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From the State Librarian

It is always exciting to begin a new year and to look forward to upcoming events. This year we are celebrating the Library’s literary collections with Literature 2004, part of an annual project which will take us up to the centenary of the Mitchell Library in 2010. It is a well-known fact that the Mitchell Library came into being as a result of the bequest from David Scott Mitchell which stipulated a purpose-built structure. You can read more about ‘Mr Mitchell’s Monument’ in this issue (page 9) and view the eponymous display when you next visit the Library. Yet Mitchell’s priceless gift created more than a world-renowned research library. It has led to a tradition of generosity and in this issue we pay tribute to some special, present-day Library benefactors. Already this year we have celebrated the completion of the Mitchell Vestibule with the installation of a magnificent display case to showcase recent acquisitions and Library treasures (see page 13). This has been made possible through the benefaction of Ms Dorothy Peake, her husband Dr Alex Robertson and Mrs Zeny Edwards.

The manuscript which first referred to the Southern Cross, the rare Lettera di Andrea Corsali, has taken pride of place in this newly refurbished display area. Our thanks go to Dr Bruce Reid AM, KNO for loaning this material as well as for funding the sculpture inspired by Corsali’s letters.

The opening at the Library of the national touring exhibition, Miles Franklin: A Brilliant Career?, and the launch of Paul Brunton’s book, The Diaries of Miles Franklin (see pages 14–15) have put the spotlight on another aspect of the Library’s collections. The Written Word, a series of public events throughout the year, will feature current Australian writers such as Sonya Hartnett talking about what inspires them to create books, plays, poetry and songs. You can read an excerpt from the insightful speech Sonya gave at the Miles Franklin launch in our feature story.

It is always sad to write about the death of a distinguished librarian let alone two such as Allan Horton (1928–2003) and Warren Horton AM (1938–2003). Allan Horton worked here between 1944 and 1960 (at what was then known as the Public Library of NSW) before being appointed University Librarian at the University of NSW. He remained there until his retirement in 1988, participating in a wide range of external activities, including chairing the Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries in the mid seventies, whose report took his name.

Librarians from all around the country, politicians and senior public servants attended the funeral of Warren Horton AM in Canberra late last year. Warren spent the early years of his career here, becoming Deputy State Librarian in 1975 before leaving in 1981 to become State Librarian, Victoria, and thence to the position of Director-General, National Library of Australia in 1985. Warren too was very active in his profession and was appointed a member of the Order of Australia in June 1992.

Dagmar Schmidmaier AM
State Librarian & Chief Executive
2004 is an exciting year for the Library as we celebrate some of the highlights of our literature collections through an integrated program of preservation, digitisation, exhibitions, events and educational programs.

With its broad appeal, Literature 2004 has attracted sponsorship from The Sydney Morning Herald, Visions of Australia, the Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts and James Squire.

The year began with the Written Word series, which features popular young Australian writers talking about their work. Early in March the exhibition Miles Franklin: A Brilliant Career? was launched by writer Sonya Hartnett. First published at age 15, her recent novel, Of a Boy, made the 2003 shortlist for the Miles Franklin Award. Sonya’s words had a special resonance as she looked at what young writers today can learn from Miles Franklin. The Bulletin has kindly given permission for part of Sonya’s launch speech to appear in Upfront.

A BOLD LIFE REACHES ACROSS TIME & SPACE

The State Library of New South Wales is to be congratulated for bringing to the attention of wider Australia the details of an extraordinary life through its Miles Franklin: A Brilliant Career? exhibition, which opened at the Library on 1 March. During her long life, Franklin travelled widely, dabbled in journalism, kept precise and sometimes vicious diaries, and fought for female equality; she is best remembered, however, for the two enduring legacies she left to Australian literature. One of them is the annual Miles Franklin Literary Award; the other is a novel which became the shining light of her career.

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin published My Brilliant Career in 1901. She had written the book while still in her teens; she was twenty-one when it was published. A. G. Stephens, in The Bulletin, called My Brilliant Career ‘the very first Australian novel to be published’; Henry Lawson contributed the Preface, declaring the book the most ‘truly Australian’ he had ever read.

Such high praise didn’t save Franklin’s literary career from coming almost immediately unstrung. Despite critical lauding and the adulation of smart society, the novel achieved no lasting financial benefit for Miles. Its sales were not especially low, but its royalty rate was: Franklin estimated she made a total of twenty-four pounds from the book. Infinitely more unnerving, however, was her inability to publish further major work, including the rather forlornly titled sequel to My Brilliant Career, My Career goes Bung. Unpublished and impoverished, Miles Franklin found herself facing a future she dreaded, the life of ceaseless domestic drudgery lived by her mother and by most women of the time.

Continued over ➔
Miles reacted to save herself: in 1906, aged 26, she left Sydney for America. Twenty-six years would pass before she'd return to live permanently in Australia.

As the SS Ventura pulled away from shore, Franklin must have had mixed feelings. Miles loved Australia — My Brilliant Career closes in rapturous praise of the country and its people, and her childhood in the uplands of NSW had instilled in her the independence that would be the driving force behind her life — and it's fair to think she departed with some regret. However, in 1906 Miles was, by any standards, a failing novelist, her first book five years in the past and stagnating, her subsequent work largely spurned: she surely felt relief to be leaving the scene of such expectation and disappointment. Maybe she realised that the big red country was, in fact, too cramped for her. A feminist and free-thinker, Miles was always ahead of her time: Australia, vastly isolated, could never keep up with the times.

