



Dear Readers

The iconic Mitchell Library is much loved by the public and the staff who work here. We are fortunate to work with an extraordinary and unrivalled Australian collection that is used by researchers, students and all interested in the history and culture of this country and region. There has been some misinformation circulating about the revitalisation of the Mitchell: it continues to be a reading room, one of Sydney's most evocative places. What is happening is a story of improvement to provide our readers with greater access to our collection both onsite and online.

I share the view that the Mitchell Library – the collection that commenced with David Scott Mitchell's generous legacy and has been assiduously built by generations of librarians, collectors and donors – is an invaluable collection of our nation's historical records and is at the heart of reading and research in Australian history and culture. To that end, we continue to acquire major items of importance for the study of Australian history including the TAL & Dai-Ichi (Derby) collection of 745 early Australian natural history drawings which will feature in a landmark exhibition opening in March. In addition, we continue to acquire New South Wales publications comprehensively, most Australian publications, manuscript collections, photographic collections (such as the recently acquired archive of Max Dupain and Associates) and many other materials which are central to both research and creative work. Last year the Library added 8,433 books to the Mitchell collections, as well as 290 metres of manuscripts, 196,000 photographic negatives and 24,187 prints and drawings.

These acquisitions have been complemented by the completion last December of a five year project to create online records for our entire collection, much of which was previously only recorded in the card catalogues and often with limited detail. This achievement is a boon to researchers on site and at a distance. We are also fast-tracking the digitisation of much of our unique material under a State Government funded Digital Excellence Program which has already delivered close to two million pages of newspapers via Trove. Both initiatives will help make our rich collections more widely known and more readily available to researchers, writers, historians, students, indeed anyone, locally and internationally.

Storage is an ongoing concern for all major libraries with large collections. At the State Library of NSW, we need about two kilometres of additional storage every year. When the budget allows, we install additional compactus to keep more material on site and are working on ways of further increasing on site storage. Some materials are being relocated from unsuitable storage areas to ensure their long term preservation and to facilitate access and use. This is an ongoing process which will actually lead to greater accessibility for all those who wish to use the material. The combination of online catalogue records, digitisation of a growing proportion of historical documents and the ability to request items online means it is even easier to access to our extensive collections.

*A world leading library and centre of digital excellence*

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The core imperative for everything we do, and what the 1939 Library Act is built around, is providing free access to our collections and resources so that all of us can understand our past, consider our present and imagine our future. Through exhibitions, lectures and other activities, school programs and student seminars, we introduce the wider public and, especially, new generations to the importance of knowledge and research. The Amaze Gallery, opened last year, is a first step in enabling us to show the depth and breadth of our collection: we aim to add to those facilities. By seeing those wonders, many of those visitors of today become our readers and researchers of tomorrow.

We value all of our readers and are determined to provide appropriate spaces for them to access all forms of material - original and digital. To this end we are recreating a dedicated reading room to access manuscripts and other special collections in the original Mitchell wing where the likes of Manning Clark, Patrick White and Greg Denning researched and wrote. Together with an adjoining study room for State Library's Fellows, this will offer a place where ideas can be exchanged or quiet and concentrated research can be pursued, just as it did before this service was moved to the current Mitchell Reading Room in 1988. As always, our passionate staff will continue to deliver materials and provide advice and expertise.

Like all great libraries, we will continue to respond to the changing needs of readers. We have been speaking to individuals, associations and institutions to discuss how best to support the scholarly community, and this will continue. We remain committed to scholarship and this Library's leading role in supporting research and writing in Australian history and culture is undiminished.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alex Byrne', written in a cursive style.

Dr Alex Byrne  
**State Librarian and Chief Executive**

Tuesday, 11 February 2014