

FRIENDS◀REVIEW

JULY 2021



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From the **President**



Suddenly winter has arrived bringing a mix of optimism and uncertainty. Our Friends continue to experience different challenges across the country. Some are still experiencing disruption with unpredictable and sadly ongoing closures, other groups are watching shrinking budgets, and many are still nervous as they await the vaccine rollout.

Fortunately, many parts of regional Australia are not just open but seeing increased numbers of city visitors who love cultural experiences and might normally have been travelling overseas. I hope that they are calling into galleries and museums, and we are able to help them enjoy the enriching experience of spending time in the regions.

Above all we are all acutely aware of our own community's need to visit our institutions, see familiar faces and to have the opportunity to see the collections and experience the events we all love.

The last quieter months have given us the opportunity to do the back office jobs, improve online activities and sharpen documentation. Just as we are all becoming adjusted to the new operating methods, some things remain unchanged, and the core value of Friends groups is undeniable.

I hope that you all stay connected in person and online, perhaps even finding a way to invite a young Friend to a Museum or Gallery event or to help with some of the technical or other challenges we face. Above all, make sure that you get back into the rewarding world of Friends activities as soon as possible.

Jane Lomax-Smith AM
President, Australian Federation
of Friends of Museums

Governor-General's medal for Carolyn Forster OAM

AFFM President, Jane Lomax-Smith AM, announced at the Annual General Meeting on 21 January 2021 that Carolyn Forster OAM, current President of the World Federation of Friends of Museums and formerly President of AFFM had been awarded a medal for volunteers by the Governor-General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC FTSC. The Governor-General is the Patron of AFFM.

In the letter accompanying the medal, the Governor-General and his wife Linda thanked Carolyn for her contribution to the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums in 2020, and her 'work, passion and commitment'.

Despite the many challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has changed the ways in which we live, work and stay connected, the contributions of many Australians have highlighted their selflessness and generosity, the Governor-General wrote. He concluded, 'Linda and I are proud to be associated with organisations like the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums. The contribution that the Australian Federation of Friends of Museums and you make in our community is considerable.'



Carolyn Forster OAM with the Governor-General's medal.

New CEO for National Film and Sound Archive

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) has announced the appointment of Patrick McIntyre as its new Chief Executive Officer.

Patrick McIntyre has been the Executive Director of the Sydney Theatre Company for the past 11 years, and has also held executive positions with the Sydney Film Festival and the Australian Ballet.

Retiring Chair of the NFSA Board, Gabrielle Trainor AO, said that 'Patrick's respect for the work of the archive together with his vision will take us further along our transformation from a collecting institution to an even more vibrant participant in our national cultural life'.

Patrick McIntyre, courtesy of STC and Nic Walker

News
about
people

FREE AFFM Lunchtime Talk

on Thursday 29 July
2021, 12 noon ACST
(12:30pm AEST)

Celebrating Iconic Artists

presented by Brian Parkes, CEO JamFactory, Adelaide

Brian Parkes has been CEO at JamFactory in Adelaide since April 2010. He has overseen significant development of the organisation's exhibition and training programs and substantial growth in its audience and operational budget.

He is passionate about good design and fine craftsmanship and has worked in senior curatorial and commercial management roles in the visual art, craft and design sector in Australia for almost 30 years, including stints at the Australian Design Centre, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the National Gallery of Australia. He has curated numerous exhibitions focused on contemporary Australian design including the landmark survey Freestyle: new Australian design for living

in 2006 and has remained active in mentoring and supporting emerging designers and creative entrepreneurs over the past two decades.

Based in Adelaide, JamFactory is Australia's leading craft and design centre. Every year since 2013 JamFactory has awarded 'Icon' status to one outstanding and influential South Australian artist working in crafts-based media. Each artist is celebrated with a major solo exhibition that opens in conjunction with the annual South Australian Living Artist (SALA) Festival. Each exhibition tours nationally for at least two years and is accompanied by a major monograph publication. Parkes will outline the history and ambition of this project and speak to the Tom Moore and Angela Valamanesh exhibitions currently touring Australia and the forthcoming Pepai Jangala Carroll exhibition.



Tom Moore, *Cyborg Symbiosis*, 2020, hot joined blown and solid glass, 290 x 360 x 145 mm.
Photographer: Grant Hancock



Pepai Jangala Carroll, *Walungurru, Kiwirrkura, and Kiwirrkura*, all 2020, stoneware, tallest 640mm, photographer: Grant Hancock

Missed a Lunchtime Talk?

If you missed our first two Lunchtime Talks, or want to hear them again, here is the link to the recorded talks on the AFFM website: <https://www.ausffm.org.au/lunchtime-talks>

The talks are William Morris in Adelaide (11 February 2021) and Understanding the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme (25 March 2021).

How to participate in the Celebrating Iconic Artists FREE Lunchtime Talk

Members and Museum Friends will need to register in advance for this FREE Lunchtime Talk. Please share this email and link amongst your members and ask that they register individually.

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tjAud--gpjkvHNLUPiHGvCHzMVN-9GNv9Aj>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting on Thursday 29 July 2021.

New inscriptions from AFFM member institutions on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register

The UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee, part of the larger UNESCO Memory of the World Programme for safeguarding documentary heritage, announced nine new inscriptions and one addition to an existing inscription at an online ceremony on 26 February 2021.

