Vol 36 , No 4. — November 2025

NEWSLETTER

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

JESSIE STREET NATIONAL WOMEN'S LIBRARY

2025 Annual Luncheon speaker Verity Firth

Library volunteer and former Board member, Suzanne Marks, introduced our Guest Speaker, Professor Verity Firth AM, Vice President of Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement at the University of New South Wales. Verity has over twenty years' experience in government and education in Australia.

Verity said she 'had leapt at the chance to talk to you today' and that her enthusiastic acceptance of the invitation stemmed from hearing, when she was a child, *A Heroine of Mine*, the powerful song about Jessie Street written and sung by Judy Small. The song's lyrics proclaim Jessie was an 'inspiration to the women of her time' and that any of those in society who 'depend on the labour of the poor', can fight for social justice; If you have privilege, you need to support those less advantaged. (*Note:You can listen to this wonderful song on YouTube*)

Verity emphasised that until recently education has been the great equaliser of disadvantage and can change individuals' lives regardless of their socio-economic background. Unfortunately nowadays, she said, the world is facing a rising tide of right-wing populism that is undermining the very fabric of transformative education. In the UK universities are terrified about Nigel Farage's Reform Party policies, whilst in the US, Vice President JD Vance's 'playbook' derides universities as 'communist and polluting young people's minds'. This hard right wing cost-cutting agenda has confounded the more moderate socially democratic parties and found them unable to respond.

In Australia, Verity explained, recent conservative governments mishandled higher education policy, slashing budgets and resulting in huge job losses and cutting of student places. According to the government of the day, this was necessitated by universities' over-reliance on fees from too many international students. The response to this existential threat could not rectify the situation fast enough. In the midst of this stoush about universities and their funding crises, a federal election saw the far right Liberal leader Peter Dutton cast out in a landslide victory to Labor. But, Professor Firth pointed out, universities had already been weakened and divided by hard right policies and have lost 'their social licence'. This effect was in many respects amplified by the universities themselves who were already culpable, by underpaying staff and relying on casual labour whilst raising fees, thereby appearing elitist and out of touch. Many students could no longer participate in campus life due to the necessity of having to work to pay for course fees and/or accommodation. Thus any sense of university community life had been impacted for some time. There was also a widening gap of understanding between political leaders and Vice Chancellors.

Universities have always been complex and broad institutions developed to meet the skills and knowledge needs of the status quo at the same time as challenging those institutions. They aim to teach creative and critical thinking. Society needs these spaces to have these conversations and this is most evident in the social sciences, which have been targeted by recent neo-liberal fee structures so that an Arts degree now costs $50,000. This obviously has impacts on student course selection. In Verity's opinion, no degree is more important than Arts, which fosters empathy, understanding of the human condition, how technology shapes us and ensures that we do not lose sight of what it means to be human. It teaches students to approach global problems as 'citizens of the world'.

Governments should see universities as public assets essential to the country's wellbeing. Access to education needs widening to all citizens especially underrepresented communities, whilst simultaneously recognising that universities are not the only sources of knowledge.

Verity's vision for the future? By 2030 all families should have a member who has attended university and benefitted by the experience as universities continue to inspire. Such goals should be actively pursued as did Jessie Street. We should all ask ourselves 'What can each of us do to continue her legacy?'

Barbara Henery and Jessica Stewart

Wishing all our readers a happy and joyful festive season!

The Library will be closed on Friday 12 December and reopen on Monday 19 January 2026.

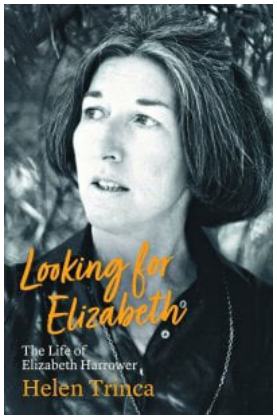
Recent Acquisitions – Black Inc/Latrobe University Press

To keep our collection up to date, it has been the practice of acquisitions librarians to send requests to selected publishers seeking donations of review copies of books by Australian women writers or about Australian women. The requests stress that the library is run entirely by volunteers. In previous years, university presses did not always respond to our begging letters but nowadays university presses are trying to attract a broader audience than just academe.

