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Fiona Massy reveals the colourful history behind one of the Library's outstanding botanical works

In December 2006, the Spanish Embassy presented to the National Library of Australia a magnificent gift in the form of 16 volumes entitled Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada (1783–1816), on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the voyages of de Quirós and Torres to the South Pacific. These large folio books contain reproductions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century tempera and watercolour paintings of flora from New Granada, an area now occupied by Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador. Accompanying the Flora Botánica is the two-volume English edition of Mutis and the Royal Botanical Expedition of the Nuevo Reyno de Granada, donated to the Library by Gonzalo Nieto, Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Madrid. This generous addition makes the Flora Botánica more accessible to non-Spanish readers. While studying the luminosity and delicacy of the illustrations, I began to search for the tale behind this wonderful collection.

The story began with an extraordinary man named José Celestino Mutis, who was born in Cádiz in 1732, the son of a bookseller. He attended the University of Seville, where he studied medicine and philosophy. While undertaking further studies in medicine and botany in Madrid, he also pursued interests in astronomy, geography, and mathematics. He became well established at the court of Charles III, and the prospect of a brilliant medical career lay ahead of him. In 1760, however, the New World beckoned and, at the age of 29, he set out for New Granada, accompanying the incoming Spanish viceroy as his personal physician. He arrived at Santa Fe de Bogotá on 24 February 1761. This small town was set against the hills, on a large Andean plateau at a height of 2635 metres.

Mutis was a man who seized opportunities and pursued many interests. We find him being ordained as a priest in 1772, as well as working on more temporal matters. He corresponded regularly with Carl Linnaeus, and in a letter to the great Swedish scientist in 1767, he wrote: ‘I tell you, what I have seen in this region surpasses everything that travellers have admired in all other parts of
the world.’ He investigated the cinchona (quinine) tree, useful in treating malaria, and made plans for transporting it back to Spain. In 1777, Mutis was energetically propagating strawberries in the mountains, undertaking new mining ventures, teaching students in physics and mathematics, receiving books from Linnaeus, and developing an excellent library which he shared with his students. He worked as a doctor for the rest of his life in New Granada, and his medical duties included sourcing a vaccine to control smallpox, as well as encouraging hygienic practices among the local people. He also introduced reforms in the teaching of medicine in Santa Fe de Bogotá.

For 20 years, Mutis corresponded with Spanish court officials about his plans to mount a botanical expedition into New Granada. Permission was finally granted by royal decree from Charles III. After much preparation, the expedition set out shortly after midday on 29 April 1783, Mutis’ diary relating that ‘the bright sunlight was tempered by that cool bracing wind that blows regularly on the savannah’. He planned to explore all the territory from Ecuador to the isthmus of Panama, but perhaps didn’t envisage that the expedition would last for 33 years! Scientific objectives of the expedition included astronomical observations and topographical surveys as well as the gathering and study of cinchona bark, and ‘other plants useful for trade’. Colour pigments were sourced for expedition artists from the earth and from available plants including lichens, and the brazilwood tree from which a red dye was extracted. Members of the expedition included ‘adjutants, commissioners, scribes, draughtsmen, and herborists’. Although there were several other Spanish expeditions to the New World at this time, Mutis’ grand expedition was the most carefully prepared, lasted for the greatest length of time, and was the most expensive. After collecting plants in the field, the drawing, pressing and drying of the botanical specimens took place in a permanent studio. This was established in Mariquita, in 1783, and later moved to the Casa de la Botanica in Bogotá. The studio
and art school became the centre of the country’s academic life.

The expedition was unique in having its own drawing school, which trained some of the 30 artists who came and went during the many years of the expedition. The school operated on a strict regime. Specimens were brought in from the field and carefully wrapped in paper, Mutis wrote in his diary: ‘everything was arranged the night before, so that the draughtsmen might begin their work early the next day’. The artists began drawing at six in the morning, and worked long hours. The fragile plant specimens had to be painted quickly, and details recorded before they deteriorated. The drawing of each plant was to be as close as possible to the real specimen, in size, outline and colour. Attempts at invention, or experimenting with different styles of painting, were forbidden, resulting in a marked similarity in the watercolour paintings. The works are large-format compositions, and symmetry is used in their geometric layout. They are done in detail with very fine line work, showing even the small hairs on some of the stems. The illustrations in the Flora Botánica are very similar in style to watercolour paintings by the French botanical artist Claude Aubriet (1665–1742), showing great clarity of detail and strongly defined forms.

Mutis had plans to publish a Flora Botánica, and replica ink drawings of plants were made to serve as models for future engravings, but no drawings were actually published at this time.

The artists varied considerably in their temperaments, skill and ability to work. Pablo Antonio García, from Bogotá, was the first artist to be appointed to the expedition, but he suffered from delicate health. Francisco Javier Matis joined the expedition at the age of 20. He was a young man of exceptional drawing talent, who produced the greatest number of signed drawings. Salvador Rizo, like most of the other young artists, had no prior training in botanical drawing. He was hardworking and became the strict director of the drawing school, demanding a uniform artistic style from his pupils. Later artists were brought in from Quito, skilled both as draughtsmen and in combining light and colour in their paintings. Two academically trained artists from Madrid proved disastrous and produced little work: José Calzado led ‘an unruly life that took him to his tomb’ and Sebastián Méndez ‘proved to be a shirker who caused great conflict with his directors’.

