

Marie-Louise Ayres: I first delivered this lecture on July 26th in Perth at the invitation of History West, the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. I thank History West for that invitation.

Today I'm speaking to you from Canberra, from the beautiful lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples. I give my respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, and thank them for caring for the land I call home and from which the National Library of Australia does its work.

“When we saw it, we were three or four leagues away at most, at four o'clock in the afternoon, advancing on it downwind. If it had been two or three hours later, we would've been lost for we had no thought of land. This land appears very low and has many large rocks that seems separated from the land. We do not know precisely by what people it is inhabited or perhaps there is no one, but for a few people.”

So wrote Surgeon Bremond aboard the L'Oiseau on the 4th of August, 1687. L'Oiseau was one of five French ships, which set off from rest, for what was then called Siam. Blown far further than they realised due to big storms, the L'Oiseau was the only one of the five that sighted the coast of Western Australia, and they did not disembark. Their latitude of 31 degrees south on that August day 336 years ago suggests they were somewhere north of the Swan River, which means of course that the land they could see was inhabited by the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation whose ownership of the land and stewardship of culture, custom, language and country, extended back tens of thousands of years. Surgeon Bremond had no inkling of the rich and sophisticated cultures that he sailed past. We have the opportunity to share in that rich inheritance.

Why am I starting here? Because the National Library of Australia recently acquired this magnificent journal, which includes the first verified French, and what is believed to be the 33rd European sighting, of Australia. There are only three pages that relate to Western Australia or Australia at all, with the remainder of the journal concerned with lands to our north. This tiny fragment of history is just a taste of the deep and rich Western Australian related collections held by the National Library, and helps to answer some important questions. What does the National Library do for the people of Western Australia? Or how does an institution, 3,000 flying and 4,000 road kilometres away, and even worse, in Canberra, serve Western Australians? This evening, I want to try to answer that question through three lenses, the collection lens, the service lens, and most importantly, and for me most passionately, the collaboration lens.

As the National Library operating on Ngunnawal and Ngambri land, our collecting remit encompasses the whole of Australia. Our history begins with federation in 1901 when the first federal parliamentarians then based in Melbourne, acted on their conviction that the parliament would need access to a good library. Over time, the parliamentary library collected a range of material of outstanding national heritage value, books, manuscripts, artworks, objects. After the move of the Parliament to Canberra in 1927, the concept of a National Library distinct from a parliamentary library gradually became a reality, where Sir Harold White appointed the first national librarian in 1947 and the library formally set separated out by the National Library Act of 1960.

We moved into our present beautiful building in 1968, so we are celebrating 55 years by the shores of Lake Burley Gryphon this year.

The first part of the National Library Act tells us to build a national collection, particularly focusing on Australia and the Australian people. Under the legal deposit provisions of the 1968 Copyright Act, we have the right and the responsibility to collect a copy of every Australian publication, every book, journal, newspaper, map, or piece of sheet music, whether in physical or digital form. We also collect Australian archival material, websites, and selected social media. Together, these pieces of legislation and decades of work mean that we hold the largest and richest library collection in the land.

Our, your physical collection is very, very, very large and we take very good care of it. In fact, at 280 linear kilometres, you could drive from Perth to Margaret River before you got to the end of our shelves. Our digital collection is also very large, at a whisker under three petabytes, which is 3 million gigabytes, and translates to billions of digital files.

This comprehensive collecting of publications, and selective but still nationally focused collecting of other documentary heritage also means that a significant portion of documentary collections relating to Western Australia are held by the Library in Canberra on behalf of the entire nation, including WA. Given that Western Australia also has specific legal deposit obligations for state publications, Western Australia's documentary heritage is held and stewarded in two great libraries, the State Library and the National Library, adding additional safeguards for our future.

