

NEWSLETTER

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



A young migrant's voyage

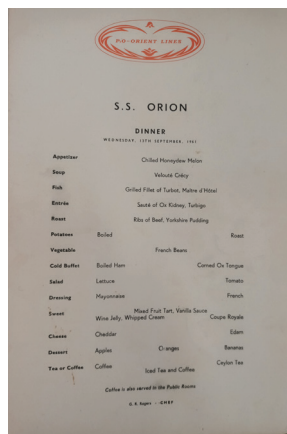
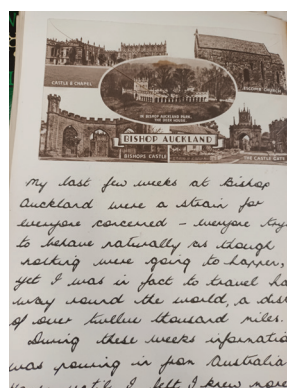
A very interesting collection was recently donated to the Library's archives by Hilary Walmsley. The collection documents her voyage from the United Kingdom to Australia as a 'Ten Pound Pom' in 1961 on the SS Orion.

It is an amazing collection which Hilary was about to throw out, thinking it was of no importance or interest to anyone. Fortunately, one of the Library's supporters stepped in to persuade her otherwise. We were delighted to accept this remarkable example of personal and social history. It gives us a detailed glimpse into the life of an 'ordinary' woman – something our archives have always been committed to.

The material is meticulously curated and tells the story of a young teacher's journey from Tilbury in England to Australia. There is a beautifully hand-written diary describing the whole journey. As she waited at the railway station nearest her home, Hilary wrote, 'I was so alone with my thoughts,

and if I could have travelled back then, I would have'. She cheered up when her friend Marge, also emigrating, met her at the ship. Soon they were joined by two other young women who were to share their cabin.

Most of the diary is penned on the backs of the ship's daily menus. The menus themselves



are a fascinating glimpse into the kind of food enjoyed in the Anglosphere in the 1950s and 1960s. There are documents regarding the application and acceptance process for the passage to Australia. There are *bon voyage* cards from friends, train tickets to the docks from Hilary's home, cabin and baggage tickets, information handbooks and passenger lists.

Each port of call on the long voyage is described in detail. The first stop was at Piraeus in Greece, from where they were able to explore Athens. Then the ship took on 'hundreds' of Greek migrants, including 'about a hundred young girls [who] had been married by proxy and were going to join their husbands for the first time'.

The stops in Aden and Colombo are described in detail and there are postcards and photographs and all manner of interesting memorabilia which document Hilary's experiences. While perhaps she had been nervous about embarking on such a fundamental change in her life, her interest and excitement in these exotic places comes across vividly. By comparison, Fremantle, Adelaide and Melbourne seemed a little odd (the accents!) but familiar. Hilary and Marge disembarked at Pyrmont in Sydney to start their new lives as teachers.

Hilary went back to the UK to marry an Australian man. She returned to live here and raised a family of three children. She is now in aged care and is active in her community, giving interesting talks to groups each Friday.

Bev Sodbinow



Annual Luncheon on Monday 7 September, Parliament House, Sydney

Booking forms and raffle tickets are enclosed

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

20 August Kate Rowe

*How the F*ck Would I Know?*

Kate is 75, Ten Pound Pom, Aussie by choice, ageing lesbian feminist, 78er, clean and sober for 49 years, child sexual abuse and rape survivor, feminist, athlete, travel adventurer and unapologetic truth-teller. Kate brings sharp wit and deep humanity to her stories. In her recently released memoir, *How the F*ck Would I Know?*, Kate shares stories drawn from a life lived boldly and honestly, reflecting on joy, resilience, politics, humour and freedom often found in unexpected, everyday places.

15 October Helen Zigmond

We Are Our Own Resource - Finding the language

In 1993 Helen Zigmond's monodrama on surviving child sexual assault, *In Relation To Inadmissible Evidence*, was staged at the Belvoir St Downstairs Theatre. It was the beginning of a professional journey that would take her through the sectors of arts education and health. In each sector she found the need for a new language counterpointed with the knowledge that the strength and power of community is understanding that it is its own resource.

Annual Luncheon raffle prizes

1st Prize: Two nights in a Junior Suite with Darling Harbour views, a package which includes breakfast, refreshments and more at Sofitel Sydney Darling Harbour, value \$2000, donated by Teachers Mutual Bank and Sofitel.

2nd Prize: Handcrafted sterling silver brooch designed and made by Connie Dimas Jewellery, value \$600.

