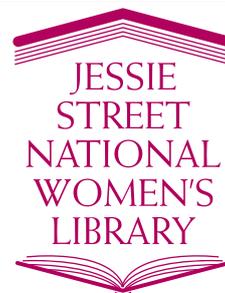


# NEWSLETTER

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



## HANDLING THE MISOGYNY FACTOR

This year's Annual Luncheon filled up quickly, reflecting respect for guest speaker, activist and author Dr Anne Summers AO, and also the urgent need to understand why women still endure inequality in Australia, as recent national events graphically attest.

Anne's cogent answer: the 'misogyny factor'. Her term encompasses the traditional meaning of misogyny, old-fashioned hatred of women, broadened to include systemic beliefs and behaviours. Both men and women may hold these attitudes — many women as misogynous as many men. She stressed, 'I'm not denigrating men, I'm denigrating a set of beliefs'. Anne lamented how wrong 'we' 1970s second wave feminists were to assume everybody saw equality as a good idea. 'We were wrong to believe that barriers falling — first women High Court judges, premiers, jockeys, fighter pilots, whatever — meant progress towards success.' She paid tribute to Hillary Clinton's 'truly revolutionary insight' into the difference between progress and success. Hosting the September 2011 APEC Women and Economy Summit, Clinton as Secretary of State had deplored the fact that worldwide, for millions of women in the formal workforce, success can be 'stymied by formal and informal forces' preventing their full participation and consequent global growth. Significantly, Clinton observed that in achieving equality, '*evidence of progress is not evidence of success*'.

'We now recognise we must define success', says Anne. Her book *The Misogyny Factor* (May 2013) sets out three criteria — inclusion, equality and respect — to measure the success of what she terms an 'Equality Project' comprising three principal objectives. Financial independence requires women have good education, good jobs, childcare and equal pay. Control of fertility requires access to safe affordable reliable contraception backed by safe legal affordable abortion. Her third objective, freedom from violence, sadly reflects persisting physical results of misogyny.

Australia falls short against equality, inclusion and respect criteria. Women are still under-represented in major

institutions: 39% of Australian public service senior executives; 28% of the last Federal Parliament; in ASX200 companies, female directors 16.3% (47 companies with none) and new appointments down after spiking in 2010-11, female senior executives c.9%. Women on average earn 17.5% less than men. Startlingly, lifetime earning statistics show a 25 year old woman post-graduate entering the workforce today will earn \$2.5m during her working life, a male post-graduate \$3.8m; and worse, a Year 12 qualified man will earn more than a female post-graduate — \$2.55m versus \$2.49m.



Anne considers respect perhaps the key success criterion, and that the 'bullying from office' of Australia's first female prime minister is ample proof Julia Gillard did not receive appropriate respect. Subject to unprecedented sexual and other vilification, in any other workplace she would have a

discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying case under the *Sex Discrimination Act* and the *Fair Work Act*. The then Opposition portrayed Gillard as either bitch or witch; rallying outside Parliament House, the woman now selected as Speaker of the House of Representatives stood in front of a sign that called Gillard 'Bob Brown's bitch'; journalists openly mocked her; some colleagues did too — shockingly, Kevin Rudd reportedly used the 'bitch' epithet. Criticism became the norm: clothes, hair, voice, earlobes — even, thanks to Germaine Greer, her arse. Lack of respect affected other prominent women including Governor-General Quentin Bryce and Anna Burke, House of Representatives Speaker for the former Labor Government. But Gillard bore the brunt of the hostility Anne labels 'misogyny'. Tony Windsor, until recently Independent Member for New England, told ABC TV's *Australian Story*, 'I have never seen male, female or dog treated in the fashion that Julia Gillard was treated.' Largely a strategic process to destroy, it was horribly successful: Gillard's authority undermined,

*Continued on page 2*

### Christmas Closure

The Library will close on Friday 13 December 2013, reopening Monday 13 Jan 2014. Our best wishes for the festive season!

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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

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

## From the Editors

This November *Newsletter* has a theme – the status of women and ways of changing it.

Annual Luncheon keynote speaker, Anne Summers, addressed Australia's 'misogyny factor' and how to deal with it. Lunch Hour Talks speakers covered related topics: Lynette Curran spoke of coping in adulthood with repression arising from childhood sexual harassment by her father and older brothers; Charline Emzin-Boyd encouraged us to support Aboriginal expectations of improving their future, in part by achieving recognition in the Constitution; Bernice Lee's survey of women in 20th century China showed their depressingly slow emergence from domination by men and many challenges still ahead in their quest for equality. Beverley Kingston's article reviews several books dealing in different ways with some unusual women and their struggle for identity and status.

Much food for thought.

*Continued from page 1*

her legitimacy questioned, her popularity diminished, then unpopularity the rationale for her elimination. Anne argues the 'misogyny factor' explains why the Equality Project has not succeeded: atavistic views that women have no fundamental right to be outside the home and *ought* to be mothers, often masked by discussion of 'motherhood' and 'merit' – misogyny in theory and sexism in practice.

But there are some welcome signs. For the first time since the 1970s Anne can see women fighting back. 'More than ever, they want to talk, rage, grieve, understand. Women mourn Gillard's political death. She was the proxy: we all mourn the death of our rights!' Anne recalled Gillard's farewell remarks on 26 June 2013 – 'being the first female prime minister does not explain everything ... it doesn't explain nothing. It explains some things and it is for the nation to think in a sophisticated way about those shades of grey'. She instanced Gillard's electrifying sexism and misogyny speech to Parliament on 9 October 2012: 'I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man.' Gillard, says Anne, has provided a template. 'We must think in a sophisticated way about those shades of grey, use different language, destroy what treats us badly, combat the misogyny factor. I'm sure Jessie Street would stand shoulder to shoulder with us.'