2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register to which the new inscriptions will be added, bringing the total number of inscriptions on the Australian Register to 78.

AFFM member institutions, the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the State Library of New South Wales, feature among the new inscriptions on the Australian Register.

The new inscriptions remind us of famous names in Australian history: William Bligh, Charles (C.E.W.) Bean and Jessie Street.

The State Library of New South Wales nominated the Log of HMS Bounty (William Bligh) 1787-1790,

a key record of one of the most notorious mutinies in maritime history. The log is the only journal written at the time of the mutiny on 28 April 1789 and maintained during the subsequent longboat journey in which Bligh and 18 loyal crew members sailed to Timor over 47 days and 6710 km across the Pacific Ocean.

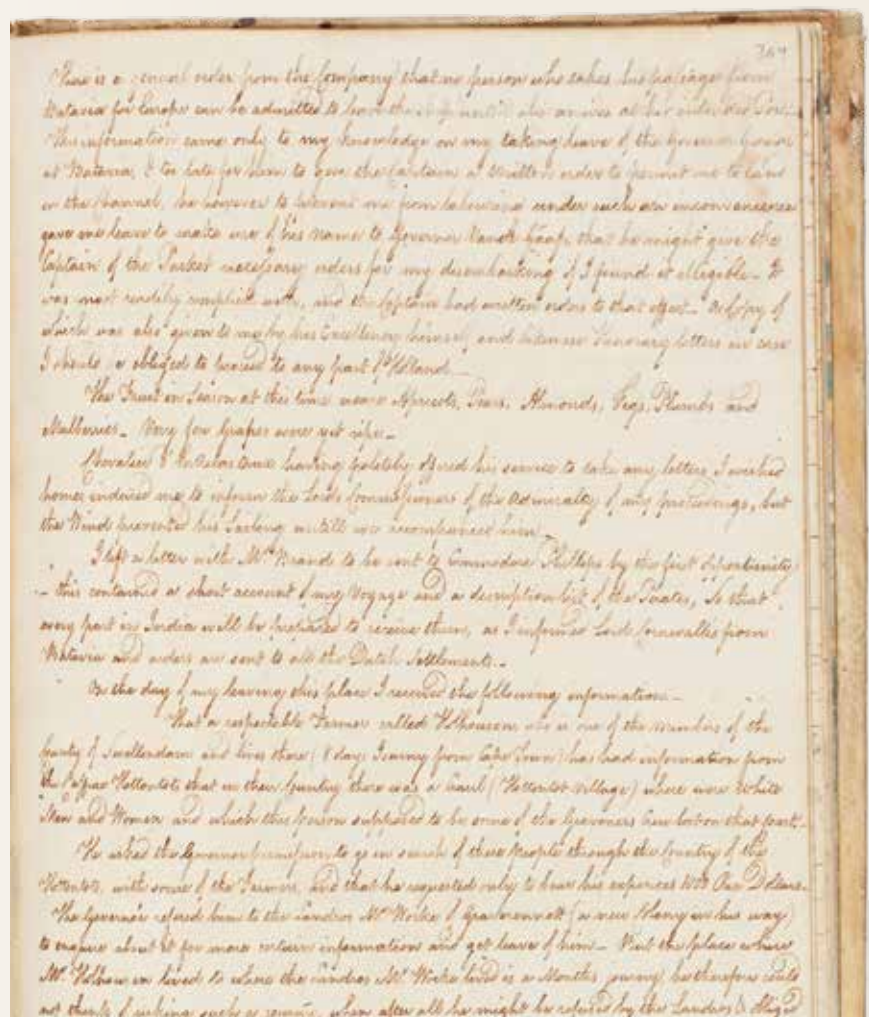
The diaries, photographs and records of C.E.W. Bean, nominated by the Australian War Memorial and the State Library of New South Wales, comprise multiple collections relating to C.E.W. Bean (1876-1968), Australia's official war correspondent and official war historian for the First World War (1914-1918), regarded as the 'father of the Australian War Memorial'.

The Papers of Jessie Street, nominated by the National Library of Australia, document the life of a leading Australian feminist who was active in Australian and international organisations concerned with women's issues and feminist activities, the peace movement and campaigns to ban nuclear weapons, the formation of the United Nations and the UN Status of Women Commission, relations between Australia and Russia, and Indigenous rights and race relations.

Roslyn Russell is Chair of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee.

A page of the log of HMS Bounty, held in the collection of the State Library of New South Wales, and now inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

Photo courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.



Miss Porter's House: a Newcastle house museum

Many of us have been to National Trust properties: old stately homes with big rooms, grand furniture, and extensive gardens. Miss Porter's House is the opposite, a small twentieth-century terrace crammed with memories and possessions, in the middle of a city. And therein lies its interest and value. To the young children who visit, the lives of their great grandparents are revealed. To the older visitors, it evokes memories and stories of their childhood in Newcastle (NSW) and beyond.

When, in 1997, Hazel Porter left her home and its contents for the benefit of the public, the house had been occupied by one family for most of the twentieth century. Hazel, sister Ella and their widowed mother, Florence, lived there until their deaths.

The sisters never married and, after father Herbert Porter's untimely demise during the 1919 influenza epidemic, it was essentially a women's house reflecting the working, domestic, family and community lives of its inhabitants.

