



FIT TO PRINT: DEFINING MOMENTS FROM THE FAIRFAX PHOTO ARCHIVE

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the 18,006 glass-plate photographs which comprise the Fairfax Archive speak volumes. The National Library of Australia's new exhibition *Fit to Print: Defining Moments from the Fairfax Photo Archive*, curated by veteran photojournalist Mike Bowers, delves into the stories behind the photographs, the photographers who made them, and the beginnings of photojournalism in Australia. Produced between 1890 and 1948 for newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sun*, and *The Sydney Mail*, the collection, held in the Library's care since 2012, traces the art of photojournalism from its infancy, through the development of the language of visual storytelling, to the highly illustrated news stories we know so well today.

The Library's Fairfax Archive is a deep well from which to draw stories of Australian histories on a broad range of topics. As a

member of the curatorial team, I had the pleasure of working with Mike in developing the show. In the exhibition you'll come face to face with touring musicians, sporting legends, civil rights activists, visiting princes, underworld criminals, children, students, and politicians. These photographs represent one part of Australia's public memory. The other part is the stories behind them, that are frequently reported in newspapers established, or that would later be acquired by, John Fairfax & Sons.

These stories were collected from across Australia (though predominantly in Sydney and surrounding New South Wales), by the dedicated Fairfax photographers. The early days of press photography were enabled by dry-plate negative technology. Prior to this innovation, there was a fifteen-minute window in which photographs needed to be developed once captured. Dry plates freed a photographer from needing to stay close to their darkroom and allowed them to travel farther distances with less equipment. Still, the job was by no means easy; the cameras of the time were large and unwieldy, and glass plates heavy, fragile, and expensive. Beau Leonard, *The Sydney Morning Herald's* chief photographer from 1932, began to ration glass plates as a cost saving measure. Photographers were provided 60 plates per week, around just four plates per job.

To me, there is something about photographs taken on glass that is akin to magic. The idea of a photographer in a darkroom, surrounded by various chemical baths and metallic toners evokes images of an alchemist trying to synthesise gold from lead. There are, however, two significant differences between alchemist, and the photographers of the 19th and 20th centuries. The first is that rather than the transmutation of lead to gold, the photographer distils light and silver into shape, and art, and memory. The second, is that unlike the alchemist, the photographer is successful.

In researching these photographs, Mike, myself, and our curatorial team dived into Trove's digitised newspaper collections and deciphered cursive handwriting written on the reverse of negatives to find the context in which the photographs were originally presented. The articles and captions which accompany the photographs provide varying degrees of insight into the story behind the picture. At times,

Continued on page 4 ▶

Washing a glass-plate negative in the processing department of The Sun Office, Sydney, ca.1930. nla.obj-163371269



FRIENDS EVENTS

For further details keep an eye on the weekly eNews or go to the Library's **What's On** page.

19 March

Discovering Millicent Armstrong

Dianna Nixon from Music Theatre Projects uncovering the life and work of playwright Millicent Armstrong

27 March

New members morning tea

Casual meet and greet for new members. Hear from Mike Shuttleworth, Bookshop Manager about the latest new releases. RSVP with any dietary requirements to friends@nla.gov.au by 24 March.

8 April

Artists of the National Library: Olive Cotton and Wolfgang Sievers

Presentation by Helen Ennis. Afternoon tea served during the interval.

22 May

Coffee with the Curator: *The Excellencies of Music*

Gallery floor talk by Library Curator Dr Susannah Helman, followed by morning tea.

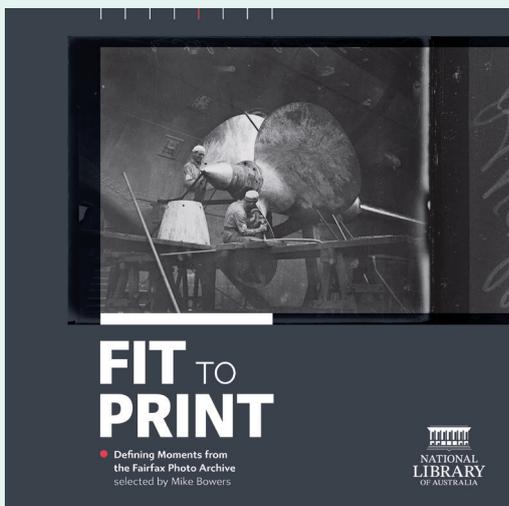
11 June

Traveller's Guide to the World's Great Libraries

Lecture by Trish Hepworth, followed by afternoon tea.

NATIONAL LIBRARY BOOKSHOP OFFER FOR FRIENDS

Friends will receive a 30% discount on copies of *Fit to Print: Defining Moments from the Fairfax Photo Archive*, by NLA Publishing when purchased before 31 May 2025, online and in-store.



