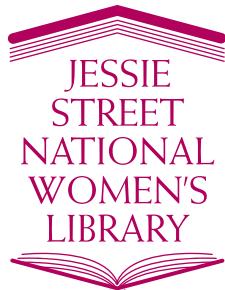


# NEWSLETTER

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



## CHILD ASYLUM SEEKERS & THE FOURTH 'R'

Guest speaker at the Library's 2014 Annual Luncheon, Dorothy Hoddinott AO took the opportunity to traverse a compelling case: young asylum seekers' rights for education equity. Fifteen years ago, she had heard the former President of the Irish Republic, UN Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson, speak compellingly of human rights in education. The message resonated with her. And ever since, she has fought tirelessly for human rights in Australia's education process. As Principal of Holroyd High School in Sydney's west since 1995, her special focus has been refugee and asylum seeker children: their rights to Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic and Rights – the fourth R.

Australia enshrined education equity in law in the late 19th century. Nevertheless, violations of children's rights litter Australian history, most obviously involving Aboriginal people but also many other groups including disabled children.

Dorothy painted today's stark picture for asylum seeker children. Under the guardianship of the Minister for Immigration, nearly 2000 children in detention centres, some in Nauru or Manus Island, have no access to formal education, live often in appalling conditions, have limited medical care, witness violence daily and, particularly if unaccompanied, risk physical and sexual abuse. No children in community detention or on bridging visas can hope for permanent settlement in Australia under current government policy. Life is constant uncertainty.

Despite the current second Human Rights Commission enquiry in twelve years into the plight of young asylum seekers, 'successive federal governments have shirked their legal and moral responsibilities', Dorothy said. Australia is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child whose Article 29 states, the '*education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*'; Article 37(b) states: '*No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and ... used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate ... time*'. A society where many are illiterate or semi-literate cannot be progressive or democratic, and is likely also to disregard other human rights. Dorothy observed that the better access to education now helping disabled children increase

their community participation highlights the injustice of denying education equity to children in immigration detention.



Dorothy is adamant that an approach driven by human rights has great potential. She says Holroyd High has become a beacon of hope for many refugee, asylum seeker and disadvantaged children. 'At Holroyd, respect and responsibility inform everything, principles through which we build the trust essential to a civil society, hope for the future, and help students reach their educational potential notwithstanding seemingly intractable government policy for some students.' One Holroyd asylum seeker student, Nahid Karimi, told Dorothy the three most important things she learnt there were the rights to freedom of speech, to an education, and to be yourself.

Holroyd High serves a largely multicultural community in Australia's most multicultural city. It comprises an Intensive English Centre (providing one year of English for non-English speaking background children in Australia less than a year) and a co-educational high school. Of about 570 students in the high school, 83% are NESB, and of those 38% have been in Australia under three years. Some 60% of students are recent refugees.

Currently over 80 asylum seeker students, she said, are in community detention or on bridging visas and about 20 asylum seeker students have permanent protection visas. Many refugee students have little or no prior schooling, all have experienced trauma, separation and loss; many asylum seekers despair. *Switch on the Night*, a 2004 lyrical but confronting documentary film about seven Holroyd High asylum seekers, deeply distressed some students at a recent screening. How, she asked, can we discuss issues like this without causing more pain?

Despite the challenges, teachers at the school nurture a culture of high expectations and achievement: an average of 40% of Holroyd students go to university annually (the NSW average is 37%). Good teaching and shared values are critical. Before Holroyd, Afsaneh, now a successful clinical psychologist, could not openly identify as Kurdish; Nooria, Australia's first child asylum seeker with a public face who told rallies, 'Children should be in school, not

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### Christmas Closure

The Library will close on Friday 12 Dec 2014, reopening Monday 12 Jan 2015. 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 focusing on 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 Australia's development

### Patrons

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## Joyce Stevens memorial service

On 17 July about 180 people gathered at Sydney's Glebe Town Hall to honour the life of Joyce Stevens AO, communist, feminist, journalist, activist and author. The memorial program identified broad themes of Joyce's life for people to talk about.

*Women's Liberation to Socialist Feminism 1969-1975:* Julie Gibson remembered Joyce's courage leading, probably for the first time in an open forum, a ground-breaking discussion about what we now call child sexual abuse. Mary O'Sullivan worked with Joyce through International Women's Days, the 1974 Women's Commission and the magazine, *Scarlet Woman*. Debate in the Scarlet Woman Collective of all facets of the women's movement afforded magical inter-generational moments with the Women's Liberation movement enabling young people to learn from the preceding generation. Through Joyce we glimpsed an older Australia where poverty, class violence and racism drove political commitment and where socialism and communism could make you an alien.

*Creating women's institutions and services:* Janelle Crosier told us how from campaigns Joyce was involved in, Leichhardt Women's Health Centre was funded by 1974, Liverpool Women's Health Centre by 1975: and by 1986,



Dorothy Hoddinott: *continued from page 1:*

gaol', now supports children in community detention while studying accountancy; with three years of formal schooling, Hawa, a Sudanese refugee, has almost finished a university sociology degree; Faduma, with four years of formal education, is doing the Higher School Certificate.

