



Mura Gadi

Barry York introduces Mura Gadi, a pathway for searching the National Library's special collections relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

In recent years, the National Library has paid special attention to the acquisition of materials which document the lives and work of significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Attention has also been paid to the question of how to improve access to National Library materials, particularly for Indigenous communities. The Internet has provided a wonderful technical means of connecting the Library to the people, wherever they reside. It is against this backdrop that the Library's 'Mura Gadi' project has come into being.

Mura Gadi is an online annotated guide to information relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians within the Library's three principal special collections: Manuscript Collection (original diaries, notebooks, correspondence and personal papers), Oral History Collection (interviews with Australians of national standing and with everyday people, as well as field recordings of Australian folklore) and Pictures Collection (paintings, photographs, drawings, prints and realia). 'Mura Gadi' is from the language of the Ngunnawal people, the original inhabitants of the Monaro region, and means 'pathways for searching'.

Developing Mura Gadi was a painstaking process for the team of workers who searched through vast manuscript and pictorial collections, or listened to lengthy oral history recordings, with a view to sifting out their Indigenous significance. Sometimes the material was obvious; at other times hidden within

collections. A very large quantity of material was located and then had to be described, annotated and indexed. Mura Gadi consists of 117 manuscript collections, 84 oral history collections and items, and 170 pictorial collections and items. The manuscript collections range in size from a few folders to dozens of boxes measuring many shelf metres. The oral history collections sometimes include several individual interviews within a single collection. The 84 oral history collections represent well over 300 interviews. The same applies to the pictorial collections. In all, Mura Gadi identifies and describes more than 1000 individual items.

Each collection and item is described in detail, highlighting content relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Australians. The team of people who worked on content selection asked a central question of each item: does it enhance an understanding of Indigenous Australia? If the answer was affirmative, the item was included. There are entries featuring non-Aboriginal Australians. Overall, the manuscript and oral history items focus on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, medical practitioners, musicians, politicians, missionaries, anthropologists, writers,

(left) Joseph Lycett (c.1775–1828)
[*Aborigines Hunting Kangaroos*] c.1817
watercolour; 17.7 x 27.7 cm
nla.pic-an2962844
Pictures Collection PIC/R5681 LOC MS SR

(right) William Westall (1781–1850)
Port Jackson, a Native [1802]
pencil drawing; 31.8 x 26.4 cm
nla.pic-an4562309
Pictures Collection PIC/R4291
LOC Westall Box 4

(right below) Neville Bonner (1922–1999)
[*Boomerang*] 1968
wood boomerang; length 56 cm approx
nla.pic-an8005371
Manuscript Collection MS7903

filmmakers, trade unionists, police, bureaucrats, lawyers, boxers, academics, broadcasters, health workers and activists. Biographical data is provided with each entry.

The Indigenous holdings in Mura Gadi's pictorial section include some of the most valuable and most significant Australian colonial works in the Library. For instance, it includes watercolours by the so-called 'Port Jackson painter'; the first travel artist, Augustus Earle; the convict artist, Joseph Lycett; and the gold-field's artist, S.T. Gill. As well there are photographs taken in the twentieth century by leading photographers such as Axel Poignant, Hamilton Aikin, David Moore and, more recently, the young Australian, Peta Hill.

Two highlights of the guide are the detailed annotations, and the use of terms for the index based on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander thesaurus, compiled by Heather Moorcroft and Alana Garwood, and published by the National Library in 1997. Both are extensive, the index based on general concepts as well as names of people, places and organisations, in a list of nearly 1500 terms. By using terms from the thesaurus, better access is provided to the rich resources described in the guide.

A good example of how Mura Gadi is structured, and how it works, is found in the listings for Neville Bonner. As the first Aboriginal Australian to be elected to the Australian Parliament, it is not surprising that the National Library holds original material by and about



him across the three special collections. In the Manuscript Collection the listing entry describes Bonner's papers—an extensive collection of personal records and material about his public and parliamentary career—and also carries an outline of his life from his birth in 1922, to his death in 1999. The

papers consist of 57 boxes and take up eight metres of shelf space.

Mura Gadi, however, offers more than a descriptive listing. Its value lies in its analysis of content. The guide informs readers that: 'The Bonner papers are an important source on the increasing prominence given to Aboriginal affairs as a national issue in



the 1970s and 1980s, while providing insight into the life and career of a prominent figure.' This more specific analysis draws researchers' attentions to the fact that boxes 9–16 contain files relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs in the Parliament during the 1970s, and that topics include the Racial Discrimination Bill (1975), land rights, black power, Aboriginal criminology, self-determination and compensation. Box 13 contains files relating to Noonkanbah, and boxes 14–16 relate to Aurukun and Mornington Islands.

Mura Gadi complements the records that are in the Library's Catalogue and is substantial in its annotations: a valuable research tool because of its subject focus and indexing. The entry for Bonner in the Manuscript Collection covers a wider range of issues, all of which are indexed for easy searching—politics, compensation, enterprises, land rights, self-determination—and four specific index terms: Bonner, Neville Thomas (1922–1999), Mornington Island (Queensland), Noonkanbah station (Western Australia), Aurukun community (Queensland).

