

November 2008

Message from the Editor

Dear Friends

Although 2008 has been drawing to a close, Friends have benefited from some super events in recent weeks, and there is more to come!

Most recently, a party of 108 enjoyed the Spring Day Tour to Yass on 25 October. A report of this very successful visit will appear in the next edition of the Newsletter.

You will find below a brief note on the recent address by Michael Gibbons on the Irish famine, to a near capacity audience of Friends and others interested in this dreadful event which, of course, had a major impact on Australia in terms of the thousands of Irish immigrants who took refuge here, most never to return. And the Friends Committee looks forward to welcoming you to the Celebration on 8 November of the publishing achievements of Tony and Maureen Wheeler, founders of the groundbreaking Lonely Planet travel guidebooks.

Later in this edition of the newsletter we conclude our report of Christine Fernon's presentation on the history of the National Library building, delivered to commemorate its fortieth anniversary.

The Friends Committee looks forward to welcoming you to the Friends Annual General Meeting on 8 December, to be followed immediately by our Christmas Party. Full details are provided below.

Best wishes

Gary Kent

Friends AGM and Christmas Party

The Friends Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday 8 December, from 5.30pm in the LG1 Theatre, followed by the Friends Christmas Party from about 6pm in the Foyer. The 2008 Friends Medal will be awarded at the Christmas Party, and the recipient of the 2009 Friends Travelling Fellowship will also be announced. Make sure you do not miss this opportunity to enjoy the festive season with other Friends and library staff. Refreshments will be served from Bookplate and there will be live piano music.

The NLA Bookshop will be open during the party too, offering Friends a 20% discount on all purchases - a timely opportunity to do some Christmas shopping.

If you would like to attend the Christmas Party please complete the booking form on the back page of this newsletter and return it with payment to the Friends Office by Monday 1 December. The Christmas Party entry fee is \$15, which will assist in covering the costs of catering at the party.

Volunteers Required

As many of you will know, each month a hardworking group of volunteers meet in the Friends Lounge to assemble the newsletter packs that you receive in the mail. We are seeking some new volunteers to join our mail out crew as 'reserves', to be called upon when our regular volunteers are unavailable.

The Friends mail outs will occur quarterly from 2009, usually on the first Tuesday of the month in March, June, September and December. The volunteers meet at 10am in the Friends Lounge and work though until the mail out is finished - usually about 1 or 2pm. Lunch is provided for the volunteers.

If you would like to volunteer to assist with the Friends mail out, please contact Sharyn O'Brien, the Friends Executive Officer, on 02 6262 1551 or at friends@nla.gov.au.

The Legacy of the Great Irish Famine

On 8 October 2008, Michael Gibbons delivered his lecture on the legacy of the Great Irish Famine in History, Archaeology and Folklore to an audience of over 200 people in the Library Theatre. Michael, who is one of Ireland's leading archaeologists, enthralled those gathered with a densely-packed, well-illustrated and thoughtful discourse on the impact of the famine on the Irish landscape and folk-memory.



Michael Gibbons

One of Michael's key messages was that the experiences of those who lived through the famine were such that very few passed on their memories of the horrors to later generations. The Irish oral tradition therefore remains relatively mute in relation to the famine, whereas other more 'heroic' aspects of Ireland's history are much better preserved.

Other themes touched on by Michael include the reasons for the enormous reliance on potatoes as a staple crop, the callous indifference of the British authorities to the impending disaster, the fact that all levels of Irish society were impacted by the famine, the catastrophic collapse of the Irish population due to starvation and emigration, and the long term effects of the famine on the Irish agricultural landscape.

Building the National Library

On 20 August 2008, Christine Fernon addressed the Friends on the history of the National Library building, which this year celebrates its fortieth anniversary. In our September newsletter we summarised the first part of Christine's talk dealing with efforts over many decades to create a permanent home for Australia's national library collection. This month, we present Christine's findings on the steps involved in designing, constructing and fitting out the marvellous building we appreciate so much today.

The task of designing the library was awarded, following a limited competition, to the Sydney architectural firm of Bunning & Madden, in association with architect Tom O'Mahoney. A world-renowned expert on library design, Keyes Metcalf, was hired as a consultant. Bunning & Madden designed a range of other Canberra landmarks, including Parkes Place, the Captain Cook memorial water-jet and several embassies.

The architectural team were given a difficult brief. The Library structure was to be subservient to the yet-to-be-designed Parliament House in both design and colour and it was to have a capacity for eleven million books, a height lower than the adjacent Treasury building, a maximum of two floors underground due to the building's proximity to Lake Burley Griffin, and to reflect Prime Minister Robert Menzies' preference for a building with columns.