Students on temporary protection and bridging visas used to have to leave school at 18, so in 2002 Dorothy established a school trust fund, *Friends of Zainab*, and in 2003 a donor trust fund with the National Foundation for Australian Women. These funds support refugee students from Holroyd to finish school and go to university. *Friends of Zainab*, now also within the Public Education Foundation, currently provides scholarships to some 60 refugee and asylum seeker students across NSW in their last two school years and first two university years. Recently, the fight to continue the enrolment of asylum seeker students turning 18 began again. Dorothy is also campaigning against the full international fees now demanded of asylum seeker university students (a nightmare for *Friends of Zainab*).

Dorothy pointed to Australia's largely successful history of migration including refugees and asylum seekers. It is certain that the refugee diaspora will continue: the UN estimates 45 million are displaced, 16 million of them refugees (45% from Afghanistan or Iraq, and increasingly from Syria), almost a million of them asylum seekers.

She concluded: 'This great moral issue, our treatment of asylum seekers, diminishes us as a nation. We do not want ghettos of resentment with potential for growth of terrorism. We must never repeat the mistakes in our treatment of Indigenous people. Schools make a difference. At Holroyd, every day we build optimism about the future through success at school. That is why the fourth R is important.' Her audience agreed with sustained applause.

Margot Simington

22 funded women's health centres across NSW (including Sydney's Rape Crisis Centre).

*Socialist feminism, working women, and women's activism in the union movement 1975-1989:* Diane Hague said Joyce drafted the first Working Women's Charter, used with some success to lobby successive ACTU Congresses from 1977. The Women's Employment Action Centre over its seven years from 1982 organised conferences, campaigns and newsletters on issues such as equal pay, technology and sexual harassment. WEAC also set up the Register of Women in Non-Traditional Work. A key WEAC activist, Joyce later wrote WEAC's history.

*Public housing advocacy from the mid 1980s:* Adam Farrar said Joyce used her lived experience of public housing as a leader in the Public Tenants Movement for many years.

Sue Wills reminded us that Joyce, possibly more than any others, ensured that the 'Ten Years After' project collected and preserved Sydney Women's Liberation Movement history. The tapestry of Joyce's life included wonderful knitting and crocheting and an amazing doll collection. The Sydney Trade Union Choir ended the service with rousing renditions of 'Bread and Roses', 'Don't Be Too Polite Girls' and 'Solidarity'.

Diane Hague

# Gough Whitlam

The death of Gough Whitlam on 21 October saddened many of us. We mourned a great, if flawed, leader who represented progressive social change. He was Prime Minister for only three short years 1972 -1975, arguably the most transformative years in Australian political history. For women, the Whitlam Government changed our lives.

The 1972 election was the first in which 'women's issues' were a factor in the result. The Women's Electoral Lobby was founded in 1972 and surveyed candidates about issues such as equal pay, abortion, child care and sex discrimination. The gross lack of knowledge of so many male candidates (there were hardly any female candidates then) was fully exploited by WEL to publicise candidate and party views and mobilise women voters. Whitlam's commitment to action on issues affecting women gained support and may well have determined the election result.

Many of Whitlam's great reforms – in health, education, Aboriginal affairs, cities, the arts, foreign policy, removal of discrimination – were then controversial but they have stood the test of time. It was Whitlam's government that funded Australia's first women's health centre at Leichhardt, the first refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence (Elsie Women's Refuge) and the Rape Crisis Centre, all in Sydney. These 'firsts' were quickly followed by other centres across Australia. Now, forty years later, women are mobilising to save women's services like these from governments bent on privatisation.

Whitlam's commitment to equality of opportunity and increased spending on education was very important for girls and women. The abolition of university fees made it possible for girls and young women from less affluent families to gain a tertiary education, and for older women to resume their education after child-rearing, and embark on a new career. These were life-changing experiences.



Faith Bandler's birthday announcement wins hands down for our most popular post on Facebook: 537 hits. Follow us on [www.facebook.com/nationalwomenslibrary](http://www.facebook.com/nationalwomenslibrary)

Whitlam appointed Elizabeth Reid as Women's Adviser to the Prime Minister, opening the way for women's issues to become an integral part of policy development. Margaret Whitlam commented in 1975 that Reid must be the bravest woman in Australia, criticising only her job title: 'How many male advisers are there? It's a weighted battle but at least we're in it.' Margaret's partnership with Gough was an important driving force in his commitment to equality for women, and her non-traditional role as the PM's spouse inspired women. Like Gough, Margaret continued to play a public role until her death. In 1999 the Jessie Street National Women's Library was proud to have her officially open our premises in Town Hall House.

Whitlam was committed to ensuring fair pay and conditions for women. He reopened an equal pay case in the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, resulting in a decision that saw half a million women becoming eligible for full pay, as well as an overall 30% rise in women's wages. He also appointed Elizabeth Evatt to the Commission. Whitlam improved working conditions for women in the public service, passing the *Maternity Leave Act 1973* offering twelve days full pay and twelve months unpaid leave for new mothers employed by the Commonwealth and outlawing pregnancy-related discrimination. He introduced single mothers' benefits, improved other social welfare payments and lifted the luxury tax on contraceptive pills. These measures greatly reduced teenage pregnancies and almost ended the scandal of babies being removed from unmarried mothers for adoption.

Gough's legacy is now so deeply established that we sometimes take it for granted. We forget how fierce the battles were. His memory should inspire us to have vision in politics and the courage to fight for it.