Cathartic like Anne's later 'conversations' with Julia Gillard in Sydney and Melbourne, her address elicited a new Annual Luncheon phenomenon – a standing ovation.

*Margot Simington*



## Professor Emerita Jill Roe AO

Jill is a founding member of staff at Macquarie University, where she taught two generations of students and continues as a researcher in the discipline of modern history. Earlier this year, the University awarded her the prestigious higher degree of Doctor of Letters for more than 45 years of scholarly work culminating in 2008 with her prize-winning biography of the notable Australian woman writer, Miles Franklin. In addition to the biography, she has edited a two volume selection of Miles Franklin's letters and co-edited a volume of Franklin journalism. She has also written a very influential history of theosophy in Australia, *Beyond Belief* (1986). In 2007 she was made an officer of the Order of Australia recognising her work for history in the community as Chair of the Board of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, guiding it through its transition to an 'on-line' service now consulted by thousands of Australians every day, as President of the Australian Historical Association while it hosted a massive international gathering of historians in Sydney in 2005, and most recently in overseeing the compilation of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature*.

Jessie Street National Women's Library is delighted to welcome her as one of its patrons.



# Women's records in Victoria

There were inspiring and informative presentations and lively discussion, but there was no consensus among the 40 participants at the forum in Melbourne, 'Keeping Women's Records' in Victoria. The door opened to many ideas for a new women's institution based in Victoria and preserving documentation of women's lives.

Chair of the Library, Jozefa Sobski and Board member Marie Muir attended the forum in August organised by the League of Women Voters in Victoria. Jozefa was the opening speaker with Dr Deborah Towns, President of the League introducing. Barbary Clarke from Monash University spoke about her personal vision of a women's library in Melbourne. Two speakers from the Public Records Office of Victoria addressed the 'History and Practice of Record Keeping in Victoria' and Dr Winsome Roberts from the University of Melbourne talked about the 'local' in collections in Victoria. She saw a future in partnerships with local libraries encouraging them to dedicate some of their collections to women's lives.

Group discussions focused on the best way to tackle 'the collecting, preserving and promoting knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritage of all women particularly Victorian women and accessible to Victorians.' Barbary Clarke had visited several women's libraries overseas and was inspired by the extent of their collections and the resources and staff available to support them. The **Fawcett Library** in London, **Glasgow Women's Library** and the **Marguerite Durand Library** in Paris were among those which had shaped her vision. The **Atria (Aletta)** in Amsterdam had 12,000 metres of shelf space with 40 workers at any one time.

Discussion ranged across the options with some participants keener to establish a museum which was more likely to generate income and hence pay for itself. Others felt the future was online and that support ought to be directed to the Australian Women's Archives Project based at the University of Melbourne.

Jozefa spoke about the inspiration of Jessie Street's life which led to the establishment of **Jessie Street National Women's Library**, the importance of collaboration to

avoid duplication as well as the legal, practical, financial and staffing challenges which faced any group embarking on building a feminist institution. This national women's Library in NSW was now 24 years old – operating with little or no government support, its accommodation subsidised by the City of Sydney and its capital and recurrent costs raised from subscriptions, donations, bequests and fund-raising activities.

Victorian women at the forum who included former government ministers and teachers and principals, as well as activists of many years from WEL, were invited to collaborate with the Library and its members once they had decided on what they would like to establish. There was no agreed vision. All ideas were noted. There was a realisation of the complex challenges which faced any organisation whether it was aimed at creating a library, an archival repository or a museum.

Jozefa stressed that **Jessie Street National Women's Library** needed to deepen not broaden its collection; to specialise, not generalise, and to focus on the unique; encourage diverse and innovative uses for our material; digitise rare and unique material for wide access; expand educational and political functions; become a feminist cultural centre, not just a house full of good information; build a strong academic network; work with social media and through our website to build a profile in diverse communities; support women's organisations and communities; and develop and sustain partnerships and collaboration.

*Jozefa Sobski*

*Dr Towns has asked us to convey to the Library the League's appreciation of the Jessie Street Board's supportive wishes,*



*A McNulty (l), Dr D Towns, B Clarke*

*and of Jozefa and Marie's generosity in paying for themselves to come and support the League's event in Melbourne.*

## LUNCH HOUR TALKS 2014 – third Thursday of the month

**20 Feb: Deidre & Chloe Mason Alice Wheeldon's story**

Deidre and Chloe, feminists themselves, have a family heritage of peace and social justice activism. Great grandmother Alice Wheeldon, a suffragist and courageous anti-war campaigner, was subjected in 1917 to a questionable conviction for conspiracy to murder Britain's prime minister.

**20 March: Dr Judith Godden Adoptions and Crown**

**Street Women's Hospital**  
Historian Judith Godden explores reasons for the many baby adoptions at Sydney's Crown Street Women's Hospital in the late 1960s (helping single mothers? helping infertile couples?) along with related issues – forced adoptions, trauma and interpreting memories.

**17 April: Pat Richardson Queenie, Letters from an Australian Army Nurse 1915-17**  
During WWI Pat's Aunt 'Queenie' Avenell nursed in Egypt (Gallipoli casualties), France and England. A government grant enabled Pat and journalist Anne Skinner to prepare for publication 107 letters from Queenie to her family. This event is a **BOOK LAUNCH**.