Our collections go far beyond the published, and many of its riches are in the unpublished collections, personal and organisational archives, oral histories and pictures collections. We hold the personal archives of many great Australians, born or living in Western Australia. Politicians such as Dorothy Tangney, and activists such as Bessie Rischbieth. Both of them groundbreakers. We are digitising their archives now as part of our philanthropically-funded Women Leaders Project. In 1943, your Dorothy Tangney, and Tasmania's Dame Enid Lyons were the first women elected to Australia's federal parliament. 70 years later, they were finally honoured in the form of this lovely statue outside Old Parliament House, a very happy occasion for family members and the community.

That political papers tradition has continued to this day. We hold the papers of Billy Snedden, who was born and educated in Perth, Sir Paul Hasluck, whose son was at my lecture in Perth, and Fred Cheney. We hold the papers of great Western Australian writers, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Tim Winton, Randolph Stow, Faes Vicky, Dennis Haskell, Dorothy Hewett. Of historians, and public servants, and journalists, and thinkers, and performing artists, Daisy Bates, Vincent Serventy, Eric Rolls, Geoffrey Bolton, Wilfred Burchett, Kate Fitzpatrick. The list goes on. Our oral history collection is the largest in the nation approaching 60,000 hours. We hold interviews from more than 1,000 Western Australians, some of them very well known, such as writer, Veronica Brady, Senior Jandamarra man, Banjo Woorunmurra, and Richard Wittenoom, engineer, former Albany Mayor and past Vice Commodore of the Royal Perth Yacht Club.

Others are less well known. Doug Fong, a teacher and historian in Broome, Francis Berman, a leading librarian, who served on the Library Board of Western Australia from 1982 to 1993. Lillian Kavanaugh, speech and drama teacher, who recalls holidays at Kalgoorlie, her education at Loretto, learning speech with Lionel Logue, of the King's Speech fame, and so much more in a very long life. Our entire oral history collection has been digitally preserved, and where interviewees have given us permission are available to listen to via Trove, assisted by timed summaries and transcripts. A great wealth of Western Australian history is contained in these life stories.

Our maps collection is also very strong on Western Australian mapping. From this exquisite Von Qualen map of 1704 based on the Villain of Lumming sketch of 1697. This map has been part of the Library's collection since 1911 when the Pithorie collection, one of the four great foundation collections of the Library was transferred to the Commonwealth. Our mapping of Western Australia continues through the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st century, right through to the modern day.

The NLA's Pictures Collection runs to about 1 million images, including some historical beauties such as this sketch of the Canning post office, and portraits of many Western Australians. But the great strength of our Pictures Collection is in photographic archives, documenting everything from the landscape, to the mining industry, to fauna and flora, to Western Australian tourism posters over many decades.

We also commissioned photographs especially of important community events. Just last year for example, we commissioned Philip Costello to photograph election campaigns and polling places around Western Australia as part of our very focused collecting of federal elections and referenda. And we commissioned documentation of Chinese New Year's celebrations for the year of the tiger, part of a large National Library project to improve collecting relating to Australians of Chinese heritage.

I hope that even this tiny snapshot shows you that our collections are incredibly rich in documentation of Western Australian life, leaders, culture, society, land and industry. Developing a collection like this takes generations, and many of these archives have been with the National Library for decades.

For example, we acquired the papers of Bessie Rischbieth in 1967. This is a collection we share with the State Library of Western Australia. Rischbieth left her personal papers and books to the National Library, seeing them as relating to the national empire and international development of modern women's movements. Papers of personal and local interest were bequeathed to the State Library. This distributed collection held in two institutions can be reunited virtually and discovered through aggregated systems such as Trove. I'll return to this theme a little later.

I've been asked in the past about why we collect this material, and shouldn't all Western Australian material be in Western Australia? My answer to that question is that Western Australian material is of interest to a very broad range of researchers from across Australia and internationally, not only to Western Australians. We collect with a national remit for a national and international audience. Sometimes the boundaries between national and state collecting are very clear. We, for example, hold the records of all the major political parties, but only at the federal level. One of our largest archives is the records of the RSL, but again, only at the national level. We collect from nationally-focused organisations, not state-based ones.