Miss Porter's House was built in 1909 by Herbert Porter whose family ran a grocery business in nearby Hunter Street.

The house was to be the marital home of Herbert and his bride, Florence Jolley, and within a few years, two daughters. The little group was however part of an extensive family network both within Newcastle and in the wider Hunter region. Like a large proportion of the white population of NSW, all four of Hazel and Ella Porter's grandparents were mid-nineteenth century migrants from the United Kingdom. It is no surprise that the Porters maintained contact with some of their UK relatives throughout their lives. The museum collection contains poignant reminders of that association; a poem describing solitude, sadness, and ties that no distance can sever and postcard correspondence during the First World War are just two examples.

The museum itself is unique in Newcastle. Its importance resides in the building, little changed in almost a century, and in its extensive collection of the family's objects and documents. Through furniture, receipts, invoices, letters, official notices and photographs, stories can be told of the house, family, and their local area.

A fragment of a draft letter to the Newcastle Town Clerk, probably written in 1990 by one of Herbert's daughters, refers to the land on which their home was built as a wedding gift to our father (grandfather, James Porter) and confirms that the plans were drawn by Uncle Wallace Porter, a well-known Newcastle architect.



Herbert, Florence and Ella Porter outside their King Street, Newcastle, home, c1912. Photo courtesy of Miss Porter's House, Newcastle.



Ella, Herbert and Florence Porter, south wall of bush house, c1912. Photo courtesy of Miss Porter's House, Newcastle.



Edwardian Christmas postcard from relatives in the United Kingdom.

We know from invoices and receipts that it had gas fittings, no sewer connection and that in 1911 a bush house was added by a well-established firm of local builders. Later correspondence with the local council show that the Porters cherished their bush house, renovating it in about 1975.

A large and extremely important group of documents are those which refer to the disastrous 1989 Newcastle Earthquake. Many survival stories were recorded but the Porter group records the entire period of disaster and recovery, December 1989 to mid-1991. We see both the immediate aftermath and evacuation through the collection of possessions and temporary housing to repairs, renovations, and the community response. The Miss Porter's House collection of documents allows us to glimpse two

remarkable women in their seventies who emerged from the initial trauma to successfully navigate solicitors, banks, government agencies and the insurance industry, finally returning to a rebuilt and renovated house. They displayed their solid education, administrative competence, and considerable financial acumen.

There are many Porter stories to be told and the significance of the house and its collection lies in their totality: Ella and Hazel's school days and employment as stenographers and secretaries, the women's lives of making, making do, and mending clothing and household linens, exquisite craft skills at competition level reflected in the many local agricultural show awards, community involvement with local church, charitable and cultural organisations.

The list is long and the volunteer Management Committee which cares for the property on behalf of the National Trust is only gradually telling the Porter stories.

Since Hazel Porter left her house and possessions to the National Trust (NSW) in 1997, those volunteers have protected, organised, and accessioned over 5,000 items, everything from the original house plans in 1909 to the label from a dogfood can in the late 1990s.

A well organised and digitised collection means that it is easy for the volunteers to piece together stories, not just of the family and house, but in the context of the local area. These are used to inform room guides, for promotional advertising, for

Art Deco lounge chair and stencilled cushion. The Porter family were skilled at crafts such as needlework, dressmaking, knitting and crochet, and basketry and stencilling.



Green 'Depression glass' in the dining room, Miss Porter's House.



A corner of the fernery, Miss Porter's House, Newcastle.

magazine articles and exhibitions at Newcastle Museum and at the Newcastle Show.

The information also enables volunteers to construct talks to societies such as U3A, school students and presentations at Hunter New England Health, aged care and other similar facilities.

A good example is *A Walk with the Porters*, where visitors are guided through the local area, combining places we know the Porters attended school, shopped, socialised and worked with changes to the western end of the city in the last 200 years.

Miss Porter's House promotional flyer states that *It survives with contents intact as a living snapshot of life in twentieth century Newcastle.* But the reality is more complicated. The Porters' house might survive as a poignant insight into the homelife of an era, but it now sits amid both reminders of the past and the buildings and activities of the future. By preserving and studying Miss Porter's House and its collection we can see, not stagnation, but change.

Gaslight gave way to electricity; sewerage, television and refrigeration arrived over time; plastic items were added to existing china and glass and neighbours and neighbourhoods arrived and departed. Miss Porter's House is indeed uniquely significant.

Further information

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/miss-porters-house/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MissPortersHouseNewcastle/>

<https://ehive.com/collections/5831/miss-porters-house-national-trust-nsw>

YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpirqQ1fUT1>

and the MPH webpage <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/miss-porters-house/>

Jean Bridges and Pam Marley are MPH volunteers for Miss Porter's House Management Committee.

Piinpi:

Contemporary
Indigenous Fashion
at the National Museum of Australia

Bendigo Art Gallery is known nationally for its exhibitions of fashions, and “Piinpi” is a wonderful show of Australian Indigenous fashion, now showing at the National Museum of Australia.

Maicie Lalara, *Pink dress* 2018. Plant dyes, recycled sari silk. Courtesy of the artist and Anindilyakwa Arts. Photographer: Anna Reynolds

The word “Piinpi” is lyrical in form and meaning. It captures and describes “a sacred connection between people, place and land”. Of course, it is far more than that – it is the land talking to the local people who inhabit it, the cultural knowledge that guides much of their lives.