**15 May: Pamela Burton From Moree to Mabo: the Mary Gaudron Story**

Canberra lawyer and writer, Pamela will discuss Mary Gaudron, first female justice of the High Court. Gaudron, passionately committed to gender equality, Indigenous rights and removal of discrimination and inequality has a significant place in Australian legal history.

**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

# EXPECTATIONS

One did not know quite what to expect from Charline's talk. We knew from vice-chair Michele Ginswick's introduction that Charline, a Bundjalung woman, had since 2003 been a NSW Teachers' Federation activist, focusing on policy issues, recruitment and especially on supporting Aboriginal women members.

But we were not prepared for her to address us all as 'elders'. Just like Aboriginal people, she said, 'you pass on knowledge from generation to generation'. And then she requested we all stand up in line from eldest to youngest. Now, keen Masters' Games participants are aware of age categories (rowers need precise ages to compile boat crew race entries) but Australia's normal social exchange politely eschews the age question. Eventually we arranged ourselves, forty or so – with some surprises! some hilarity! Charline explained her approach as arising 'from years of some sort of rainbow style of teaching' – and we realised that in skirting chairs we had actually wound around into a snake configuration. 'Imagine,' said Charline 'every one of you will pass on experience to families, communities, teachers, friends – age, experience, depth of knowledge, culture and women – like Jessie Street', who Charline had been delighted to discover grew up in Bundjalung country, taught to swim by two Bundjalung women. She went on, 'You're part of this: the Aboriginal people and the Jessie Streets. Myself a contemporary Aboriginal, not traditional, I think about my ancestors. Young people think they have nothing to give but they do. We are all warriors, heroes, campaigners, part of the 200 years of our new Australia seen here in this serpent'.

Identifying herself as having an Aboriginal mother, a Vanuatu dad, and a white Irish grandmother, Charline spoke of her Bundjalung country stretching from just inside southeast Queensland into north coast NSW including Fingal Head where her mother was born. 'I still go home for comfort, connection and nurturing with my family', she said. 'Dad died when I was 13, but our strong Aboriginal mother, forced to leave school in Grade 3, often talked about hardship and challenge for women, and the need to be educated and strong. She believed in hard work, commitment and persistence and was tireless in ensuring we had the opportunity she'd missed. My grandmother was also a strong, quiet achiever.'

Charline was preparing the ground for her message on how all Australians can move forward to fully realise the *expectations* of Reconciliation. Reconciliation is 'like a tide', she said, 'some days crashing in with awesome power, at other times so low one feels everything must begin again'. The 1967 Referendum was high tide – a glorious moment in the ebbs and flows between black and white: Australians were ready to accord the Commonwealth power to legislate on Aboriginal matters. Then 16, now 62, Charline didn't realise until preparing this talk that Jessie Street instigated the 1967 Referendum to change the Constitution. 'Jessie rang Faith Bandler and other colleagues, and made it happen', said Charline. (Board Member Marie Muir added

that Faith later recalled, 'Jessie said, "Faith, you are going to work on this", and whatever Jessie said, you did!') Charline identified the national apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008 as another high point.

But the tide now is out, Charline said. Aboriginal Australians remain Australia's most disadvantaged group. The 2012 bipartisan Expert Panel report to the Prime Minister about what to do advocated among other things a referendum to recognise this country's first people in the Constitution. But notwithstanding visits by the Expert Panel to many, many communities, and talk with thousands of Aboriginal people, the referendum initially proposed to coincide with the 2013 Federal election was deferred because too few people (especially Aboriginal people) knew about it. Now proposed for 13 February 2015, this means two years for informing, engaging, connecting.

A federal 'Recognise' campaign is now in full swing. Various activities include The Long Walk charity activities inspired by footballer Michael Long's walk to Canberra, including a Darwin 1 June 2013 walk engaging with small and large communities, black, white and multi-cultural. Charline told us about the NSW Teachers' Federation contribution: a short booklet, 'Recognise', which suggests ways for connecting – grandparents and aunts can use it to converse with children about the future, about



strategic planning and setting high expectations. Charline herself pulled this document together and now confidently attests to the Constitution having more mention of lighthouses, beacons and buoys than Australia's first people. She urged us to get involved in the Recognise campaign. 'You and I are all

proactive. Commitment and dedication to education and wider community is vital to building capacity and to ensure positive change. We need an incoming tide of everyday warriors to lift expectations especially of young people – and to continue Jessie Street's work'.

Charline's talk was uplifting. It drew from the past and the present, and from Aboriginal and other experience, to generate high expectations for the future. She donated copies of 'Recognise' to the Library. Do visit the Library and have a look at them.

*Transcription by Helen Ruby*

*Report by Margot Simington*

# OVERCOMING REPRESSION

Lynette Curran is best known for her acting in long-running television series like *Bellbird*, *A Country Practice*, and *Blue Heelers*, in films from *Alvin Purple* to just released *These Final Hours*, and for her stage work, most recently in Sydney's Belvoir Theatre production, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. She has won numerous awards including Sammy Awards, an AFI Award and two 2004 Film Critics Awards for *Somersault*. This busy professional actor gladly accepted at short notice our invitation to speak at a lunch hour talk.

Lynette began to understand the implications of dysfunctional families on reading Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (1976). Dixson delves into early gender relations in colonial Australia, examining ancestral inheritance and the low status of men in a society where a woman's status was even lower. The oppressed male was also the oppressor: the Irish male was a victim of the English and in turn took out his humiliation and lowered self-esteem on females. In the 1800s if the eldest son, or any son, walked into a room, women would vacate chairs and get out of the way. It reminded Lynette of her two much older brothers.