Other times, that sense of a line is much fuzzier, and there would be a good case for collections to go in either direction. This is where strong relationships between institutions, especially the national and state libraries, really come into play. We often discuss grey areas like this with colleagues at state level. We aim to collaborate on building collections where possible, but we will definitely compete on occasions. We need that kind of creative tension in our relationships to make it all work. Australia is not homogenous. We do need a National Library and State Libraries and the local history collections that are held in public libraries and local museums and of course historical societies. We don't need to all look, feel, and behave the same. All have a part in telling the Australian story for distinct or overlapping audiences.

Collections come alive when they're used. All of our services are directed at making our collections known and usable by people to whom they may be useful. I was born at St. John of God Hospital in Subiaco. Both of my parents were born in Western Australia. I have many Western Australian relatives, and some have been quite prominent in Western Australian history, including my great uncle, George Henry Berville, an agricultural scientist who was recently named by the Western Australian as one of the 100 people who have most shaped your state. But I can't claim to be Western Australian. I've spent almost all of my life in Canberra, raised my family here, pursued my career here. It's truly home. However, when I think about what the mission of the National Library is, to be a library for the entire nation, I've often thought of Western Australia.

In designing our digital services, I have frequently challenged our teams to think about how best we can serve, for example, a citizen in Fitzroy Crossing. Last year, the Western Australian population was around 2.7 million, or 10% of the Australian population. In that same year, 234,000 individual Western Australians used Trove, 170,000 used the National Library's website, and 80,000 visited other Library web pages. Now, there's likely to be quite a lot of crossover in those figures, but they still suggest that on an annual basis we serve perhaps 8% of Western Australians through these digital services, which is a bit behind where we might expect it to be when we compare to the broader Australian use of our services.

We know that slightly less than the expected number of school children from the west get to our Library school tours. Although one of our most memorable visits was that of seven students of a total school population of 26 from Useless Loop Primary School back in 2018. As Western Australians know, Useless Loop near Shark Bay is hundreds of kilometres from Geraldton and even more hundreds of kilometres from Perth, but there are also great connections in our collection. The region appears, for example, in our magnificent Blougg map where it is noted as Lund Dundret. With apologies to any Dutch speakers who are listening. These students were terrific. Their knowledge of everything that we spoke about including Cook, we were marking 200 years since he set out on his first Pacific voyage when they visited, the Mabo decision, and early European exploration was astounded. They were thrilled with the Library and thought it was amazing. Their excitement at the Library was only eclipsed by their excitement at the trip they were taking later that week to the snow.

Still, slightly less than the expected number of teachers and students use our digital classroom, and slightly less Trove use comes from Western Australia. We typically answer 400 to 500 reference inquiries every year from Western Australians and they're incredibly varied, ranging from 17th century Dutch mapping of the Western Australian coastline, to research into potential contamination of the Jumblebar Battery Mine Site. But given we answered 27,000 inquiries last year, we reckon that Western Australians could be making us work a bit harder, but please don't tell my colleagues that I said that. We keep an eye on these figures because it is our job to serve the 98% of Australians who live more than three hours drive from the National Library building. And because the National Library belongs to all of you, we sometimes do targeted campaigns to raise awareness of what we have to offer.

For example, over the last 18 months, Trove digital marketing campaigns promoting Western Australian newspapers reach 74,000 Western Australians. A specific regional social media campaign featuring material in our collection relevant to Mandurah was watched by 68,000 Western Australians. We have definitely seen an increase in Western Australians getting National Library cards since those campaigns,

which means more Western Australians can use our services, including digital databases that may not be available through local libraries in the home state.