3rd Prize: Visa Cash gift card donated in memory of Marie Muir, value \$350.

4th Prize: Stunning views with a meal for two at Cafe Sydney, Circular Quay, value \$200.

5th Prize: Sparkling High Tea for two at Shangri-La Hotel, value \$200.

6th Prize: Voucher for Gleebooks, value \$150, donated by Gail Hewison.

7th Prize: Signed book, *One Hundred Years of Betty* by Debra Oswald, and a bottle of wine, value \$50.

8th Prize: Signed book, *Sisters in Peace* by Kate Laing, and a bottle of wine, value \$50.

9th Prize: Signed book, *The Life of Sylvia Lennox* by Elizabeth Hamlin, and a bottle of wine, value \$50.

10th Prize: Signed book, *The Dinosaurs Roar* by Sharron Sillett, and a bottle of wine, value \$50.

Wine produced by Kurri Kurri TAFE and donated by NSW Teachers Federation.

Drawn at Annual Luncheon, Parliament House, Sydney, 7 September 2026.

All proceeds to Jessie Street National Women's Library.

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 AM; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney; Nadia Wheatley.

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Editorial Team

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



Ordination of Women

The Library has recently added to its badge collection with three new badges.

About 20 years ago, I was very involved with promoting women's ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican church in Sydney.

Although we were unsuccessful at Sydney Synod for this to pass, MOW Sydney is part of a larger group of Anglican feminists Australia-wide, called MOWatch, also promoting women's ordination.

Now, in 20 of the 23 dioceses in Australia, women's ordination is supported. Only in Sydney, Armidale and the North-West Australian diocese is it forbidden.

The third badge refers to the ordination of bishops. There are now 12 female bishops in Australia. One of these is Kay Goldsworthy, who leads the diocese of Perth, as Archbishop.

There is much more to this history. There have been many decades of hard work and activism by hundreds of people. The first ten women priests were ordained in Australia over 30 years ago in Perth.

For more information, see an excellent article by Dr Muriel Porter in the National Comprehensive Anglicanism Network, at <https://www.can.au>

Christine Middleton

Social Media update

Over the past months, the Library has continued to celebrate and share women's stories, histories and achievements through a range of engaging social media content.

In recognition of NAIDOC Week, we highlighted the contributions and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, drawing attention to important voices, histories and resources within our collection. We also marked Pride Month by sharing badges in our collection that showcase experiences and acknowledge the contributions of LGBTQIA+ communities.

Our book recommendation posts have connected followers with inspiring reads. We have also enjoyed taking our followers behind the scenes at the Library, offering a glimpse of the work involved in preserving and promoting women's history, from collection management and cataloguing to archival discoveries.

For those interested in exploring these topics further, we recommend:

She Shapes History – An Australian platform dedicated to uncovering and sharing the often-overlooked stories of women who have shaped our cities, communities, and national history.

Australian Queer Archives – Australia's largest and most significant collection of LGBTQIA+ historical materials, preserving and sharing queer histories for future generations.

NAIDOC Week – An annual celebration that honours the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and provides opportunities to learn, connect and celebrate.

These organisations provide valuable resources and perspectives that complement the stories and histories shared through the Library's collections.

If you enjoy our content, we encourage you to follow the Library on social media.

Gabby Hyde-Smith

Lunch Hour Talk: Dr Zephie Comino Cerny

Australia's First Women Dental Graduates

18 June 2026

Our speaker in June was Zephie Comino Cerny, University of Sydney dental degrees, BDS 1972 and PhD 2000. Zephie worked in private general practice, public health in special needs, lectured to medical students in Newcastle and worked on a curriculum for the new dental course at the University of Sydney. Her interest in the history of the profession is demonstrated by her ongoing community involvement in the Dental Museum at Westmead.

Her talk highlighted the journey of the first two women pioneers to enter the dental profession by enrolling in a new course at the University of Sydney in 1906. This course heralded 'a new era for dentistry' and was to transform the dental occupation into a profession and thus change the culture of dentistry. Their names were Madge Barnes and Annie Praed and they embarked on this new course together with eleven men. It was a groundbreaking course for its day. Previously all male dental practitioners learnt their skills by serving the equivalent of an apprenticeship where their skills were learned 'on the job'.

Zephie made some important observations from her PhD thesis which revealed how these two women were 'in the right place, at the right time'. At the turn of the century the universal suffrage movement had shone a light on gender inequality. In Australia, an uprising of activist women coincided with the emergence from the severe drought and depression of the 1890s, the achievement of Federation and the death of Queen Victoria. Zephie concluded that these factors contributed to a feeling of optimism in Australia that a new era was beginning.