In 1801, Mutis received a visit from the scientist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, and Aimé Bonpland (an expert botanist), who were undertaking explorations of South America. Humboldt described a challenging journey to Bogotá, following a steep, narrow path up the eastern Cordillera mountains. The track was barely wide enough for a mule, and passed...

the artists’ school became involved in the revolutionary cause.

Mutis never returned to Spain, dying in Bogotá in 1808. He has become recognised as an important figure of the Spanish enlightenment, taking this quest for ideas and knowledge from the old world to the new. Although his nephew Sinforoso Mutis carried on with the work of the expedition, civil unrest caused activities to diminish. In 1816, General Pablo Morillo, a military commissioner posted from the Spanish court, ordered the herbarium, botanical paintings and manuscripts (including Mutis’ diary) to be sent to Spain, after looting occurred in the house where they had been stored. These items are now housed in the archives of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Madrid.

The scientific study of the herbarium and the eventual publication of the *Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada* are both epic stories, involving the passion and dedication of many people. The vast plant collection remained unopened for many years after its arrival in Madrid in 1817. An eminent botanist, Ellesworth Killip, described the good condition of the specimens in 1933. Many of the plants were completely unknown to science and work on describing the species continues to this day.

In 1954, the governments of both Colombia and Spain began jointly publishing the botanical paintings, a venture that has continued over many decades. The result is a fitting finale to the commitment and grand vision of an exceptional man, José Celestino Mutis. The Spanish Embassy’s generous gift of a copy of the *Flora Botánica* is an outstanding addition to the Library’s collection of illustrated botanical works.

Fiona Massy undertook an internship at the National Library as part of her graduate diploma in Art History at the Australian National University through woods of nutmeg, walnut and cinchona, before reaching the plateau and Santa Fe de Bogotá. The explorers stayed with Mutis for two months. Humboldt described the botanical library as being second only to that of Sir Joseph Banks in London. At the artists’ school, Humboldt particularly admired the work of Francisco Matis.

Ironically, Mutis’ encouragement of the academic life of New Granada, including the development of the artists’ school, helped to create an intellectual atmosphere that would lead to the independence movement in the Spanish colony. Some students from

Salvador Rizo (1783–1817)

*Mutisia clematis*

reproduced from *Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada* (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2004)
Jennifer Moran ponders the iconography of several pens in the Library’s Collection

Would a computer used by an admired writer move us if we saw it in an exhibition? Perhaps, but probably not in the way a pen would. There is something intimate about a pen: its peculiar characteristics endear it to the user and its close association with writer or statesman or history makes it interesting to the rest of us.

As a tool, a pen proves its worth with functionality, its adaptation to the human scale. The best pens take account not just of the necessity of making a legible mark upon paper but also of their feel in the hand that holds them.

Some pens are beautiful—their form as carefully designed as their function. Some acquire beauty as fingers polish their wood with use, or as a nib is ground to make perfect letters. And some pens are plain ugly, but fascinating nevertheless. One of Henry Lawson’s pens in the National Library’s Collection is a case in point. This is how it looks: a stub of pencil, mustard yellow, has a nib bound to it with a roughly knotted, roughly wound piece of string. The string is discoloured with ink, and possibly sweat. Underneath the string is another binding, black—perhaps embroidery thread. On the lower end of the pencil the paint is shaved and the initials ‘R.N.’ and a smudged third letter, which might be another R or a D, are written on the bare wood beneath. The nib, rusted now, has a half-moon cut-out.

A note with the pen reads: ‘The pen in this envelope was one used by Henry Lawson at Leeton, N.S.W. It was given to Clair Kennedy by Mrs Jim Gordon (‘Erahame’), and passed on to me by Clair, on 11/11/1963. Harry Pearce’.

In 1916, Henry Lawson’s friends, concerned about his drinking and his erratic living arrangements, had organised a job for him at Leeton, to provide data for the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. He lived in Leeton from January 1916 to August 1917. To look at this pen, fragile now, one must lift it from the box using parsilk (an inert fabric used for conservation).

This pen is a much humbler instrument than another pen used by Lawson and also held in the Library’s Collection. This second pen, dated c.1900, is a plain wooden one mounted with a metal nib. The wood is dark and nicely tapered. The pen’s end is very worn, the varnish quite gone. (Did Lawson suck the end of his pen as he pondered rhyme or structure, or mulled over the words he wrote to his friends?) It has an elegant, silver-coloured nib holder, now pitted; the nib itself is classical and spare. The tip is not symmetrical—whether ground for italic writing, or simply broken, is not clear.

In 1900, Lawson went to England with his wife Bertha and their children. He corresponded with Miles Franklin and, in England, promoted her work as well as trying to make a name for himself as a writer. But this English sojourn was not happy. Lawson apparently drank excessively, Bertha was hospitalised and there was other misery in the marriage. Lawson did write the four Joe Wilson
stories in England and some of his work was published, but, as reported in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Online Edition), ‘Lawson himself in later years provided fuel for the idea that his English interlude, so eagerly anticipated, was in fact a catastrophe: “Days in London like a nightmare”; “That wild run to London/That wrecked and ruined me”.