To claim your **30% discount**, use the promotional code PRINT at checkout.

Use this code to also access your Friends **20% discount** on other online Bookshop purchases.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRS

Welcome to the first Friends Newsletter for 2025!

2025 is an exciting year for the Friends of the National Library. We will celebrate our 35th anniversary on 7 April this year.

That is quite an achievement of which many people can be very proud. We publish here Michael McKernan's account of the beginnings of the Friends. He promises, he tells us, to do more research to take the story further.

The Friends have an exciting program of activities lined up for 2025. We would like to see as many Friends as possible at our events. We know that Friends will be stimulated, entertained and intrigued. One of the strongest benefits of the Friends is in meeting like-minded people all attached to the great work of the National Library.

Members of the Committee are hoping to see a surge in membership as the anniversary year unfolds. Michael tells us of the first Friends event, the Friends Welcome Day, when 3,000 visitors came to the Library and 150 people or households became Friends members on the spot. Perhaps we should aim to celebrate that by attracting an additional 150 people or households to join the Friends this year.

Look out for our regular events announcements and please do come if you can. There should be a lot of joy among the Friends this year. We would like to hear from any Friend interested in joining the Committee; please speak to either of the Co-Chairs or a Committee member.

We are excited by the opening of the Library's first exhibition for the year, *Fit to Print*. It promises to be a beauty!

We were delighted that our Executive Officer, Lauren Conron, took a temporary promotion to another position in the Library. She has so ably and solidly supported the Friends for nearly three years. We look forward to welcoming Lauren's replacement.

Catherine Anderson and Michalina Stawyskyj | Co-Chairs

THE FRIENDS ARE (NEARLY) 35!

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the formation of the Friends of the National Library of Australia. Listening to the Director-General, Dr Marie-Louise Ayres, talking of the importance of the Friends to the Library at last year's Annual General Meeting I began to formulate some questions.

When did the Friends come into existence? What was the purpose of the Friends intended to be? How has the role of the Friends changed over time? I found that no-one I talked to had a clear idea of why the Friends were created and by whom or much of an idea of the achievements in the past.

I read three articles on the history of the Friends sent to me by their author, the well-known Friend, Gary Kent. He emphasised the role of a prolific local Canberra historian and public servant, Donald Ian McDonald (1923-1990). Yet when I talked to the first Executive Officer of the Friends, Bea Brickhill, and the first Chair of the Friends Committee, Vanessa Fanning, neither of them could tell me of his role. So, I started with a puzzle. Possibly Ian's urging for the creation of the Friends in the 1980s set people thinking.

The Friends were given an official beginning on Saturday 7 April 1990 at a 'Friends Welcome Day' when over 3,000 people crowded the Library to hear much-loved and highly acclaimed Australian actor, Ruth Cracknell, formally inaugurate the Friends. 150 families and individuals joined on the spot. A good start! By June 1991 the Library was boasting 650 Friends, '40% of whom live outside Canberra.'

But those who joined on the Welcome Day were likely not the first Friends. Talking to current Friends Committee member, Nancy Clarke, I asked her how she has a Friends membership number of 22. 'You must have joined at the Welcome Day' I suggested. 'I couldn't have,' she replied, 'because I wasn't there.' Working in the library at the Catholic Teachers College, Signadou, in Watson ACT, Nancy was also a member of the local Library Association of Australia Committee.

It was likely, we reasoned, that the Library's then Director-General, Warren Horton, had mentioned the formation of the Friends at a Library Association meeting and that Nancy Clarke had immediately taken out a membership. Hence her pleasingly low membership number.

Those I spoke to, Bea Brickhill, Vanessa Fanning, Jan Fullerton, and Nancy Clarke all emphasised the crucial role Warren Horton played in the formation of the Friends. It was his initiative, his decision, and, as a man brimming with energy and determination, if Warren Horton wanted something for 'his' Library it happened. He appointed Bea Brickhill first Executive Officer, he invited several people to join an inaugural Friends Committee and asked Vanessa Fanning, a very senior public servant and daughter of a Library 'Legend', Mrs Pauline Fanning, to take the Chair.

Looking at the first members of the Committee is instructive. There were several academics, among them Professor Ian Donaldson (ANU), W.F. Mandle (University of Canberra) and the Canberra writer, Marion Halligan, joined by Warren Horton, Jan Fullerton and John Thompson, a high Library presence.

Marion Halligan was amused by an uncertain start for the committee. Whether the committee knew what it was doing or not they certainly hit the ground running. Kicking off with the highly successful Welcome Day they organised a series of other activities including 'Behind the Scenes' tours for Friends, lectures and talks, and tours out of Canberra.