Franklin wouldn't be the last to flee the country's backwateriness: the 20th century witnessed Australian artists and intellectuals deserting their homeland in droves. Only in recent times has the bleeding seemed to slow. There are many reasons for this, among them the contracting of the world into a global village, and the raising of Australia's profile from uncultured, yobbo-infested, arse-end-of-the-world to young and charismatic Great Southern Land. From a writer's point of view, one good reason to stay has been the increased willingness of Australian publishers to produce Australian literature. My Brilliant Career was rejected by the Australian company Angus and Robertson, and eventually published by a Scottish firm, Blackwood and Sons; were Miles Franklin writing today, she could send the manuscript to any of a dozen or more local publishers who compete in the chase for fresh local talent. Her contract would specify a 10% royalty rate, the not overly-despicable industry standard; a good agent might wrangle something higher. The book would be edited in Australia, designed in Australia, and probably typeset and printed here. The name on the spine would be Stella Franklin — there'd be no need for Franklin to adopt the masculine identity of 'Miles'.

The new-minted novel would go out into a world where Australian literature is respected, having claims upon such venerable literary prizes as the Commonwealth, the Orange, the Booker, the IMPAC and the Nobel. International publishers would vie for the overseas publishing rights; with a bit of luck, there'd be a bidding war. When all the hoopla had died down, the novel might join the syllabus of one of the many respectable universities which run courses in the study of Australian literature. Just as it was one hundred years ago, the hideous pressure would now be on Miles to produce a second work, for which everyone would hold their breath.

All of this could happen, were Miles a contemporary writer, but not all of it would — because there's a hitch in Franklin's brilliant contemporary career. My Brilliant Career is indisputably an Australian classic. Our literary cannon would be lesser without it and without her. But if Miles submitted the manuscript to an Australian publisher today, My Brilliant Career, the classic, 'the very first Australian novel to be published', would be released — and I hate to say it — as a Young Adult novel.

It has all the hallmarks that qualify it as a Young Adult novel: a teenage protagonist, a first-person narration, an obsession with the opposite sex; violence, heartbreak, hormones and the relentless swilling of storms-in-teacups. They are characteristics which earn Young Adult literature, along with most other teenage diversions, the scorn it ceaselessly attracts. Yet Young Adult is where some of the most adventurous contemporary writing is being published, and My Brilliant Career; with its undercurrent of desire and its wilful, vile-tempered heroine, was nothing if not adventurous. However, being released into today's Young Adult market would hobble the book's future. The novel, in Young Adult guise, would be unlikely to attract a champion of Henry Lawson's influential standing. It would probably not cross the desk of so venerable a critic as A. G. Stephens. There'd be no stratosphere-raising bidding war, no shortlisting for the big-paying prizes.
to survive the frustrations of her early writing years but to persist as a writer, sometimes far from the land that inspired her, always against a society whose entrenched sexism she strove to defy. In an era when Australian women authors were writing about talking marsupials and the antics of naughty children — subjects suitable for a lady, and perhaps all she was capable of broaching — Miles Franklin wrote about a clever and tempestuous girl, ‘a cynic and an infidel’ at once enticed and repulsed by the approach of adulthood. In My Brilliant Career, Franklin lay bare the inner life of the teenage Sybylla in a way that may have unnerved men — Lawson, in his Preface, wrote, ‘I don’t know about the girlishly emotional parts of the book … ’ — but which surely made the hearts of female readers beat fast with recognition. In My Brilliant Career, Miles reached out to her contemporaries, acknowledging what it was to live as a woman in Australia at the end of the 19th century; one hundred years later, women are free to be who and what they please, but nonetheless we can still identify with Franklin’s struggling, striving heroine, our hearts can still beat fast with recognition. Miles Franklin reaches across time and space: her rich, bold, wild life continues to enrich this country, giving us a shining example of what it is to live true to oneself, to live free.

**Sonya Hartnett**

*The very first Australian novel to be published’, in contemporary Young Adult form, would be lucky to claw a few lines for itself in the increasingly-absent children’s section of The Australian Book Review. Because of its status as a Young Adult book, My Brilliant Career would not be eligible for the Miles Franklin Prize. Despite its intention being to recognise ‘the novel or play of the year which is of the highest literary merit’, the prize won’t accept children’s or Young Adult books, regardless of quality, into competition. I wonder what Miles, the fighter for equality, would say about that.

But I have got on my hobby horse; forgive me, I’ll get off. Besides, to inflict contemporary standards on Miles Franklin is to lessen the many remarkable achievements of her life. Her brilliant career shines most brightly when seen against the muffled light of her own era. What incredible courage it must have required from someone such as she, to reject the rigid expectations of society and, instead, to carve for herself a place not just in the literary world of her own time, but also in ours. The writing life demands from its practitioner a deep and unshakeable confidence — confidence in one’s ability, confidence in the worth of the work: how much more than typical confidence Miles Franklin must have possessed, not only to survive the frustrations of her early writing years but to persist as a writer, sometimes far from the land that inspired her, always against a society whose entrenched sexism she strove to defy. In an era when Australian women authors were writing about talking marsupials and the antics of naughty children — subjects suitable for a lady, and perhaps all she was capable of broaching — Miles Franklin wrote about a clever and tempestuous girl, ‘a cynic and an infidel’ at once enticed and repulsed by the approach of adulthood. In My Brilliant Career, Franklin lay bare the inner life of the teenage Sybylla in a way that may have unnerved men — Lawson, in his Preface, wrote, ‘I don’t know about the girlishly emotional parts of the book … ’ — but which surely made the hearts of female readers beat fast with recognition. In My Brilliant Career, Miles reached out to her contemporaries, acknowledging what it was to live as a woman in Australia at the end of the 19th century; one hundred years later, women are free to be who and what they please, but nonetheless we can still identify with Franklin’s struggling, striving heroine, our hearts can still beat fast with recognition. Miles Franklin reaches across time and space: her rich, bold, wild life continues to enrich this country, giving us a shining example of what it is to live true to oneself, to live free.