On the other hand, over the last five years, 12% of Community Heritage Grants have gone to Western Australia, with 35 organisations benefiting from this Commonwealth-funded grant scheme administered by the Library. So in this area, Western Australia is punching above its weight. Community Heritage Grants help dedicated community heritage organisations to understand the significance of their collections, their preservation needs, and to plan appropriate collection management so those collections can be treasured for generations to come.

The Perth Observatory Volunteer Group, for example, has won four grants since 2016, to complete a significance assessment, a preservation needs assessment, and to deliver two collection management projects. The North Cliff Pioneer Museum was established in the 1970s to document the history of this small remote forested regional settlement. Like the observatory group, Community Heritage Grants have enabled a significance assessment, preservation assessment and project, the purchase of cataloguing software, and most recently a training project for volunteers from across the region. These small grants are incredibly powerful when they're put together with passionate custodians of collections. Grant assessment is undertaken by a panel of professionals, together with public servants from several of the national collecting institutions. I'd like to stress that I have final sign off on these recommendations. I take that responsibility very seriously and I have never rejected a recommendation from these expert panels.

The National Library of Australia also offers an array of funded fellowships and scholarships to give scholars the gift of time to engage deeply with our collections. Our fellowships and scholarships are funded by philanthropists, not by the Australian government, and I want to take this opportunity to thank those who help us with that work. Among them, the Stokes family who support three fellows every year, and our council member Dr. Benny Ung, who is supporting a MAP scholarship.

We regularly welcome Western Australian scholars but would love to welcome more as it is so much harder for Western Australian scholars to access collections held on the other side of the nation. Among the most memorable recent Western Australian scholars for me, are Associate Professor Andrea Gaynor, with her work on children's engagement with urban nature, and Ruth Morgan, then a PhD student working on rainfall decline in southwest Western Australia.

We offer interlibrary loans service to all Australian libraries, and I'm happy to say that the service paused during the pandemic, and while major building works prevented access to large parts of our collection has just restarted as a digital first service. So if there's something in our collection that you would like to borrow, your local library may be able to help. We also offer our copies direct service to individuals, charging less than the cost of offering the service in the interests of getting material to those who need it.

Now, as a National Library, we don't do any of these things to build market share. We are not a business. We are not aiming to reduce market share elsewhere. We do not receive funding according to how many people we serve. We do these things, we try to reach that person or community in Fitzroy Crossing, or Albany, or Northern, or Kalgoorlie, or Broome, or Exmouth, or offer that outstanding scholar the opportunity to spend a few months immersed in our collections because it is our duty, our mission, and our passion to ensure that a National Library that is funded and owned by every Australian is useful

to the broadest cross section of the community possible. And most importantly, and this is where I want to turn to my third lens of today, we do not do these things alone. The way the Australian library system operates is almost unique in the world. Despite the fact that we are seven states and two self-governing territories. We have cooperated on library matters deeply and on a national level and for decades.

When I first delivered this lecture, I was in Perth to attend a meeting of National and State Libraries Australasia, an association of the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand, and Australia's state and territory libraries. We are celebrating 50 years of close collaboration this year. The Western Australian State Librarian, my colleague, Catherine Clark, hosted us for that meeting and I was very pleased that she was able to be present for the delivery of this lecture in Perth. When I say close collaboration, I do not mean talk fests. I mean that we develop shared agendas and set out to achieve common goals across our organisations that we invest in shared digital infrastructure, that we aim to make service experiences in our libraries as comparable as possible, that we agree to and stick to staff development programmes across all of our libraries. We co-invest in a small but very professional staff who work with the CEOs of our 10 libraries to develop strategic and operational plans across targeted priorities. Across our libraries, and at any given time, dozens of professional library people are working with their peers across this network on specific projects or activities. We bring together the knowledge and expertise of our libraries to build, manage, and provide access to library collections and services that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. We are not aiming for uniformity here. We do not aim to be the same. What we do focus on is identifying work we can do better together than we can alone. I've been heavily involved in this work for 15 years, and the collaboration continues to be one of the greatest sources of energy and joy in my professional life. To put it simply, we get stuff done.