This is a celebratory exhibition. It is exuberant, joyous, and colourful. It honours many older women, and I was particularly impressed by the fact that Peggy Griffiths, whose hair is grey, is modelling “Legacy Dress”, to which several artists have contributed. The multiple frills are hand-blocked printed on linen and cotton. Ms Griffiths is a highly respected Elder, artist and cultural advisor.

Simple techniques are used to decorate the fabrics and while some works are structured simply, many are not.

Grace Lillian Lee is showing four woven body sculptures from a series titled “A weave of reflection”. Each work represents a season – in keeping with the name of the exhibition and are in bright colours. These hang below the wearer’s waist, covering her front almost like an apron. The materials are soft and pliable: cotton webbing, cotton yarn, cane and goose feathers. They make a stunning entrance to the exhibition.

Two outfits are more formal – both dresses with short, bolero jackets. Both, by Deborah Kamanj Wurrkidj they show the foods that the communities eat: bush



Simple techniques are used to decorate the fabrics and while some works are structured simply, many are not.

plums and water lily roots, and are screen printed on silk. In the past I have been critical that some Indigenous textiles have been poorly made up, detracting from the fabric or weaving they are created from. Raw Cloth from Darwin has made these two garments and they are professionally finished.

Shannon Brett founded the label LORE, currently based in Brisbane. Her designs are bold, telling dynamic stories, and hand painted in ink on fabric. The searing colours throb on the mannequin and the pages of the catalogue.

Recycled sari silk and plant dyes were used to create the fabric for "Pink Dress" by Maicie Lalara of Anindilyakwa Arts on Groote Eylandt. A layered full-length skirt with unfinished edges is balanced by a cropped top, with over-sized sleeves. The different pinks and reds sing, and the stripes and splashes of dyes are highlights.

An excellent catalogue accompanies this exhibition, and the joy, love, and friendships between the women in the images modelling the garments shine through.

I encourage you to visit the exhibition and to come out having been uplifted!

National Museum of Australia, Lawson Crescent, Acton Peninsula, Canberra until 8 August 2021.

© Meredith Hinchliffe.

This article first appeared in *City News*.

Shannon Brett, *Femme gem* 2020.
Hand painted ink on fabric. Courtesy
of the artist. Model: Perry Mooney.
Photographer: Shannon Brett





A. Henry Fullwood, Shoalhaven River from Cambarwarra [sic], 1892, image courtesy of a private lender.

Visualising a nation

A Nation Imagined: The Artists of the Picturesque Atlas, National Library of Australia and Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Those of us who travel to the south coast of New South Wales over Cambewarra mountain will recognise the vista that stretches before the viewer in A H Fullwood's *Shoalhaven River from Cambarwarra* [sic], painted nearly a century and a half ago in 1892, and on display in the National Library of Australia's current exhibition, *A Nation Imagined: The Artists of the Picturesque Atlas*.

The bucolic scene of the swagman hoisting his swag as he heads off up the dusty road having delivered a mob of sheep to a pastoralist riding back down the mountain, watched by the swaggie's dog as they disappear

in the dusty rose-gold light, has long gone, replaced by bitumen and streams of traffic heading to the holiday havens of the coast. The bush, the mountain and the river remain.

A Nation Imagined: The Artists of the Picturesque Atlas, presented in partnership with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and on display until 11 July 2021, makes the case for a group of artists who worked as illustrators for the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* between 1886 and 1888 as performing as critical a role in the formation of an Australian visual language underpinning national identity as the members of the Heidelberg School of Australian impressionism.

The Atlas was published in 42 supplements between 1886 and 1889, and aimed to document through illustrations, maps and

text a settler-colonial view of Australia's history, landscape and ways of life.

The exhibition's premise is that artists such as Julian Ashton, Albert Henry Fullwood and Frank Mahony, several of whom also worked on periodicals promoting Australian nationalism, notably the *Bulletin*, were as integral to creating the imagery that represented Australians to themselves and to the world as artists such as Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, George Lambert, Charles Conder and Frederick McCubbin. Indeed, some of the artists celebrated in the exhibition were friends and colleagues of these artists both in Australia and in London and, in the case of Fullwood, as a fellow Australian war artist in the First World War with George Lambert, Arthur Streeton and Will Dyson, among others.

The exhibition, curated by University of Sydney Honorary Associate Dr Gary



Julian Ashton
***A solitary ramble* 1888**
 watercolour, opaque white highlights on paper, 35.5 x 25.7 cm
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1888
 Photo: AGNSW, Jenni Carter



Frank Mahony
***Rounding up a straggler* 1889**
 oil on canvas, 91.4 x 127.6 cm
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1889
 Photo: AGNSW, Jenni Carter

Werskey and Art Gallery of New South Wales Curator of Asian and Pacific Art, Natalie Wilson, showcases the art of three of the Atlas's artists: Julian Ashton, A. Henry Fullwood and Frank Mahony. The works of other Atlas contributors – including William Macleod, Ellis Rowan, Constance Roth and Americans William Smedley and Frederic B. Schell – are also featured, as well as the original engraving tools of Atlas artist George Collingridge. The exhibition includes works from national, state and regional galleries and collections, and private lenders.