The manuscript entry also draws attention to a collection of 14 cassette recordings which accompanied the Bonner papers, and which are housed in the Oral History Collection.

The entry for Bonner in the Oral History Collection describes and annotates an interview recorded with him by Pat Shaw for Parliament's Oral History Project between 1983 and 1985. Parliament's Oral History Project commenced in 1983 and consists of interviews with retired parliamentarians. The entry provides the 'call number' for the interview (ORAL TRC 4900/64) and describes it as four audiocassettes, totaling 240 minutes, with a 69-page transcript. The oral history interview's content is described as covering Bonner's family background and early life, various jobs, the One People of Australia League, his early interest in politics and involvement with the Liberal Party, his career as a senator and his decision to stand as an Independent, Aboriginal land rights, Uluru (Ayers Rock), apartheid in Australia, Malcolm Fraser, and other issues during his career.

The content analysis of the interview is substantial, at about 300 words, and adds detail to the description. The insights that can be provided through oral history are evident in the following excerpt from the annotation: 'He also discusses the beginning of his political career: as a member of the Liberal Party's One Mile branch at Ipswich, through to his demise when, in 1983, the Liberal Party failed to preselect him for a winnable position on its Senate ticket ... He speaks frankly about the context of his effective dumping by the Liberal Party in 1983, relating it to the influence of the National Party in Liberal politics in Queensland.'

The oral history entry has extensive information to support easy searching. Index terms include accommodation, assimilation, cattle stations, land rights, missions, policy, politics, race relations, self-determination. Then there are 13 specific index terms: Bonner, Neville Thomas (1922–1999), Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), Fraser (John) Malcolm



(far left) Axel Poignant (1906–1986)
Aboriginal Stockman,
Central Australia c.1947
 cibachrome photograph; 41 x 31 cm
 nla.pic-an13388178
 Pictures Collection PIC/P1831/1 LOC R9B

(left) Axel Poignant (1906–1986)
Milingimbi Swimming [194?]
 gelatin silver platinotype photograph;
 51 x 41 cm
 nla.pic-an13391164
 Picture Collection PIC/P1831/13 LOC R9B

Oomera Edwards, Gordon Bryant, Stewart Harris, Judith Wright, Peter Baume and W.C. Wentworth. There are also organisational records, including those of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee (ACT) (1969–1981) and the Australian Inland Mission for the period 1908 to 1998. The latter collection takes up 82 metres of shelf space.

It should be noted that, while many of the pictorial items—photographs and paintings—are available online, the manuscript and oral history items are not. The Library's digitisation project is gradually placing more and more special collections' material online and the time will come when much more of the Mura Gadi material will be directly accessible.

There is no doubt that Mura Gadi will improve awareness of, and access to, the Library's special collections relating to Indigenous Australians. A feedback facility will encourage users to help further develop the collections in this area.

The National Library asks that users of the guide do all they can to ensure that the information they access is used in a way consistent with the views and sensitivities of relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The guide contains images and names of deceased persons. Titles have been transcribed from original items, thus reflecting attitudes of the time the items were created. Mura Gadi is accessible through the National Library's web site at www.nla.gov.au/muragadi.

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(1930–), Jagara people (see: Yuggera people), Lismore (New South Wales), One People of Australia League (OPAL), Palm Island (Queensland), Referendum 1967, Shaw, Pat, Ugarapul people, Ukerebagh Island (New South Wales), Uluuru (Ayers Rock) (Northern Territory), Yuggera people (Queensland).

The entries in the Pictures Collection include a portrait of Bonner by Greg Barrett and a boomerang, made and inscribed by Bonner in 1968.

Other items in Mura Gadi throw light on Bonner's career and are accessed through the index. In addition to the abovementioned Bonner items, there are references to him in interviews with former parliamentarians Les Johnson, Jim Keefe and Malcolm Mackay, current parliamentarian Senator Aden Ridgeway, and writer Judith Wright McKinney. The index also draws

attention to photographs featuring Bonner taken by Loui Seselja.

Conditions of access for each collection or item are listed in the Mura Gadi guide. These are conditions usually imposed by the individual or their family. The Library encourages all those seeking access to materials to contact the collection managers for further information.

Neville Bonner is but one example from the hundreds of entries in Mura Gadi. Better-known individuals who feature in the guide include Barrie Dexter, Harold Blair, Alick Jackomos, Essie Goodgabah Coffey, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Jack Davis, Paddy Roe, Clyde Holding, Bill Gray, Faith Thomas, Grant Tjapaltjarri Nelson, Bill Neidjie, Wesley Enoch, Deborah Mailman, Aden Ridgeway, Chicka Dixon, Stephen Page, Marie Winch, Eddie Mabo, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, Fred Hollows, Ruby Ginibi Langford, Charles Perkins, Gatjil Djerrkura,