This second Lawson pen came into the collection through Mr John Vincent, from Croydon, New South Wales. A note says it arrived ‘via [Dame] Mary Gilmore’, who was Lawson’s friend and defender. A manila envelope bears the inscription: ‘A pen of Henry Lawson’s, given me by Mrs Byers, M.G. Given by me to the Henry Lawson Society, Sydney. Mary Gilmore 23.3.44.’ Mrs Byers was Isabel Byers, Lawson’s protector and sometime saviour, who from 1904 until his death in 1922 frequently provided lodging and succour.

Both of Lawson’s pens are a far cry from the pen owned by former Prime Minister W.M. ‘Billy’ Hughes, held in the Library’s Collection with other of his personal effects dating from 1900 to 1940. The ‘Little Digger’s’ golf stick, his false teeth and his hearing aid might be interesting to all sorts of researchers, one imagines, but his pen—instrument of signature and jotted thoughts—is evocative for different reasons. Technology was replacing the simple nib pen, by this time. Hughes had a Waterman’s Ideal Fountain Pen. It is cradled in a velvet case, adorned with Waterman’s proud motto, ‘Makes its mark all around the world’, stamped inside the lid. Hughes’ initials are engraved on the pen, which is black, trimmed with gold, and possessed of the then-fashionable pump lever used to fill the reservoir with ink.

Hughes’ pen is presently on loan to Old Parliament House for the travelling exhibition *Billy Hughes at War*, which opened at Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance in February this year and will be at Old Parliament House in Canberra, in June.

Curator Laura Back, while focusing the exhibition on Hughes during the First World War, also wants to portray Hughes the man. She believes that the regulations that Hughes passed, and the way he governed, make his character evident, but that the more personal objects, including his pen, have their interest too. She quotes Hughes himself on this matter, Hughes having once said: ‘There was a time when the constitution of this country was in my fountain pen.’

The fledging of the national seat of government is marked with another pen held in the Library’s Collection—the pen and inkwell used at the first sale of leases in the Federal Capital Territory. The silver lid of the inkstand is engraved with the commemorative words: ‘This Inkwell was used at the first sale of leases in the Federal Capital Territory conducted on behalf of the Government of the Commonwealth by Richardson & Wrench Ltd Sydney and Messrs Woodgers and Calthorpe Queanbeyan on
The 19th December 1924. The bottom of the inkstand is glass, the base cut in a diamond pattern in rows. A hallmark on the lid, and maker’s mark, show it to be from Birmingham, made from sterling silver in 1918.

The pen itself is long and silver, tapering to the end, with a small knob to finish it. The underside of the nib is gold. There is also a mallet (a gavel really) included in the set—presumably the one used to knock down each lot as it was sold.

Particular acts of government are sometimes themselves commemorated with a presentation pen. The fountain pen used to sign the security treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States (the ANZUS Treaty) is held in the Library’s Collection. The Australian Ambassador to the United States, the Hon. Percy Spender, signed the treaty in San Francisco on 1 September 1951.

Historical documents released by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade include the ‘Statement to be made by Spender’ at that occasion. The Treaty marked, he said, ‘the first step in the building of the ramparts of freedom in the vast and increasingly important area of the Pacific Ocean’. Labelling the Treaty ‘an instrument not of offence but of defence’, Spender declared it ‘a pact for peace’. The Treaty sought to defend the longstanding values of freedom to worship, freedom to work and live together without fear of aggression from without or tyranny from within, freedom to associate peacefully for social progress, remedying of injustices, and for improving the lot of the underprivileged, freedom to strive for that form of society which will best secure and preserve … constitutional liberty, social justice and equality before the law, and such is our dedication to these principles that there is no effort we will spare that they may not be imperilled.

The 11 articles of the ANZUS Treaty set out the parameters of the agreement, which was signed by Spender, by C.A. Berendsen for New Zealand, and by Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Alexander Wiley and John J. Sparkman for the United States.

The commemorative pen is black—a Sheaffer, made predominantly of plastic. Towards its narrow end, lines are close-etched into the surface. It is decorated with a gold band on the lid piece and a gold pocket clip. Above the clip is the trademark white dot of Sheaffer pens. On the gold band is engraved, ‘SECURITY TREATY 1951’.

The pen’s lid unscrews, it has a metal thread inside and a corresponding narrow metal band circles the pen. The nib is rounded, gold, its tip silver-coloured—perhaps iridium. ‘Sheaffer. Made in USA 14k’ is engraved on it. Little dots of dried ink fall from the lid or nib as the lid is unscrewed, traces from a brief time when the world hoped that the pen was indeed mightier than the sword.

Jennifer Moran is a writer and editor for several journals and newspapers.
Snooping around Flynn’s legacy

On the 80th anniversary of the Royal Flying Doctor Service this month, Ann Villiers pays tribute to John Flynn’s grand vision by dipping into his personal letters.

The story of John Flynn (1880–1951) has gripped me ever since reading Kay Batstone’s book Outback Heroes: 75 Years of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (2003). For two years I have been exploring the evolution of his vision to bring aerial medical services to outback Australia, and now I want to dip into some of the source material.

So I find myself in the Library’s Manuscripts Reading Room, about to read letters which Flynn wrote to his father in the early 1900s. The room is an inner sanctum, where researchers tap their laptops, click their cameras, and record gems from Library treasures. I eavesdrop on queries from curious staff inviting detailed accounts of researchers’ explorations, or reassessments of their thesis deadlines.

As I wait with anticipation for my selected boxes from the John Flynn Papers (MS 3288) to arrive, I wonder whether the letters will reveal something more than the many books I’ve already read. Will they spark some deeper, fresher, previously unimagined insight?