Director-General of the National Library of Australia Dr Marie-Louise Ayres likened the exhibition to a pictorial time capsule from this period in Australian history: 'The *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* helped to establish the iconography of Australian impressionism, as well as providing readers with practical geographical details, through text and maps and hundreds of steel- and wood-engraved illustrations. The exhibition

gives us an insight into what the artists of the day thought important to capture in presenting Australia to the world 135 years ago.'

The production of the *Picturesque Atlas* was a massive undertaking, with artists sent across Australia and the Pacific to illustrate its pages. The images they produced were seen not only by the publication's 50,000 subscribers, but by visitors to the popular world expositions in Melbourne in 1888 and Chicago in 1893.

Co-curator Dr Gary Werskey said that 'A *Nation Imagined* will offer visitors the opportunity to reimagine the history of late 19th-century Australian art, as well as to reflect on the origins of a settler-colonial world view of the nation's history and identity that still resonates with many Australians'.

Werskey's biography of one of the exhibition's leading contributors, Albert Henry Fullwood, *Picturing a Nation: The*

Art & Life of A. H. Fullwood (New South Publishing, Sydney, 2021), is both a proxy catalogue of the exhibition and a fine-grained examination of Fullwood's life and work as a key protagonist in the development of a distinctly Australian version of impressionism.

The book critiques and expands our view of the cultural, personal and artistic dynamics of the Australian artistic community in Sydney and London from the years before Federation and into the early decades of the twentieth century. It accords Fullwood his rightful place among the artists who produced a distinctive vision of Australia around the time that it became a nation.

Exhibitions

Trevor Kennedy Collection: Highlights, National Museum of Australia

This extraordinary exhibition is but a small selection of a much larger collection partly donated by Trevor Kennedy and partly purchased from him by the National Museum of Australia.

As the curator, Dr Sophie Jensen – who has been working on the acquisition for nearly ten years – said of the exhibition, it captures “some of the magic and mayhem of the way in which Trevor Kennedy displayed his collection in his private museum”. The exhibition shows “jewels, objects of rare beauty, items of curiosity and wonder, and priceless artefacts of Australian historical interest.”

This exhibition – approximately ten per cent of the entire acquisition – can be described as “eclectic, eccentric and unique”, as we are told at the entry. The collection has been described as “democratic”. Many exhibitions are incorporated within the acquisition, some small and others vast.

Kennedy maintains a continuing interest in everything Australian, whether it depicts Australian flora and fauna, (though it might have been made in the United Kingdom), is made from Australian materials or shows Australian motifs, landscapes or historical moments.

A large vase, by W Moorcroft in 1939, depicts a waratah. A stylised image of the bloom has been used in dark wallpaper in some of the “rooms” in the exhibition,

giving an appropriate backdrop. The “rooms” help to delineate display areas.

One room shows a suite of wall panels and furniture by Robert Prenzel, who arrived in Australia in 1888. Late in the 1800s he began incorporating Australian motifs into his furniture. Using Australian woods and his formidable skills his repertoire included familiar Australian animals and birds, such as kookaburras, cockatoos, koalas, and flora: sprays of gumnuts and eucalypt leaves. An outstanding longcase clock dated 1922 is on show – one of only two known examples. A desk from around 1900 is a simple piece, with only a few decorative elements, and contrasts with the later wall panels, that depict our birds.

Kennedy has a long-standing passion for Australian gold. He collected brooches, often made on the goldfields, that incorporated mining tools and equipment, bags of gold, and tiny models of miners. These were made for wives and sweethearts, and possibly mothers and daughters. Often they bore the names of the towns or fields where the gold was dug up, or where it was made.

He also collected “nuggety” forms – which showed nuggets of gold in their original state. These were souvenirs and novelties from the goldfields.



Diamond and platinum ‘Southern Cross’ brooch in blue case given by Charles Kingsford Smith to his wife. © National Museum of Australia

Trophies for all kinds of sporting achievements were created in gold and a collection of these is displayed, from the plain and restrained to the slightly bizarre.

In 1860 J Henry Steiner, silversmith, set up his workshop and business in Adelaide and exhibited widely in Australia and overseas. He quickly made his name and attracted many people from the elite strata of Australian society. One of the most outstanding works, shown as you enter the exhibition, is a silver centrepiece which was displayed at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880.

Skilled craftspeople flocked to Australia and were fascinated by the unusual animals, birds, trees and flowers and created many examples of objects for the local population as well as the international market.

This is such a varied collection of objects which displays the tastes and fashions of early European settlement in Australia. All Australians should visit it to see how wealthy Europeans lived in the first 150 years of settlement.

National Museum of Australia, Lawson Crescent, Acton Peninsula. Until 10 October 2021. Open daily 9am to 5pm.

© Meredith Hinchliffe. This review was first published in City News.



Trevor Kennedy with Robert Prenzel longcase clock.
© National Museum of Australia



Gold openwork brooch with Australian motifs in black box.
© National Museum of Australia



Melbourne 1880 Exhibition centrepiece by Steiner.
© National Museum of Australia



William Moorcroft flambe waratah exhibition vase, 1939.
© National Museum of Australia

Friends around the lake view the NMA's Kennedy Collection Highlights

... and farewell Ron Ramsey



Representatives of Friends organisations in Canberra, the 'Friends around the Lake', gathered at the National Museum of Australia on 19 May to join a guided tour of the Trevor Kennedy Collection Highlights exhibition, and also to farewell Ron Ramsey, who was visiting Canberra with fellow Art Gallery Society colleague, Joseph Alessi. Ron is retiring from his position as Executive Director of the Art Gallery Society at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

NMA guide Caitlin Pearce gave us a most informative tour of the highlights of the National Museum's wonderful new acquisition, the Trevor Kennedy collection. This acquisition of 5000 items is the largest in the history of the National Museum, and is a tribute to the collecting zeal and generosity of Trevor Kennedy,

and the assiduous curatorial work of Dr Sophie Jensen over two years.