Jan Burnswoods



## LUNCH HOUR TALKS – third Thursday of the month

19 Feb: Dr Meredith Bergmann  
**ASIO: how do we know we are safe?**

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 on reconnected her with half-siblings, fuelling her appreciation of Amsterdam's art and culture.

**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

# LISTENING TO COUNTRY

The nightmare event organisers fear seemed to have materialised with speaker Ros Moriarty nowhere in sight, the audience waiting. Mobiles came in handy: Ros had just reached Sydney airport following fog in Canberra. Vice-President Michele Ginswick handled everything with aplomb – and serendipitous help from Dianne Ottley, (who would be presenting the Library's next Lunch Hour Talk in July – see page 10).

Ros would be speaking about Aboriginal culture. So Dianne drew on her seventeen years of guiding in the Aboriginal collection at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She reminded us of how the Aboriginal art industry has blossomed into a very acceptable avenue for people to earn income, but it was not always so. No Aboriginal language contained the word 'art'. Anthropologists for many decades, from Baldwin and Spencer researching Aboriginal Dreaming in the 1890s, collected 'barks' and dilly bags destined for museums. Aboriginal artifacts were not seen as 'art' until the 1950s, the change signalled in the dispersal of an important research collection by gifting to major Australian art galleries, not museums. Following this gifting, abstract artist Tony Tuckson, the NSW Gallery's Deputy Director, commissioned its first Aboriginal art: bark paintings from the Northern Territory Marika and Yunupingu families. In 1958 Tuckson travelled with avid collector Dr Stuart Scougall who commissioned what would become the Gallery's first Aboriginal sculpture: Pukumani Grave Post carvings from the Tiwi Islands off the Northern Territory coast. Then, in the early 1970s in the south of the Northern Territory, schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon, who had identified what is now known as 'dot' painting, set up the Papunya Tula art cooperative to market such paintings. Sales proved slow until some were included in the Gallery's contemporary art exhibition, *Australian Perspecta 1981*.

Dianne's remarks seamlessly segued into Ros's talk. In 1983, Ros with husband John established Jumbana Group. Inspired by John's family story of deep belonging to land and culture, this design, communication and strategy practice works with individuals and companies to connect Indigenous Australians and business. One thrilling example of their successful marketing of Aboriginality dates from 1994: four Qantas aircraft covered in Aboriginal motifs (kangaroos leaping across campsites and song lines) drenched in landscape colours (greens of the wet season, blue-purple of mountain ridges at dusk, yellow ochre of sandstone, charcoal of campfires, white of ochre body paint shimmering on a red base), the whole design symbolic of the Aboriginal cultural beauty she and John want wrapped around Australia.

Ros enthralled us with her *Listening to Country, a journey to the heart of what it means to belong* (2010). A revealing personal discovery of the importance of belonging to land, this book traces her four 'journeys' into Northern Territory Aboriginal country, landscape and culture: in 2006, eight days camping in the Tanami Desert, 'feeling the gentle

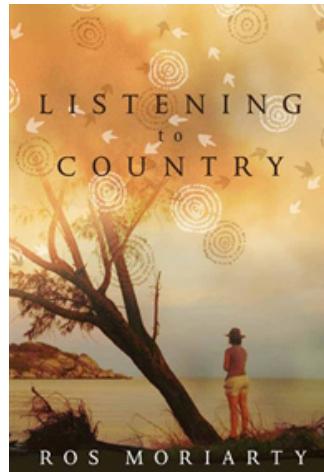
physical and spiritual cocoon of old land'; the second, discovering through marriage the warmth, generosity and wisdom of John's Yanyuwa people in Borroloola, particularly the women; third, her family journey – marriage, children, the business; and fourth, white and black Australian hopes for a shared future.

Childhood in Tasmania gave Ros a sense of land and belonging but the deep affinity with country amongst John's Borroloola family was a revelation. The family landscape 'radiated a warmth that seemed to rise from the baked land itself, from the singing and dancing', she said. By contrast, when she, John and baby settled in a leafy Adelaide suburb in the early 1980s, an elderly neighbour Gladys severed their wisteria at the root. In Ros's words, 'our wisteria had wound around Glad's lemon tree like us wending our way into her suburb'. Glad never fully accepted them, despite asking John to show her German relatives 'really Aboriginal things - throwing boomerangs, playing didgeridoos'.

John was a Stolen Generations child. His mother a full 'bush' woman, his father Irish, John was one of the paler kids arriving aged four at Roper Mission School where his mother had been told to take him. But under prevailing assimilation policies he and other children were abruptly transported to Sydney without his mother's knowledge. At Borroloola in 2006 his mother was still crying over the day he was taken away. John's lonely young life was spent in the Blue Mountains, comforted somewhat by a tiny basket his mother wove and sent him, complete with dugong tusk inside. In the late 1970s when 21 year old Ros met John, she could not understand his story – few people then knew about the Stolen Generations. Ros and John named their first son after elder, Tim Wakawurlma, who knew about Maccassans trading in northern Australia for six centuries before the British arrived: old Tim embodied generations of spiritual life.

Ros is sad Australians generally are unaware how Aboriginals suffer from severance of links to place – of how 'singing of the continent continues in the heart of its landscapes'. Her book embodies the philosophy and spirituality of Yanyuwa matriarchs towards much deeper, wider understanding.