In 1991 they launched The Kenneth Myer Lecture to commemorate the work for the Library of the former Chair of Council, Kenneth Myer. With the first Myer lecturer they aimed high. Former Prime Minister, E.G. (Gough) Whitlam delivered a lecture: 'National collecting institutions'. That same year the Friends published this as an 18-page booklet.

With that achievement under their belt the Friends grew bolder. They established annual celebratory talks honouring Australian writers/publishers/illustrators and published an annual booklet based on the talks. This series, bearing the imprint, 'Friends of the National Library of Australia', ran from 1993 to 2007 with only one year missed, 1998. This was an astonishing achievement.

The Friends stayed true to their brief celebrating writers such as Geoffrey Serle, historian, Thomas Kenneally, novelist and historian, Tim Winton, novelist, Rosemary Dobson, poet, Michael Leunig, illustrator, and Alec Bolton and Katharine



Brisbane, publishers. There were eight men and six women honoured. The booklets were beautifully produced, the longest running to 42 pages, the shortest to 23 pages. Strangely, the second in the series, published in 1994, was entitled, *Geoffrey Serle: in tribute*. This might have implied that the tribute was written after Geoffrey Serle's death. In fact, he died in 1998. This booklet is the only one not authored by one writer; a number of historians contributed short pieces on Serle.

This series was a triumph for the Friends. It showed a real seriousness of purpose and a determination to contribute to Australian scholarship in an appropriate fashion. The series throws up so many questions. How was it organised? I imagine the Friends committee agreed on a person to be honoured and invited an author to prepare a manuscript. Was the author paid? How did the Friends pay for the publishing costs or was there a subvention from the Library? There is no indication that the Friends' series was assisted in production by the Library's publishing division but it might have been. It was claimed that distribution of the booklets was managed by the Friends. I imagine that all current Friends received a copy of the booklet on publication. Copies, I suppose, were also sold in the Library's bookshop. Elsewhere? Probably not.

When Warren Horton retired from his position as Director-General of the National Library of Australia in 1999, he had every reason to look back on his creation, the Friends of the National Library, with great satisfaction. It was then flying high and an accepted part of the Library's presentation of itself to its various publics. Talks and lectures still continue to this day. Might current friends attempt to involve themselves more closely in the promotion of an Australian culture?

I realise that I have asked many questions of the past history of the Friends, most unresolved here. I intend to continue my research to try to find the answers.

Michael McKernan | Friends member

Selection of Friends booklets



► Continued from page 1

the newspaper provides no additional information than what can be understood by looking at it. A photograph might never have been published, and any story beyond the clues in the image is lost to time. But occasionally we find truly remarkable stories: Jean Thompson and Marie Jenkins in their Bugatti race cars at Gerringong; Alf Gibson, the lighthouse signal master who waxes poetical about storms; and cricket legend Eddie Gilbert bowling the great Don Bradman off his feet.

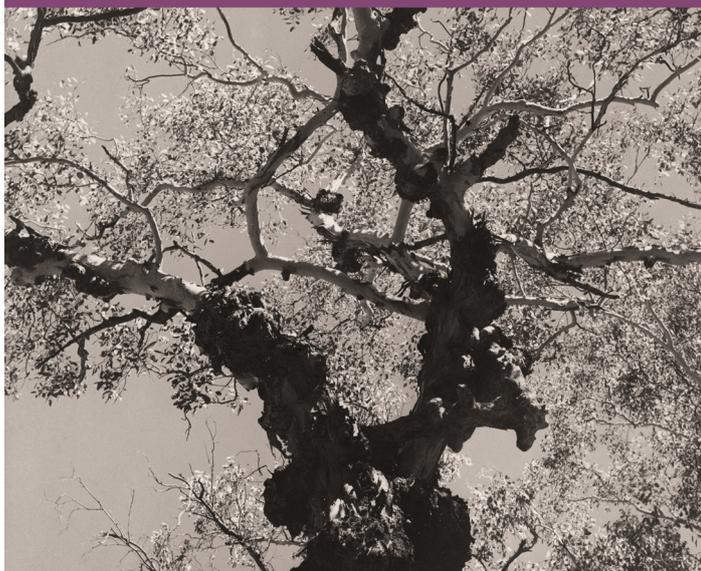
The photographs from the early 20th century, a selection of which are exhibited in *Fit to Print*, reveal parallels with contemporary Australia - including the nation's media. Prime ministers, celebrities, royal visits, and Chinese New Year celebrations continue to appear in the pages of news - in print and online. They also show the development of techniques used by early press photographers to inspire emotional responses from readers. Eye-level portraits to evoke empathy. Low-angle photographs to inspire awe. Movement to simulate drama, and stillness to elicit calm.