Recently I wrote to Latrobe University Press and was pleasantly surprised to receive their response – 'Your organisation sounds amazing! We can certainly send you your requested titles'. Nowadays La Trobe University Press is a joint imprint of Black Inc. Books and Latrobe University. Their website states, 'We publish "leading scholars and experts, producing books of high intellectual quality, substance and originality."' I had sent them a list of suitable titles written by Australian women selected from their on-line catalogue and was excited to receive the following books promptly delivered from their Sydney distribution centre:

Latrobe:

Judith Wright: Selected Writings ed by Georgina Arnott



Looking for Elizabeth: the life of Elizabeth Harrower by Helen Trinca
Playtime: a history of Australian Childhood by Emily Gallagher
Prove It: a scientific guide for the post-truth era by Elizabeth Finkel
Madame Brussels: the life and times of Melbourne's most notorious women by Barbara Minchinton with Philip Bentley
My Tongue Is My Own: a life of Gwen Harwood by Ann-Marie Priest

Quarterly Essays (Schwarz Media):

Woodside v The Planet: how a company captured a country by Marian Wilkinson
Losing It: can we stop violence against women and children? by Jess Hill
Highway to Hell: climate change & Australia's future by Joelle Gergis
Not Waving, Drowning: mental illness and vulnerability in Australia by Sarah Krasnostein

We are most grateful to Black Inc for their generosity.

Barbara Henery

Annual Luncheon Raffle winners

Congratulations to the winners of our fundraising raffle drawn at the Luncheon on 15 September:

1st: Two nights at Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour, donated by Teachers Mutual Bank

Ticket no. 0792 D. Kuras

2nd: Connie Dimas jewellery

Ticket no. 1154 M. Burn

3rd: Visa cash gift card, donated in memory of Marie Muir

Ticket no: 123 J. Kitson

4th: Café Sydney, Circular Quay Dining Voucher

Ticket no: 0446 J. Bailey

5th: Sparkling High Tea at Shangri-La Hotel

Ticket no: 0188 C. Michler & S. Cordeau

6th: Gleebooks voucher donated by Gail Hewison

Ticket no: 1748 K. Bayer-Johns

7th: Signed book *Women of Colonial Australia* (3 vols) by Rose Cutts and bottle of wine

Ticket no: 1268 L. Jennett

8th: Signed book *Cold War in a Hot Kitchen* by Margaret Spence and bottle of wine

Ticket no: 1890 R. Needham

9th: Signed book *She Shapes History* by Sita Sargeant and bottle of wine

Ticket no: 0486 O. Cole

10th: Signed book *Unconventional Women* by Sarah Gilbert and bottle of wine

Ticket no: 0725 N. Siano

All wine produced by Kurri Kurri TAFE and donated by NSW Teachers Federation.

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

Quentin Bryce AD CVO; Elizabeth Evatt AC; Dr Beverley Kingston; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney; Nadia Wheatley.

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Chair Christine Yeats, Vice Chair Dr Janet Ramsay PSM, Treasurer Jean Burns, Secretary Sherri Hilario, Michele Ginswick, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Christine Kibble, Alison Rees-Oliviere, Beverley Sodbinow, Barbara Thompson, Dr Hilary Yerbury.

Editorial Team

Kris Clarke, Jessica Stewart, Jan Burnswoods, Editors; Margaret Knowlden, Proofreader.

Migrant Women Cleaners at Eveleigh Loco Works

In 1977, the Wran Labor government passed the Anti-Discrimination Act, banning discrimination on the basis of race, gender and marital status. But real workplace change often needs sustained effort, such as the Jobs for Women campaign at BHP Port Kembla. Reform can also be achieved through the work of committed feminists in the bureaucracy. I was privileged to play a part in assisting one of the most marginalised groups in the workforce: women cleaners at State Rail, Eveleigh.

In 1981, I was appointed by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission to chair a tripartite Local Industrial Board, with union and management representatives, to investigate the underlying causes of the bans by car cleaners at the Eveleigh Loco Works, where interstate trains were cleaned and maintained. I was also directed to establish the truth of allegations made by a union official of instances of racial discrimination, sexual harassment, exploitation of migrant women, physical assault, graft, and standover tactics by supervising staff.

It was crucial that all employees, on both the day and night shifts, were individually contacted and interviewed. We felt that if all employees were seen to be coming to the Board, it would lessen the likelihood of reluctance to come forward for fear of being regarded as informers. State Rail provided a closed carriage for interviews and bicultural interpreters across 10 languages.

From the start, we were aware that many of these employees were socially and economically vulnerable. Ninety percent came from non-English speaking backgrounds and were overwhelmingly women. The majority were illiterate or semi-literate in their own language and spoke little English. With few skills to sell in the labour market, they feared losing their jobs. Some said they did not want to stay too long as they were being timed. Others said their husbands opposed their talking to us.

To overcome these fears, we held a mass meeting where we reassured the workers that all interviews would be strictly confidential and anonymous, using an interpreter. Interviews would take place during work time, and they could choose not to be interviewed.

Gradually confidence grew; more people came forward and were more outspoken. We were certain that many statements made to us would never have been made to either management or union representatives.