Obvious to all, the Parthenon was a major influence on the design of the National Library. Chief architect Walter Bunning had visited Athens in 1961 and been impressed with the striking beauty of the ancient Greek temple when viewed from viewpoints both near and far. To cut costs, the Library has one row less of columns (sixteen compared with seventeen) than the Parthenon.

The final cost of the Library was about \$9 million, although many of the lower ground floors were left unfinished. To quote Christine, "Bunning described the library as a contemporary building in the spirit of classical design. He believed the building not only honoured the origins of western culture but was in harmony with the style of buildings depicted in the Griffins' Plan [for Canberra] and was a tribute to colonial architecture. Viewed from a distance, he said, the building looked like a colonial homestead with narrow, white verandah posts".



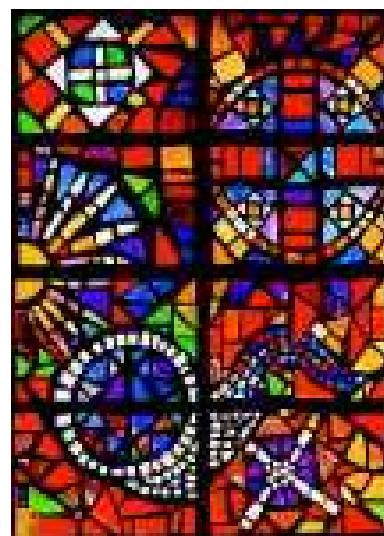
National Library of Australia nla_pic-an24164239
The National Library under construction, June 1966

Great care was taken in choosing traditional materials for the Library's construction, including Carrara marble for the columns, Pentellic marble for the foyer stairs, Travertine marble for the outside walls and Wombeyan gold marble for the foyer paving.

The design of the reading rooms reflected earlier influences. For example, the spacious main reading room paid tribute to high-ceilinged reading rooms of earlier times, while the design of the original Ferguson reading room honoured the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library at the Provisional Parliament House.

It was considered that the Library needed relatively few artworks, primarily reflecting the view that the building was impressive enough on its own terms and not require excessive ornamentation, but also for reasons of cost and the flexible nature of the interior design, which was not suited to fixed artworks.

Perhaps the most striking of the Library's artworks are the sixteen Leonard French coloured glass windows, which are based on the theme of the planets. According to French, "the purpose of the windows is to animate the area with light colour - to create movement through colour intensity and to allow whoever may look at them a free and personal interpretation".



Leonard French coloured glass window in the foyer of the National Library of Australia, Canberra

Several tapestries were commissioned from the French artist Mathieu Mategot to represent the Australian experience. The Woomera radio telescope (representing the times in which we live), Australian flora and fauna, and a montage of themes such as tropical Australia, urban life and the land, all feature in the various tapestry designs.

The remarkable Tom Bass sculpture which adorns the entrance to the Library was inspired by cuneiform pictograms engraved on ancient Sumerian seals. The ark symbolises the Library's role in conserving all species of knowledge, the honeycomb pattern within the ark symbolises the gathering of the residues of our culture, the winged sun represents enlightenment and the power of inspired truth, and the sacred tree symbolises the continuous growth of knowledge.



Tom Bass at the installation of his Library lintel sculpture above the entrance to the National Library of Australia, 1968

Due to its location in the Parliamentary triangle, the development of the site has been controlled not by the Library but by the National Capital Authority and its predecessor, the National Capital Development Commission. In the 1970s the NCDC thwarted the Library's plans to erect one of the originally-proposed flanking wings, prompting the Library's Director-General to threaten to build a new National Library in the Canberra suburb of Fyshwick!

It is worth quoting Christine's conclusion to her lecture in full, to convey how attitudes to library users have changed over the years:

“Viewed from the outside the National Library looks much as it did forty years ago. Inside there has been some redevelopment over the years. The most significant change, though, has probably been in attitude. In 1968 a sign stating ‘Researchers Only’ hung menacingly over the imposing closed door into the library proper. The rest of the populace was meant to confine itself to the foyer, theatre and exhibition area. Those curious about what the scholars were up to had to make do with glimpses through a peep hole in the wall above the Main Reading Room on the mezzanine floor. I imagine it must have made pretty boring viewing. I’m told that one of the senior librarians, whose office was near the peephole, used to regularly look through it and ring down to the library staff to wake any readers she spotted asleep. Today everyone is welcome to use the library and, particularly since the opening of the Bookplate restaurant, the library has become a favourite meeting place for Canberrans and one of our most loved buildings.”

[This article is based on portions of Christine Fernon’s lecture, the text of which she kindly provided to the Friends].