The sample of Trevor Kennedy's collection on display is reviewed by craft expert Meredith Hinchliffe on pages 12-13.

The Friends Around the Lake joined Ron Ramsey and Joseph Alessi for drinks and

nibbles in the NMA Friends Lounge after the exhibition tour. Thanks go to our excellent guide, Caitlin Pearce, Lyndal Hughson and Karen Pittar from the NMA, and Carolyn Forster, for organising this event.



Jody Barnett, Ron Ramsey and Carolyn Forster.



Joseph Alessi and Sue and Ray Edmondson.



Ron Ramsey, Danyka Van Buren and Karen Pittar.



Sandy and Rob Forbes and Sue and Ray Edmondson.

Cold Comfort for collection at Burnie Regional Museum

At the AFFM AGM and Conference in Hobart in October 2019, Robyn House (Treasurer) and Chris Banks (Vice President) from the Friends of the Burnie Regional Museum Inc. presented a report on recent activities and developments at their Museum (BRM) in Burnie, Tasmania. In their talk, Robyn and Chris spoke of the state-of-the-art facility for the preservation of the extensive photographic collection at the BRM. This talk created much interest amongst the delegates who wanted to know more, so this article will attempt to provide more information.

The Winter family were commercial photographers in Burnie for three generations. Ernest A. Winter was the founder of the family business, Tasma Studio, in 1909. Sons A.J. (Bert) Winter, Wilfred Winter and Keith Winter followed and grandson Colin Winter continued the business. In 2001, Colin offered for sale to the Museum more than 350,000 negatives dating from 1882 to 2000. This collection, now known as the Winter Collection, was purchased and acquired in 2003. Together with other important photographic collections, this brought the BRM's inventory of photographic images to around 400,000!

Since closing the old Tasma Studio premises in Cattley Street in 2000 and moving the Winter Studio business to Wilson Street, Colin had also generously donated about 250 pieces of old photographing and photographic processing equipment that had been superseded by newer technologies. These items included a large, full-plate, freestanding, mahogany-cased studio

camera made in the late nineteenth century.

It took a team of dedicated volunteers, under the direction of Senior Officer Patty Boxhall, many years to catalogue the Winter Collection. By the end of 2005, 20,000 images had been catalogued. By March 2008, the tally was 297,850.

As images captured by local commercial photographers, the collection includes family portraits, weddings, social events, public ceremonies, sporting and cultural events, scenery, buildings, industry and commerce. It is a priceless record of the life and culture of the North West and West Coasts of Tasmania spanning twelve decades.

However, photographic film, including negatives, is prone to deterioration and the risk of loss. In particular, celluloid acetate film suffers from vinegar syndrome, that is, a chemical reaction in which the acetate ion reacts with moisture to form acetic acid, producing a vinegar odour when the film container

is opened. However, the reaction is continuous and, once started, it cannot be reversed. In fact, the reaction is autocatalytic which means that it feeds on itself and speeds up over time. The acid produced can also react with the dyes in colour film, causing dye fading and damage to both the image and the base film.

Many images in the Winter Collection were found to be suffering from vinegar disease and disintegrating. The issue was discussed by the Burnie City Council, the owners of the BRM, in 2012. The solution appeared to be an atmosphere controlled, sub-zero temperature, storage facility dedicated to the preservation of the Museum's photographic collections which were anticipated to increase in the near future.

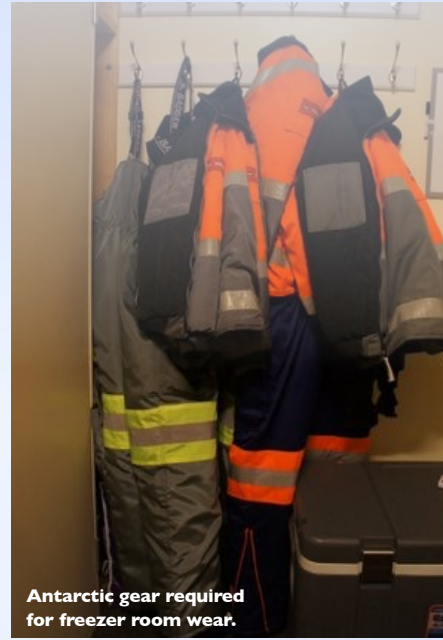
The cost to the Council was considerable and the barriers to be overcome were numerous. The required technology was researched by Curator Georgia Wade, specifically for a "passive, humidity-controlled, cold storage



Burnie Museum freezer room.



Burnie Regional Museum.



Antarctic gear required for freezer room wear.



Temperature control for the freezer room.

vault using conventional freezer technology and moisture-sealed cabinets". The technology was obtained from the USA and the cabinets were manufactured in Launceston. A local builder was engaged to construct the freezer store beside the Museum building.