Fundamental to many of the problems was communication. Clearly State Rail had not effectively addressed how a highly multicultural workforce with insufficient competency in English would be able to understand decisions made affecting the workforce. These included how rosters were allocated, some with better pay and conditions than others, overtime, and allegations of favouritism to workers seen to have regular access to the Depot office. This led to daily disputes and women were often faced with shouting and screaming arising from misunderstandings.

A key recommendation was that State Rail establish an Industrial Language Training programme. As most employees were women who worked the 'double shift' — work plus childcare and domestic tasks — we stressed that the classes must be held on site and in working time. State Rail implemented this immediately, providing a carriage for the classroom and an ESL teacher. I heard later that this was highly effective in lifting the morale of the women who took great pride in decorating and making it comfortable.

We reported that it was State Rail management's responsibility to investigate allegations made about stealing, gambling, alcohol abuse, sleeping on duty, workplace intimidation and sexual activity. No one claimed to be sexually harassed but we were aware that, because of cultural taboos, it was unlikely that anyone would admit to this.

In summary, this was a typical multicultural workplace staffed mainly by non-English-speaking women who had emigrated as part of our post-war mass immigration program to boost population and provide 'factory fodder' for developing industries. Little regard was paid to their working conditions and communication needs. This was exacerbated for women. We hoped that the information we uncovered and our recommendations significantly improved their work experience. Our report gave the last word to a woman who, during her interview, commented wryly about work at the Depot: 'Well, at least it's better than the [production] line.'

Suzanne Marks

Pine Gap Journal

In 2009, the Library's Archives team curated the exhibition *Remembering Pine Gap* at Parliament House, using story-boards, photographs, artworks, poetry, banners and memorabilia from our Pine Gap women's peace camp donations. The work of entering these collections into our on-line catalogue for dissemination is ongoing.

One such collection, donated by Gillian Fisher, came across the Archives work desk recently. Gillian's journal of the Pine Gap Camp in 1983 details her experiences. Fear of the nuclear arms race and her lack of agency in the Cold War are catalysts for Gillian's pilgrimage to the centre of Australia with seven hundred women and young children to protest against the US Pine Gap military installation. Apprehension of radical feminists, being the conservative married mother of three children with a husband at home, and the dread of being jailed and shaming her family, are fundamental to Gillian's narrative.

However, her encounter in Alice Springs with the 'Double our Numbers' banners project enthralls her. She is tireless in finding out everything she can about it. The banners flooding in from women across Australia delight them all and fuel motivation to complete manufacture and assembly so every banner can be transported and paraded at Pine Gap. Gillian commandeers a sewing machine and works furiously for three days. As the custodian of some of these treasured items, Gillian's eyewitness account of this extraordinary community project of feminine sensibility is particularly significant to the Library.

Gillian's discomfort and insecurity camped under a parachute-cum-tent is vividly expressed. The encamped women experience abuse, hostility and arrest at the hands of the authorities, but their spirited and courageous stance with Pitjantjatjara indigenous owners in defence of Country and a peaceful world order is life changing for Gillian.

Gillian's moving narrative is now in digital format and accessible on our catalogue.

Christine Smith

Lunch Hour Talks

Venue/Time: 12.00-1.30pm
Customs House Library, 31 Alfred St, Sydney on Circular Quay
Enter via front of Customs House
Cost: $20 (members) $25 (non-members) including light lunch.
Pay at the door. Book by noon Monday before the talk. Ph (02) 9571 5359

19 February 2026
Sharron Sillett
The Dinosaur's Roar – A Collective Memoir that documents the lived experiences of women who worked in women's refuges across New South Wales from the early 1970s through to 2014

When women's refuges in NSW in 2014 were taken over by large faith-based organisations, the women who had dedicated their lives to women and children fleeing violence were made redundant. These 'dinosaurs' decided that their experiences deserved to be recorded so that their stories didn't die with them.

16 April 2026
Dr Kate Laing
Sisters in Peace: Women and Pacifism in Australia

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915, campaigns against militarism and nuclear weapons. In Australia, WILPF connected political women to a worldwide network that sustained their anti-war activism. This talk will give a glimpse into the activities of the group throughout the twentieth century.