When they’re on my desk, I find the letters are legibly written on notepaper of various sizes and qualities, inked in a copperplate style and always signed, ‘Your affectionate son’. John Flynn wrote monthly to his father, from an amazing range of places across Australia—Morwell, Buchan, Sydney, Toorak, Hamilton, Narracourte, Beltana. Clearly our postal services worked well, as his father’s letters also found their way back to Flynn, regardless of his location.

As I read the letters, however, a faint uneasiness seeps into my mind. These letters...
were never intended for public viewing. They were written, just as I write letters today, with the expectation that only the recipient will read them. So I’m torn between wanting to know the person in these intimate epistles, and not wanting to invade the man’s privacy by continuing to read. I wonder if my fellow explorers have similar misgivings.

Flynn was quick to see the potential of new technology. In the early 1900s he developed a keen interest in photography. By selling photographs for publication and as postcards, he gained much-needed income during his years of theological study. His letters to his father in Melbourne, who acted as his agent, chronicle his frustrations and success with the newspapers of the day—the Leader, the Australasian and the Weekly Times. For example, with characteristic humour, Flynn comments in November 1906: ‘I have not heard from Sydney again and their “next week” is like the proverbial someday.’

One of the captivating elements of researching Flynn is the byways that entice me away from my immediate path, one such being Flynn’s photographic contribution to the documenting of Buchan, 360 km east of Melbourne. In 1906, aged 25, Flynn spent a year as a student home missionary in the Buchan district. While travelling on horseback between the lonely settlements, he recorded images of the pioneers, their isolation and living conditions, as well as the unspoilt landscape. He continued this practice throughout his career, taking photographs wherever he went, giving us a rich, photographic legacy.

While at Buchan, Flynn met Frank Moon, who explored the local caves. On discovering what became known as Moon Cave, Frank arranged for Flynn to take photographs. Subsequent discoveries of caves and formations by Moon and others were also photographed by Flynn. Flynn’s promotional efforts are credited with raising awareness of the caves’ beauty and influencing the government to open the caves as a tourist destination.

Flynn was a gifted speaker and understood the value of a strong image. A tireless advocate for an aerial medical service, he presented illustrated lectures, turning his photographs into magic lantern slides. These lectures were also revenue-raising ventures, though sometimes the audience members were reluctant givers. Writing to his father about a lecture he gave in Hamilton in 1909, Flynn comments that it was not a great success. Audience was good considering the heat and showers of rain, but the good givers did not turn out, and those present let the collection go by without straining themselves.
However there will be some donations later on which will remedy that.

The most poignant letter I found in Flynn’s papers was largely written on the eve of Flynn’s 30th birthday. (As context, John Flynn was born in Victoria on 25 November 1880, the youngest of three children; his father was a teacher and lay preacher, and when John was only three years old his mother died in childbirth.) Flynn writes from the Manse at Narracourte, South Australia, on 24 November 1910:

I just now wakened to the fact that tomorrow is the 25th and so I have only another hour this side of thirty.

Don’t know that there is any special significance in that fact. Certainly it feels much like any other hour.

But before sliding into the years which bring greater responsibilities and wider life generally it would be well for me to turn and thank you for all the love and care of the long years now behind.

There seems to be a deal of the unspeakable Scot in us at times, I fear. The absence of a mother’s touch has perhaps intensified the fault. But let me take this opportunity of heartily thanking you for your pains and sacrifices on our behalf.

As to the future, God only knows what it holds in store for us. My giving to the Bush must seem to you inconsiderate. And I shrink from it terribly at times. But somehow I have stumbled into things as they now are, and I dare not turn back. But wherever I move I will try and merit that respect which your name has won among all who know you. If I can carry into the Church that citizenship which you have always displayed even amid most depressing circumstances at times, I will not have lived in vain.

That hour is more than up. So let me open the new decade with the wish that I may prove in it worthy of you and of the cause I seek to serve.

How many of us would express such sentiments to our parents, regardless of our profession? Maybe few of us experience such an early sense of vocation, or perhaps the generational links are severed in our current times of career portfolios.

Once ordained, Flynn moves into the Manse at Beltana, South Australia, in 1911. ‘Yes, my district is big,’ he writes, ‘it is nearly the size of Victoria.’ Deftly describing his new home, he tells his father:

This country is peculiar to a Victorian. No grass for 50 miles to the south, and none to the north. Fodder is salt bush and scrub. A little grass may be found in the corners where cattle have camped.

Throughout his career, Flynn did a vast amount of what sounds today like arduous travelling—no passenger jets or four-wheel drives. He explains to his father in February 1913:

I have made arrangements to go to Alice Springs about next Friday. I go 150 miles by camel with a private team, then 50 by mail buggy, and the last 100 or so by mail camels again. I expect to reach there on 24th inst and leave a week later. I should be in Adelaide about 22nd of March, and home a few days later. I have to go almost at once to Sydney, however, and as soon as I return from there I have to proceed to lecture all around Victoria.

In addition to his photography, public speaking and writing, Flynn developed skills in mapping. He used his maps to persuade and influence people, educating them on details about Australia, along with his concept for an aerial medical service. In a 1932 radio broadcast address,
Dr George Simpson, longtime Flynn friend and supporter, described how Flynn liked maps ‘to help him think’. Simpson says the map Flynn was most proud of was the one of Australia showing six circles with a radius of 400 miles (640 km) illustrating how the aerial medical service could work.