I'd like to give you just a few examples of this collaboration in practise. Along with other state and territory libraries, the National and Western Australian Libraries are partners in National edeposit, or NED, a system owned by all Australian members of NSLA, and built and maintained by the National Library. This system allows publishers across the nation to deposit their digital publications just once in order to meet their national and state legal deposit obligations. More than 2,700 Western Australian publishers have used this system to build our shared national collection. With more than 7,000 Western Australian books, magazines, government publications, maps, and pieces of sheet music deposited and preserved digitally, like these recent deposits. More than one third of all deposited materials are approved by their publishers for immediate free and online access via Trove, greatly enhancing easy availability for all. Publishers can of course assert their full copyright protections, in which case, deposited materials are available for reading room use only, in most cases, in at least one reading room in each state. This has been an incredible success for our partnership and there is nothing quite like it anywhere in the world. A single system that has to deal with multiple state entities, each with different legal deposit legislation, but gaining all the power and efficiency of a single system.

Another outstanding collaboration has been in newspaper digitization. Those of you who use Trove, and I'm sure many do, are probably barely aware that our Australian context of a single national repository of digitised newspapers freely available to all, and both text searchable and text correctable is very much the international exception. Some western countries have digitised many newspapers, but they're only available to paying customers. In other countries, there might be hundreds of individual newspaper digitization projects, not joined up or only joined up through painful cobbling together of content created to different standards. Now Australia did not escape these cobbling problems by accident. For 25 years before newspaper digitization became possible, Australia's national, state and territory libraries

had cooperated on the Australian Newspapers Plan, which saw each of our libraries taking responsibility for micro filming newspapers to good preservation standards, ensuring we had close to 100% coverage of Australia's newspaper heritage. So when digitization became possible, we were ready.

Alas, back in 2006, we could not persuade government to give us any money to start digitising newspapers, and believe me, we tried. But at the National Library, we decided to digitise one major daily from each capital city as proof of concept. We were assisted in this aim through the generosity of Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation. State libraries came on board as partners, together with some more local organisations and philanthropists over time. The rest, as they say, is history. Almost all Western Australian newspapers published in 1955, the copyright cutoff date have been digitised. That is 387 titles and more than 25 million articles that you can read in your home, office, or on the bus, on your laptop, tablet or phone. Digitization of this content has been 50% funded by the State Library of Western Australia, 45% by the National Library of Australia, and the remaining 5% has been funded by other organisations. All of this content is freely available and fully text searchable via Trove, which itself is a unique collaboration run from the Library, but truly a national endeavour with more than 900 partners.

Some of our collaborations may be less obvious to you, our audiences, but have profound implications. In Australian research libraries, we use Library of Congress subject headings to catalogue our collections. Until just a few years ago, there was just a single subject heading, Australian Language, to cover hundreds of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and their variant names. As the National Library, we worked with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to propose and argue for a change to these cataloguing rules, replacing that single subject heading with the ability to use the AIATSIS language thesaurus, AUSLANG.

Once implemented, in 2019, we ran the first national AUSLANG Code-a-thon, asking librarians across the nation to down tools and improved their catalogue records, replacing Australian language with appropriate specific language codes. Librarians everywhere embrace the call, and now joined by members of the public participate enthusiastically in a Code-a-thon every NAIDOC Week. We built a language search facet in Trove to take advantage of those codes, which means that anybody interested in finding books and library resources in Western Australian indigenous languages can do so. 1,500 resources are tagged so far, with Noongar being the most prominent language. This kind of national collaboration has real and tangible benefits for First Nations communities wanting to keep languages strong or to wake sleeping languages. We are unaware of any similar project anywhere in the world.