**Sonya Hartnett**

*The Written Word* 04

Throughout 2004 the Library will explore the achievements and personalities of famous literary figures and new Australian writers through exhibitions, public events and films. *The Written Word* is an eight-part series of public events at which popular Australian writers will talk about their work in fiction, memoir, songwriting, journalism, comedy and script and screenwriting.

Sonya Hartnett will share *Of a Boy’s eerie and heartbreaking story and discuss her unique writing processes at the Library in May.*

Sharing the stage in May will be award-winning writer Anna Funder, whose debut book, *Stasiland,* burst onto the bestsellers’ list in 2002. Anna lived in Berlin before the Wall came down, later returning after the fall of communism to record some of the extraordinary stories of the people who lived under, or within, the Stasi regime.

Ben Kozel will visit the Library in June for a light-hearted chat about his career change from scientist to intrepid travel writer. Ben’s first river odyssey saw him rafting the Amazon River from source to sea before launching his writing career. *Three men in a raft* became a bestseller, and journeys in Mongolia and Serbia reported in *Five mates in a leaky raft* are receiving great reviews.

‘Young memoirs’ (Thursday 10 June in the State Library’s Metcalfe Auditorium) will see Ben and others answering (or possibly dodging) questions from witty raconteur and author, Rachael Oakes-Ash. In her latest book, *Anything she can do I can do better,* Rachael approaches the taboo topic of female rivalry, and challenges prominent women including Dame Anita Roddick, Amanda Vanstone, Nikki Gemmell and Maggie Alderson to do the same.

For more about Library events see the free publication @ the Library, or visit <www.sl.nsw.gov.au>.

*Images from top: Sonya Hartnett, Anna Funder, photograph by John Gollings, Ben Kozel, photograph by Colin Angus, and Rachael Oakes-Ash*

**Principal Sponsor**

**The Sydney Morning Herald**
For colonists seeking a souvenir of the curiosities of this unfamiliar land, birds – particularly colourful parrots and lorikeets – were obvious collectables. Just 10 days in New South Wales, for instance, Ralph Clark, on 1 February 1788, shot a parrot: for him they were ‘the most beautiful birds that I ever saw’. Similarly, Peter Cunningham boasted in 1827 that Australian parrots ‘exceed all others in the world in the splendour of their plumage’.1 As a number of recent Library acquisitions of colonial art coincidentally feature one parrot, the King Parrot, it is interesting to trace its passage through the hands of early naturalists and artists.

Besides being colourful, parrots were also accessible. Cunningham reported that they could be purchased in local Sydney markets for sixpence each. They were hardy too, important for collectors hoping to impress friends and patrons in Europe with an antipodean novelty. They were said to be ‘the most valuable for selling to ships to take to England’. The mortality rate on ships was high, but parrots did better than most.

Dead King Parrots had reached England by the end of 1788 when they were described and illustrated in both The voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay of 1789 and John White’s Journal of a voyage to New South Wales of 1790. Noting the parrot’s similarities – but also its differences – to the Tabuan Parrot from Fiji and Tonga, both publications tentatively named the bird the Tabuan Parrot, a name which stuck for many years, in Europe at least, until it was finally properly described in 1816.

Local collectors and artists, far removed from arguments about classification, simply enjoyed the bird. One of the first to illustrate it locally was John Hunter, later governor of the colony. A limited but pleasing artist, he included a King Parrot in his album of one hundred drawings of NSW birds and flowers of 1789 (National Library of Australia).
Intriguingly, a contemporary copy of this album came into the possession of a young ensign in the NSW Corps, Robert Anderson Seton, who arrived in the colony in 1800 intent on furthering his career and supplying curiosities to his family. In this however, he was frustrated by the ‘high prices for every curiosity’ he wanted. It is not known if Anderson Seton himself made his appealing copy, which the Library purchased in 2000, but his friendship with Hunter would have given him access to the original. Certainly colonial artists – especially amateur military artists – commonly copied each other’s work as a way of sharing information.

The criticism of Hunter’s work as a naturalist – that he was a ‘Man unskilled in Natural History’ – also holds true for many of his contemporaries. Thomas Skottowe (?–1821), commandant of the penal settlement in Newcastle, decided to compile an illustrated manuscript about the region’s natural history in 1813. Although he had little knowledge of the subject, he employed a convict under his charge, Richard Browne, to provide twenty-nine illustrations for his Select Specimens from Nature of the Birds, Animals Etc of New South Wales of 1813 (bequeathed by David Scott Mitchell, 1907). This charming volume of things which caught his eye was never published. Skottowe was attracted to the King Parrot because of the ‘richness of its plumage, from which, and its being a larger size than the other Parrots of this Country, I imagine it takes it name’.

Only a few years later, a young Dubliner named Kenelm Digby (1800–1880) was observing live King Parrots in a Dublin menagerie, and including them into his encyclopaedic and equally eccentric volume, A Naturalist’s Companion, which the Library purchased in 2001. With teenage enthusiasm, Digby illustrated an eclectic range of more than 440 specimens and artefacts he found in local museums and menageries.