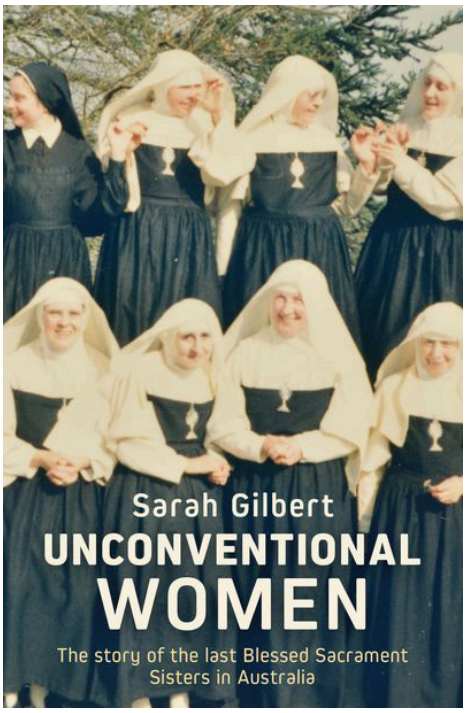
18 June 2026
Dr Zephie Comino Cernie
Madge Barnes and Annie Praed: Australia's first women graduates in dentistry

Madge Barnes and Annie Praed were members of the very first group to be awarded the Bachelor of Dental Surgery in 1903. This talk draws from Zephie's PhD research, exploring the factors that enabled these two women to be included in that inaugural graduating class. It will shed light on the pathways that led them to this significant milestone in the history of Australian women in dentistry.

Lunch Hour Talk - 21 August 2025

Sarah Gilbert: *Unconventional Women*

Sarah started by recalling how she learnt of Jessie Street from her parents during her childhood and then by picking up 'bits and pieces' over time, eventually including her in an episode for the ABC's Makers of Modern Australia. Describing Jessie Street as 'a woman whose impact is still felt today', she drew the parallel with the subjects of her book, *Unconventional Women,* whose impact was as lasting as Jessie's, but whose stories are far more obscure. Not because they were, and are, any less dedicated to 'transforming our world in the name of justice and freedom' but because they operated within the context of religious life.



In the 1950s and 60s, eight young women left their lives in the wider world to join a strictly enclosed order of nuns in Melbourne, the Blessed Sacrament Sisters. Sarah drew her material from the oral histories she recorded where she explored and provided answers to why these young women entered a life that, to many outsiders, severely limited their freedom to think, speak and behave. She is deeply sensitive to their highly individual and, at times, deeply personal and sometimes painful experiences.

Sarah related how she had, for a long time, been interested in the lives of nuns, piqued by her Catholic upbringing where, in her schools, nuns held impressive positions of authority as teachers and principals and who encouraged independence, education and self-reliance for their female students. She was struck by something historian Jo Anne McNamara wrote: "There is no human institution older than the sisterhood."' Convents created fertile ground for the growth of a separate feminine sensibility and strengthened the bond of sisterhood. They were the foremothers who, she contends, for two millennia broke new paths for women in a hostile and forbidden world: that without the daring and sacrifice of these nuns, it is impossible to imagine the feminist movements of modern times finding any purchase in the public world in that they created the image and reality of the autonomous woman.

Drawing on the examples of 12th century Abbess Hildegarde von Bingen as a writer, composer, and pharmacologist, and Renaissance nun Arcangel Tarabotti who published *Paternal Tyranny*, Sarah contended Catholic nuns were, in the Western world, the first women writers, composers, botanists, philosophers and artists.

By the 18th century some orders had broken free of the convent walls and by the 19th century, nuns were educating girls from all social levels creating a contradiction for the church with nuns being the generators of modernisation which the church was railing against.

The rest of Sarah's talk focussed on the women of her book, Maureen, Vianney, Marie; of how the changes wrought within the church by Vatican 2 in the mid-sixties brought down the walls of the enclosed orders and of how these women joined Father Ted Kennedy's Redfern ministry to the 'true people of God', mainly Aboriginal people who were poor and broken by the traumas inflicted on them by white colonisation.

Sarah led us through the changes these nuns experienced in their understanding of the Eucharist, and the joy they found in bringing it from the elitist role it had become into the communities and the people who they served.

Given the suspicion of nuns I grew up with in the 1950s and 60s, I never imagined that I would so highly recommend such a book. It is a true insight into how, over centuries, Catholic nuns created the precedents which led into the freedom and equality movements for women in Western societies. And how the women in this book brought the Eucharist from a medieval closed order to the streets of the most abused and marginalised people in the country and found a deeper more authentic understanding of their faith.

Suzanne Marks

2025 Annual Luncheon

Library members and guests mingled with old friends and greeted newcomers at the Annual Luncheon held at Parliament House. Our Parliamentary hosts Natasha Maclaren-Jones and Peta Waller-Bryant were present, as were other politicians.

Over 200 guests were present, including students and teachers from Auburn Girls, Birrong Girls, Burwood Girls, Hoxton Park, Matraville Sports, North Sydney Girls, Rooty Hill and Sydney Girls High Schools and Wenona School.

The Welcome to Country by Wiradjuri elder Norma Ingram urged our pledge not to harm the land, the people or the ecosystem. She spoke of her vision of Australians joining together to walk in harmony to the future.