Friends of the National Library Book Club

The Friends Book Club is held on the last Tuesday of each month, from 7 to 8.30pm in the Friends Lounge at the National Library. The last meeting for 2008 will be held on Tuesday, 25 November and the book for discussion will be *Blue Ribbons Bitter Bread* by Susanna de Vries

If you would like to participate in the Friends Book Club, please RSVP to the Friends Office on (02) 6262 1551 or friends@nla.gov.au. Don’t forget that as a Friend of the NLA you receive a 15% discount on all purchases at the bookshop.

NLA Book Club - Advance Notice:

December 2008 - No meeting

January 2009 - *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

February 2009 - *Breath* by Tim Winton



SPECIAL OFFERS

Art Song Canberra - Reflections

Art Song Canberra presents *Reflections with Michael Martin*, tenor, Rowan Harvey-Martin, violin, and Narelle French, piano, on Sunday 30 November at 3pm in the Music Room, Wesley Music Centre, National Circuit Forrest.

This will be an afternoon of reminiscence involving music that has a special place in the artists’ lives. Music will include songs by Britten, Schubert and Quilter, arias by Britten, Rossini, Gounod and Bellini and violin works by Kreisler and Stenhammar.



Friends of the National Library of Australia are entitled to admission at the discounted price of \$22, which includes program and refreshments. Tickets are only available at the door.

For further information about the Season of Song 2008 please visit www.artsongcanberra.org. Enquiries to Oliver Raymond on (02) 6295 9613 or artsong@cyberone.com.au

COMING EVENTS

The full programme of events can be consulted in the 'What's On' section of the National Library's website at <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/events/>

Friends Events

<p>Tony & Maureen Wheeler: A Celebration Saturday 8 November 2:00-4:00pm Theatre and Foyer</p>	<p>The Friends are delighted to celebrate the life and work of Tony and Maureen Wheeler, creators and publishers of <i>The Lonely Planet</i> travel guides. The event will be followed by afternoon tea in the foyer.</p> <p>Bookings essential on (02) 6262 1551 or friends@nla.gov.au</p>
<p>Friends Book Club Tuesday, 25 November 7:00-8:30 pm Friends Lounge</p>	<p>The book for discussion at this month's meeting will be <i>Blue Ribbon - Bitter Bread</i> by Susanna de Vries.</p> <p>Bookings required on (02) 6262 1551 or friends@nla.gov.au</p>

NLA Talks and Events

<p>Poetry Slam 2008 - Heat 1 Friday 7 November 7:00 - 9:30 pm Foyer</p>	<p>Bear witness to the competitive art of performance poetry, as Canberra's local poets, hip-hop artists and other wordsmiths compete in the Australian Poetry Slam 2008!</p> <p>All competitors must register in order to perform. Registration to compete: events@nla.gov.au or (02) 6262 1122 Bookings: bookings@nla.gov.au or (02) 6262 1271 For more information visit http://australianpoetryslam.org/</p>
<p>Sydney PEN '3 Voices' Thursday 13 November 5:30 - 7:00 pm Conference Room</p>	<p>In the final of the series, author Anna Funder will speak on COURAGE, followed by a conversation with ANU Professor Hilary Charlesworth. In association with Sydney PEN, Copyright Agency Limited and Manning Clark House.</p> <p>Bookings essential: director@manningclark.org.au or 02 6295 9433. Cost: \$22 / \$12 Concession (includes light refreshments)</p>
<p>Poetry Slam 2008 - Heat 2 Friday 14 November 7:00 - 9:30 pm Foyer</p>	<p>Part 2 of the Canberra heats for the 2008 Australian Poetry Slam 2008.</p> <p>Registration to compete: events@nla.gov.au or (02) 6262 1122 Bookings: bookings@nla.gov.au or (02) 6262 1271</p>



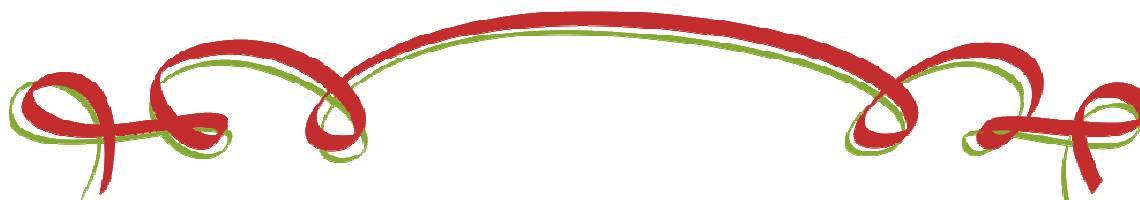
<p>Griffith Taylor Book & Exhibition Launch Thursday 27 November 4:00 - 5:30 pm Conference Room and Foyer Free</p>	<p>Join us for the launch of <i>Griffith Taylor: Visionary, Environmentalist, Explorer</i> by Carolyn Strange & Alison Bashford, to be launched by Professor Tom Griffiths, Professor of History at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Book signing & refreshments to follow. Bookings: 02 6262 1271 or bookings@nla.gov.au</p>
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NLA Exhibitions