As well as King Parrots and kangaroos, the volume included Irish treasures, Egyptian mummies, and Pacific Island artefacts collected on the voyages of Captain Cook. Yet Digby’s compendium of the natural world – like those of Hunter and Skottowe – was about his pleasure in the diversity of God’s creation rather than philosophical debates about classification.

When artist Richard Read Senior (c. 1765–?) wanted to thank the London lawyer who had defended him, unsuccessfully, of forgery charges which occasioned his transportation to NSW in 1813, he sent a watercolour of three parrots, dominated by the King Parrot. It was a work of art intended to be hung on a wall rather than consulted by naturalists. Painted in the late 1810s (and purchased by the Library in 1997), the watercolour represents how most colonists viewed Australian natural history: colourful, exotic and an ideal present for a patron.

Richard Neville
Manager, Original Materials

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1 Peter Cunningham, Two years in New South Wales (1827), Angus & Robertson, 1966, p. 159
For the first time at the State Library, new technology enables clients to virtually turn the pages of some of the oldest and rarest books in the world. High quality digital images of open pages from extraordinary items like the first book printed in English by William Caxton in 1473, proclamations of Queen Elizabeth I and Edmond Halley’s catalogue of the southern stars complete with margin notes, printers’ markings, typography and illustrations are now yours to pour over.

Early English Books Online (EEBO), purchased in 2003, is the exciting new database that makes all this possible. It complements an Early English Books microfilm set collected since 1938 in a project to preserve the earliest books printed in Great Britain or in English anywhere in the world.

Digitisation of the microfilm marks a new beginning for this great resource. About 100,000 works from the microfilm collection are now available and scanning of the remaining titles will bring the total number to more than 125,000 by 2007.

EEBO currently contains more than 80% of the surviving written record of the English-speaking world from 1473 to 1700. On this database you can find single sheet ballads, an Elizabethan bookplate, broadsides from the English Civil War and a three-volume set of the complete works of John Milton, among many, many fascinating titles and articles.

It is an important new way to support research in many subject areas including literature, history, religion, art, music, botany, geography and travel. Researchers can look at Edmund Spenser’s *The faerie queene* (1590), John Donne’s last sermon (1632) or music by Henry Purcell or John Dowland. Botanists may be interested in *The herball or Generall historie of plantes* (1597) by John Gerard. Historians might like to read the accounts of voyages around the world by Sir Francis Drake (1628) or William Dampier (1697).

The resource considerably extends the State Library’s collection of works printed before 1701. Scanned images in the database also enable clients to closely examine details of publications online, thus protecting the fragile and aging paper and bindings. There is even the possibility of comparing the State Library’s copy of an early work with digital images of others held in major libraries around the world. The facsimile images provide greater flexibility for searching than microfilm reels which contain batches of often unrelated items.

Now available for searching, EEBO is the first of a number of large new databases that will increase access to old and rare printed materials. To access the database, simply visit the State Reference Library and ask at the Information Desk for assistance.

**Philippa Armfield**

Top image: EEBO web search page <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search>  
Below: Cover illustration of *The herball or Generall historie of plantes* by John Gerard, 1597, London

**WEB LINK**

For more information about Library databases visit <www.sl.nsw.gov.au/databases> or select AskNow! online to post a question to a librarian.
While his name is world-famous, David Scott Mitchell himself was elusive in life and remains much of an enigma today. The little we know of this gentleman collector is based on anecdotal evidence and it is impossible to escape the conclusion that this is exactly as he wanted it. The puzzle of remaining records, news reports and personal statements Library researchers have sifted through present a portrait of a man who would have concurred with the famous tribute to Christopher Wren in St Paul’s Cathedral, London: *si monumentum circumspice* — if you seek a monument, look around you.

What is indubitable is that on his death in July 1907, David Scott Mitchell, known to his contemporaries only as a wealthy, eccentric and reclusive collector of Australiana, left the people of New South Wales the greatest single cultural bequest ever made in Australia.

Mitchell’s entire collection of more than 60,000 printed and 11,000 original items, including 1,140 manuscript volumes and some 251 pictures, was bequeathed to the State on the condition that a purpose-built and permanent home be dedicated to the rare and now priceless collection. It was this important qualification that resulted in what we have known now for nearly 100 years as the State Library of New South Wales.

Mitchell was remarkably far-sighted in assessing the future significance and use of his collection. He is reputed to have proclaimed the following words at a time when people were desperate to excise any mention of the ‘bad old days’, especially the taint of convict ancestors:

> The main thing is to get the records. We’re too near our own past to view it properly, but in a few generations, the convict past will take its proper place in the perspective …

The path leading to this magnificent legacy is interwoven with the colonial history of the State. Like many such processes, the negotiations were complex and delicate, with Mitchell almost cancelling the agreement at one point due to the government’s inaction. That Mitchell was more than capable of defining precise details is obvious when his last will and testament is studied. With clarity, and indeed perspicacity, he ensured the future for his great collection. Not the least of his terms, the requirement for a permanent home for his collection has left us with a legacy in bricks and mortar, as well as in books and manuscripts.

It is this legacy that is the focus of *Mr Mitchell’s monument: An architectural history of the Mitchell Library*, currently on display in the Dalgety Walkway.

Commencing with the Government Architect’s impression of the planned ‘National Library’ building in 1885, through to the last additions to the south-east corner of the ‘Public Library’ building in the 1960s, the architectural features of the Library provide a most unusual map of influence, fashion and cultural values over a century in NSW.

It is not overstating the case to say, as Robert Hughes has done:

> ... that what is preserved in the Mitchell and Dixson archives constitutes one of the world’s absolutely indispensable repositories about a single nation or state.