Verity Firth gave her timely address on the tenuous position of universities today in a climate where funding is being withdrawn from less employment-oriented courses, and stressed the importance of their survival for the intellectual and cultural development of the nation. Education is the great equaliser - one of the few tools we have left that can change individuals' lives (see report on page 1).

The vote of thanks was given by Imogen Szabo from North Sydney Girls High School, Verity's *alma mater*.

As guests enjoyed their delicious two-course meal, Christine Yeats gave her report, reviewing the Library's activities over the past year.

Thank you to all who purchased raffle tickets to make our fundraising event a success, and congratulations to all the prize winners (listed on page 2).

A big thank you to all those who donated raffle prizes, in particular Teachers Mutual Bank, Connie Dimas Jewellery, Gail Hewison and the NSW Teachers Federation. Thank you to all the Annual Luncheon Committee members for their hard work throughout the year in organising the event and to volunteers who offered their services on the day.

A final thank-you to all who attended and for your support throughout the year. We hope you will be able to join us again for next year's Luncheon.

Kris Clarke

The year in review

Among the highlights of the Library's year was our hosting of a tour for the Arts Libraries Society of Australia and New Zealand. The visit show-cased the depth of our collections and their power to inspire cultural connection. We also welcomed a delegation of librarians from the Republic of Korea whose visit sparked meaningful discussion about women's rights and international collaboration, illustrating how our archives foster global understanding.

The Library contributed material to several exhibitions, including the NSW Parliamentary Library's International Women's Day display marking 50 years since International Women's Year, Clare Wright's *Struggle, Suffrage and Freedom* talk at Parliament House, and the UTS Gallery's *Elsie (and Minnie)* exhibition on women's refuges. These partnerships demonstrate how our collections continue to illuminate women's history for new audiences.

Led by Beverley Sodbinow, who celebrates 26 years of dedicated service, our Archives now hold over 200 collections. Beverley was originally recruited by Shirley Jones and Jane Pollard following the transfer of material from the Canberra Women's Archive in 1993. In her first decade with us, Beverley worked as a salaried employee, but when funding was not available, she generously continued a voluntary basis.

Notable recent archival additions include the Sue Baldwin Collection, detailing the life of a young Australian diplomat (1974–1988) and the Preterm Foundation's records, documenting Sydney's pioneering family planning clinic.

Through partnerships with TAFE and Charles Sturt University, the Library supports internships that train the next generation of professionals. Alongside these initiatives, the Library's regular talks, newsletters, History Week participation, and the Annual Luncheon continue to bring our community together.

Collectively, these activities affirm the Library's role as a living, dynamic institution preserving women's voices and achievements.

Christine Yeats, Chair

Lunch Hour Talk – 16 October 2025

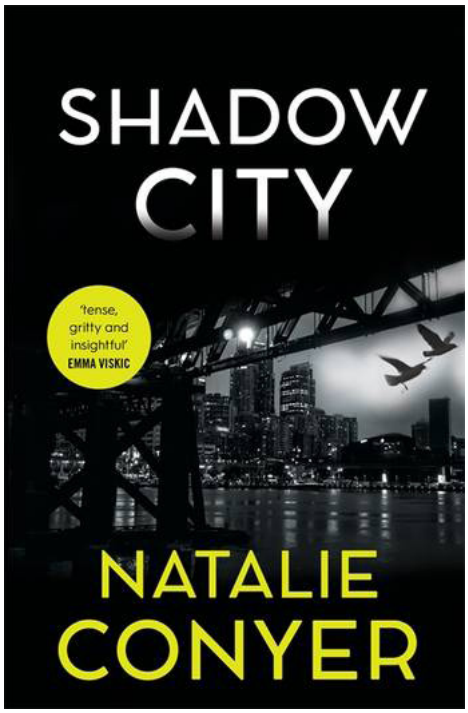
Shadow City: Natalie Conyer

Dale Dengate introduced crime fiction writer Natalie Conyer to an interested group of members and friends in her second Lunch Hour Talk. In her first in 2019, she told us about her first book, *Present Tense*, which won the Ned Kelly Award for a first novel and was shortlisted for the 2020 Sisters in Crime Australia, Davitt Award.

Her second Schalk Lourens mystery is entitled *Shadow City* and is set both in Sydney and in South Africa. This time, for gender balance, she has included a female detective who is based on a real Australian female detective whom she interviewed during her research for this book. It promises to be another nail-biter for those who love this genre and there are a lot of them! Natalie told us that one in three books published in the UK is crime fiction.

She reminded us of her writing journey and set out to answer, 'Why crime fiction?' She explained that it was her addiction to the genre which led to her enrolment in a creative writing course at the University of Western Sydney and then a PhD in crime writing. She revisited Cape Town in 2011, after many years in Australia as a refugee from the hated apartheid system. As the Mandela Government gradually changed living conditions for the better, she decided to re-engage with the new post-apartheid South Africa which led to her setting her first novel in her birth city of Cape Town. Her research process involved regular visits for a month at a time and placements in police headquarters to study police procedure at close range.