Overseas in America, the University of Philadelphia had commenced offering dental degrees. In Australia a professional organisation, the Australian Dental Association and a professional journal had both been launched. Universities began expanding their outreach and sought students beyond the wealthy elite. When Madge Barnes and Annie Praed applied to undertake the new university dental course there was little or no competition for places, nor were there any specific entry requirements (how fortunate!). At the time, the education system did not offer girls mathematics and physics. These subjects were not considered of use to women as their employment to this date was mostly restricted to the lower paid work of nursing and teaching. Women's moral obligation remained firmly in the home. The only science taught them was 'domestic science'.

Luckily for Barnes and Praed, when women were admitted to Australian universities in 1881 unlike the prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge where women were segregated and encountered extreme prejudice, no such segregation occurred on Australian campuses. So the timing was right for women to enter the professions and dentistry was a newly minted one.

Barbara Henery

Donations

Pam Bevan - *How Australia Led the Way: Dora Meeson Coates and British suffrage*, Myra Scott

Notable Women Scientists, Pamela Proffitt

Barbara Henery - Quarterly Essay Issue 57
March 2015, *Dear Life: on caring for the elderly*, Karen Hitchcock

Donations since May 2026

General donations

Elizabeth Fitzgerald

Anne Marie Kestle

Deborah Nance

Jan Nash

Penelope Nelson

Jan O'Reilly

Helen O'Sullivan

Susan Steggall

Susan Wishart

Books

Allen & Unwin

NewSouth
Publishing

Spinifex Press

Textile artist Frances Phoenix uncovered

I visited the Library in May to conduct research for my Bachelor of Art History, Honours which I am undertaking at the University of Queensland. My thesis is focusing on Australian women textile artists, one of whom is Frances Phoenix. In the early stages of my research I found that the Library held a collection of Phoenix's works and writing. I am so grateful that the volunteers were able to organise for me to visit on my short trip to Sydney. The experience was incredible; just walking into the space and being surrounded by so many years of women's history was amazing.

The archivists were welcoming and excited to help me with anything I needed. They had gathered slides that Phoenix had taken at the Women for Survival Pine Gap Peace Camp in 1983. They explained her involvement in the movement and their own role in putting together a Pine Gap exhibition in 2009. These were fascinating to look at and something that I had not considered to include in my thesis as I have been focused on her textile works, not her more collaborative projects. After this visit, I am very interested in researching further.

We then moved on to what I was most excited about, which was viewing some of Phoenix's original works and writings. I viewed ten of the posters that Phoenix worked on with the Women's Domestic Needlework Group; these were political posters discussing various issues but mainly women's and Indigenous rights. These were amazing to see in person, the details coming through so much better than images online. I was able to see how they were composed and how the printmaking was done.

A lot of the posters included doilies, all of which were in The D'oyley Show exhibition catalogue that I was viewing at the same time as the posters were being brought out. The D'oyley Show: An Exhibition of Women's Domestic Fancy Work toured Australia from 1979 to 1980 and was organised and curated by the Women's Domestic Needlework Group, of which Phoenix was part. The show included an archive of hundreds of doilies that had never been displayed in an art exhibition before. Viewing the catalogue and posters together emphasised the importance and versatility of textiles, particularly how they can be used to transform the personal into the political. Most of the posters were addressing issues of women's domestic labour, so adding either full doilies or decorative lace elements helped to enhance the topic.

I was also able to view Phoenix's centrefold piece in the first edition of *Lip Magazine* from 1976. This work is incredibly rare

as it was deemed 'too controversial' and removed from most editions following the defunding of the magazine by the Victorian Government. I was able to view the small book, *Our Story, Herstory? 1982*, that contained Phoenix's recounting of her time working with



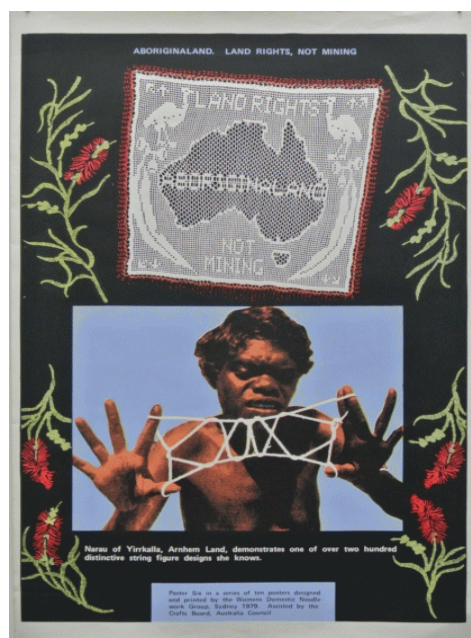
Judy Chicago on her work *The Dinner Party*, 1978. As someone who has idolised this work, this was absolutely eye-opening and added even further context to Phoenix's work *No Goddess, No Mistresses*, 1977-1980.