Elizabeth Ellis
Mitchell Librarian

Main image: ‘National Library’: north elevation, W. L. Vernon & G. M. Blair, architectural drawing, 1905
Middle: Portrait of David Scott Mitchell, c. 1870, photograph by B. C. Boake. This small carte-de-viste photograph is the only known posed portrait of Mitchell.
Below: Detail of columns within the Mitchell Vestibule, photograph by Avril Whitnall, curator of *Mr Mitchell’s monument*, 2004
In 1907, David Scott Mitchell left what is arguably the greatest cultural gift to the Australian nation. But little did he realise that his bequest would perpetuate a spirit of generosity that lives on in greatness today.

Mitchell’s bequest was the catalyst for a tradition of generosity that has contributed significantly to the advancement of the State Library, and its place on the world stage as a cultural icon.

Today the tradition lives on, and testament to this is the generosity of our modern-day benefactors, some of whom have followed in Mitchell’s footsteps by providing a gift in their Will to the Library.

Howard and Beryl Lewis are a fine example of such benefactors. Former Volunteers of the State Library, and Friends since 1983, Howard and Beryl’s relationship with the Library started as each separately began to use the collections for their own purposes. Howard spent many Saturdays here in his early career studying metallurgy, and Beryl’s interest intensified when she became President of the Fellowship of First Fleeters.

That relationship continued to grow as the couple became more actively involved in the Library and its activities. Beryl summed up the reasons for this ongoing relationship by saying that it has been her habit to ‘put something back where I’ve taken something out’. This is especially important to Beryl as she feels that the Library is the most important cultural institution in Australia.

Right top: Portrait of David Scott Mitchell, 1893, etching by Lionel Lindsay after a drawing by Walter Syer
Howard had never been inside the Library until 1990 and when I finally made my entry to the new Macquarie Street building I was amazed and overwhelmed. I began my time after joining The Library Society as a volunteer, wondering how I would ever fit in to such a grand and wonderful place; the beauty of the buildings and the many treasures in keeping, but it seems I did because I’m still here!

I guided my first exhibition in 1991. Woven History – it was all about how Persian carpets were made and why the history of the Middle East was recorded in their fabrics. It was fascinating and I was terrified. I had to learn all about dyeing and weaving, carpet making and the history of the Middle Eastern regions. With the support of wonderful Library staff I undertook my first group. It was a remarkable experience, as every tour since has been.

Soon I was confident enough to present the opening general public tour of the Bligh exhibition. The first day I’ll never forget: the crowds and the excitement! I guided about 20 or 30 people through all the galleries and at the end – it was the biggest thrill I ever had – everybody applauded.

Fourteen years ago I was sent to the Library to re-establish my self-esteem and found a new life there. These days, I’m involved in the Library as a Volunteer, member of the Friends group, and as a Custodian Leader. To me, today just walking into its buildings is like entering a place where I truly belong.

Malcolm was delighted to be the subject of this Friends column. Sadly, Malcolm died suddenly, but peacefully, at home in late January. The Library has lost a true friend. Wilma Norris

Join the Friends
The Library collects and preserves the written and visual records of our developing and diverse culture – including many rare and beautiful objects, paintings and maps.
Make friends with the Library and discover more about our treasures through a fascinating calendar of events, lectures, tours, publications and exhibitions.
Contact the Foundation on (02) 9273 1593.
AUSTRALIAN STORY

It's a well-known fact among writers that inspiration thrives on the mundane. The best ideas, as many will attest, are born on taxi rides and washing days. This is why the birth of the National Biography Award, an idea sparked by a mid-week dinner in a Melbourne restaurant, is such a nice tale to tell.

There is a pleasing symmetry to the fact that one of the most generous private contributions to Australian Arts should have been inspired by a chat over a simple meal.

Geoffrey Cains, dermatologist, collector and advocate of Australian culture, says the award, which he funds in full each year, came ‘out of the blue’. ‘I was with writer and poet Tom Shapcott, and it was his thoughts about the importance of biography that started it all,’ recalls Mr Cains. ‘We were discussing writing and Australian identity, and Tom was describing how essential biography is to our understanding of ourselves as a changing nation. I realised then how vital it is that we have a way of looking at ourselves and at the Australia we live in. I thought about how little we celebrate the people who endeavour to reflect this for us in literature and realised that it was really a very important thing for me to find a way to support writers in this area.’

It was a strange decision really. Mr Cains is a confirmed lover of Australian fiction. ‘My only experience of biography was at the State Library where I was given the opportunity as an undergraduate to read through Miles Franklin’s legendary coded diary. I never really looked at any others after that,’ he laughs.

In more recent years though, countless readers have been rewarded with great Australian biographies including Abraham Biderman’s Holocaust memoir, The world of my past, Jacqueline Kent’s A certain style, exploring the literary life of Beatrice Davis, and Don Watson’s memoir of working with Prime Minister Paul Keating, Recollections of a bleeding heart – all prize winners in the National Biography Award.

The genre is thriving. In Britain about 3000 new biographies are published each year and in Australia there has never been such interest in stories of our own. It’s an important development for the strengthening of Australian identity that is celebrated by publishers, writers and critics alike.

‘Biography,’ says Les Murray biographer Peter Alexander, ‘… [provides] a very strong sense of common humanity’. It’s this Mr Cains finds especially important in the Australian context. ‘We have maintained many myths about being Australian that no longer serve us,’ he says. ‘In biography we explore the motives, the weaknesses and challenges that drive Australians today, and so find in our own stories, insights which may take us each a little more strongly toward an Australia that nurtures individuals and supports their ideals and endeavours.’