These days, Flynn’s original vision has grown to cover 80 per cent of Australia. This month, the Royal Flying Doctor Service celebrates its 80th birthday. While still recognised for its emergency flights, today’s service provides a wide range of medical and health services operating from 22 bases. Each year, Royal Flying Doctor aircraft fly nearly 20 million kilometres—equivalent to 26 trips to the moon and back!

John Flynn, one of Australia’s ‘greats’, has left eloquent legacies that speak to us today of a dedicated, persistent, humorous, compassionate and talented man. A leadership model, indeed, of how to make a lasting difference. I’m left wondering, though—How will we know contemporary ‘greats’ 50 years from now? Will we be reading collections of 168-character text messages and coded emails or watching YouTube grabs? Somehow that prospect doesn’t engage me as much as delving into the richly worded moments captured in personal letters.

My forays into the Library’s Manuscripts, Newspaper and Pictures Collections have given me enormous appreciation of historians who piece together snippets of information to reconstruct a coherent and accurate chronology of events. And how fortunate we are to have institutions like the National Library as custodians of these treasures which inform us about past lives, places and endeavours.

**Dr Ann Villiers, Mental Nutritionist**, delivers keynote presentations based on iconic Australian stories that illuminate today’s challenges. [www.mentalnutrition.com](http://www.mentalnutrition.com)
Ian Warden uses the Library's Newspaper Collection to trace Empire Day's fall from uplifting displays of imperial loyalty to larrikin 'Cracker Nights'

Australians who were children in the 1950s and 60s and only remember Empire Day—24 May—for its intoxicatingly irresponsible 'Cracker Night' may be surprised to learn that the day had once been meant to help them train themselves to be 'Polite, Diligent, Respectful, Obedient, Courageous, Temperate, Persevering, Unselfish and Self-sacrificing.'

In an undated (c.1930) Empire Day promotional booklet held in the Library's Ephemera Collection, the Empire Day Movement insisted that children must cultivate that long list of virtues for the Empire's sake—only then would they 'become the right men and women to continue the Great Empire'.

By the 1950s however—with Empire Day (initiated in Australia in 1905) then in its twilight years—love of the day's punctuating bonfires and fireworks had eclipsed the day's original patriotic purposes. In their 1979 essay, 'From Empire Day to Cracker Night', historians Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hoorn argue that this widening, and by the 1950s unbridgeable, chasm between official and popular notions of what the day was for was an important reason for governments eventually allowing Empire Day to fizzle out and disappear in the 1960s. 'Released from school at lunchtime, children spent the half holiday on May 24 testing ... double
burgers … Roman Candles and miniature home-made bombs for the real business of the day: Cracker Night.’

But why, to use an appropriately pyrotechnical metaphor, did Empire Day’s commemoration go up like a star-showering rocket in 1905, only to come down like a burnt stick just a few decades later? Popular press reports of the day’s commemorations, especially in its early years between 1905 and 1915, describe the commemorations as awesomely vast and popular. The day promises to be a bigger-and-better-every-year occasion of vital national importance.

Sydney’s first Empire Day on 24 May 1905 (24 May was the birthday of the late, great, imperious, Empire-building monarch Queen Victoria) saw great gatherings of folk and serial unfurlings of the Union Jack. The weekly Sydney Mail reported that the New South Wales Governor, Sir Harry Rawson, ‘was kept going at express speed all day from school to school and function to function’. There had been Empire Day goings-on throughout the state. In every town and hamlet the children had warbled patriotic songs, and every community had displayed fervour in some way unique to itself. In Nowra, ‘an Empire Tree, a Norfolk pine was planted by the Mayor (Alderman Peak) who delivered a short address’, while ‘at Tamworth the Prime Minister [George Reid] excelled himself in the eloquence of his panegyric on the Empire’.

The fervour had been at its height, the Mail reported (publishing large photographs to illustrate the point) in Sydney, where that ‘oldest and greatest city of the Commonwealth … rose nobly to the occasion’. The report continued:

In the city and on the shipping, bunting was flying everywhere. It floated high from each tall building … the very banana man’s stalls and carts had Union Jacks stuck over them. Of course the warships were illuminated, and in
the evening the [vessel] Euryalus [had] … all her outlines … marked with electric lights. The decoration … was participated in by all the ships of all nations that thronged the wharfs and bays of Port Jackson. The centre of interest was Queen Victoria's statue, in Queen's Square. That was decorated and embowered in greenery, and it was a centre of pilgrimage all day…

The Mail, with its illustrated section, loved the spectacularty photogenic, circulation-stimulating events of Empire Day, and in 1909 captured with enormous and still truly gasp-provoking photographs a Public Schools Children's Display held at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where 25 000 people watched 7100 children arrange themselves into ‘a great living Union Jack’.

In fact, however, Empire Day was never the universally observed, nation-galvanising occasion that some of the Australian press reporting suggests. Its champions never did succeed in persuading state governments that the day should be made a public holiday. It was a conservative, Protestant

enthusiasm and invention. The Irish in Australia had strong historical recollections of British imperialism in Ireland, and the overwhelmingly Irish-orientated Roman Catholic church in Australia was hostile to, or at best lukewarm about, Empire Day. From 1911, it was Catholic policy to mark 24 May in its schools not as Empire Day but as Australia Day.