She briefly outlined the history of her genre, which she learnt dates back to the early 17th century, when stories of their terrible crimes were dictated by prisoners at Newgate Prison in London, before their executions. These stories, when published, proved to be very popular with the general public and their emergence coincided with the rise of the novel. In the 18th and 19th centuries, novelists such as Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Conan Doyle wrote stories which included crime, often crossing into other genres. These were often serialised in the newspapers of the day which increased their readership even further. As crime writing increased in demand, more writers emerged which gradually included many successful women writers such as Agatha Christie and Anne Cleeves.



Resolution of the crimes is usual but may also be violent. Nowadays, stories include details of police procedure, but the most important feature is that it should be 'a good yarn' and must entertain. Crime fiction attracts readers because of its realism. She bases her novels on real crimes.

Natalie explained how crime writing often gets a 'bad wrap' but does not necessarily deserve its shoddy stereotype. Stories do not have to be 'just another thriller or detective story' but can help explain fractures in society that backdrop the story, contextualising the characters and explaining their behaviour. In both her novels, she foregrounds race and gender issues and shows how the police have had to adapt to a 'post-apartheid' regime where the rules have changed and private security companies have to work together with police to solve crimes.

In concluding, Natalie said that crime fiction often deals with societal fears and that reading about these issues can be helpful. She pointed out that there is a growing schism between the law and what is morally right, but that crime fiction realistically embraces these schisms.

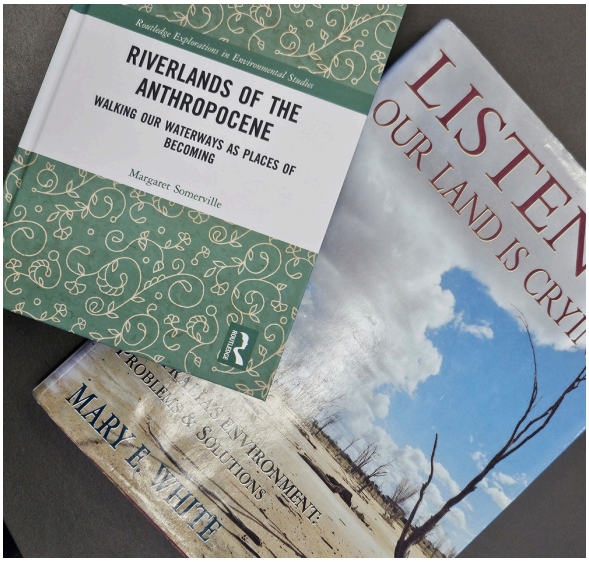
Michelle Ginswick then thanked Natalie and opened the floor to questions. The answers highlighted the worth of crime fiction to society in bringing social problems to the fore, such as the drug trade, sex trafficking and domestic violence.

Barbara Henery

History Week 2025 – Water Stories

Water, fundamental to life and underpinning our histories, from rivers that shaped lives, to oceans crossed in search of freedom, to activism that fought for clean water and community rights, there are untold stories of resilience, resistance, culture, and care. Through our Facebook series, Currents of Persistence, we shared stories of women whose lives have been shaped by water, uncovering diverse and sometimes surprising connections between women and water throughout history.

The subject of the first post was **Kathleen Muriel Butler** whose work was essential in making the Sydney Harbour Bridge a reality. The bridge united communities across a vast waterway, overcoming political, logistical, and engineering obstacles.



In 1897 **Caroline (Cara) Martha Edgeworth David** accompanied her husband Professor Tanat William Edgeworth David to Funafuti Atoll in the Ellice Islands (now Tuvalu). Her experience went far beyond domestic duties, defying convention to participate in scientific field work. Her papers from the expedition have been inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register and the UNESCO MOWCAP (Regional) Register.

Bidjigal artist **Mrs Esme Timbery** is celebrated for her intricate shellwork. She has left behind not only a remarkable body of work, but a cultural inheritance crafted in salt and shell, her journey a powerful reminder that some of our richest histories live where land meets sea.

While **Isabel Letham** is remembered for her tandem ride with legendary Hawaiian surfer Duke Kahanamoku during a 1915 surfboard exhibition, her contributions to surfing and swimming earned her lasting recognition.

The **Women's Cooperative Silk Growing and Industrial Association** in the 1890s reflects the Australian landscape and the challenges of flood, drought and fluctuating seasons on communities and industries.

Charmian Clift is best remembered for her powerful newspaper columns in the 1960s and her time on the Greek island. Her story began in the coastal town of Kiama, a place shaped by the ocean.