Jade Richardson

The National Biography Award of $15 000 was established in 1996 to encourage the highest standards of writing biography and autobiography, and to encourage public interest in the genre. The award is made possible by the generosity of Geoffrey Cains (pictured right).
A GRAND ENTRANCE

As the transformation of the Mitchell Library Vestibule nears completion, it is timely to acknowledge the generosity of State Library Foundation benefactors whose support and enduring interest in the Library have brought these changes to reality.

In a sense, Foundation Life Benefactor, Dr Bruce Reid AM, KNO set the process in motion several years ago. He and the State Librarian were walking along the first floor corridor above the Vestibule early one evening when Dr Reid suggested that the blank space on the western wall would be a marvellous place for a sculpture. An additional artwork would complement the other fine features of the Vestibule.

In a moment of inspiration, Dr Reid suggested that the sculpture’s design could be derived from a very rare early 16th century Italian manuscript document which he had in his possession, depicting the first image ever drawn of the stars of the Southern Cross.

If we come forward to the present, a beautiful glass and stainless steel sculpture now adorns the wall. (Read ‘A Heavenly Sign’, Upfront, vol. 15, no. 3). The sculpture is a munificent gift to the Library from Dr Reid on behalf of the Bruce & Joy Reid Foundation.

The desire to contribute to the Library and enrich the experience of all who visit encouraged former Sydney library director Ms Dorothy Peake and her husband, retired academic Dr Alex Robertson, with Mrs Zeny Edwards, well-known architectural historian, writer and publisher, to give generous financial contributions for the conversion of another blank space on the other side of the Vestibule. Ms Peake, Dr Robertson and Mrs Edwards all responded to the idea for a dedicated place for display of some new acquisitions.

Those with long memories will recall the location of the new display case as the old Library cloakroom. Until 1988 the area was busy with queues, its ‘pigeon-holes’ and tags system ruled by generations of security officers. Since then the space was boarded over and sometimes used for temporary signage.

An elegant, state-of-the-art display case designed by the Library’s heritage conservation architects, Noel Bell, Ridley Smith & Partners, now graces the once dark alcove. The first item on display is the manuscript of the Southern Cross – a perfect partner to the sculpture, and another generous contribution by Dr Reid.

A finishing touch to the upgrading of the Vestibule has been the engraved inscription in classical Roman lettering of the name of ‘The Mitchell Library’ on the centre of the marble gallery fascia. For this we thank Mr John Merewether, who, as great-nephew of the first notable benefactor, David Scott Mitchell, has a special place in the past and present history of the Library.

All who enter from the portico of the Mitchell Wing of the State Library now encounter a glittering array: not only the celebrated marble Tasman map, the stained glass windows and the wonderful architectural details of the original design completed in 1941, but also the new additions of the Southern Cross sculpture and the Vestibule display case. It can truly be said that this grandest of Sydney public entrances has come alive.

Elizabeth Ellis
Mitchell Librarian

Images from top:
Dr Bruce Reid AM KNO and Jon Hawley
Ian McLachlan with Dorothy Peake and Dr Alex Robertson
Tempe and John Merewether
Zeny Edwards with Elizabeth Ellis
Photography by Scott Wajon
Miles Franklin kept a diary from the age of 29 until her death in 1954. In volume after volume, written in ink, in a neat, if slightly spidery hand, with very little correction, her life unfolds in all its infinite variety.

And it was varied; even in her last years, she packed a lot into a day. ‘Did she not threaten us all with her diary, to be published when she was safely dead?’, wrote novelist and historian, Marjorie Barnard in 1967.

The diary is not simply a recitation of where Franklin went and what she did. She meditates. She reminisces. She discusses politics, religion, sex – all the forbidden subjects – frankly, intelligently and memorably. She vividly describes places visited and events attended. She criticises books, plays and films with insight and humour. And best of all, she takes to pieces, and then reassembles, her contemporaries on three continents with precision and devastating wit. You cannot read Miles Franklin’s diaries without laughing out loud. Almost alone among Australian writers of her generation, she secured their preservation by bequeathing them to Sydney’s Mitchell Library, where she had spent many happy hours.

The overwhelming impression the journals leave is of what a life-enhancing companion Miles was. This too was the testimony of those who knew her. In 1933 P. R. Stephensen said that ‘images fall from her like ripe fruit even when she is talking; ‘that’s your trademark – a brilliant whimsical originality’, exclaimed Jean Devanny in 1952. In the last year of Franklin’s life, Katharine Susannah Prichard wrote: ‘I do love the wit & play of your so original mind. Nobody makes me laugh so much … so delightfully Miles, gay, intrepid & unique! … thank you again for so much stimulus – and the happiness of being with you’.

I delighted in Miles’ company as I journeyed with her thoughts and journals to Chicago, London, Macedonia, then home to Sydney, by air to Alice Springs, to Melbourne and across to Perth. She liked a convivial lunch and I have now had many with her, as it were, relishing her table talk. She springs from the pages of her diary, fresh and alive.

There is the social Miles who scintillates and enchants. There is the private Miles with a ‘creeping melancholy’ and sense of failure revealed to few: though her closest friends sensed it.

The legendary diaries of Miles Franklin reveal her devastating wit and a secret world of shadows.
Even as early as 1913, at 34 in Chicago, with an interesting job, active social life and glamorous suitors, she could confess suicidal thoughts to her diary.