Signal Master Alf Gibson looking through a telescope, Sydney, 28 July 1927. nla.obj-163109733

While pouring over the photographs in *Fit to Print* I have often wondered if the readers of the past noticed the same things I did. A medal bar on Bhola Singh's jacket from service in the First World War. The hatters shop underneath the entrance to Flinders Street railway station, still present today. A doll dressed as an Australian soldier, hoisted above a victory parade. A child collecting a ball under a sign declaring "ball games prohibited on beach." *Fit to Print* explores these images as a spectrum of defining moments. As much as the completion of the Sydney Harbour Bridge is a defining moment of Australian industrial design, so too are images of an artist standing in her garden, or an immigrant arriving on Australian shores defining moments in their own ways.

Fit to Print: Defining Moments from the Fairfax Archive is hot off the press and open in the National Library's Exhibition Gallery until the 20th of July 2025. Keep an eye out for our events accompanying the exhibition, including an evening dinner and presentation with Mike Bowers and a panel discussion with Mike and other photojournalists.

Allister Mills | Coordinator, Curatorial



OLIVE COTTON

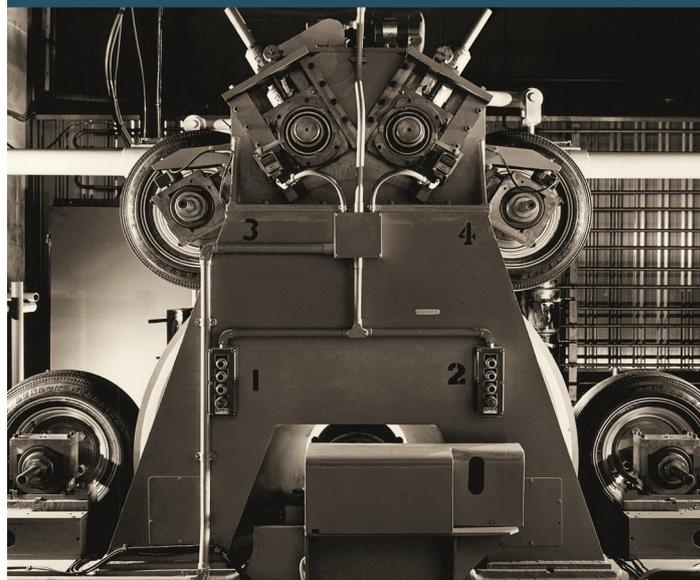
With essays by Helen Ennis and Sally McInerney
And commentary by Olive Cotton

OLIVE COTTON AND WOLFGANG SIEVERS

Every photographer I have met has a unique relationship with their archive of photographic works. Olive Cotton's was fascinating because, although she was very proud of what she had produced, she did not appear anxious about her legacy. She was content to leave the use and interpretation of her archive open to the future, one that she did not attempt to determine. Through our friendship I came to understand her attitude was not simply related to her temperament but also to her idea of the world and humans' place in it. Another crucial dimension was her concept of time: Cotton's father was a geologist and imbued in his daughter an understanding of deep time – geological time. She therefore did not consider human endeavour to be of paramount importance and for nearly sixty years lived simply on a rural property, 'Spring forest', located in central western New South Wales where the forces of nature were ever present.

Wolfgang Sievers' perspective could not have been more different. As with Cotton, I had the pleasure of spending time with him in his domestic environment. At his beautiful home in Sandringham, a bayside suburb in Melbourne, it was obvious how important his past was to him. He was surrounded by family treasures which he had managed to bring from his home in Berlin on the cusp of World War 2 and the conflagration that engulfed Europe. In contrast to Cotton, he was a new Australian (naturalised in 1944) and his enormous archive was proof of his productivity and the success he had achieved in his new homeland – as far away from the Nazis as it was possible to get was how he put it. With good reason Sievers was fiercely attached to his archive and all that it represented, meticulously cataloguing and controlling it.

The significance of photographers' different attitudes to their archives extends far beyond personal and biographical



WOLFGANG SIEVERS

With an essay by Helen Ennis

dimensions. The larger context is a complex mix of temperamental, familial, political and cultural factors. Cotton's and Sievers's archives tell us, for example, much about the gendered state of the photographic industry in the modern period in Australia, one in which studios were overwhelmingly run by men. It was the men, too, who were the camera operators while the women occupied other, usually less visible and less creative roles. The Sievers collection in the National Library is a vast professional archive of industrial and architectural photography comprising a staggering 19,000 prints and 52,000 negatives. They demonstrate his mastery of a modern style of photography characterised by its precision, exactitude and extraordinary depth of field. Cotton did not have an extensive career as a commercial photographer and her holdings in the Library are mainly examples of her lyrical art photographs. Much of Cotton's work dates from the high point in her career when she was attached to the Max Dupain Studio in Sydney between 1934 and 1946 and achieved success exhibiting in Australian and international salons of photography.