The idea resonated with her. Lynette felt so passionately about it that she convinced a female director

it could serve as the basis for a play. Having received a grant, her company engaged a writer and workshopped the project. But the result was very disappointing – nothing like what Lynette expected. The young writer had treated it superficially, not revealing the essence of Miriam Dixson's book. Lynette blamed herself for lacking confidence – not being assertive enough to get the result she wanted.

Also in the mid-70s she was invited to take part in *The Coming Out Show* (ABC Radio National 1975-1998) to publicise the play based on *The Real Matilda*. Lynette was an absolute devotee of this iconic program about 'standing up and saying what isn't right, what's unequal' but was shocked to find herself having to say 'No'. She was afraid of alienating people with something perhaps too confronting; moreover, she feared exposing her story – a 'coming out' different from today's meaning of publicly declaring homosexuality.

She turned to psychotherapy, conscious she could acknowledge her brothers' role but could not 'look at her father'. Her two Freudian male therapists in the 1980s wouldn't listen when she tried to bring up her brothers or allow her to blame her father. Another therapist tried testing Lynette's capacity for emotional response but repression smothered any physical reaction. Having read Jung, Lynette sought out a Jungian woman therapist, telling her she'd raised the abuse with her older sister only to find her unsympathetic: 'He [their father] lay down beside me ... But I got up and moved away.' Lynette's Jungian observed, 'A baby doesn't get up and walk away'.

With her keen interest in astrology, Lynette believed that a 'Saturn Return' event, occurring at about 28 years of age, demands a major review of one's life. She herself was

aged 28 when her father died. She began to re-interpret her past, looking critically at him and her family. She asked to be written out of the *Bellbird* series, and a level crossing fatality was arranged to give her time for coming to grips with her past. In 1991 after fifteen years in therapy, Lynette had finally realised she must face up to the sexual abuse and incest she had endured. She turned to



Dymphna House, a non-government organisation (1984-2009) helping child survivors of sexual abuse to fathom their state of therapeutic regression. She felt less isolated and fearful. With people from other groups, through Dymphna they formed WISN (Women's Incest Survivors' Network). When WISN's inaugural conference began nearby Sydney's old

NIDA Tin Shed where Lynette was busy rehearsing, she insisted on attending. As one of 600 women, she found the strength to address that highly emotional gathering. WISN, she says, so significant for her, helped many others overcome alienation and isolation – survivors who didn't become prostitutes or kill themselves with an overdose.

A retreat in the Hunter Valley also proved liberating. Talk there with other abuse victims convinced her to get over the hurdle of not wanting to lay blame, of making excuses to herself about a father damaged by World War II.

By this stage it was very obvious to her audience that Lynette even now has great difficulty approaching the core of her story. The effects of repression were still palpable. And as well as primary abuse, she experienced secondary abuse: her family denied what had happened: 'Why are you doing this to us?' they said. 'It's not true.' Her aunt asked why she couldn't forget it. Lynette does not talk to her family now because they deny the truth of her life.

Lynette's self-therapy has included recording what happened when she was a child, a difficult task that took over twenty years. She also has an unfinished play written about it, and an autobiography. The aphorism she keeps on her bedroom wall helps: 'You have to own the events of your life to make yourself yours'. Her coping strategy is reinforced by a message from Alice Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (revised 1997), 'Creativity saves people'. Since school days she has always found release in acting: 'stage, the only place I'm free,' she once told her mother.

Today Lynette welcomes talking about her experience and encouraging people to break free from past injustice, and readily agreed to share her experience at the talk.

Transcription by Helen Ruby

Report by Kris Clarke

'You have to own the events of your life to make yourself yours'.

# FULL HOUSE: ANNE SUMMERS R



# LEADS THE PULSE OF THE TIMES



On 16 September members, friends and guests gathered at Parliament House Sydney for the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Luncheon. Chair Jozefa Sobski gave the welcoming address to a full house, firstly paying tribute to the generous bequest of prominent feminist and former Library member Joan Bielski. She spoke of the unprecedented demand for luncheon places this year, a tribute to guest speaker Dr Anne Summers whose work testifies to her having had 'her finger on the pulse of the times', and thanked Anne for her contribution. Acknowledging our Parliamentary hosts, the Hon Catherine Cusack and Hon Penny Sharpe, and our longstanding patrons, she also welcomed new patron, Professor Emerita Jill Roe (see page 2) and NSW Members of Parliament attending.



This year six schools were represented – Canterbury Girls High, Cheltenham Girls High, Mosman High, Loreto, Wenona, and Holroyd High attending for the first time with sponsorship by generous donors. Jozefa commended the fine reputation this school has earned for its work with refugee students under the dedicated direction of Principal Dorothy Hoddinott. She thanked major sponsors, the City of Sydney and the Teachers Mutual Bank, and the NSW Teachers Federation for its support.

Julia Readett, MC at last year's annual luncheon, took the stand to welcome Anne Summers. Julia reflected on her pride in putting her personal copy of Anne's *The Misogyny Factor* on her bookshelf next to her mother's much read and loved 1975 edition of *Damned Whores and God's Police*. 'Anne's dedication and passion has reached both my mother's generation and my own ... Anne's work provides the essential connection between the dense scholarship of the Gender Studies course that I'm taking and the vital need for activism ... I know it's time for women from my generation to take up the baton and continue the advancement of the Equality Project that Anne has significantly established.'



In her address Anne posed the question: why is it that after 40 years of campaigning the battle for equality has not been won, and summarised her arguments and assessment of women's lack of progress in her book *The Misogyny Factor*. The mood of the audience was charged and her rousing words received a standing ovation. (See page 1 for a detailed report.)