The notion of Empire Day also had some powerful and passionate secular opponents. On the eve of that first Empire Day in 1905, the opinionated and pugnacious weekly the Sydney Bulletin railed against the concept in words and pictures. ‘To mark this official feast-day of Saint Jingo’, it editorialised, ‘the children in the public schools will gather together to sing hymns of blood and battle, in glory of a country [Britain] which is not their own.’

The Bulletin seethed that Empire Day was the invention of Australia’s ‘weak-minded snobs’ who hoped they could get knighthoods by disparaging their own country and being sycophantic towards Britain. What was needed, the Bulletin evangelised, was a form of Australian nationalism. The front cover of this especially earnest edition was an illustration of a father pointing to a map of Australia and lecturing his four rapt children: ‘An Empire Day, By All Means; But Let This [Australia] Be Your Empire!’ Empire Day was unAustralian, the Bulletin raged, because ‘there is everything hostile to Australia in the British Imperialism of today, with its ideas of war, conquest, pillage…’ of which the Bulletin thought the Boer War had been a recent shameful example.

The Bulletin therefore, in all seriousness, urges those Australian parents who are Australians first to gather their children round them on May 24 and tell them of their own land … washed by clear seas, purified by the breath of the gum forests … where no man [is] landlord or master, and neither wood nor wood game [has] been divinely set apart for squire and parson, and hats [are] touched to none except in genuine chivalry and respect.

Enthusiasts for Empire Day really did often seem to demonstrate just the sorts of love of blood and battle and conquest on Britain’s behalf that the Bulletin deplored. Pageants, speeches, songs and poems were full of martial activities and military metaphors.
Boys were encouraged to be ready for glorious self-sacrifice and to don uniform to answer the Empire’s call.

Official recitations of the might and size of the Empire were often full of jingoistic braggadocio. For Empire Day 1907, the League of the Empire (South Australian Branch) produced an Empire Day Souvenir program of events and Collection of Imperial Facts And Poems For Sons And Daughters Of The Empire. The National Library has an eerily well-preserved copy of the Souvenir. ‘The British Empire, if cut into a strip a mile wide, would reach around the world 450 times!’, the Souvenir swaggers, as if its text was dictated by St Jingo. ‘Half the ships in the world are British, and the best of them can be converted into ships of war in 48 hours! If any big misfortune were to happen to England 60 000 000 English-speaking people in other countries would leap to their feet.’

The aforequoted Empire Day Movement booklet from around 1930 also sounds like an essay by St Jingo: there is grisly bragging about how ‘The Empire played the greatest part in the Greatest War the world has ever seen [the war of 1914–1918] ... The Empire’s Dead in the Great War amounted to approximately 1 000 000—no Empire has ever put forth such gigantic Strength in the History of the World.’

But time and world events eventually eroded the power and purpose of Empire Day. Its importance in Australia peaked in 1915, before suffering the long, slow slither into oblivion, albeit punctuated by some sensational pageants and rallies, and then some nighttime bonfires and fireworks. Thenceforth, Anzac Day—an opportunity to express patriotic fervour about Australia and Australians instead of Empire and Protestantism—seriously usurped the sentimental patriotic usefulness of Empire Day. (See story in April 2007 edition of National Library of Australia News.) During the Second World War, it was often made clear by Winston Churchill’s policies that Britain put the Empire’s interests ahead of Australia’s. By the late 1940s, Queen Victoria’s Empire, which had once imparted such great pink swathes to the world map, began to shrink. India became independent in 1947 and other colonies of the Empire bustled their way towards independent nationhood. Notions of unquestioning love of England and of Empire became increasingly quaint and unAustralian.

In 1905, the Sydney Morning Herald’s enthusiasm for the then brand-new concept of Empire Day was expressed by festooning the Herald building’s four-storey façade with Union Jacks. By the 1950s, though, the only truly newsworthy things about 24 May which the Herald was reporting were Cracker Night excitement: burns, injuries and larrikin atrocities. The morning after Empire Day 1955, the Herald ran a big front-page story on the brilliance and mayhem in a city ‘lit by the glow of bonfires in every suburb’. Mention of the day’s fading solemn purpose was relegated to page seven, which featured, with the caption ‘Do you remember Mafeking?’, a picture taken at the previous day’s Veterans’ Empire Day luncheon, showing two fading Boer War veterans nattering about days of long ago.

Ian Warden is a Canberra-based writer with a background in newspapers
THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL LIBRARY

VERONICA BRADY ARGUES THE CASE FOR SEEING LIBRARIES, LOCAL AND NATIONAL, AS INDISPENSABLE RESOURCES

Ever since I learned to read, I have been in love with libraries, and it is hard, if not impossible, to say how greatly they have contributed to my education and to my professional life. As far as the National Library of Australia is concerned, I have had the privilege of being awarded a Harold White Fellowship in 1996, without which I would not have been able to write my biography of Judith Wright (South of My Days, 1998). So I am particularly aware of, and grateful for, the contribution that the Library makes to scholarship. These days, however, it is difficult not to be aware that cultural icons like the National Library are no longer unquestionably accepted—at least by those in power—as vital to our national wellbeing.

By definition, debates about priorities in governments’ use of budgets involve questions of value—of what is more or less, for the life of our nation. It is easy to demonstrate the importance of defence and security, of providing adequate health care and ensuring the wellbeing of those who are unable to provide for themselves. But most people would also grant the importance of education (in the general sense of the word), and this is where libraries belong.