For me, it was immensely satisfying working with Sievers and Cotton on different projects during their lifetimes (Cotton died in 2003 and Sievers in 2007). In the longer term however, it is the ongoing engagement with their works in public collections that matters most. Their photographs, which are featured in the two monographs in the new series Artists in the National Library of Australia, played key roles in visualising the modern period in Australia and now contribute to our understanding of it. The books highlight each artist's work, the Library's extensive Pictures Collection, as well as important aspects of Australia's history represented in visual form.

Helen Ennis | Professor Emerita, ANU Centre for Art History and Art Theory



A FORCE OF CULTURE! DR SHANE SIMPSON AM, MEMBER OF LIBRARY COUNCIL

By any yardstick Shane Simpson AM was a 'good get' for Australia from New Zealand, certainly up there with John Clarke! He has an astonishing CV which reflects his long engagement with a huge diversity of aspects of Australian culture; from Indigenous arts to virtually every aspect of visual, literary and performing arts. Shane is presently working on a new book (*Collections Law* - he has written eight others) which sounds like it will have direct relevance to the Library.

For six years as a Council member Shane has been working with other Councillors and the Director-General to give guidance to the operations of this institution. Asked about the issues he felt he had focussed on while on the NLA Council he said: "I have worked on two main 'issues'; 'philanthropy' to help the Library develop projects not paid for by Government, and 'digitisation'. As he says: "Large institutions like the NLA have very competent staff, so it is essential that members of Council stick to their brief – oversight, strategy and policy. Council should bring the large view: what is the role of a national library? How is it different from state, local or university libraries? National co-ordination functions like Trove fit that description. So too is the current digitisation program. While it is important to retain and grow the physical Library with its wonderfully deep collections, it is hugely important that these resources - the national record and memory - are made available to all Australians and indeed internationally."

Some 40 years ago after teaching at the UNSW Law School and practising at the NSW Bar, an Australia Council grant enabled him to spend three months in the United States investigating the nature of art-related legal problems and observing structures for their resolution.

From there he began work on what became the Arts Law Centre of Australia and a mighty series of books and initiatives around copyright, visual arts, music, Indigenous arts and the law. It also included him setting up his own legal practice to support

Dr Shane Simpson AM, image courtesy simpsons.com.au

this field of work – perhaps the first Australasian legal firm to specialise in the area.

Shane has been on the board of several cultural institutions (Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon, Australian National Academy of Music and many others) and now, besides his role on the Council of the National Library, still serves as Special Counsel to the firm he started and maintains roles on several charitable foundations. Shane also chairs the Ethics Advisory Committee of the National Gallery of Australia.

Editor's Note: This is the beginning of a series, I hope, on the Members of Council of the NLA to better inform Friends. Full disclosure, I have known and worked with Shane Simpson going back to the late 1980s.

Max Bourke | Editor

MELBOURNE'S FIRST NEWSPAPER

The recently published and long awaited *A History of the Book in Australia, Volume 1: 1788-1890*,¹ describes in fascinating detail the trials and tribulations of Australia's early newspaper publishers. Even when they could be procured from overseas, the early printing presses were of poor quality and limited capacity.

One of those who faced these hurdles was John Pascoe Fawcner (1792-1869), one of Melbourne's first European settlers and often regarded as its founder (see *Friends News*, Winter 2023 and Winter 2024 for other aspects of Fawcner's life and career).

Fawcner had conducted the *Launceston Advertiser* in Tasmania prior to his move to Victoria (then known as Port Phillip) in 1835. He was keen to establish a Melbourne newspaper - according to his biographer 'he must always have a vehicle for his ego' - but was unable to find a printing press and type.²

Never one to recoil in the face of adversity, Fawcner took the only course available to him – he produced a handwritten newspaper. The *Melbourne Advertiser*, written in ink on a double sheet of foolscap, made its first appearance on 1 January 1838.

Fawcner proclaimed the paper's purpose in a statement that appeared at the top of the first page of this first issue:

We do opine that Melbourne cannot reasonably remain much longer marked on the chart of advancing civilization without its Advertiser. Such being our imperial Fiat We do intend therefore by means of this our Advertiser to throw the resplendent light of Publicity upon all the affairs of this New Colony, Whether of Commerce, of Agriculture, or of the Arts and Mysteries of the Grazier.

The *Melbourne Advertiser* appeared in manuscript form for nine issues, the last appearing on 26 February 1838. According to Fawcner, 32 copies were published weekly, although it is possible that the early issues were produced in even more limited numbers. In his *Bibliography of Australia (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941)*, Sir John Ferguson estimated that it would take approximately two hours to write one copy, which helps explain why copies were not produced in greater numbers. He noted that there is no evidence that Fawcner himself wrote the *Advertiser*, and that there was likely more than one writer as the handwriting differs between issues.