*Transcription by Helen Ruby  
Report by Margot Simington*



Ros Moriarty has donated a copy of *Listening to Country* to the Library.

Readers' Feast Bookstore stocks it: Ph 03 9662 4699  
[readers@readersfeast.com.au](mailto:readers@readersfeast.com.au)

# WOMEN, GIRLS AND PATHWAYS TO PRISON

Professor of Criminology at the University of New South Wales, Eileen Baldry focused her research on social justice matters and women who end up in prison. She gave an insight into the way the criminal justice system deals with young women from disadvantaged backgrounds, often with mental health and cognitive disability.

Patriarchal treatment of poor, disadvantaged and Aboriginal women began with the British invasion of Sydney in 1788, when a small number of women convicts were set to work in the Parramatta Women's Workhouse (later the Parramatta Girls' Home).

Across the affluent world over the last 25 years, the rate of women in prison has grown substantially. In Australia in 1983 women comprised 3.9% of the total population of prisoners: in 2013 it was 8%. There has been a 48% increase for women over the last decade. General prison population is rising, but the women's rate is much higher.

Studies show changes in the manner in which women go to prison. A portion of women committing violent offences goes to prison at higher rates, but for lower level violent offences than previously. Criminologists compare rates across the world in terms of the number of people per 100,000 in prison. Male prisoners are 322 per 100,000 in Australia; women prisoners 26 per 100,000 – but rates are not uniform across Australia, with criminal justice generally legislated by States and Territories. The Northern Territory has a very high rate of women's imprisonment: in 2013, 120 per 100,000 of women in prison, mostly Aboriginal women. Victoria is consistently the lowest and New South Wales sits on the median.

In Australia, the increase is almost entirely due to the increased number of Aboriginal women going to prison. In 1996 21% of all women prisoners were Aboriginal women, who comprise about 2.5%-3% of Australia's general population. In 2006 it had gone up to 30% and by 2013 33% – so a third of the women in prison today are Aboriginal: world-wide, the worst over-representation of Aboriginal or indigenous women. This disgrace goes largely unnoticed. When Eileen was in Canada a few years ago she demonstrated against 'disappeared' first nation women. Many hundreds of indigenous women in Canada disappear every year – in almost every case connected with the criminal justice system. They often come to the towns, as do many Aboriginal women in Australia, to make their living as street workers. Many are raped and killed. So it is not just Australia's patriarchal culture. Eileen referred to Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) and the belief that patriarchy has the same hallmarks as colonialism – in its class structure and violence.

Approximately 50% of people in prison today have either mental health or cognitive disability or both, and with drug and alcohol abuse, it would be close to 100% for women. One factor in driving the growth is the increase in the number of people with impairment who end up in prison. A recent survey in the Northern Territory found that 40% of Aboriginal people in prison have hearing impairment. Cognitive impairment, significantly more common amongst prisoners than in the community, includes intellectual disability (below 70 IQ) with other

social deficits; borderline intellectual functioning (70-80 IQ) with associated difficulties in social interaction; foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and acquired brain injury. Recent work shows that 40% of people in prison have some sort of acquired brain injury, with some 20% of this group affected by their lack of capacity to manage everyday interactions. People with cognitive disability often experience impulsivity and are often vulnerable to being persuaded to break the law. Someone may say, 'Here's a toy gun – go into that service station and get the money. You'll be our friend for life.' Most women in prison come from poor, disadvantaged families in poor areas.

A story reported on the ABC that exemplifies these issues concerns an Aboriginal woman, Roseanne, aged 23, with cognitive impairment from foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Abused from a young age and moved between her community and the riverbed in Alice Springs, she was eventually made a guardee, recognised as being at serious risk. The NT has almost no welfare support for Aboriginal people with disability. Roseanne was constantly in trouble with the law for minor offences, such as shoplifting and other theft. Two years ago she was across the border in Western Australia, and was picked up by the police for driving a stolen vehicle without a licence. The WA Disability agency said she was not their responsibility; that she belonged to the NT. She was considered 'not fit to plead' due to cognitive impairment so could not face Court. Not having anywhere for her, the WA court put her in the lockup in Kalgoorlie. No conviction, no charge. Her guardian pleaded with NT welfare that something be done, to no avail. Eighteen months later her guardian started a protest with the Aboriginal Disability Justice Campaign and wrote to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who demanded an explanation. Roseanne was repatriated to Alice Springs and was supposed to be provided with supported housing with appropriate disability support services. But NT services did not provide secure safe accommodation and Roseanne was arrested recently and is again in prison without conviction. Eileen believes the problem is systemic – it is easier to leave someone in prison.

Another example is Natalie, a non-Aboriginal woman, with borderline intellectual disability, substance abuse disorder from a young age and various mental health diagnoses. She spent time in and out of home care and crisis accommodation as a teenager. Police noted she had 'no fixed abode' at the age of 12, left school aged 14 and had 22 police contacts before her first juvenile justice custody. On the day of her eighteenth birthday she damaged property and abused the staff in the Community Services office, was arrested and put in adult remand.

