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Part of the Allport exhibition at the State Library of Tasmania

Preserving Tasmania's heritage

The heritage collections of the State Library of Tasmania

Like all of Australia's state libraries, the State Library of Tasmania places a special emphasis on collecting and preserving our state's documentary heritage. Our success lies not just in the library's own efforts, but also in the generosity and foresight of the Tasmanian community.

The largest and most rapidly-growing of the library's heritage collections is the Tasmaniana Library, which aims to collect and preserve published material — everything published in Tasmania and anything published elsewhere which has Tasmanian content or is by a Tasmanian author. As well as the usual paper-based materials — books and pamphlets, maps, ephemera, postcards and so on — the Tasmaniana Library also has extensive collections of published audio and video recordings. The State Library has also begun, under the project title 'Our digital island', to collect Tasmanian web sites. Unlike the other state libraries, the Tasmaniana Library does not actively collect manuscripts or photographs — these are largely the responsibility of the Archives Office of Tasmania.

The State Library owes a great debt to two benefactors. The first is Henry Allport (1890–1965), whose family settled in Van Diemen's Land in 1832. Many members of the family achieved distinction in their professions and in the fine arts, photography and sciences. Henry Allport, who actively built on his family's collections, bequeathed the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts to the people of Tasmania. The Allport collections include about three thousand works of art (oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, sketches and prints); a library

of fine and rare books; photographs and manuscripts; and a substantial museum of decorative arts (porcelain, silver, glass and furniture).

Sir William Crowther (1887–1981) presented the WL Crowther Library (named in honour of his grandfather) to the State Library in the late-1960s. Sir William was a medical practitioner (as were his father, grandfather and great-grandfather) and he served in the armed forces during World War I. Sir William was a keen amateur historian and collector. His library of books and pamphlets, photographs, works of art, manuscripts, objects and furniture reflected his wide-ranging interests — Tasmanian and Australian history, whaling and sea-faring, medical history, bibliography and book-collecting and many other subjects.

The heritage collections are housed in the State Library's building on the corner of Murray and Bathurst Streets in Hobart. The Allport collection is on the ground floor. The current exhibition is 'Ferdinand Bauer: natural history drawings 1801–1803', and there is an extensive permanent display of decorative arts. The Tasmaniana and Crowther collections are on the second floor. The displays there include permanent exhibitions of whaling, medical and fine art material from the Crowther collections and a special feature on life in Tasmania in 1939.

The Heritage Collections will be open on Saturday, 28 August, from 9:30am to 2:30pm. Guided tours of the Allport collections, covering both the current exhibition and the museum as a whole, will be conducted.