Three-quarters of the *Melbourne Advertiser* comprised advertising, with a few cursory news items. Other than advice of shipping movements, the only news item in the first issue was a short piece on the escape of a bushranger and murderer, Jim Comerford: he is 'now at large in the Bush well mounted and Armed. A party of volunteers are gone in Pursuit'.

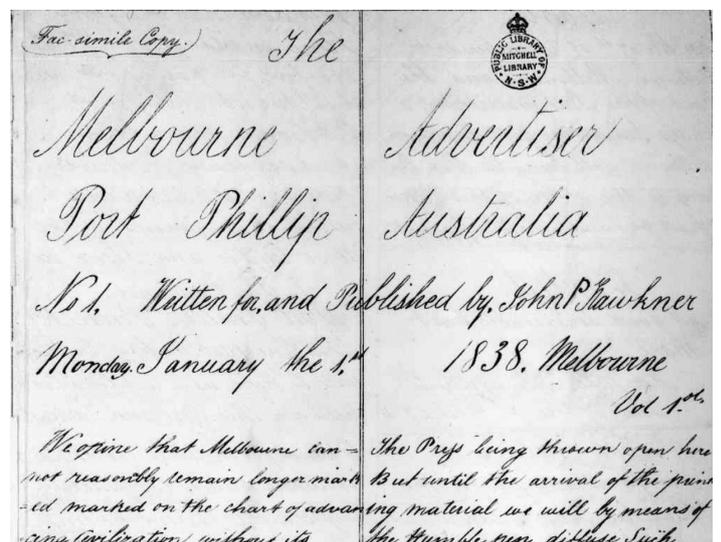
Fawcner printed the tenth issue, which appeared on 5 March, on a rickety old wooden two-pull press and with waste type, that he had been able to scrounge from Launceston. He was assisted in this task by an 18-year-old compositor from Tasmania. The 26 February issue, which survives only in manuscript form, had apparently also been printed on the dodgy press, but no copies have survived, Fawcner stating that they 'were lost or stolen'.

The National Library has excellent but incomplete holdings of the nine manuscript issues of the **Melbourne Advertiser**. Several issues are available in digitised form on Trove.

The printed version of the *Melbourne Advertiser* did not last long, surviving only for eight issues, the last appearing on 23 April 1839. Its further publication was banned by Captain William Lonsdale, the local police magistrate (but effectively the administrator of the new settlement), as Fawcner had not complied with the registration requirements of the Newspaper Act.

Melbourne from the falls, 1838, nla.obj-142349789

Facsimile copy, the *Melbourne Advertiser*, 1 Jan 1838



Fawcner finally obtained permission to publish, and the first issue of his *Port Phillip Gazette and Melbourne Advertiser* appeared on 6 February 1839. In 1845 he sold the paper, which concluded forever his foray into newspaper publishing.

By the 1860s the manuscript editions of *the Advertiser* were rarely seen, and to satisfy public curiosity they were reproduced many times later in the nineteenth century. The best known are the facsimiles produced, in competition with each other, in early 1869 of the Melbourne publishers Peter Alcock and E. Whitehead & Co. Fawcner died later that year, and his

pioneering periodical again received significant public attention. The National Library holds copies of these facsimiles, and another published by De Gruchy & Co, the publication date of which is unknown.

Even in 1869, three decades after their publication, Fawkner's primitive publication was looked on as quaint, reflecting the growth and maturity of Melbourne in the intervening years. *The Age* newspaper, in noting the Alcock facsimile, described it as 'a literary curiosity and relic of a bygone age'.

The Library's copies of Fawkner's hand-written newspapers, Melbourne's first, are an invaluable record of Melbourne's very early days and another reminder of the contribution of an individual who, although not always well-liked, played a pivotal role in the development of the town.

1 *From Convict to Book Arcades. A History of the Book in Australia. Volume I: 1788-1890*, Ancora Press, 2024.

2 *C. P. Billot, The Life & Career of John Pascoe Fawkner*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985.

Gary Kent | Friends Member



YOUR FRIENDS MEMBERSHIP HELPS THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Friends members are part of a community of passionate National Library supporters and advocates. Friends benefit from on-site and online events and presentations that promote our cultural heritage and scholarship. Friends support fellowship programs, digitisation projects and have gifted art to the Library.

When reminded, please [renew your membership online](#) and encourage others to join.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

As this is the Friends' Newsletter we are hoping that some of you will have some thoughts you would like to share.

We are asking for contributions of up to 400 words on any topic that you think might be worth sharing especially about the Library, matters biblio or any of the topics thrown up by the Newsletter.

We will only edit for clarity where necessary.

Please address your thoughts to: **The editor** via friends@nla.gov.au. We are very keen to hear from you!

