life and romantic entanglements in developing a script for a film (to star Katherine Hepburn as Bates) that came to nothing. Most recently, Bob Reece who has expertise in both Irish and Aboriginal history, was commissioned by the National Library of Australia to make sense of Daisy’s anthropological archive and her correspondence in collections in other Australian libraries. In her old age Daisy burnt the letters she had received (as well as all evidence about her youth); however many of the letters she wrote have survived. As well as examining and

listing Daisy’s correspondence, Reece’s *Daisy Bates, Grand dame of the desert* (2007) expertly summarises the arguments about her work, provides a clear context, and includes a comprehensive bibliography and index (none of which are available in De Vries).

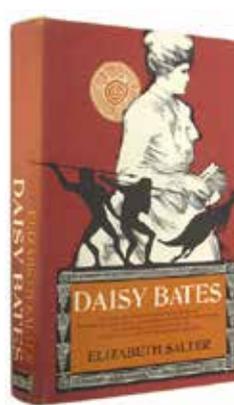
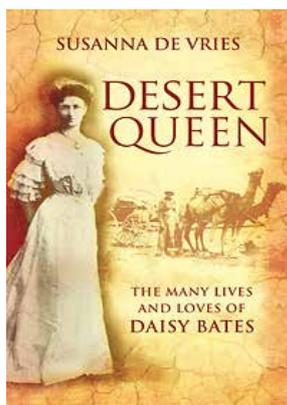
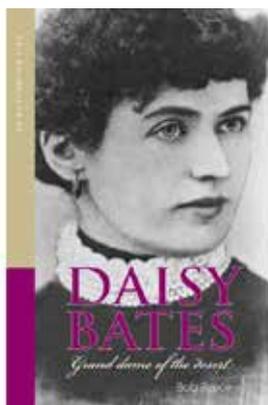
De Vries’ main contribution has been to fill in some detail by re-examining the clues in Ireland before Daisy emigrated to Townsville in 1883 in the light of her own experience as an Irish orphan searching for her own parents, and also Daisy’s romantic adventures in Australia before she turned up in Perth in 1899. In recent years De Vries has made a specialty of popularising the lives of Australian women, from pioneers to women in war and in public life. For this, as well as her biographies of Joice Nankivell Loch and Daisy Bates, last year she was awarded an ‘Alice Award’, a bronze statuette, for ‘an outstanding long-term contribution to Australian literature’. Her work shows the benefits of cumulative research. Would Hilary Mantel have been able to write her immensely readable fictionalised series on Thomas Cromwell without several hundred years’ worth of historical research? The answer is no, Mantel’s novels are based on a massive foundation of earlier writing. So it is with the work of Susanna De Vries.

Yet Daisy Bates remains an enigma. Intensely conservative in her personal and political views, she made great claims about her work among the Aborigines, though all she was able to provide was some simple, kindly health care. She lobbied for more resources and official recognition, yet her approach to Aboriginal welfare was only to ‘soothe the dying pillow’ – a phrase first used by Captain J. L. Stokes about the Tasmanian Aborigines in 1846. She became obsessed by cannibalism among the desert tribes. Her ‘great’ book, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, was largely an historical document when it was published in 1938 though it was read as contemporary comment and probably

had a regressive effect on both popular and official thought. However, some of the material she compiled during her years in WA before she moved into the Nullarbor is now considered a valuable record of Aboriginal groups which have since disappeared or lost touch with their own past. The extent to which Daisy was challenging the dominant male hierarchy among anthropologists – they regarded her as a dotty if not dangerous amateur – and the attention she paid to questions relating to the Aboriginal women whom she regarded as grossly exploited by their menfolk is only now coming into view. However, at the same time she ferociously rejected miscegenation, and turned away the half-caste children who came for help.

Like the stories of those other immigrants, Breaker Morant (who was briefly, and ironically, married to Daisy Bates) and John Simpson, ‘the man with the donkey’ at Gallipoli, both of which are more complicated and less heroic than popular mythology will have them, the true story of Daisy Bates will probably never be as acceptable as the mythologised one she concocted for herself.

Beverley Kingston





Jessie Street National Women's Library  
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Please use the intercom for admittance.

For level access, enter via the Community Centre in Bulwarra Rd

**Opening times:**

The Library is open to the public Monday to Friday 10 am to 3 pm

**Borrowing Policy:**

The public can access items using the interlibrary loan system. The public cannot borrow items, but may use them in their library of choice. A loan collection is available to financial members.

**How to reach the Library:**

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 Pool Stop) from Sydney Town Hall or Railway Square;
- ▶ Bus 443 (Harris and Allan Streets Stop) from Circular Quay or Wynyard Station;
- ▶ Light rail from Central Station to Exhibition Stop
- ▶ If you drive, there is limited two hour street meter parking available.

**Contact us:**

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## **7th Australian Women's Health Conference**

The Australian Women's Health Network holds its 7th Conference in Sydney over four days, 7-10 May. Many papers will be presented. The theme is Gender Matters: Determining Women's Health, and the planned focus – cutting edge research and best practice nationally and internationally. The Library is contributing to the conference with a display of Library posters, photographs and other items.

## **Women and work: History Week exhibition**

The Library with assistance from the Trades Hall Association is curating a sizeable exhibition of posters, photographs, banners, pamphlets and memorabilia at Parliament House NSW 2 September – 4 October. All are welcome.