On the publication of My Brilliant Career in 1901 when she was 21, Miles Franklin became a celebrity – ‘a comet of wonder’, as she said. She received hundreds of letters encouraging her to continue writing, including one from the Governor-General in his own hand. She was taken up by the great and the good. A golden literary future was predicted. But it did not eventuate. She could publish nothing further in Australia though she tried and tried.

In 1906 she escaped to America where in Chicago, despite pioneering work in the women’s trade union movement, she was again unable to publish anything. In England from 1915, literary success also eluded her though she managed to publish the first volumes of the series of books she would write under the pseudonym, Brent of Bin Bin.

But these books brought no glory to the name of Miles Franklin, as she never admitted authorship. The pseudonym did, though, enable her, with outrageous effrontery, to praise Brent’s works publicly and privately as if she had nothing to do with them. ‘Won’t everyone be surprised’, we can almost hear Franklin say, ‘when it is revealed that the famous Brent of Bin Bin is actually Miles Franklin, the rejected author’.

Back in Australia from late 1932, the tide turned. She published a string of books right up to her death. Her prize-winning novel of 1936, All that swagger, was a huge success, reprinted many times – one fan wrote that Franklin was as exciting as Don Bradman. Her 1945 paperback edition of an earlier work, Old Blastus of Bandicoot, sold 25 000 copies in its first year.

But it was not enough. In her view, the promise of 1901 was never fulfilled. ‘I’ve struggled so long for nothing – long enough to prove over & over again that I have no talent for writing’, she wrote in her diary in January 1950.

Just a few months later, at 70, she would deliver in Perth a successful series of lectures on the Australian novel for the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

To read her diary is to come to know Miles Franklin as a friend. She is vulnerable yet indomitable; lonely yet sociable; outspoken and sensitive. She felt her life a failure but would never throw in the towel. What she wrote about her friend and editor Beatrice Davis applies equally to herself: ‘she has intelligence, fire, courage & perception’.

In an act of magnanimity, unprecedented in Australia, she left her estate to foster Australian writing through the annual Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Paul Brunton
Senior Curator, Mitchell Library

Paul Brunton is the author of The Diaries of Miles Franklin, recently published by Allen & Unwin in association with the State Library of NSW.

A version of this article first appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald on 28 February 2004.

WEB LINK

Visit a selection of Miles Franklin images online: www.sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/miles
THE BUSINESS OF CHANGE

From beauty pageants and callisthenic classes to the modern world of downsizing and telecommuting, changes at work reflect deeper shifts in our way of life.

Does your workplace have a motto? How about company picnics, fancy dress parties or staff pantomimes? Perhaps you remember the days when a job was for life? The historical records of Australian businesses provide fascinating insights into the changing nature of work in our society.

Working life has altered radically over the last century and it’s not just advances in technology that have shaped the workplace revolution. Today productivity bonuses and profit margins connect workers to the company’s bottom line, but in the past the workplace provided a deeper sense of community, with employees ‘belonging’ to an organisation.

Take, for example, the story of Anthony Hordern & Sons, one of the flagships of early Australian retail. In 1825 a single-fronted drapery shop in Sydney was the unlikely start for what became the largest department store in the southern hemisphere. Anthony Hordern & Sons’ gigantic Palace Emporium, built in 1905, was six stories high and occupied an entire city block. By the 1920s more than 4000 employees served 30 000 customers each day, basing their work ethic on the company motto: ‘While I Live I’ll Grow’.

The welfare of staff was seen as paramount to the success of the business. The store’s own Welfare Department established sports, musical and dramatic societies, physical culture classes and organised annual dinners, dances, picnics and charity fundraisers. Work was not just a source of income, but a way of life. The Hordernian Monthly staff magazine offered not only company news, but also staff gossip, social pages and light entertainment. In 1932 the magazine devoted a double page spread to the coronation of Miss Eileen Bullen of the Furnishings Department who was officially crowned Queen of the Oval at a charity fundraising event at the company’s sportsground in Dulwich Hill.

A happy and healthy worker was also a productive one. Physical culture classes offered not only health benefits but an opportunity for ‘pretty and graceful girls to learn discipline, control and team work’ – an early form of corporate training!

An Australian institution for so many years, Anthony Hordern & Sons was de-listed in 1970 and its famous old building demolished in the 1980s. However, the records of working life in this golden era of Australian companies are preserved among the Library’s collections.

Jennifer O’Callaghan
Curator, This Working Life

Images from top:
Anthony Hordern motto ‘While I Live I’ll Grow’ as printed in the Hordernian Monthly, 1938
Palace Emporium, A. Foster, 1935
Annual Sports, Running Race, A. Foster, 1934
Crowning of Miss Hordernia, A. Foster, 1934

WEB LINK

See more online at:
thisworkinglife
Did you think you would be a writer when you were a boy?
I was sixteen when I tried to write my first book. At that time I was heavily involved with football, but soon realised I wasn’t big enough, good enough and hated training. I also started to read books that weren’t work anymore and decided then that writing was what I want to do with my life.

What is it that separates would-be writers from the ones who get published?
Failure.
I think rejection is what makes a writer. I was rejected seven times on two different books and didn’t send my third one away because I felt it wasn’t good enough. All of those external and internal rejections have fuelled my writing.