<p><i>Wild Places: photographs by Richard Green</i> Until 16 November 2008 Visitor Centre and 4th Floor</p>	<p>Richard Green is a photographer with a passion for landscape photography and for helicopters. He and his wife spend weeks at a time using their helicopter to access and then photograph remarkable remote areas of Australia - often wild places never before photographed.</p>
<p><i>The Opening Chapter: National Library of Australia</i> Until 16 November 2008 Visitor Centre</p>	<p>This year marks the 40th anniversary of the opening of the National Library building. <i>The Opening Chapter</i> looks at the physical attributes of the building, including the vision of architects Bunning and Madden, photographs of the interior by Max Dupain and the important contribution of renowned artists Tom Bass and Leonard French.</p>
<p>Thomas Griffith Taylor: Prophet and Pariah From 21 November 2008 Visitors Centre</p>	<p>Thomas Griffith Taylor (1880-1963) was a traveller and a map-making analyst of the globe. This exhibition asks how this modern Australian thinker moved from his training as a scientist to fashion himself into an explorer, a climatologist, an ethnographer, a theorist of race and a philosopher of world peace. The answers lie in Taylor's words, but even more so in his illustrations and artefacts.</p>
<p>Lords of the Ring: Arnold Thomas boxing collection From 21 November 2008 Visitors Centre and 4th Floor</p>	<p>The Library's Arnold Thomas boxing collection is Australia's most extensive archive on prize-fighting. The collection of mostly photographs focuses on the development of boxing in Australia from the introduction of glove fighting in 1884 and throughout the twentieth century. This display includes photographs of many well-known Australian boxers including Les Darcy and Lionel Rose.</p>
<p>Brutal, Tender, Human, Animal: Roger Ballen photography From 26 November 2008 Exhibition Gallery</p>	<p>South African photographer Roger Ballen has lived and worked in Johannesburg for the last thirty years. During this period, he has principally depicted the people and places of his adopted land. Over time, his works have shifted from a documentary style to highly subjective psychological portraits. Combining work ranging from the 1980s to very recent imagery, it is this key shift that this exhibition will investigate.</p> <p>Ballen's confronting and compelling black and white photographs (of humans, animals, and inanimate objects) are acknowledged as being some of the most intensely challenging images being made in the world today.</p>



Friends of the National Library of Australia Inc. Canberra ACT 2600
Telephone: 02 6262 1698 Fax: 02 6273 4493 Email: friends@nla.gov.au



Friends of the National Library Christmas Party

You are cordially invited to the Friends of the National Library's 2008 Christmas Party.

Come along for as little or long as you would like - we would love to see you there. There will be brief speeches at 6:15pm but otherwise this is your time to relax and mingle with other Friends of the Library.

When: 6:00pm – 7.30pm, Monday 8 December
(following the Friends AGM which begins at 5:30pm)

Cost: \$15 per person

Venue: Foyer of the National Library of Australia,
Parkes Place, Canberra, ACT

What's On:

- Refreshments in the foyer
- 20% discount for all Friends in the bookshop (from 5.00 to 7.30pm only)
- Live music

Would you like to come? Please complete the booking form on the back of this page and return it with payment to the Friends Office on by **5pm Monday, 1 December**.

If you can't make it, the Friends Committee and staff would like to wish you a merry Christmas, a safe and peaceful summer and a wonderful new year.



Friends Christmas Party – Monday 8 December 2008

BOOKING FORM

Full Name(s):.....

Preferred name(s) for name tags:.....

Address:

..... **Postcode:**

Home telephone: **Mobile:**.....

Email:.....

PAYMENT DETAILS

Tickets: \$15 per person

I enclose cheque payment for \$.....

(Cheques should be made payable to 'Friends of the National Library of Australia')

OR

I wish to pay \$..... by Visa/ Mastercard (please circle your card type)

Card Number: / / / Expiry Date:

Full Name on card:

Signature:

Completed booking forms and payment can be left at the National Library Bookshop for collection by Friends Office staff or posted to:

**Friends of the National Library
National Library of Australia
Canberra ACT 2600**

Enquiries: (02) 6262 1698 or friends@nla.gov.au

Bookings must be made by 5pm Monday, 1 December.