Jill Roe, moving the vote of thanks, congratulated Anne on the heartening speech from 'such an inspiring figure in the Women's Movement.' She referred to Anne's forthcoming – now legendary – interview at the Sydney Opera House on 30 September with Julia Gillard. Jill praised Anne for her stimulating and challenging thoughts and for her encouragement.

Highlights of librarian Barbara Henery's report included the Library's recent membership of the Equality Rights Alliance, which supports the largest network of women's organisations in Australia advocating women's equality. Volunteer cataloguers working on the archives project aim to have the digitised catalogue of the archive collection online in 2014. Barbara mentioned the importance of one of the Library's roles, acquisition of material from libraries of disbanded women's organisations: the Human Rights Commission in downsizing their library offered copies of relevant feminist materials which the Library was pleased to accept.



After the drawing of raffle prizes (see back cover), Jozefa thanked luncheon committee members – in particular convenor Diane Hague, the indefatigable Lyn Eggins and Treasurer Jean Burns assisted by Toni Milne – and remarked on the generosity of spirit and good humour of all volunteers. Her final thanks went to all the supporters in the audience for joining the community of women vital to the Library's survival and furthering its valuable work.

Kris Clarke

Guests clockwise from top right: Chris Burvill, Dorothy Cora, Margaret Jones; Christine Smith, Michele Ginswick; Holroyd students and teachers; Front: Anne Summers, Professor Emerita Denise Bradley AC, Daniela Torsh Back: Marie Muir, Jozefa Sobski; Ruth Robinson, Beth Robinson, Tonya Rushmer (three generations); Julia Readett, Jill Roe; Bernadette Chad, Robyn Harriott, Christine Lees; Olivia Wellesley-Cole, Lyn Eggins; Fran Weston, Margaret Foxon; Loreto and Cheltenham students and teachers; Shelley Hancock MP, Catherine Cusack MLC; Meredith Burgman, Carmel Tebbutt MP, Linda Burney MP; full house; Jacqueline Fingleton; Liz Watson, Nan Barner, Jean Gledhill; Barbara Briggs; Jozefa Sobski, Marie Muir, Maree O'Halloran AM; Bronwyn Marks, Merv Murchie, Barbara McGregor; Clover Moore (passing by); Jim and Kay Johnson; Judith and Leanne Nicholas; Ann Juster, Beverley Sodbinow, Margie Clitheroe.

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN 20TH CENTURY CHINA

Bernice drew her grim survey of the status of women during 20th century China from research into Chinese records and English secondary sources, and her own experience of life in China and Taiwan. Bernice stressed that everyone suffered in that terrible century from revolution, political disorder, invasion, civil war, famine, and massacre – but it was much worse for women.



As the 20th century began, law and custom still enshrined China's ancient tradition of male domination. Codes dating from the 7th century CE and based on Confucianism's five human relationships (ruler/subject, father/son, husband/wife, elder brother/younger brother, friends) defined women's inferior status. Family hierarchy reflected sex, seniority and degree of kinship.

Marriage, arranged by parents, grandparents or other senior relatives, existed for family and ancestor benefit. A wife had no independent status. She could not own or inherit her dowry, had to live with and obey her husband, remaining *chaste* even in widowhood. Most widows did not remarry; government awards encouraged them to remain chaste and some to suicide. Marriage was *patrilocal*: a wife lived with her husband's family, often effectively enslaved, her prime duty being to serve parents-in-law. Divorce, requiring a husband's and his parents' consent, was often used to repudiate wives. Concubinage garnered still lower status. A husband could marry several concubines as well as his wife, his authority over concubines even greater than over his wife. A concubine had to obey him and his wife, live with him and remain chaste; he could repudiate her and if she left without permission could sell or give her away. Bearing a son elevated her status but he and his wife had more authority over her son than she did.

Custom also discriminated against females. Sons were preferred to daughters – for work, supporting parents in old age, and worship of ancestors (who could help or punish descendants). Female infanticide was prevalent. Han Chinese virtually crippled girls with the painful footbinding deemed essential for a suitable marriage (less so where women worked southern rice fields). Poor families often sold young girls as future daughters-in-law.

Revolution overthrew China's imperial Qing Dynasty in 1911, ushering in Republican government. The Civil Code of 1929-31 (aimed at persuading Western powers to stop infringing Chinese sovereignty) dramatically

enhanced women's legal status. It legislated marriage equality: freedom of choice, duty of both husband and wife to stay faithful, divorce available to each (within limits) for bigamy or adultery, equal inheritance by sons and daughters married or not, prohibition of new foster daughter-in-law relationships and abolition of awards for widows and betrothed girls staying chaste or suiciding after husbands/fiancés died. But the Code did not touch concubinage or parental and property rights. Overall, it constituted little more than paper change affecting few women: the imported Western individual rights concept conflicted with Confucian tradition, and enforcement was impossible given a largely illiterate population, Japanese invasion from 1931 and civil war won by the Chinese Communists in 1949. Abusive practices continued, one indicator being more female than male suicides. Sale, pawn or hiring out of foster daughters-in-law, daughters, wives, widows and concubines persisted, as did female infanticide (prohibited in the late 1920s). Only footbinding declined, condemned by both Westerners and progressive Chinese.