The reason for choosing the moisture-sealed cabinets with passive humidity controls was so that conventional freezer technology could be used. This would save on construction costs and ongoing operational costs. It was by far the most realistic option for housing such a large collection. Otherwise we would have had to seal the negatives individually with humidity indicator cards – a time-consuming and costly exercise.

Naturally, there were delays in obtaining the parts and materials for the cabinets plus funding from the State Government and the Council. It was also discovered that the Council did not own the land on which the freezer store was to be built. It was a surprise to the Council to learn

that the laneway that it thought it owned was in fact part of the estate of the owner who died about 100 years earlier. The Council had to work with the Public Trustee to establish the whereabouts of the title and to negotiate a price for purchase.

The starting date for the turning of the first sod was delayed several times and finally, with due ceremony and publicity, occurred on 6 September 2016. This long-awaited and much-needed facility is a great asset for the BRM so its completion about a year later was welcomed by the staff and volunteers dedicated to the Museum and its priceless collection of local history and culture. When the cabinets eventually arrived and were tested, the negatives were moved into the freezer on 19 February 2018. The temperature inside is between -210C and -230C so access is strictly limited and full Antarctic gear is essential.

Of course, we wanted to give this facility a name rather than just refer to it as

the freezer store. A call was put out for suitable names and the winner by popular vote was The Hibernum. Why? Because it means "winter quarters" or a place to hibernate over winter – Winter being the pun here.

As an amazing footnote to this story: our local newspaper, *The Advocate*, donated to the BRM one million (yes donated, yes 1,000,000) negatives of published and unpublished images, again all from the North West and West Coasts and covering the region's history from 1953 to 2000. These, too, are accommodated in the freezer store from which they will be taken, one box at a time, brought up to temperature, digitised, catalogued, put on the Internet for all to view, and refrozen.

Follow the Museum's website: (<http://www.burnieregionalmuseum.net/Collections/Our-Collections>) and Facebook page: (<https://www.facebook.com/BurnieRegionalMuseum/>) for details of just when these images will be available for viewing and for purchase.

Curtain call for Mastertouch?

On 1 July 2005, the Mastertouch Piano Roll Company in Sydney closed its doors, bringing to an end 88 years of piano roll production in Australia. It had run out of time and money, leaving just one competitor – the QRS Company of Buffalo, New York – as sole survivor of the multitude of European and American roll makers which had flourished in the glory days of the 1920s and 1930s.

The survival of Mastertouch was a testament to Australians' enduring love affair with the pianola or player piano. Over nearly a century, Mastertouch, along with its local competitors, had churned out millions of perforated paper rolls in elegant boxes bearing the iconic “dancing ladies” label. From the classics to the latest pop tunes and *Community Land* singalongs, great Australian exponents of the pianola style, such as Len Luscombe and the Pardey sisters, kept the country listening, singing and dancing. They were celebrated stars of their day, and they brought their distinctive interpretations to every recording. Lettie Keyes, Lindley Evans and others carried the medium into the fifties and beyond, while Greg Crease's dazzling arrangements characterised Mastertouch's final decade.

When the end came, all that remained was some silent machinery and the company archive collection of the roughly nine thousand releases produced from 1917 onwards. The roll production plant and the Fotoplayer (an elaborate player piano/organ designed for cinemas) was sold to Sydney's Powerhouse Museum where the plant remains in storage, while the Fotoplayer is publicly performed by volunteers. The roll collection was donated to the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) in Canberra, the legislated guardian of Australia's audiovisual heritage, complementing the new Mastertouch releases routinely acquired since the 1970s.

Such a formed collection is very rare: the complete history of an audiovisual medium that has come and gone. It is both tangible and intangible heritage, a living part of Australian family and social life. As a local company with a long lifespan, Mastertouch was integral to the domestic commercial and cultural landscape for almost all of the twentieth century.

Like too many other parts of the NFSA's holdings, the Mastertouch collection languished for years in storage as more urgent priorities – currently, the need for large scale digitisation – dominated attention and resources. Staff familiar with the collection inevitably retired or moved on.

Today the NFSA, like the other national memory institutions, suffers from years of “efficiency dividends” and redundancies, and from the relentless pressure to do more with less, while also required to seek off-budget resources. Despite announcements of an apparent increase in funding, the NFSA's budget for 2021-22 is actually less in real terms than the previous year. The consequence is the continued narrowing of collecting parameters from the comprehensive to the selective. That includes a selective approach to piano rolls.

On 27 May 2021, the NFSA announced that it was disposing, by tender, of a total of 77 pallets of deselected 78rpm sound



Producing pianola rolls in Mastertouch's Sydney roll production plant.

recordings, Amberol cylinder recordings, and piano rolls – including the bulk of the Mastertouch archive. The media coverage proved somewhat unhelpful, suggesting a “collectors' dream”, a cornucopia of attractive items up for grabs by all comers. This wasn't the intention, and in the Canberra Times the Head of Collection, Jacqui Uhlmann, emphasised that the NFSA wanted to see all the material go to a good home:

It's not a revenue raising exercise. Public access would be really important ... and how what they're proposing to do would fit into that. The other things we're going to be looking at is the nature of the organisation, or the people who are wanting it as well as how many pallets they might be taking.