REX NAN KIVELL: LIFE IN FITZROVIA

Some of you will be aware that I have been pondering and researching (some might say obsessing about) the colourful life of the remarkable collector Sir Rex Nan Kivell (1898-1977). Colourful, for Nan Kivell's life was not only suffused with the colours of the many works of art sold through his prominent Redfern Gallery in Mayfair, and the innumerable works he collected, but also through his daily life as an uninhibited gay man living in Fitzrovia, central London. His subterranean life in a modest basement flat in Gosfield Street enabled him to partake in the artistic and bohemian life of Fitzrovia, or he could pull down the shutters and dedicate himself after hours to cataloguing his huge collection, which was being batched up and progressively sent off to Canberra. Nan Kivell's collecting legacy, held today in the Library, is plumbed daily by researchers onsite and around the world for insights into life in the Pacific over half a millennium.

Fitzrovia is an area which Google Maps will tell you, is 'a diverse residential area where grand 18th- and 19th-century apartment buildings sit side by side with social housing. Handy for the West End theatres, it's filled with hotels, galleries, and old-school pubs. Charlotte Street is lined with lively bistros and cafes, and the surrounding streets are home to new media, advertising, and architectural companies.' In Nan Kivell's day it was less 'new media' and more 'old louche' with many colourful and infamous characters living there or visiting. The fact that he stayed in this unique location for decades says a lot about him. Partly, that he was tight with his money and on a good wicket with a rent controlled central apartment near his gallery, but also that he enjoyed his immersion in London bohemia right on his doorstep and access to the now-lost Middlesex Hospital as he aged and physically declined. A modest rental in a central location like Fitzrovia would suffice and, of course, allow him greater scope in his collecting activities. Nan Kivell enjoyed the frisson of his interactions with the gay world of London (and further afield), and life in Fitzrovia presented interesting opportunities for him.

Fitzrovia, an area circumscribed by Euston Road to the north, Oxford Street to the south, Portland Place to the east and Gower Street and Tottenham Court Road to the east, is a place of contrasts. It has been a locus for artists, actors, writers, poets, philosophers, politicians, spies, Satanists, gangsters, murderers and, generally, bohemians. Eighteenth century artists such as Hogarth were inspired by its scenes, and prominent painters Richard Wilson, Benjamin West, James Barry, Henry Fuseli, and the sculptor John Flaxman all lived there. Turner and Constable also lived in Fitzrovia along with the perhaps more populist painters, Edwin 'Stag at bay' Landseer and Daniel 'Dickens' Maclise. The Pre-Raphaelite artists, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti all lived and painted there, along with their friend and sometimes model, the inspiring Elizabeth Siddal, the poet and painter who later became Rossetti's wife. (What she thought of his pet kangaroo and wombat named Top is unknown.) The painters William Frith and Augustus Egg shared accommodation in Fitzrovia alongside the deranged artist-murderer Richard Dadd, who meticulously painted fairies and cut his father's throat. The acclaimed designer and poet William Morris opened his showroom in Fitzrovia in 1877, and William



De Morgan, the remarkable designer and maker of exquisite ceramics and stained glass, also worked and lived in the area.

James McNeill Whistler, the controversial American painter, etcher and out-witter of Oscar Wilde lived, worked, and often ate in his favourite restaurant in Fitzrovia. His pupil, the talented Walter Richard Sickert also lived and painted gritty scenes in Fitzrovia using prostitutes as his models. Amusingly, Whistler advised Sickert to leave the Slade School where he was studying saying, 'You've lost your money, no need to lose your time as well.' The Redfern Gallery showed the work of Sickert from 1927, not long after Nan Kivell joined the business. Speculation about Sickert's secret life as Jack the Ripper has percolated through public discussion more recently and been disproven. Sickert was for some years a leader of the Camden Town Group of artists who congregated in the area and achieved a deal of prominence given they only cohered in name and in exhibition for a few years, at the beginning of the new century. The celebrity painter and bohemian Augustus John also lived and worked in Fitzrovia, and his works could also be seen exhibited at Nan Kivell's gallery. Gwen John, his talented artist sister also lived with him there for a time. The artists Wyndham Lewis, Roger Fry and the Omega Workshop, including Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, painters Mark Gertler, Dora Carrington, Stanley Spencer and Nina Hamnett all lived in Fitzrovia. In later years the talented but tortured Francis Bacon would drink, heavily, there.