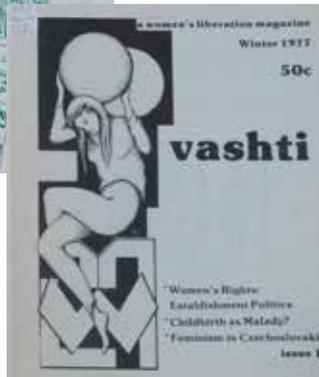
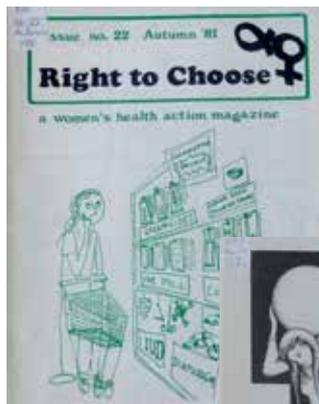
Mao's communist ascendancy opened with the Marriage Law of 1950 aimed at destroying the old system to enable land reform and women's employment outside the family. Mao's law largely incorporated the Civil Code, with additions. It provided free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for women and children, minimum marriage ages (18 for girls, 20 for boys), divorce if both parties agreed, and property rights for women who also benefited from land reform (some received personal, or joint husband/wife land certificates). It abolished bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, prevention of widows remarrying and marriage gifts. But again, law alone could not bring change. Bitter opposition included suicide and murder: parents insisted on choosing marriage partners; gift exchange continued; divorce stayed low. The Law did help raise rural marriage age, and possibly explained the virtual disappearance of foster daughters-in-law in the 1950s, although apparently marrying-out of young girls continued.

Some Mao policies disadvantaged women. Mao's decree that women's priority was work outside the home generated a *double burden* for women – paid work outside the home plus unpaid domestic responsibilities (raising children, care of elders, running households). Women often pregnant struggled with heavy farm work (wanting sons they resisted birth control); bound feet forced women to kneel for working northern wheat fields. From 1953, farming collectives usually comprised male relatives so women lost out in wages, positions of responsibility, child custody and property. Similarly in the late 1950s rural women could not compete equally with men although communes, communal dining, and education and childcare weakened household patrilocality. Urban women encouraged into industry had poor literacy and technical skills, despite training schools, childcare and birth control. Mao's later campaign for large families to boost the workforce included bans on abortion and contraception.

*Continued on page 11*

# DELVING INTO SERIALS

As a library component, serials come less to mind perhaps than do books. Serials are newspapers, newsletters, annual reports and periodicals (journals and magazines published more than once per year with regular frequency). They can be in print, non-print (microform, CD, etc) and/or electronic format. They have two characteristics distinguishing them from books. Firstly, they are issued in successive parts; secondly, when first issued, their publishers intend that the publication continue indefinitely. Also, more than do books they can have unique complexities deriving from the often indefinite nature of the publishing entity. If perspectives and resources of an entity's leadership/membership change, it may choose to modify its own name, and/or all aspects of its publication, including name, place of publication, format and frequency, even temporarily suspending publication. Serials held by Jessie Street National Women's Library comprise largely a range of academic, social and everyday periodicals dating mainly from the early 1970s and second wave feminism. The collection, overviewed at the Library website, is valuable for its wide and often definitive coverage in periodicals and newsletters which can provide unique snapshots of popular culture and of many women's issues otherwise poorly recorded. There is much of great interest in some of the Library's lesser known serials holdings. Many obscure publications were produced by short-lived organisations, newsletters in particular often having had short runs with funding haphazard and volunteers becoming scarcer over time. Newsletters (now fragile) published by 1970s grassroots women's groups contain primary source material about matters affecting women's lives. Successive issues often carried related articles about triggers and responses incrementally shaping campaigns. Concerns beyond the primary focus of collectives influenced how groups evolved. The Sydney-based Women's Abortion Action Campaign, one of Australia's oldest still active women's liberation organisations, changed the name and focus of its publication *Abortion is a woman's right to choose*, (1973-1981) to *Right to Choose: a women's health action magazine* (1981-1992), not because of its eight year campaign for repeal of abortion legislation and freely available safe contraception, but because, with the cessation of funding for allied groups (the Women's Health Centre and Family Planning Association), WAAC had decided to 'get together [and] pool ... resources' to continue the magazine as a 'forum for dialogue on all women's issues' (21, 1981). The publication's early broadsheet layout on poor quality paper suggests WAAC's initial focus was everyday campaigning rather than potential for a valuable historical record of struggle. Moreover, the decision to expand the magazine's



scope revealed a mature far-sighted membership stepping up to have a voice on an increasing range of women's issues for the longer term.

Similarly, many of Melbourne's dynamic and fluid women's collectives in the 1970s worked in mutual support to spread their message. *Vashti's Voice* (1972-1976), published quarterly by the Carlton Workshop Women's Liberation Group and later renamed *Vashti* (1976-81), was a forum for mainstream feminist issues. CWWLG also raised its profile through regular reporting by the Women's Centre (100 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne) in its *Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1973-1980) later renamed *Melbourne Women's Liberation Newsletter* (1980-1987). This newsletter routinely featured reports also from the Melbourne Women's Health Collective, the Feminist Ecology Group, the Rape Crisis Centre, the Melbourne collective of Scarlet Woman and Vesuvia Women's Craft and Book Co-operative Ltd. In effect, *Women's Liberation Newsletter* and the array of newsletters published by collectives loosely affiliated with the Women's Centre, filled the role of today's social media for Melbourne's feminists.

Little wonder then that the Women's Centre supported a feminist press both as a tool for socialist revolution and to teach women how to print. Sybylla Press, named after Miles Franklin's rebellious heroine in *My Brilliant Career*, opened nearby (106 Little Lonsdale Street) in 1976. As its founders had links to various women's groups, Sybylla was soon printing feminist publications, including *Scarlet Woman* (as published by the Melbourne Scarlet Woman collective), *Vashti's Voice*, *Women's Liberation Newsletter* and also *Lesbian Newsletter* (initially a supplement to *Women's Liberation Newsletter* and later separate). In 1982 Sybylla reduced its publishing program and in 1988 closed down.

