

From humble beginnings: The Fryer Library at The University of Queensland

Origins

The Fryer Library is the repository for Australiana and rare and antiquarian material at The University of Queensland Library. When established in 1927, the collection consisted of books on Australian literature contained in one cedar book case housed in the then English Department of The University of Queensland at its site in Old Government House, George Street, Brisbane. The collection had its genesis in a gift of £10 donated by the Students Dramatic Society to commemorate the memory of fellow student and former Vice-President of the Society, John Denis (Jack) Fryer who died in February 1923 from wounds received in battle on the European front during World War I.

Frederick Walter Robinson, known affectionately by students as "Doc Robbie", joined the staff of the University in the same year as Fryer's death. The University asked him to begin the study of Australian literature as part of the first year course in English. He became the custodian of the collection known as The Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature which had expanded to fill a reading room approached through Dr Robinson's study and later, after the University's move to St Lucia in 1949, what Robinson described as "a handsome room, 30 foot long, under the cloisters of the main St. Lucia building". Fryer was a reference and reading library only and continues to be so today.

Despite his careful stewardship, his personal scouring of book shops and the ongoing donations of books and funds, Robinson acknowledged in 1952: "It will be seen that as a library of Australian literature the Fryer is still small and incomplete". As a result of the concerted efforts of University academic and library staff in subsequent decades, and one remarkable acquisition in 1967, Robinson's vision of a collection of national and international standing was eventually achieved.

Growing the collection

In 1954 the expanding collection came under the management of The University of Queensland Librarian and was moved to the Duhig Building.

In October 1967 the Library acquired the remarkable collection of Father Edward Leo Hayes. The relationship between the University and Hayes had its origins in Hayes' personal friendship with Cecil Hadgraft, an academic in the

English Department and another great champion of Fryer. In a lifetime of collecting, Hayes had accumulated at his residence at Oakey on the Darling Downs, a vast collection of Australiana – books, journals, manuscript material, maps, stamps, postcards and realia. In something akin to a military operation that took two full days to complete, a convoy of trucks transported the 25 tons of material to the University. The transfer was the final wish of an ailing Hayes. As the collection was uncrated, sorted and classified, treasures were discovered including a first edition copy of Mathew Flinders' Voyage to Terra Australis and all 12 volumes of Gregory Mathews' extremely rare and valuable *Birds of Australia*.

The Hayes collection has provided the raw material for much quality research on Australian studies and has the potential to do so for many years to come. To a significant degree its acquisition put The University of Queensland in general, and Fryer Library in particular, on the map as a top ranking research institution in Australian studies. It remains the jewel in Fryer's crown. Since its acquisition Fryer has continued to attract literary and historical treasures. The platform laid in 1967 has been built on. The Hanger Collection of Australian Playscripts was established in the 1970's as a permanent memorial to Eunice Hanger, a lecturer in drama at The University of Queensland. It continues to grow with regular new acquisitions, most recently a large collection of playscripts from the Melbourne Theatre Company. The collecting of political and historical works expanded with donations such as the Paul Tripcony collection of historical and political books and pamphlets and electioneering material. The Library also acquired books from



An illustration of the Cape York Palm Cockatoo from Gregory Mathews' *"Birds of Australia"* (1910) (12 vols.)



J.D. (Jack) Fryer
Fryer Library,
University of
Queensland
Library



An montage of books from the Hayes collection including *"Birds of Australia"* and *"Cook's Voyages."*

the old Trades Hall Library and the Workers' Educational Association.

The acquisition of significant Australian literary manuscripts in the Hayes Collection provided the basis for further collecting of personal papers and manuscripts of Australian writers. Acquisitions during the 1970s included papers of Ernestine Hill, George Essex Evans, John Blight, Martin Boyd and the a Beckett family, Michael Dransfield, Rodney Hall, Gwen Harwood, P.R. Stephensen and Tom Shapcott. In 1979 the papers of Xavier Herbert were transferred to the Fryer Library. In the following decades significant collections of material on such prominent authors as Peter Carey, David Malouf, Thea Astley, Frank Moorhouse, Olga Masters, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and poet, Bruce Dawe were also acquired.