The announcement was the catalyst for several former staff members, familiar with the history of Mastertouch, to get together with their current successors in the NFSA in order to seek a practical way to meet this “Humpty Dumpty” moment, and keep the collection intact: for if it is dispersed, it can never be put back together. A possible scheme involving volunteer input and off-budget funding to complement the NFSA's limited resources was discussed. The NFSA has to duly evaluate all the tender proposals, so the final outcome remains to be seen.

Ironically, the piano rolls of last century share three critical characteristics with the video games the NFSA has now begun to collect. They are digital. They are significant cultural expressions. They are interactive experiences. And hopefully Australians can continue to enjoy them both - permanently.

Dr Ray Edmondson OAM, NFSA Curator Emeritus



In Session 5 'Questions & answers and illustrations', Susan and Sandra include a short video contribution by Greg Mackie, CEO of the History Trust of South Australia, shown here with the 2020 History Festival program, cancelled because of Covid-19.

Make history at home co-producers and presenters Susan Marsden and Sandra Kearney, make their introduction in the home 'studio' in Erindale, South Australia.

Photos by Susan Marsden

Make history at home

Covid-19 lockdowns closed museums across the country, and they are only gradually reopening. Museum volunteers and staff, as well as visitors, are spending more time than usual at home but this does give them time to think about making history of their own and to share their stories digitally with museums. To encourage and help in this rewarding and valuable pandemic activity historian Dr Susan Marsden has created a project called *Make history at home*, supported by the philanthropic Marsden Szwarcbord Foundation.

The free 'how to do your own history' series is presented by Susan Marsden and Sandra Kearney, who has been engaged by the Foundation as intern historian. Since May 2020, through lockdown and after they've created in Susan's office at home a series of videos, photos and advice, posted on social media, to help viewers use time at home to arrange their own, family and local records and photos, and share their own histories.

Watch *Make history at home* sessions on YouTube (Marsden Szwarcbord Foundation), with photos and history

links on Facebook (@MSzFoundation) and Instagram #mszfMakeHistoryAtHome. Museums, Friends and staff are warmly invited to share these links with their own communities, and hashtag stories or post them on Facebook. Or you can email them to Susan at smarsden@mszfhistory.org.au.

To learn more about *Make history at home* or the Marsden Szwarcbord Foundation, visit mszfhistory.org.au. You can also follow the links from there, and can see the group in action at #marsdenszwarcbordfoundation.



Ron Ramsey pictured alongside John Russell, In the afternoon 1891. Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 2016. Photo © Nick Kreisler.

Ron Ramsey retires

from the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales

With a career in art museums spanning nearly four decades, including five very successful years most recently at the helm of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales, Executive Director Ron Ramsey has announced his decision to retire in June 2021.

Mr Ramsey happily reflected on his time at the Society – the Art Gallery of New South Wales’s 30,000-strong membership organisation – saying, “It has been such a privilege to be engaged with art and audiences in my professional life, and the last five years in the Society’s Executive Director role has been an absolute joy.”

“The AGS is a really special place. Here, many members join as children and stay loyal to the Art Gallery of NSW for their entire lives. There is such opportunity and excitement now around the Gallery’s expansion, the Sydney Modern Project, including the creation of an expanded Members Lounge in the much-loved existing building.”

Mr Ramsey “felt it is the right time to provide to another, this compelling opportunity to help shape the Gallery’s membership program and continue to build on the close relationship we share with AGNSW.” Society President Brian Greenacre extended heartfelt thanks to Mr Ramsey on behalf of the Art Gallery Society Council, members, staff and volunteers.

“We are all enormously grateful for Ron’s enlightened leadership, which has transformed the Society and strengthened membership growth and loyalty. He has been the popular face of the Society, a much-admired colleague, and a knowledgeable and enthusiastic lecturer in the Society’s vibrant Art Appreciation lecture

series and World Art Tours program. He has also built dynamic partnerships with sponsors and cultural organisations, and has overseen the transformation of the AGS’s flagship publication, Look magazine. Ron leaves a great legacy and an organisation well positioned to engage with the exciting opportunities ahead.”

Art Gallery of New South Wales Director, Dr Michael Brand, said:

“Ron Ramsey’s knowledge and experience of art museums and their audiences is extensive, having worked in regional, state, national and university art museums as well as serving as cultural attaché at the Australian Embassy in Washington DC from 2004 to 2007. I overlapped with Ron for his first couple of years there when I was working as Director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in nearby Richmond, and also had the good fortune of working with him earlier at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra when he was Head of Education & Public Programs and I was Curator of Asian Art.

Ron has always been an exemplary colleague and a good friend of my family.

His four decades working in art museums has made a huge impact in Canberra, Newcastle, Melbourne and Sydney.

Ron has left all these art museums better engaged with their communities and, therefore, always much better placed to navigate their futures. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and all my colleagues I wish Ron all the very best. He will be greatly missed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.”

Joseph Alessi, Art Gallery Society of New South Wales.

Cover image:

Peggy Griffiths, Delany Griffith, Anita Churchill, Cathy Ward, Kelly-Anne Drill, *Legacy dress 2019*. Hand-block printed linen and cotton. Courtesy of the artists and Waringarri Arts.

Photo: Grace Lillian Lee and Chris Baker.

Model: Peggy Griffiths

Contact list for AFFM members

Here is a list of AFFM representatives who are able to assist with problems, give advice and bring issues to the notice of the Executive Committee.

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