The Library's serials collection, its breadth and wealth of content, reflects the diversity of women's lives, history, creativity and achievements. The Library has a continuing commitment to this substantial and specialised and collection. Enquiries are most welcome.

Anne Bolding and Lynne Morton, Serials Librarians

## Can you fill any gaps?

*Abortion is a woman's right to choose*, *Vashti's Voice* and *Women's Liberation Newsletter* are held by very few libraries. The Library seeks to fill gaps in its holdings of these periodicals, in line with Chair Jozefa's words about the need to 'deepen [the] collection... to specialise ... to focus on the unique' (page 2). Should you be willing to donate copies of these serials, please phone the Library to discuss with Anne Bolding or Lynne Morton Ph: (02) 9571 5359, or email: [info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au](mailto:info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au)

# Books for your bedside table

Jennifer M.T. Carter and Roger Cross *Ginger for Pluck, The life and times of Miss Georgina King*, Wakefield Press SA 2013, ISBN 9781743051719

Jennifer Horsfield *The Edgeworth David Women*, Rosenberg Publishing Dural NSW 2012, ISBN 9781921719516

Patricia Clarke *Eilean Giblin, A feminist between the wars*, Monash University Publishing Clayton Melbourne 2013, ISBN 9781921867842

Yvonne M. Ward *Unsuitable for Publication, Editing Queen Victoria*, Black Inc Collingwood Melbourne 2013, ISBN 9781863955942

Katrina Strickland, *Affairs of the Art, Love, loss and power in the art world*, Melbourne University Press 2013, ISBN 9780522858624

Georgina King was a plain girl thought to be difficult by her family, though she was clever and curious. These days she would have gone to university and found a good job, even one where her tendency to argue was seen as an advantage. But in the late 19th century she was simply unmarriageable, destined to care for a motherless nephew and then for her ageing parents. Encouraged by her clergyman father and his friends to take an interest in contemporary scientific debates she developed an interest in botany and geology, becoming one of the lady amateurs who collected specimens for male professionals and attended such scientific lectures and other gatherings as were open to women. But when she tried to participate by presenting the findings of her own 'research' she was rejected and became very bitter and critical. Her experience was similar to that of Daisy Bates with whom she formed a kind of alliance late in life. Like Daisy (see *Newsletter* May 2013), there was something in what she had to offer, but as an untrained amateur she lacked knowledge and was unable to relate her perceptions convincingly to the scientific establishment. In *Ginger for Pluck*, husband and wife team Jennifer M.T. Carter and Roger Cross have tried to rescue her but their rather childish attacks on Georgina's supposed enemies, especially on Cara, wife of Professor Edgeworth David, do nothing to advance their argument. In Jennifer Horsfield's recent study, *The Edgeworth David Women*, Cara David is shown to be both strong and difficult but she almost certainly regarded Georgina King as beneath her dignity.

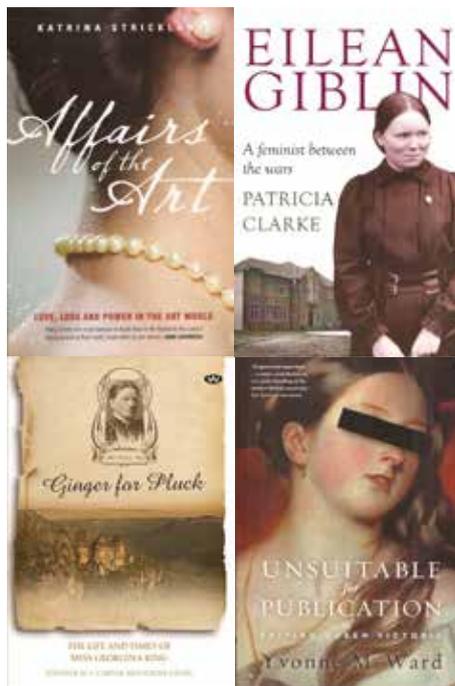
Eilean Burton was fortunate in being born 40 years later than Georgina King and into a more tolerant family. Like Jessie Street, she attended the prestigious Wycombe Abbey School in Britain with its advanced views on women's education; and among her mentors were two suffragist aunts who spent time in Holloway Prison in 1912 for their involvement in suffrage

demonstrations in London. In 1913 she decided to travel to Australia, partly because she thought the advanced political status of women in Australia might make an interesting travel book. While in Tasmania she met Lyndhurst Giblin, a most unusual man whom she later married. Though she failed to find a publisher for her various travel diaries, and the letters she wrote to Giblin have not survived, his letters to her and the diaries she kept as the wife of a senior public servant in Canberra provide the basis for a thrilling biography by Patricia Clark. It is thrilling because of the way in which the stories of these two remarkable people have been woven together. Theirs was a strange marriage in which they were more like comrades than husband and wife. Giblin's position as a senior economic advisor to a series of governments provides a fascinating backdrop to Eilean's story and it certainly opened doors and made it possible for her to find her own purposes (there were no children), but she was lucky in having independent means. She was able with Giblin's encouragement to strike out on her own, her most significant achievement being as Chair of the Council that established Melbourne University Women's College.