Being able to view all these works was an invaluable experience. This visit emphasised the importance of women's archives. During the day, we all realised how many gaps there are in the documentation of Phoenix's life and practice. Our collective knowledge and what was held in the Library only covered her works through the 1970s and 1980s, with very little known about her after that. It is for this reason that I am so passionate about accurately documenting women textile artists in my thesis.



Thank you again to the Library volunteers for all the incredibly important work to preserve and share women's history.

Elsie Salkeld



New volunteers

Gabrielle Hyde-Smith (Gabby)

I am delighted to be joining the Library as a volunteer, supporting its social media and communications work. My background may appear unconventional, but it reflects a longstanding interest in communication, the arts and community engagement.

I hold a degree in communications and have spent over 15 years working as a ballet teacher, a role I continue to value deeply while transitioning toward library and information work. Alongside this, I have developed a parallel career in aerial and circus arts, performing and teaching aerial silks and corde at 6-9 metres off the ground. This work has strengthened my creativity, discipline and ability to communicate movement and story in dynamic ways.

My day-to-day life is varied, balancing teaching, family life with my two young children, and creative and professional projects across evenings and weekends. This balance has strengthened my organisational skills and adaptability across different environments.

Earlier this year, I experienced a serious health event involving septic shock, which required a significant period of recovery. This experience prompted reflection on the importance of learning, community and meaningful contribution, and ultimately influenced my decision to pursue postgraduate studies in library and information studies.

I am excited to bring my experience in communication, performance and storytelling into the library sector and to contribute to the important work of preserving and sharing women's histories.



Gabrielle Hyde-Smith (Gabby)

Ness Bryan

I am a Master of Information Studies student from Charles Sturt University, with my final semester approaching this July (very exciting!). Alongside my studies and some casual work, I have been a weekly volunteer at the Library since my Professional Placement here in January. My reception into the Library team has been warm without exception, and I could not be more grateful for the guidance I have received during and beyond my Placement experience.

My entrance into the library sector began after I completed my undergraduate studies in Criminology and Social Justice. In the many hours I spent hunting through job listings after completing my degree, I found that roles in libraries appealed to me more than any other; while I had no working experience in libraries at the time, I felt this line of work strongly aligned with my love of reading, researching and learning. It was then that I applied for my Masters course.

I have since been enjoying building practical experience in the Library. I have had a wonderful time undertaking various research and writing projects for the Newsletter and social media, and have also loved exploring and fast-adding the Zine collection. I find these DIY works absolutely fascinating: each one is full of personality, brazen words and images, and a refreshing element of imperfection.



Every part of the Library collection that I have encountered has made me feel excited and affirmed in the path I chose, and I look forward to exploring even more in my time here!

Ness Bryan

Elsie: We Will Not be Beaten

Last year, the Library contributed significant research support and material to archival displays for an exhibition of new work by artist Zanny Begg. Commissioned by UTS Gallery & Art Collection, Elsie (and Minnie) is a video installation on the formation of Elsie, the first women's refuge in Australia. Inspired by an overwhelming response, the dream of making a feature documentary was born. Michaela Perske of Pursekey Productions joined the project. Successful in their first step at securing support by Documentary Australia, we are pleased to let you know that the project has been awarded development funding from Screen Australia.

In a time of increasing violence against women, not only will this documentary tell the story of Elsie Women's Refuge and its legacy, but it will also reveal the audacity, bravery, commitment to women's agency and the power of collective action, preserving this transformative history of feminist activism. It will trace a history of activism to connect with and inspire today's rising movements for change.

The Library is acknowledged as an Impact Partner: we added our name in support of making this documentary to the project's application for Documentary Australia support.

For more information about Begg, her work and many achievements: <http://www.zannybegg.com/>

For more information about Elsie: We Will Not be Beaten: <https://documentaryaustralia.com.au/project/elsie-we-will-not-be-beaten/#>

Sherri Hilario

Jessie Street National Women's Library
GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001
and we will contact you.

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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 inter-library 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

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