*Continued on page 11*



# TWENTIETH ANNUAL LUNCHEON

Opening the Library's Annual Luncheon, Chair Jozefa Sobski announced this Luncheon had a theme. Presaging Dorothy Hoddinott's passionate address (see page 1), Jozefa recalled that, as a child of refugees from war-ravaged Europe, her early years were spent in migrant hostels, among them Sydney's Villawood. 'Sadly', she said, 'this centre is now detaining a new generation of refugees fleeing war, poverty and persecution.' She knew Jessie Street would have been a vocal opponent of 'current hostile policies', and declared, 'I am proud we can stand to be counted among the enlightened.'

She acknowledged Parliamentary hosts, Shelley Hancock, Catherine Cusack and Penny Sharpe. She welcomed Library patrons Elizabeth Evatt and Jill Roe, Jeannette McHugh Chair of Jessie Street Trust, Linda Scott City of Sydney Councillor and other notable guests. She thanked major supporters, the City of Sydney and the Teachers Mutual Bank, also past Library Chair Marie Muir now living in Perth and sorely missed.

She welcomed students from Canterbury Girls High, Fairfield High, Forest High, Holroyd High, James Ruse Agricultural High, Queenwood, Riverside Girls High, Ryde Secondary College, Sydney Girls High and Wenona; also representatives of the NSW Teachers Federation, Unions NSW, Women's Action and Information Group, Retired Teachers Association, Women's Electoral Lobby and the Stella Prize. The recently launched Stella initiative to redress gender imbalance in school reading lists and promote study of Australian women's works aligns delightfully with Library objectives: Jozefa encouraged schools to collect the promotional education resource kits brought along by Stella Prize board member, Samantha Hagan.

Beverley Sodbinow, archivist and Board member, spoke about the Library. She began with the Library's birth story: the difficulties of finding material on Australian women, the first proposal of a library concept at a 1989 centenary celebration of Jessie Street's birth, and the founding that same year of our Library named to honour Jessie Street. A peace activist, feminist and internationalist extraordinaire, Jessie worked all her life to improve the status of women. Beverley stressed how the Library's holdings have been and are acquired only through donations – from generous individuals, organisations and publishers, and sometimes also from women's organisations that have closed, thereby saving unique material which might otherwise be lost. The Library is committed to keeping books on its shelves, particularly important given that other libraries are culling works as they age and go out of print. Its holdings are invaluable for those interested in the women's movement.

The Library's fiction collection focuses on Australian women, including early novelists like Rosa Praed, Tasma, and Henry Handel Richardson as well as modern women. The poster collection, some 1400 items almost all digitised and having a unique single focus on feminist issues, is assessed as a national treasure. The Library is looking to better utilise its posters – in exhibitions, in women's movement history and on the Library website. The archives collection is not yet fully incorporated into the Library's on-line catalogue: work is ongoing. A recent important accession is Enid Cook's papers, the basis for a doctorate completed in 2006: Enid, teacher and political activist, worked to save Surry Hills from developers. The serials collection dating from 1944 is a principal repository for publications of some associations. It includes the *Australian Women's Digest*, founded by Jessie Street as 'an open forum for the expression of opinion on matters of interest to women and the community'.

The Library is developing as a centre of women's culture. Our History Week event, a stimulating symposium on *Australian women's peace activism* was a great success (see pages 8-9). This year Library visitors included researchers, persons wishing to donate material and others coming impromptu. School group visits, students and specialist researchers are very welcome. Update of the Library's website (a new look, revised content and elaborated entries) and launch of a Facebook page and a YouTube site are promoting the Library to a potentially younger audience.

Beverley concluded with a big Library 'thank you' to all volunteers.



# ON 2014

The photos below are of speaker Dorothy Hoddinot AO, school groups and teachers, Library members, volunteers and guests enjoying the Annual Luncheon.



# HISTORY WEEK SYMPOSIUM: AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S PEACE ACTIVISM

As a contribution to NSW History Week's focus on the centenary of World War I, Jessie Street National Women's Library dealt – unconventionally – not with the conflict itself but with peace activism. Symposium chair, **Beverley Kingston** suggested a discussion framework: three questions. Was the Peace Movement growing from the Boer War into World War I stronger than anything since? What has women's role been in such movements? Has women's relationship to pacifism changed significantly with women in the military?

Women generally are thought to shun violence and war, and to tend towards pacifism, she said. There's been no significant Australian anti-war movement since the Vietnam War, and pacifist organisations are relatively meek. But she cited a current disturbing statistic: one woman a week killed by a partner, a rate 'probably higher than in the 19th century'. The subsequent discussion highlighted women's assertiveness in place of compliance, the custody of children (previously a father's right, now mostly going to the mother), continued access to guns and much more violence in television and film. Should there be more activism around domestic violence or at least some 'real figures' and serious study on these questions? Meanwhile, we were offered three papers – a historical overview of peace activism, then two accounts of 20th century women peace activists.

Library Patron, **Professor Emerita Jill Roe** began her overview – 'as I always do' – with the subject of her famed *Stella Miles Franklin A Biography* (2008). In her lifetime Miles (1879-1954) had experience of four wars, as had many in the audience. But Miles' experience began with the Boer War and her 'fierce views' are legendary: 'Men have made a mess of the world with their belligerence and lust'; and as Cold War raged, in a letter just before her death she declared to a friend, 'As for peace messages, surely the madness of the male rampant can go no further. Peace or perish!'