Yet, the goal of education is often defined as the means of supporting and expanding economic growth. By providing access to information, technical skills, or linking up with global markets and opportunities, it seems that libraries are regarded as worthwhile. If they are not seen as helping this expansion, their other cultural activities are sometimes viewed as of secondary importance.

That, however, is to accept a limited notion of ‘value’, at the national as well as personal level. The evidence of history suggests that ultimately, to quote William Blake, in a society without a broader kind of vision, ‘a people perishes’. I would argue that the National Library has a central role in promoting this vision and setting the life of our nation in a wider context, interrogating present commonsense and pointing to different, possibly more humanly rewarding, possibilities.

In Areopagitica (published in 1644), John Milton’s great defence of freedom of thought and expression, he wrote one of the most eloquent descriptions of the place a library may have in the life of a nation. Milton exhorts the Parliament to be true to the promises they have made and describes what he thinks this new society should look like. It will, he argues, be built by a people ‘prone to seek after knowledge’. Equally significant is that he sees the library as their central resource:

Behold now this vast city: ... the mansion house of liberty ... the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth, than there be.
pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas ... others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and conviction.

It is true that this did not shake the politicians of his day to change their determination to censor and control views which they regarded as dangerous or subversive. But Milton's point remains an important one. The resources of any library, but especially a national library, provide insights and information which offer alternative and sometimes unfashionable views which are able to interrogate and expand current notions of possibility and value in creative ways. Our ideas of society and its purposes may be different, of course, from those of Milton, which were essentially theocratic. But most people who believe in a free and open society would see the value of the space a national library can provide for stepping back a little from everyday concerns and assumptions and reflecting on them in a wider context.

The National Library of Australia, as a central point of reference and sometimes of in-service training for librarians, provides essential support in the work of local libraries as the focal point of the community's information. In the Library, those in the community can find out about, and reach towards an understanding of, the larger world, and the place of their community in it. This underlines the unique nature of the role the Library has to play in the life of the nation as a whole, in its self-understanding and sense of a future direction. It needs to be emphasised that this leadership role is a crucial one, and that it is necessary that the Library receives the funding it needs to fulfil this role.

Ideally a great library is a centre of scholarship, a place in which people may come together to explore and expand our understanding of our actual situation and experiences as a people, but also to reflect on possible alternatives, often in the light of the wisdom of the past. This, of course, is what has happened throughout history from the time of the great library of Alexandria to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the British Library in London. It would be good to think that Australian governments would, in the future, endow more fellowships and scholarships for younger scholars, to supplement the relatively few which our National Library is able to provide from endowments or from its own resources. Most cultures, after all, recognise and honour the importance of scholars to their national life.

The Library's archives and manuscript holdings are areas of crucial significance for the understanding of our national heritage. They provide information about the lives of 'ordinary' people who never became famous or rich but contributed, each in his or her unique way, to the story of our nation. This is also true of much of the material from other cultures and times, most of which takes us behind the headlines to understand more deeply the common lot of humanity, and of people otherwise...
forgotten, reminding us of the ways in which libraries have contributed over time to the human story and how they may continue to do so in the future. This contribution is more necessary today, in a culture in which we have an opportunity to hear and be enriched by a range of stories, making us, one hopes, more open and tolerant people.

It is part of the Library’s task to be counter-cultural, to make us aware of ideas and experiences which exist outside the narrow frame of a future-oriented culture which takes little or no account of anything but a romanticised (and therefore unreal) past, and is in danger of forgetting many of the discoveries made about ways in which a better society might be achieved. To keep this kind of awareness alive may be essential if we are to remain a civilised society (as the Macquarie Dictionary defines civilisation): one in which ‘a high level of art, science and government has been reached’, and in which people live together in mutual respect and everyone has an opportunity to achieve his or her full potential in life and contribute to the life of the community.

This involves knowledge of cultures and thus notions of reality different from our own. But this is something which the culture to which we belong makes difficult. As Luiz Carlos Susin argues in his article ‘A Critique of the Identity Paradigm’ (2000), settler societies like ours are the product of an imperial history which is based on the story of Ulysses, who left home and journeyed through strange places, but always with the intention of returning home or of making the strange places like home. Though it would like to think it is, our culture is not an adventurous one, least of all intellectually, since it exists within what Susin calls a ‘closed circle around sameness’, with the self and its desires at the centre. This is not the kind of culture best able to deal with the uncertain future which probably lies ahead. But it is another reason why the work of the National Library matters, since it provides resources to enable us to move out of this closed circle and see ourselves from the perspective of other times and different cultures, from which we may have much to learn, and with peoples with whom we must learn to live, not least, for instance, this land’s Aboriginal peoples.

One of the most important tasks of a National Library may be to provide time and space for reflection on the ‘way things are’, in the name of more truthful, creative and more generously humane ways of thinking and feeling. Knowing what is happening in our own place is important, but knowing what is happening elsewhere, and being able to locate those events in their cultural and historical context, is to be less alarmed by them, and allows us to respond more judiciously. The National Library is a source of worldwide information and can offer the latest information about current events and their underlying causes, thereby helping us to evaluate them. This, I think, is no small thing in a time in which governments sometimes seem to promote suspicion and fear of the ‘unknown’ for their own ends, thereby fuelling the social violence, wars and rumours of wars of our time. Indeed it may be a crucial contribution; as Kofi Annan warned during his time at the United
Nations, closed minds, and lack of sensitivity to others and tolerance of beliefs different from ours, may lead to new wars of religion and ideology on a global scale. The freedom and space to think independently, but also to learn from past experience in doing so, may enable the divergent and even unpopular thinking which would question the direction in which we seem to be moving—freeing us from the manipulation of images imposed on us from outside to serve the interests of those with power, and reminding us of ideas and values arrived at by thinking people over the centuries.