The career of trailblazing Australian architect **Winsome Hall Andrew** spanned more than four decades. Though many of her contributions were overlooked in her time, she played a key role in designing the admired modernist structure the Manly Surf Pavilion.

Christine Yeats and Sherri Hilario

Tribute to Jessie Street

We were pleased to note the recognition of Jessie Street in Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's speech to the United Nations in New York, in September 2025. He said:

Colleagues, as one of the world's oldest democracies – and one of the first where women could vote in elections and stand for Parliament, Australia knows societies and economies are stronger when they draw on the talents of all their citizens.

Indeed, it was a great Australian, Jessie Street, one of just eight women among the 850 delegates in San Francisco in 1945, who insisted that the UN Charter make specific mention of sexual discrimination. Because, she said:

> 'Where the rules are silent, women are not usually considered.'

That is why Australia proudly works to promote education, economic opportunity and empowerment for women and girls around the world.

A warm welcome to our new members:

Viktoriya Butler

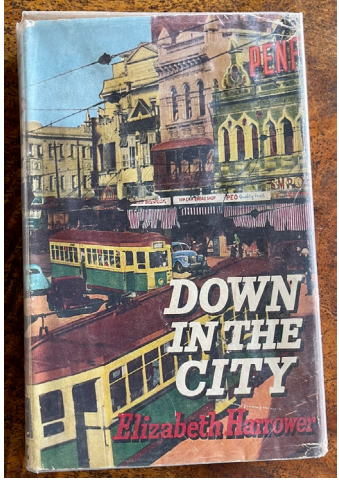
Sarah Gilbert

Louise Jennett

Saha-Mayousha Jones

BOOK REVIEW
Down in the City

by Elizabeth Harrower



Republished in 2013 by Text Classics which has reissued all her five novels (first edition cover, right), this one was written from 'the detachment of distance' when the author was living in London (first edition pictured right). The recurrent theme of Harrower's stories is of emotional abuse and manipulation of women in romantic relationships. In the light of recent legal acknowledgment in UK and Australia of coercive control as a criminal offence and a frequent precursor to domestic abuse, Harrower's novels exemplify this reality. She was certainly ahead of her time in speaking out about what happens 'behind closed doors' whilst society looks the other way.

Set in Sydney in 1957, we are drawn into the seemingly inescapable entrapment of women in the suburban post-war landscape. Motherless Esther came from one of the oldest and wealthiest suburbs in Sydney where she grew up in a family of older successful brothers. She led a sheltered life, educated by a governess and kept from the company of other girls and women. She is still living at home, a 'spinster' of 33, attended by servants and with very little to occupy her time, when a flashy shyster, Stan Peterson, suddenly appears in her life. She is captivated and he glimpses her vulnerability, a prize which is his for the taking, especially given his impoverished early life. She is lured towards the city, marries 'in haste' and moves into his Kings Cross flat.

The contrast between her closeted upbringing in Rose Bay and the seamy lifestyle of 1950s Kings Cross. as described in the opening chapters, could not be starker. The novelty of their nuptials is quickly nullified by the boredom and abandonment of most of her days. Unprepared for life without any specific occupation other than that of 'housewife', she succeeds in bonding with other female neighbours to help dispel her loneliness. But she is ignorant of the facts of Stan's occupation (so too are we the readers) and of any previous partners which take him away on secretive business which he refuses to explain (she does not need to know).

We become aware of Stan's dependence on alcohol which fuels his moodiness and cruelty and which gradually defines Esther as yet another helpless victim of domestic abuse. The question, 'Why doesn't she leave?' hovers wordlessly and is answered by the lack of resolution of Stan's duplicity and disregard for any damage he has inflicted. Do Australian women demand better treatment? And if not, why not?

Text has revisited Harrower's intelligent and perceptive writing. Her novels have been given new life at a time when domestic abuse figures continue to rise despite recent awareness of the alarming rate of women being murdered by their intimate partners, current or former.

Barbara Henery

Activism against gender-based violence

'Gender-based violence is a global crisis that transcends borders, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. It's a pervasive issue that demands collective action and awareness'- https://www.challengedv.org

One powerful initiative in the campaign against violence is *16 days of activism against gender-based violence,* an annual event that runs 25 November-10 December 2025. The annual international campaign begins on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and concludes on Human Rights Day. The 2025 campaign will focus on preventing online violence and creating safer digital spaces, with local events, resources, and funding opportunities available in different regions.

The campaign goes beyond raising awareness; it is a call to action, empowering individuals and communities to effect real change through its educational programs, support for survivors, and policy advocacy. This year the campaign will highlight the urgent need to address and prevent 'digital violence', including online harassment and coercive control.