Turning to historians, Jill noted the standard approach has war dominant. She asked, 'why not peace? People do not believe wars are good and inevitable, or that peace is ephemeral'. However, the latest, 'very good' historiography differs significantly. John Gittings, in *The Glorious Art of Peace* (2013) argues the peace tradition is much stronger than we think despite the little written about it. Margaret McMillan's *The War that ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (2014) argues that war is not, and in 1914 was not, inevitable; she examines why leaders made the decisions they did. Joan Beaumont's 'excellent' history, *Broken Nation Australians in the Great War* (2013) covering both war and home fronts – a whole national experience – offers a moderated response: who knows what will happen? Nobody did in 1914 nor do we know now. Douglas Newton's *Hell-Bent Australia's leap into the Great War* (2014) concludes Australia rushed into World War I.

The oldest dissent tradition in modern times – Quaker – is part of Christian religious commitment to peace

originating with the gospels. Jill's 'Peace' chapter in Mary Spongberg et al eds *Companion to Women's Historical Writing* (2005) covers some of this dissent tradition in medieval writing, including Hildegard of Bingen and Christine de Pizan. An intellectual liberal/rational tradition and the socialist critique developed in the late 19th century with debates in The Hague and peace societies involving people like Sydney's Rose Scott. During the inter-war years, the golden age of organised peace activism, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom president, Jane Addams, received a Nobel Peace Prize; men dominated many other peace organisations but women were also prominent. The mid 20th century brought protests in 1967, the Vietnam War with outspoken participatory activism, and protest also from Asian religions – Buddhism, and Hinduism notably including Gandhi.

Australia's own strong dissenting/peace tradition began in 1834 when Quakers arrived in Sydney. Components of Australia's tradition include anti-imperialism stemming partly from Irish experience, religious sectarianism and anti-conscriptionism which can overlap or may be the opposite of peace activism: ANZAC soldiers voted 'No' in the 1916 and 1917 conscription referenda. Alan Gilbert and Ann-Mari Jordens, 'Traditions of Dissent' in M. McKernan and M. Brown eds *Australia. Two centuries of war and peace* (1988), one of very few accounts of Australian dissent, is helpful but 'we need another study'. Responding to Jill's expectation of much more to come from biography and history of memory about regional variation across Australia, the audience instanced Newcastle's Secularists Movement and anti-Boer War opposition both secular and religious, also the value of comparing Australia's experience with other countries – English northerners are generally more radical than southerners.

**Michelle Cavanagh** had prepared a paper on Margaret Holmes (1909-2009) that was read by Mary Spongberg, from the University of Technology Sydney. The paper drew on Michelle's *Margaret Holmes The life and times of an Australian peace campaigner* (2006). At Sydney University, Quaker Camilla Wedgewood encouraged Margaret's burgeoning pacifism; then marriage to soulmate, Dr Tag Holmes, led her through the Christian Socialist Movement and Anglican Pacifist Fellowship to a personal commitment in 1936 not to support war. From 1938 she and Tag ran 'Fifty-Fifty Club' social evenings in their Mosman home for equal numbers of Australians and 'New Australians' (a three year federal program was taking 15 000 refugees). After World War II, sending food parcels to Germany, she joined a branch of the Australian Peace Council notwithstanding that Communists had been involved in setting it up.

Her major activism began in 1960 as Cold War fears mounted. With a band of dedicated women, Margaret formed the NSW Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. WILPF took on issues including apartheid in South Africa, weapons of mass destruction, American bases in Australia, the federal

government plan for a nuclear power station at Jervis Bay NSW, and British and French nuclear testing. Margaret's most challenging time came with Australia's Vietnam commitment in 1966. Following the decision to use conscripts, during Prime Minister Robert Menzies' address to a public meeting, Margaret famously led NSW WILPF members out of the room – as they in black veils silently distributed 'We Mourn for Peace' leaflets. She headed WILPF's delegation to Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, against sending conscripts to Vietnam, worked hard against conscription with 'Save Our Sons', and in October 1966 joined 10 000 demonstrators awaiting US President Lyndon Johnson's arrival in Sydney. She led WILPF members, again dressed in black and carrying 'We Mourn for Peace' banners, as they staged a silent protest while students flung themselves onto the road; other WILPF members banged the car carrying the President and NSW Premier Robert Askin, eliciting the premier's shameful, 'Run over the bastards!' Her passionate Vietnam War years working with WILPF at the same time as with Save our Sons and Anglican entities epitomised Australia's peace activism composed of various strands.

Some of those present remembered Margaret's incredible ability to instill enthusiasm underpinning her role as a key WILPF spokesperson; also the mildness of peace activism since those Vietnam years

Sabine Erika, daughter of pacifist Quaker refugees from Germany, then sketched the life of Margaret Watts (1892-1978), a Quaker whom she had met as a child. Margaret looked conservative, middle-aged, well dressed, but she could also be aggressive on education and radical on social justice. Born in England (Liverpool), she thrived in her liberal-thinking Quaker family which encouraged the children to follow their independent ideas. As a teenager she went to the Quaker Woodbrooke College (Birmingham), excited to meet people from all over the world working for the same ideals, peace and justice. In 1911 her family came to Australia. She was sent to Queensland under Quaker Peace Board auspices where she co-founded the Women's Peace Army, and went into schools as permitted – never proselytising but forming the Children's Peace Army to encourage learning about peace as an alternative to war. To counter war fervour, she tramped Queensland attending recruiting meetings: thrown out, she kept going back.