Fryer today

Fryer continues to build on its literary strengths while growing its collections into new areas: the history of architecture; indigenous studies, popular fiction, labour history and increasingly the records of refugee activists from the late 1990's and the first years of the new century. It is supported by the Friends of Fryer group. It stages regular literary events and promotes access to its collections through the publication of *Fryer Folios* magazine. The nature of Fryer work has changed significantly in 80 years. It now includes digitisation initiatives and online exhibitions. The Library retains the original cedar book case as a reminder to Fryer staff of the achievements of earlier generations of staff and the Library's humble origins.

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SLSA collections recognised by UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Program

Earlier this year, three major South Australian history and heritage collections were recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Memory of the World. UNESCO established the Memory of the World program in 1992 to recognise key historical collections and their significance to society, as detailed in the following statement:

Documentary heritage reflects the diversity of languages, peoples and cultures. It is the mirror of the world and its memory. But this memory is fragile. Every day, irreplaceable parts of this memory disappear for ever.

UNESCO has launched the Memory of the World Program to guard against collective amnesia, calling upon the preservation of the valuable archive holdings and library collections all over the world, ensuring their wide dissemination.

The Australian Memory of the World program is one of over 60 such projects and aims to: develop the Australian Memory of the World Register, maintain a Register of lost and missing Australian documentary heritage and propose nominations to the Memory of the World International Register.

In 2004, the State Library of South Australia successfully nominated the South Australian Company Deed of Settlement and Royal Charter of Incorporation of the South Australian Company (1836) for addition to the Australian Memory of the World Register. The Deed of settlement is a foremost document in South Australia's history, as the South Australian Company played a pivotal role in the founding, early survival and development of the colony. The South Australian Company was formed in October 1835 to encourage the preliminary purchase of land. In January 1836 the Company equipped and dispatched an expedition of four ships to the province of South Australia, ahead of the arrival of Colonel William Light and Governor John Hindmarsh. A small settlement was established at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island in July 1836, but the Company's operations were soon transferred to the mainland. The South Australian Company continued to play

an influential role in the commercial affairs of South Australia for more than a century.

In June 2007, the State Library of SA nominated a further three significant collections for inclusion on this Register. The joint nomination with the Adelaide City Council, of the records of Colonel William Light, is an example of heritage documentation recognised by UNESCO, for the impact that Light had as a pioneer in the practice of modern town planning.

Light's plan for Adelaide influenced the international development of the idea of the 'garden city'. The collection ranges from 1809 to Light's death in 1839.

In contrast, the archives of Polish migrant Joseph Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski (1922-1994) endorse cultural and artistic leadership in the exploration and innovation of creative endeavours. He was a prolific artist of enormous diversity who made a significant impact on the Australian art scene and influenced developments overseas in relation to chromasonics and kinetic art. His work crossed many disciplines including painting, photography, film-making, theatre design, stained glass, sculpture, murals, op-collages, computer graphics, and laser art. Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski was best known for his ground-breaking work in chromasonics, laser kinetics and 'sound and image' productions. This nomination was jointly made with the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne, where additional records are held.

Charles Percy Mountford (1890-1976) was a self-taught ethnographer who worked with indigenous communities throughout Australia, producing photographs, recordings, and a rich collage of meticulously detailed stories of Aboriginal people. During the 1940s Harold Sheard (1890-1975) was responsible, with the co-operation of Mountford, for assembling the private archive of the expedition records. Sheard negotiated for its donation to the State Library in 1957, with further items added in 1975. The Mountford-Sheard collection, as it is now known, has been respectfully preserved by the State Library of SA as an important contribution to the Australian memory.

Successful nominations were announced on 22 February 2008 at the Third International Conference of the UNESCO Memory of the World program, held at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. All 2007 State Library of SA nominations were added to the Australian Memory of the World Register. Work is in progress to feature collection items on the State Library's SA Memory website <http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au> This multimedia website illustrates and interprets themes highlighting South Australia's people, places, issues and events from the colony's beginnings to now. The wide range of archival and published items featured on SA Memory build a rich picture of the state's culture and heritage. UNESCO Memory of the World ongoing program registers and promotes significant historical collections integral to Australia's story <http://www.amw.org.au/>

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**South Australian
Company Deed of
settlement**