While Nan Kivell lived in Fitzrovia it witnessed substantial changes, but a core clientele of colourful denizens other than artists also thrived. The existence of two famous pubs, *The*

Terry Moore, *Portrait of Rex Nan Kivell*, 1959, nla.obj-136771713

Fitzroy Tavern (from which Fitzrovia gains its name) and *The Wheatsheaf* were populated by figures like Aleister Crowley the occultist, magician, poet and novelist; the poets George Bernard Shaw, Dylan Thomas and Sri Lankan-born Tambimuttu; the writers Virginia Woolfe, George Orwell and Graham Greene; the lesser known but highly regarded luminaries Peter Vansittart and the esoteric Julian Maclaren-Ross; the gay politician (and possible Soviet spy) Tom Driberg; and the psychopathic mobster twins, the Kray Brothers, Ronnie and Reggie. Drinking was not a vice Nan Kivell enjoyed but opportunities for sex for a few bob, or for swapping artworld gossip with locals were attractive.

There is irony in the fact that Nan Kivell lived in an unremarkable flat in such an interesting area while on his walls, with minimal security, he was surrounded with works created by Manet, Degas, Matisse, Picasso, old master paintings in the style of Hieronymus Bosch, a sculpture by Henry Moore, and an eccentric collection of 19th century silver-mounted, Australian-made emu eggs - an eclectic mix not unlike the collection now held by the Library.

In the early 1970s Nan Kivell finally left basement life in Fitzrovia. He departed to a four storey, freestanding home in quiet, charming, affluent West Kensington - purchased with proceeds from selling just one Picasso etching, bought decades earlier. But that is a story for another day.

For anyone interested in a fairly recent snapshot of Fitzrovia see: 'Viva Fitzrovia' on YouTube <https://fitzrovia.org.uk/about/fitzrovia/>

Nat Williams | Former Library Curatorial Staff

2024 AGM AND FRIENDS MEDAL RECIPIENT

The 2024 Friends AGM was held on 20 November. The Committee Co-Chair Catherine Anderson gave an overview of the Friends events held over the year, many of which surpassed expectations in terms of attendance numbers. A personal highlight for Catherine was the 2024 Creative Arts Fellowship presentation on Dr Miriam Hyde, by musician Celia Craig. While this was the final Creative Arts Fellowship supported by the Friends, Catherine noted that the Friends have donated over \$300,000 to the Library, making us Platinum Patrons.

Fellow Co-Chair Michalina Stawyskyj spoke about the activities of the Memberships & Communications Subcommittee in 2025. Much work was done to expand publicity opportunities for the Friends and some additions and enhancements to our member benefits have been achieved. It was noted that membership numbers are now returning to pre-pandemic levels. Michalina also acknowledged the work of Amanda Lynch who retired from the Committee following a two-year term.

Treasurer Jo Schumann presented the financial report and confirmed that the Auditor issued an unqualified opinion. This year saw a small profit from events, in contrast with previous years. Membership prices being increased has been beneficial to the bottom line, though the full impact will not be seen until the next financial year. Jo also noted that the massive reduction in postage and printing costs from the newsletter going digital has contributed significantly to this year's surplus.

We took particular delight this AGM in announcing the Friends support for the digitisation of the WISENET (Women in Science Enquiry Network) journals from 1985-2000, and hearing from founding member of the group Dr Sarah Ryan. More details on this project will be available in the coming months as the work is underway at the time of publication.

Your 2025 Friends Committee:

Catherine Anderson (Co-Chair)

Nancy Clarke

Sue Gage

Peggy Horn

Larissa Karpish

Margaret Nichols

Jo Schumann (Treasurer)

Michalina Stawyskyj (Co-Chair)

Arnis Stonis

This year marks the 18th year in which the Friends medal has been awarded to recognise a significant contribution to the work of the Library by Friends members or Library staff or volunteers. The Friends Committee were pleased to award this year's Friends Medal to Margaret Nichols, in recognition of her impressive contributions to the Friends and to the Library over the past decades.



Margaret has been involved with the Library since coming to Canberra in 1967 and her contributions include:

- As a volunteer tour guide and contributor to development of tour guide reference materials,
- As a front desk coordinator,
- As a contributor to our Newsletter,
- Being responsible for many memorable Friends events including White Gloves, Poetry Lounge, Off the Walls and On Stage, and many more;
- As Friends Committee Member and as Deputy Chair and then Chair from 2021-2023, taking the leadership role during the difficult pandemic and post-pandemic years and inspiring the Committee through her passion and hard work.

Margaret has shown exceptional leadership in her various roles and has demonstrated a true passion for the National Library through her engagement and tireless advocacy. We welcome her re-election back to the Committee for 2025.

Lauren Conron | Friends Executive Officer

Margaret Nichols (centre) received her 2024 Friends Medal, presented by Catherine Anderson (L) and Michalina Stawyskyj (R). Image courtesy Sharon Bulkeley.



Friends of the National Library of Australia Inc.

National Library of Australia

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The Friends of the National Library of Australia acknowledges First Australians as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land and pays respect to Elders – past and present – and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.