Margaret was feisty, energetic, persistent – a pacifist, socialist, feminist Quaker. Though not a member, she fitted the WILPF pattern of non-conformist religious background – Congregational, Methodist, Christian Science, Quaker (Sabine found no Catholics). Dubbed 'Peace Angel', Margaret brought people together: anti-conscription campaigning in Brisbane involved ardent socialists, trade unionists, and Laborites; she wrote for *Left Wing* and *The Worker* (conventional papers refused publication). A nice

sense of humour helped. Asking permission to speak inside a US gaol and told, 'You're far too beautiful', she retorted, 'Not at all. They need beauty in their lives!' After World War I, from Russia Margaret reported on the thousands dying of famine, inspiring the Governor-General's wife to start an Australian fund to send food and money. Having a great love of education, Margaret worked in Vienna organising food kitchens for students. After World War II, she continued social justice work, launching Australia's first UNICEF contribution and Sunday afternoon 'welcomes' for Asian Colombo Plan students, and raising money for Vietnam orphans.

Sabine also mentioned Isabel Longworth (1881-1961), socialist as well as Quaker (Isabel did not attend meetings but possibly kept up her Quaker contacts). Born in Temora NSW to an English-born schoolteacher and raised in a pacifist family, Isabel became a dentist, unusual for women in her day. She provided dentistry free to social and political activists (including Miles Franklin) and to young people gaoled for opposing child conscription. Secretary of the Women's Peace Army in Sydney, she later worked with WILPF, at times acting as its representative overseas; she also formed a Soviet Union friendship organisation. Moving to Wyong in 1932 and then to Newcastle in 1936, she continued peace and social justice work, unsuccessfully standing as an independent socialist for federal parliament.

There were good contributions from the floor as well and the discussion continued. On the Library's behalf, Board Chair Jozefa Sobski thanked speakers. 'What glorious little pearls they drop! I greatly enjoy discussions enriching our understanding of Australia', she said. Indeed, for many of us the symposium had opened up previously unknown women's activism, and provided a list of tempting reading. *Transcription by Helen Ruby Report by Margot Simington*

# GRACE CROWLEY: AN OVERLOOKED AUSTRALIAN ARTIST



Lunch Hour Talks provide a forum to celebrate women's lives. Art historian Dianne Ottley did just that for an unduly neglected Australian artist. In Grace Crowley's life we see familiar themes: challenges met in espousing new ideas; and a patriarchalism which channels women

into a wife/mother stereotype, assumes the single ones nurse aging parents, is blind to a woman's professional aspiration and disparages women's achievement. Dianne's book, *Grace Crowley's Contribution to Australian Modernism and Geometric Abstraction* (2010) shows Crowley ranks among Australia's leading modernist painters. She was certainly the leading teacher of modernism in the 1930s.

Crowley, born in 1890, home-schooled eldest daughter of cattle breeders near Narrabri NSW, was only fourteen when a professional eye discerned the talent in her published drawing. Later, at Sydney's Methodist Ladies College, she took lessons at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School. Eventually, despite parental and societal expectation of her becoming wife and mother, she broke off an engagement, joined Ashton's School full-time in 1915, and blossomed. Appointed head teacher in 1918, Crowley made life-long friendships with Anne Dangar and Dorrit Black, future modernist artists and teachers.

By 1926, Cezanne was recognised as having developed a new style of painting for a modern age. Crowley and Dangar arrived in Paris excited to be at the centre of modernist painting where women could be accepted as artists. They enrolled in the Academie Lhote. Andre Lhote was the leading theoretician and teacher of Cezanne's compositional theory which employed the complex geometry underlying classic and Renaissance art – the 'golden section', a ratio approximately 2:3. From Lhote, they learnt the geometric and abstract elements in modernist painting and scientific use of colour. In 1929, Crowley's 'Girl with Goats' hung with Lhote's work in a Paris gallery (one review rating it as good as Lhote's), and a Paris gallery offered her an exhibition.

However, dependent on family finance, she returned to Australia at the behest of aging parents. She shocked them with her stylish shift dresses, short hair and independent attitude. Then she confronted Sydney's conservative art world with a modernist portrait for the Archibald Prize 1931, condemned as 'quite extraordinary', 'contemporary' (a term of abuse) – and by a woman.

Resolute, she pursued modernism. From 1932 to 1937, she joined former Lhote student,

'Rah' Fizelle running Australia's leading avant-garde art instruction at Sydney's Crowley-Fizelle Art School. There she taught Lhote's basic compositional techniques. Dianne found Crowley's handwritten teaching notes delightfully illuminated Pythagorean geometry and abstraction. At the School's Sketch Club run in evenings and weekends, Crowley met house painter and aspiring artist Ralph Balson, and in 1934 artist Frank Hinder and his wife, sculptor Margel. Frank had studied a compositional technique in America also based on the golden section. However, it was on Fizelle's difficulties teaching the golden section that Crowley's partnership with him founded. She then initiated an artistic partnership with Balson. Dianne's research revealed Crowley mentoring Balson, helping him build on his early efforts that experts consider amateurish: like Fizelle, Balson understood practical demonstration (not theory). Together they developed geometric abstraction helped by her continued contact with European modernism through letters from Anne Dangar.