Underlying all of these possibilities is Trove's complex infrastructure, which comprises a national union catalogue, bringing together the catalogue records of more than 900 Australian libraries, museums, galleries, and archives updated in near real time and including links to digital content delivered on partner websites. Among those partners is Collections Western Australia. That partnership means that 20 Western Australian organisations, most of them not library, and 11,000 records are discoverable in Trove and by the Collections WA website, increasing the audience for these unique collections.

Trove is also a repository of born digital and digitised collection material, and a passionate community who correct OCR newspaper text, create lists of subjects of interest, and participate in community tagging activities. Just recently, for example, Australians from across the continent participated in an opportunity to tag great First Nations leaders in recognition of the 2023 NAIDOC theme, For Our Elders.

But it's also a place for community stories. In July on Trove for example, we featured a story on a Subiaco Local Studies Collection. Now, this story did not appear last night because I happened to be travelling to Perth that month. It was there because Trove is a truly national endeavour where hundreds of organisations passionate about their collections want to get their value out and known in the public domain.

We were absolutely delighted when the May budget brought us for the very first time in Trove's 14 year history, ongoing funding to maintain that infrastructure so that end user access to all of these riches remains free of charge, and that smaller organisations who want their collections available to a bigger audience can also do so without payment. Australia is a world leader in digital heritage, our born digital collecting, our web archiving, our digitization programmes, and of course Trove are envied around the world.

I believe firmly that much of that international reputation is due to the way that we cooperate on a national level and the almost unique strengths of the Australian library system. When I meet people from overseas who ask why we are world leaders, I have a simple answer. Almost everything about the way that our Australian library system operates comes down to the simple equation of a big continent and a small population, and something inherently pragmatic, can do, and community minded in the Australian psyche. And when we put together pragmatic national solutions with a curiosity that is also embedded in the Australian psyche, and those things are centred around access to cultural collections, that is when magic happens.

I'd like to share a story that really exemplifies this for me. In the early part of the 20th century, sick and even not sick Aboriginal people were routinely removed from families and country and taken to the so-called lock hospitals. Melissa Sweet, a public health journalist became interested in the history of lock hospitals when approached by members of the Carnarvon and Palm Island communities to investigate the history of this medical incarceration in Western Australia and Queensland. Working with local communities, Ms. Sweet used Trove to investigate the harsh conditions in the hospitals' high death rates and the stories of the people who worked in the hospitals. More than 70 people from the Malgana Yarrowo communities were involved in this activity. People who are still experiencing the impact of this period in history. Ms. Sweet worked with these community groups to collect their own stories and to trawl through newspaper articles from newspapers published in Western Australia and elsewhere digitised and made searchable via Trove.

We often hear of this kind of community activity, where a community knows a story needs to be told and needs to get its hands on documentation to explore or prove what happened. Ms. Sweet told us that without Trove, this research project would not have been anywhere near as extensive, and most importantly would've been less able to meet the community's needs. When the research began, there was no public memorial and little information available about the histories of the people who suffered in these environments. Ms. Sweet compiled folders of the articles sourced in Trove to give to community members and research participants in Western Australia and Queensland. Their work led to further community activism, especially in Shark Bay and Carnarvon, and ultimately to the building of a permanent memorial at Carnarvon, which opened in January, 2019.

These kinds of community stories are what drive us to think about what are the most important parts of our collection, and to find ways to digitise them so that you, Western Australians, or anybody more than three hours drive from this library, thousands of kilometres away potentially can use them. Our

collection is huge and digitization is expensive. After 20 years of effort, we have digitised less than 10% of our collection. We are not aiming for 100%. A significant portion of our collection is not Australian, and there is much that I simply do not think would repay that investment. But we have been busy identifying collections and subject areas that we think would make a huge contribution to Australia, were we to get them available online.