Digital tools are increasingly being used to stalk, harass, and abuse women and girls and include:

* Image-based abuse/non-consensual sharing of intimate images – often called revenge porn or leaked nudes
* Cyberbullying, trolling, and online threats
* Online harassment and sexual harassment
* AI-generated deepfakes.

The campaign calls on:

* **Governments** to pass and enforce laws that criminalise digital violence, protect personal information and strengthen tech sector accountability.
* **Tech companies** to ensure platform safety, remove harmful content, enforce codes of conduct and publish transparent reports.
* **Donors** to invest in feminist organisations working to end violence against women and digital rights advocates.

Join the 16 Days conversation on social media:

* #NoExcuse and #ACTtoEndViolence
* **https://unwomen.org.au**
* **https://championsofchangecoalition.org/**

Kris Clarke

Donations since July 2025

General donations

Jenny Allum
Susan Ambler
Julie Bailey
Zephie Comino Cerny
Elizabeth Clarke
Lenore Coltheart
Christine Currey
Lyn Eggins
Elizabeth Evatt
Liz Fitzgerald
Kathryn Green
Ardyce Harris
Gabrielle Hyslop
Christine Jennett
Caroline Jones
Jeannette McHugh
Bridge McKern
Rosa Needham
Penny Nelson
Helen O'Sullivan
Brenda Padgett
Kaye Paton
Jane Pollard
Rosemary Pynor
Nizza Siano
Jozefa Sobski
Kathryn Stevenson
Helen Topor
Hilary Yerbury
Wendy Young

Donations of material

Alice Grundy/Australia Institute
Cathy Summers
Spinifex Press

Newsletter future issues

When the Library reopens in 2026, the Newsletter team will be starting work on our February issue. We would love to hear from anyone interested in contributing articles for next year, reporting on Lunch Hour Talks, or helping to produce the Newsletter.

– The Editors

Capital Investment Fund

Since it was launched in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has reached $697,605. Our target is $1,000,000, which will provide essential support for Library operations.

If you would like to contribute, please indicate on the membership/donation form.

CIF donations since July 2025

Carolyn Bloch
Jean Burns
Anne Conway
Anne Giles
Cathy Bloch
Christine Burvill
Christine Curry
Robin Low

Membership/donation form

I wish to ☐ join the Library ☐ renew my membership
☐ make a donation ☐ become a Library volunteer.

Date: ____/____/____

Title: Ms/Mrs/Miss/Mr/Dr/Other_____

Name: _____

Address: : _____

_____

Preferred tel: _____

Alternative tel: _____

Email: _____

☐ Please send Newsletters by email instead of hardcopy.

Membership category

☐ Full member $70 ☐ Life member $1,000
☐ Organisation $140 ☐ Student (conditions apply) $25
☐ Concession (Pensioner/Centrelink cardholders) $35
A membership year runs from 1 January to 31 December. Members joining after 1 October are financial until the following year.

Donations (donations over $2 are tax deductible)

☐ I wish to make a donation of $
☐ to the Library for general purposes
☐ to the Library's Capital Investment Fund
☐ I am happy to have my name published in the Newsletter
☐ I wish to remain anonymous.

Payment details

☐ Enclosed is my cheque/money order for $_____
(payable to Jessie Street National Women's Library)
☐ Please charge my Mastercard/Visa $_____
Name of cardholder_____
Card no. _____ _____ _____ _____
Expiry ____/____ CCV __ __ __
Signature _____

Auto debit authorisation

I authorise JSNWL:
☐ to charge this, and all future membership renewals as they fall due to this credit car number.
☐ to charge $_____ annually to this credit card as a donation to:
☐ the Library for general purposes
☐ the Library's Capital Investment Fund

Signature _____

Become a volunteer

The Library runs on volunteer labour. Join us! We'd love to have you. Forward this form to us at the address below and we will contact you:

Jessie Street National Women's Library
GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

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GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

ISSN 1838-0662
ABN 42 276162 418
Registered Charity No. CFN10255

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

Visit us:

523–525 Harris Street (cnr William Henry Street), Ultimo
Enter through the Ultimo Community Centre, Bulwara Rd
Please use the intercom for admittance

Opening times:

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

Borrowing policy:

The public can access items using the interlibrary loan system. The public cannot borrow items but may use them in their library of choice.

How to reach the Library:

* The Library is a 20 minute walk from Town Hall Station through Darling Harbour or from Central Station via the Goods Line walk or via Harris Street
* Bus 501 (Railway Square to Ryde/West Ryde) at Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre stop
* Bus 389 (Maritime Museum to North Bondi) at Harris and Allan Streets stop
* Light rail from Central Station or Dulwich Hill to Exhibition stop
* There is limited two hour street meter parking available

Postal Address:

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Sydney, NSW 2001
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Email:
info@nationalwomenslibrary.org.au
Visit our website:
www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au

Find us on social media:

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