After her mother died, in the years 1947 to 1954 Crowley produced her most mature abstract paintings, using complex geometry deemed comparable to Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca. Dianne assesses Crowley's 'Painting 1950' as a 'masterpiece of geometric abstract art'. Full of golden section triangles, circles and blocks of colour, it reflects the international abstract art of painters like Piet Mondrian, a style still highly influential. Australian artist Jeffrey Smart used the golden section in all his painting, influenced by Dorrit Black, also a former Lhote student.

Before Balson retired from house painting in 1955, Crowley purchased a retreat on Mt Gibraltar near Bowral NSW. Using a converted double garage as studio they worked quietly together, an unconventional pair sharing their passion for art and life. They spent most of the year 1960 in Europe visiting galleries showing the latest abstract art, and painting together. Balson developed a looser style and in November that year had an exhibition in a Paris gallery, the one Crowley missed in 1929. She had nurtured, then publicised his art through contacts in Paris where French magazines reviewed their paintings. She refused to take any credit. Self-effacing, she promoted him rather than herself, taking great satisfaction in his international recognition and Paris exhibition.

Balson died in 1964, Crowley in 1979. Lack of encouragement and her way of handling this helps explain why for so long Crowley remained unrecognised, longer than Margaret Preston whose husband actively promoted her career. It was 1975 before a major exhibition of Crowley's work was held – at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. We are indebted to Dianne for raising Crowley's profile as a significant Australian artist.

*Report by Kris Clarke*



Dianne Ottley has donated to the Library *Grace Crowley's Contribution* and Elena Taylor's catalogue for the National Gallery of Australia 2006 Grace Crowley exhibition, *Grace Crowley being modern* (2006).

## Vale Anne Bolding

Sadly, Anne Bolding, one of the Library's serials librarians, died recently. Having worked extensively with serials in the Medical Library of the University of Sydney, in 2011 Anne joined our Library. An enthusiastic volunteer, she implemented a rigorous review of the serials collection, focusing particularly on filling any gaps – to the extent even of contacting relevant organisations and publishers to obtain missing issues; and she used her skills in book conservation for repairing the Library's books. Anne was also an active participant in the Ultimo Community Garden.

Our thoughts are with Anne's daughter, Rosie and her grandson, Alexander.

Lynne Morton

Eileen Baldry continued from page 5

The pattern with women is that the majority is given short sentences (under 12 months). Women are overrepresented in remand (refused bail) in a maximum security setting until their court hearing. The increase in women's imprisonment is due to poor support, Aboriginal women in particular having complex needs: many of these women would not end up in prison if a good mental health support system was accessible.

As Eileen has observed, 'The onus is on the NSW government to provide us with the evidence that the costs involved in stuffing ever more people into prison are less than the benefits' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 28 July 2014).

Transcription by Helen Ruby

Report by Kris Clarke

## A warm welcome to our new members

Jane Allen	Janet Bailey	Colleen Chesterman
Susan Edwards	Susan Field	Holly Ladmore
Laudi Macdcessi	Marion Shaw	Carol Staples

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

K Banfield, Jenny Gardiner, M Duckworth  
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Hanna Marks, J Woodhouse  
Finch Publishing, Spinifex Press, Text Publishing  
Victorian Women's Trust

## Capital Investment Fund

Since it was launched in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has reached \$202, 851.68. Our target is \$500,000, the interest from which will provide essential support for Library operations. If you wish to contribute, please indicate on the membership/donation form on this page.

### CIF donations since July 2014:

Julie James Bailey, Pamela Dingle, Kathy McClellan  
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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
- Light rail from Central Station to Exhibition stop
- If you drive, there is limited two hour street metre parking available



## Annual Luncheon 2014: Raffle

The Library thanks all individuals and organisations who donated prizes. Raffle tickets were drawn by students from each of the Sydney schools attending: Canterbury Girls High, Fairfield High, Forest High, Holroyd High, James Ruse Agricultural High, Queenwood, Riverside Girls High, Ryde Secondary College, Sydney Girls High and Wenona. Congratulations to all winners!

- 1<sup>st</sup> A M Harris – One night for two people in the Opera View Room at Park Hyatt, The Rocks Sydney, value \$1,255, donated by the Teachers Mutual Bank supported by Park Hyatt Sydney
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Caroline Bowyer – David Jones gift voucher, value \$300, donated by Marie Muir
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Robi Russell – Wentworth High Tea for two at the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth, Phillip Street Sydney, value \$118, donated by Sofitel Sydney Wentworth
- 4<sup>th</sup> Elaine Cohen – Middle Harbour Coffee Cruise, value \$108, donated by Captain Cook Cruises, Circular Quay Sydney
- 5<sup>th</sup> Jenny Blackman – ABC gift voucher, value \$100, donated by Gail Hewison

- 6<sup>th</sup> Maryellen Galbally – *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*, signed and donated by author Clare Wright, plus a bottle of wine
- 7<sup>th</sup> Deb Perry – *From Moree to Mabo the Mary Gaudron story*, signed and donated by author Pamela Burton, plus a bottle of wine
- 8<sup>th</sup> Anna Russell – *Queenie, Letters of a Queensland Army Nurse 1916-1917*, ed by Pat Richardson and Anne Skinner, donated by Lyn Eggins, plus a bottle of wine
- 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Suzanne Marks and Caroline Jones – Two bottles of wine each.

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



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