In recent years, we have digitised some of our most heavily used archives, including the papers of Sir Robert Menzies and General Sir John Monash. The Library's philanthropy programme, which we call Treasured Voices, focuses on seeking funding to digitise really important collections. We've received significant assistance to digitise newspapers, every Australian almanack ever published, performing arts collections, early 20th century serials, 19th century manuscripts, and 18th and 19th century artworks among many others. With the help of many women and some men around the country, we are focusing on Australian women leaders and have digitised the archives of Dorothy Tangney, Bessie Rischbieth, and Enid Lyons, the records of the Australian Women of Voters Federation and many more. We know that Australians have a strong interest in local history, and Western Australians were among the more than 1,000 donors who gave to our recent tax time appeal to digitise the magnificent McLaren Collection of local history pamphlets and books. This was our most successful appeal ever by a pretty big margin. Our next big endeavour is around the history, development, and uniqueness of Australian democracy, and we expect to be working on this project for the next five to six years.

With funding for the Trove infrastructure now secure, we can focus on working with partners and donors to enrich Trove with new and broader content. Then we wait to see what happens when a curious Australian, just the right collections, and the nano sections of the internet come together. I can tell you, we at the National Library are surprised every single day. Again, we don't have to do this work alone. Some kinds of collections, such as newspapers and journals, microfilm, definitely work best when they're digitised centrally through the National Library, even if funding comes from multiple sources. In many other cases, collections are digitised by local organisations such as the State Library of Western Australia. And through the magic of Trove, those collections can be discovered, alongside related collections held around the country.

We've recently begun digitising on behalf of organisations who do not have the infrastructure to do so, including some very important collections from the Australian Academy of Science. Our grand ambition is to make the most important, the most useful parts of our collection more easily available to all, but this won't be built in a day or a year. It will take decades. And I acknowledge that while 90% of our physical collection is not yet digitised, those 3,000 kilometres as the crow flies, or 4,000 kilometres by road between Canberra and Perth are a very real barrier. It's a much bigger barrier than for somebody who can drive from Sydney or Melbourne. It's a bigger barrier for users of our collections, and it's a bigger barrier for our library and cultural selection as sector colleagues too. We are, however, very determined to do all we can to reduce those barriers, and it must be said that there are a fraction of what they were 20 years ago or even 10 years ago, so I think there is real cause for optimism here. We are gradually converting kilometres to nanoseconds, and I know that path will continue.

You can break down barriers for yourselves by signing up for our National Library newsletter or the Trove Treasures newsletter, or a National Library card. I want to come back to why we, and by we, I mean the broad library community that work so effectively together in this country, do this work. While some of us do offer beautifully curated small scale exhibitions, libraries are not museums or galleries.

The bread and butter business of these parts of the cultural sector is to use collections to pre-curate stories for visitors to consume. But we are libraries. Our business is the freedom for all to read business. It is the open to all business, and it really is the choose your own adventure business. We build great collections and we offer great services, and we work together so that you can learn from and enjoy our collections and create new knowledge. That knowledge might be of your own interest only. It might be knowledge you share with your family or your local community. It might be knowledge that is created and shared with others, other like-minded individuals. It might be academic knowledge or government knowledge or business knowledge. The key point here is that you are in the driving seat.

I hope that my talk has given you a sense of, that we at the National Library are determined to collect the broadest possible cross section of Australian stories. The good, the bad, the mad, the ugly, to reach the entire Australian population, and to work with others to provide opportunities to as many curious Western Australians as we can, whether they want to know more about the history of their own house, or town, or family, or sporting group, or are pursuing a much larger and more formal research agenda.

I'd like to close by thanking History West and especially President Mr. Richard Often, and Vice Chairperson, Mrs. Sally-Anne Haslow for inviting me to deliver the lecture this year in the state where I was born, and where many people that I love deeply call home. I'd also like to thank all of my Library colleagues, many of whom I've worked with for more than two decades, for the help and enthusiasm in exploring the Western Australian chapter of the National Library story. And of course to any Western Australians watching or listening. We are here for you and I hope you find joy and fulfilment in using our collections and services. Thank you.