Your books have received wide acclaim but you shared with young writers at the Library once some of your nasty experiences with reviews. The messenger, you said, was described as ‘nauseatingly positive’ and ‘amateurish’ even though it went on to win awards – how does this kind of criticism affect you?
Thanks for mentioning that! Of course it hurts, but everyone has a job to do. The problem is that I spend ninety-nine per cent of my time talking about the one percent of bad reviews. It might take anywhere up to a month to get over it, but eventually the drive to write – the happiness of a day’s work and the ‘awakeness’ of the idea reminds me that it’s time to write again, so I do. I think of finishing a book as first light is showing up, and that’s a beautiful moment for a writer. At that precise moment, I’m willing to bet that those critics are in bed. (By the way, I have also been called immoral in a review, not to mention negative, for the same book that was supposedly nauseatingly positive – sometimes you just can’t win.)

What have you found to be the most effective means of procrastination?
Inventing games with tennis balls, like kicking them onto a small mat without hitting the back wall – but I haven’t done that for a while. I also sleep a lot if writing isn’t going well.

Is there really such a thing as writer’s block and, if so, how do you cure it?
I don’t get writer’s block – I get lack of faith in what I’ve already written. That’s when it’s hard. The idea is there. It works in your head, but sometimes by page forty, you can see it all turning sour. That’s when you do the tennis ball thing. Sometimes I write forty pages of a different idea, thinking I’ll do just a small book with no complications. But every book has complications.

We hear you’re a pretty ordinary football player. Other than writing, what are you best at?
Juggling fake fruit, and catching food in my mouth.

Top three books?
What’s eating Gilbert Grape by Peter Hedges; My brother Jack by George Johnston and Lord Jim, by Joseph Conrad. Not necessarily in that order.

Top three ways to spend a rainy Sunday?
1. Standing at Anzac Oval watching a team you coach that never listens.
2. Playing table soccer – you know, with the turning handles.
3. Sitting in the car at the beach, eating a pie and watching.

Three people you’d most like to have together in one place – who, where and why?
I think the place would be a roof somewhere. I like rooftops. As for the people, maybe Juliette Binoche, for beauty, Ernest Hemingway, to see what kind of crank he really was, and maybe Johnny Cash or Roy Orbison, so I could tell my mum.
SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

Celebrating Together!
Christmas 2003

Top row: Friends Christmas party Left: Jill & Grahame Bickford Right: Mary Neville & Marie Meyrick Photos by Phong Huu Nguyen

Middle row: State Librarian’s Christmas drinks Left: Elizabeth Ellis & Paul Murnane Middle: The Hon. Mahla Pearlman AM, with Ian and Hanne Angus Right: John Simon, Christine Davie & Robert Knight Photos by Scott Wajon

Bottom row: Volunteers’ Christmas party Left: Wilma Norris, Belinda Hutchinson, Dagmar Schmidmaier, John Ryrie, Betty Smith, Sandra Faulkner & Charmian Warden Middle: Helen Clark with Nancy Nineham Right: Patricia Ball, Brian Dymmock and Eve Worth all received 10-year service badges at the party, with Belinda Hutchinson from Library Council. Photos by Kate Pollard

Henry Parkes Foundation donation November 2003 Photos by Belinda Christie
Left: Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of NSW, Dagmar Schmidmaier & Brian Davies Middle: Jane Gray, ‘Sir Henry Parkes’ (Alan Powell), Catherine Gray, Emeritus Professor Peter Webber & Elizabeth Ellis Right: Emeritus Professor Brian Fletcher & Dagmar Schmidmaier

Sportswomen’s lunch October 2003 Photos by Scott Wajon
Left: Penny Carl-Nelson, the Hon. Mahla Pearlman AM, Susan Horvitz Right: Shane Gould with Liz Ellis

Webb Ellis Cup arrives November 2003 Dr Syd Millar, Chairman International Rugby Board, John O’Neill, former Managing Director & CEO, ARU
Photodoc October 2003
Tamara Voninsky, Jeremy Piper, Alan Davies, Hamish Ta-me and Jon Lewis
Photos by Scott Wajon

Matthew Flinders returns
December 2003
Clockwise from right:
Paul Brunton with the Hon. Bob Carr, Premier of NSW
Cadets from TS Sydney and TS Condamine
The Hon. Andrew Peacock AC with Penne Peacock and Dr William Wilson, donor
Photos by Kate Pollard

In Churchill’s shadow
October 2003
Right: Professor David Cannadine, Director of the Institute for Historical Research, University of London, and the Hon. Justice David Levine RFD
Photos by Paul Pavlou

The last great cavalry charge October 2003
↑ Nancy & John Cox, His Excellency, Major General Michael Jeffery AC, CVO, MC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Her Excellency, Mrs Marlena Jeffery & Paul Brunton

Maintaining the Muse October 2003
↑ Nichola Parshall with the Hon. Justice Rodney Purvis QC, Greg Scanhill Photos by Scott Wajon
ON SHOW

The Nelson Meers Foundation
Heritage Collection
Rare, famous and historically significant items from the Library’s collections

Freeman Studio
Prints from the Freeman glass negative collection (1875–1910)
Open to 30 May

Vive la différence! The French in NSW
Celebrating French settlement, culture and contributions to business & society.
Open 7 June to 19 September

in the Galleries

Miles Franklin: A Brilliant Career?
The author revealed through personal diaries, photographs and literary papers
Open until 20 June
A national touring exhibition

This working life
Employees at work and play in NSW from 1824 to the 1950s
Open until 20 June

Literature 2004
Celebrating the Library’s literary collections. On display until November in the Macquarie foyer

Mr Mitchell’s monument
From inspiration to reality, the making of a monument to the people of NSW
Open until March 2005

FREE ENTRY TO ALL EXHIBITIONS

COVER IMAGE: The celebration of the Mitchell Library Vestibule complete with new sculpture, display case and stone inscription, 12 February 2004. Photograph by Scott Wajon