Milton’s ideal was a ‘knowing people’ with ‘much desire to learn’, who would create a society in which there would be ‘much arguing, much writing, many opinions’, since in his view ‘opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making’—the kind of society and the kind of citizens we need, if we are to meet the challenges facing us in the twenty-first century. As Milton argued, a great library will help to form these citizens and therefore remains an important national resource today.

(Sister) Veronica Brady is a Roman Catholic nun and Honorary Senior Fellow in the Department of English, Communications and Cultural Studies in the University of Western Australia, where she taught for many years. This piece is based on an article which appeared in Dialogue 26, 2/2007; Academy of the Social Sciences 2007, pp. 23–29.
Exetering Gulliver’s Travels
Read Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift and join Dr Ian Higgins for a discussion of this satirical classic.

Date: Tuesday 27 May
Time: 6.00 – 8.00 pm
Venue: Friends Lounge
Cost: $10 Friends, $15 non-members
Bookings: (02) 6262 1698 or friends@nla.gov.au

For bookings, details of membership and subscriptions, contact:
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National Library of Australia
CANBERRA ACT 2600
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SHARYN O’BRIEN
Acting Executive Officer
Friends of the National Library of Australia

T
his month, in lieu of the regular monthly book club, the Friends will be hosting a book club lecture on the satiric classic Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift.

Gulliver’s Travels (officially entitled Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver) holds an unusual place in English literature. Modelled on the ‘travellers’ tales’ literary sub-genre, it provides a penetrating and at times hilarious analysis of early modern society and its follies and failings.

Swift saw satire as a ‘sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own’. Gulliver’s Travels was completed in 1725, and as it was a transparently anti-Whig satire, was published anonymously, in 1726. The book was an instant success and the first print run was sold out in less than a week. The ongoing popularity of the book can possibly be attributed to the fact that it can be seen as many things to many people—children’s story, Menippean satire, proto-science fiction, and forerunner to the modern novel.

On Tuesday 27 May, you are invited to join the Australian National University’s Dr Ian Higgins and a group of fellow book lovers to examine aspects of this satiric and parodic masterpiece. Dr Higgins has written two books on Swift, was an editor of the Oxford World Classics Gulliver’s Travels edition and is a general editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, currently in progress.

He will discuss Gulliver’s Travels as a mock voyage book, relating it to other literary hoaxes which Swift perpetrated on the reading public, and discussing the composition, publication, and reception of the Travels and also some of the satire’s targets. The lecture will conclude with attention given to the nagging problem of the meaning of Gulliver’s fourth voyage to the country of the horses. Following this, participants will break into small groups to discuss the issues further over a glass of wine.

Tickets are just $10 for Friends and $15 for non-members, including light refreshments. I recommend you book early for this event to avoid disappointment. Bookings can be made by calling the Friends office on (02) 6262 1698 or email friends@nla.gov.au.

If you are unable to attend the lecture, don’t forget that the Friends Book Club meets on the last Tuesday of each month, from 7 – 8.30 pm in the Friends Lounge. This is an informal club, where the members take turns in leading the group each month. For more information, please contact the Friends office on (02) 6262 1551 or friends@nla.gov.au.

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My diary was started as purely a personal record but has developed into some sort of a running record which may reflect to you and to the Department the day to day course of affairs here.

Thus Casey wrote to Australia's Minister for External Affairs, on 27 November 1940. This book, with its illuminating introduction and notes, traces the evolution of Casey's 'delicate' role as Australian Minister to the United States during a critical time in Australia's history. It reveals Casey treading a fine diplomatic tightrope for America's support of Britain and Australia in the war, without risking aggravation of America's many powerful isolationists.

The diary records his daily duties and strategies: making American diplomatic, political and military contacts; engaging with a wide range of prominent individuals and interest groups; and speaking on a broad range of topics all essentially aimed to 'sell Australia' and woo America to the Commonwealth's war cause. The diary mixes meetings with Roosevelt and Churchill, broader social commentary, and records encounters with personalities ranging from Eddie Cantor to J.M. Keynes. In tone, the entries range from business-like and analytical, to humorous and caustic.
On the cover this month

Salvador Rizo (1783–1817)

*Mutisia clematis* [detail]

reproduced from *Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada* (1783–1816)

(Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 2004)

This month’s cover shows a detail from one of the glorious botanical publications held in the Library’s Collection, *Flora de la Real Expedición Botánica del Nuevo Reyno de Granada* (1783–1816). A copy of this lavish 16-volume work, published in Madrid in 2004, was gifted to the Library by the Spanish Government in 2006 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of early Spanish exploration of the Pacific. The Flora Botánica celebrates the botanical explorations of José Celestino Mutis, ranging across a geographical area occupied by present-day Colombia, Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador. The findings of his expedition were depicted by a skilled school of artists (among them Salvador Rizo, whose work is shown here) during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See story, p. 3