An unexpected pleasure has been Yvonne M. Ward's *Unsuitable for Publication, Editing Queen Victoria*. Begun as a mature-age PhD thesis at LaTrobe University Melbourne, this book follows the processes by which the two volume authorised edition of the letters of Queen Victoria was compiled after her death. The two men entrusted with this task were themselves incredible characters and the kinds of decisions they made about which letters to include and what kind of an image they would create of the former monarch were constantly discussed in their correspondence with each other, their publisher, and court officials. The book is fascinating for anyone who has ever wondered about these editorial processes. Queen Victoria wrote some 60 million words in her lifetime (an average of 2500 words a day) but much of her correspondence, especially that concerned with being a woman, wife and mother, was deliberately excluded by her editors.

*Affairs of the Art* is another study of the creation and management of posthumous reputations, mostly by the widows of a number of significant 20th century artists. Lyn Williams, Wendy Whiteley, Barbara Tucker, Yvonne Boyd, Mary Nolan and Helen Brack are some of the women Katrina Strickland has interviewed for this absorbing study of the art market, with its intriguing insights into the hidden powers wielded by wives, not only during the life of the artist, but also after his death.

Beverley Kingston



From 1978, leader Deng Xiaoping and his successors have given priority to economic development. But return to households as production units has also returned the norm of patrilocal marriage in rural areas. Arranged marriages and gift exchange continue. Claiming family property is difficult. The double burden has intensified: married and older women take more responsibility for agriculture and childcare as men and younger women migrate for employment. Females suiciding still far outnumber males.

In particular, inception of the one-child family policy to cap population at 1.2 billion has profoundly affected women. National fertility rates fell from 5.5 births per woman in 1971 to 1.9 by 1993, bringing some horrific reports of forced abortion at eight or nine months and abuse of women producing females. One million ‘missing girls’ annually in the mid-1990s suggests rising female infanticide. Subsequently, ultrasound machines have enabled sex-selective abortion. An almost normal sex ratio birthrate of 106:100 in 1964 compares with a ratio in 2000 of 117:100 and often higher ratios in rural areas. Attempted crackdowns in 2012 on ‘illegal’ pre-natal gender tests and ‘selective’ abortions, and recent targeting of a less skewed ratio by 2015 possibly signal Chinese leaders are reviewing the one-child policy, a central concern for women. There is only *one* woman in China’s current 25 person Politburo.

Changes unimaginable in 1900 mark China’s 20th century: diabolically harsh practices – footbinding, concubinage, sale, virtual enslavement to mothers-in-law, chastity awards – all swept away, and women’s independent status assured. But continuing Confucian traditions (patrilocal marriage, preference for sons), pre-natal infanticide, the double burden and inability to break the political glass ceiling suggest many challenges still ahead in Chinese women’s quest for equality. Australian women’s problems seem pale by comparison.

*Report by Margot Simington*

### Capital Investment Fund

Since it was launched in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has reached \$176,931. 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/renewal/donation form on this page.

#### CIF donations since May 2013:

Estate of Joan Margaret Bielski  
Barbara Henery Robin Low Gayle Tollifson

### General donations since July 2013

#### Donations of money help meet day-to-day running costs:

M Armstrong, Barbara Briggs, M Duckworth  
Lyn Eggins, C Harrison, Marie de Lepervanche  
Margaret McDonell, Daniela Torsh

#### Donations of material expand our collection:

Margaret Bettridge, Helen Pomery, K Rogers  
R Solomon, Anne Steng  
State Library of NSW, Wakefield Press

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The membership year runs from 1 January to 31 December.  
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### Donations (donations over \$2 are tax deductible)

- I wish to make a donation of \$.....  
 to the Library for general purposes  
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 I am willing to have my name published in the Newsletter  
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### Payment Options

Please charge my MasterCard/Visa with \$.....

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 the Library for general purposes or to  
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### Become a volunteer

- I would like to help the Library by becoming a volunteer.  
(You will be contacted for an interview.)

Please forward the completed form to:

**Jessie Street National Women’s Library**  
**GPO Box 2656, Sydney NSW 2001**

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**Note: Please advise the Library if your contact details have changed.**

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For level access, enter via the Ultimo Community Centre in Bulwara Rd

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**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 Aquatic Centre 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 metre parking available



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**Visit our website:**  
[www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au](http://www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au)



## Annual Luncheon 2013: Raffle

The Library thanks all individuals and organisations who donated prizes. Raffle tickets were drawn by students from the six Sydney schools attending: Canterbury Girls High, Cheltenham Girls High, Holroyd High, Loreto, Mosman High and Wenona. Congratulations to all winners!

- 1<sup>st</sup>: A Gorman – Two nights stay at the Langham Hotel Sydney value \$1,000, donated by the Teachers Mutual Bank
- 2<sup>nd</sup>: G Tollifson – David Jones gift voucher for \$300, donated by M Muir
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: M Foxon – Tea for Two at the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth valued at \$118, donated by Sofitel Sydney
- 4<sup>th</sup>: S Comrie-Thomson – Coffee cruise valued at \$98, donated by Captain Cook Cruises
- 5<sup>th</sup>: C Allen – Signed copy of *The Misogyny Factor* by Anne Summers and a bottle of wine

- 6<sup>th</sup>: J Ross – *Maybanke: A Woman's Voice* signed and donated by its editors, Jan Roberts and Beverley Kingston
- 7<sup>th</sup>: S Merhi – *Waging Peace* inscribed, signed and donated by author Anne Deveson and a bottle of wine
- 8<sup>th</sup>: J Newton – *The People Smuggler* signed and donated by author Robin de Crespigny and a bottle of wine
- 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>: J Johnson and M Murchie – Two bottles of wine each.

All wine was produced by Mount View High School, Cessnock NSW and donated by the NSW Teachers Federation.