

FRIENDS OF
LIBRARIES
AUSTRALIA

NEWS UPDATE

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FOLA *Anniversary* 30 CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

The national voice for 15 million Public Library Members

IN THIS ISSUE:

FOLA Anniversary Function	2	Greetings from Hugh Mackay	8
Fola Celebrates	3	Inspirational Friends	10
Reflections on FOLA's 30th Anniversary	4	Membership, Resources, About Us	12
Celebrating Our 30th Anniversary	6		

Executive Director

FOLA'S ANNIVERSARY FUNCTION

Among the guests attending FOLA's anniversary function at the State Library of New South Wales on 24th October was Dr Paola Totaro, international journalist and author.

Dr Totaro later wrote in *The Australian* newspaper – 'Libraries made us authors of our fate' and referred to FOLA patrons, Michael Kirby and Thomas Keneally and the shared lifetime passion for public libraries.

Kirby said his work in human rights showed him how vital access to information was to individual freedom and how it was the lifeblood of democracy and civil society – "Libraries are citadels of idea" Kirby said.

Another FOLA friend and noted Australian writer was psychologist Hugh Mackay, who wrote – 'In today's society, libraries have become vibrant, lively, engaging community hubs. They have reformed and reimagined themselves. Their purpose has been redefined in the light of radical changes in our society'.

As FOLA and Friends prepare for the coming decade and the next 30 years, may we learn some lessons from the past but be prepared for an ever-more rapid change in the path ahead. Maintaining some of the characteristics that drive the development of Friends success, and be ever mindful of not losing sight of the fundamental

reasons why libraries are so important to the structure of our democratic society. This has been the essence of Friends of Libraries in the USA over the past 100 years. And while our two countries are dissimilar in many ways that form the operation of our government and library networks, especially in relation to funding, the basic truth of being the lifeblood of democracy and civil society are much the same.



FOLA is today, the only world-wide national Friends of Library body operating. Surely an achievement in just 30 years. Many bodies in other countries ie. UK, USA and Canada have altered in purpose and structure. Our future lies in understanding the connection to our communities and working together with library authorities to achieve better outcomes for all library users. This has not changed. The world around us has, and it will be contingent upon leaders of Friends groups around our nation to confront this change with creativity and continued dedication of purpose.

May we all continue to grow and develop together.

Daniel Ferguson

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FOLA Celebrates

AT THE MITCHELL LIBRARY, STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES



Hon Michael Kirby, Daniel Ferguson, Jack Goodman



Cameron Morley (SLNSW), Dr Caroline Butler-Bowden (State Librarian), Hon Michael Kirby

“Many Friends groups became extremely successful during the first ten years of FOLA”



Daniel Ferguson



Reflections on

FOLA'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

FOLA PRESIDENT

JACK GOODMAN

More than 80 guests gathered in the Friends Room of the Mitchell Library on Macquarie Street in Sydney on the 24th of October to celebrate FOLA's 30th anniversary. It was a fitting event in every way. The venue - the Friends Room - is the original home of the State Library of New South Wales. Guests included longtime FOLA board members, public library supporters, colleagues from the LBW Trust, senior leadership from the State Library and multiple guests of honour.

Those special guests included FOLA's founding patron, the Hon Michael Kirby, retired High Court judge and its second patron, the author Tom Keneally. Both men are national treasures, the former for his decades-long advocacy for human rights and dignity, and his willingness to dissent from majority opinions, the latter for his incredible creative output, including Australia's first Booker Prize winner, Schindler's Ark.

While some attendees were long-time friends - of FOLA, their local libraries, and the State Library - the event attracted a large share of new faces, including many who were learning about FOLA for the first time. Guests were greeted by FOLA founder and executive director Daniel Ferguson and social media manager Gaby Meares, as well as director and Friends of Balmain Library co-founder Mariella Totaro-Genovois and FOLA treasurer Kristina Barnett. In addition to receiving a glass of champagne or other beverage, attendees were presented with personal copies of a beautifully-printed 30th Anniversary book chronicling the impressive work FOLA has undertaken since 1994.

All of this meant that the atmosphere in the Friends Room was one of anticipation, affection, a shared passion for ideas and the frisson of



meeting other like-minded folk. Attendees were welcomed to the venue by NSW State Librarian Dr Caroline Butler-Bowdon, who spoke of the investment the State Library is making to ensure its collections are accessible to all. She also highlighted the significance of the Friends Room

and the central role of Friends in support of the mission and purpose of libraries.

Tom Keneally spoke next, and his talk highlighted the power of public libraries to expand our inner worlds and the human capacity to imagine bigger futures for ourselves. "As a kid I was relieved from the tedium of asthma in libraries and I travelled with Marco Polo, I flew with Biggles... libraries are places where you can find any text," Keneally said. "They're places where, as a school kid, you didn't have to be a brilliant opening Test batsman but where you could be a writer in your own time, in your own place."

Michael Kirby, who became FOLA's founding patron in 1994 and has remained a stalwart supporter throughout, spoke of his personal connection with libraries. Growing up in Sydney's inner west, Kirby recited the names of the librarians at each of the public schools he attended - Summer Hill, North Strathfield and Fort Street High. Later, as a law student he discovered the Reading Room at the Mitchell Library, and he can still be seen there many days each week, or enjoying lunch (and his 10 percent discount) in Cafe Trim (named for Mathew Flinders' cat) thanks to his status as a friend of the State Library. As a lifelong advocate for human rights, Kirby noted that "libraries are citadels of ideas", and "these are the reasons why I love public libraries and why we should support and fund them generously. The mind they expand could be your own."

Naomi Radford, library manager of Narrabri Shire

"Guests were greeted by FOLA founder and executive director Daniel Ferguson."

"Kirby noted that 'libraries are citadels of ideas.'"

“the audience, enthusiasm, and commitment of those at the 50th anniversary suggest that FOLA’s best years may yet be ahead of it”

“She spoke movingly of the challenges of travelling in the council library van to each remote community.”

Libraries, more than 500 kilometres northwest of Sydney, spoke about how the grants her library has received from the LBW Trust and FOLA have been used to expand the minds of children across the 12,000 square kilometres of that remote shire. In 2023 and 2024 Narrabri received grants to purchase first microscopes and then science education kits from Children’s Discovery, in order to run education programs across the shire. She spoke movingly of the challenges of travelling in the council library van to each remote community, driving for hours over many unsealed roads, to ensure young people have access to STEM learning opportunities.

“In his remarks Daniel spoke forcefully about the importance of Friends as grass-roots organisations.”

Others who couldn’t attend but who sent their apologies and best wishes included social researcher Hugh Mackay and FOLA’s first president, 102-year old retired judge Margaret “Peg” Lusink. Both were acknowledged by FOLA’s current president, Jack Goodman, who spoke briefly before Daniel Ferguson wrapped up formalities. In his remarks Daniel spoke forcefully about the importance of Friends as grass-roots organisations, and their critical role helping libraries deliver for the public.

While most volunteer-based organisations struggle to exist across generations, the audience, enthusiasm, and commitment of those at the 30th anniversary suggest that FOLA’s best years may yet be ahead of it. If all who care about Friends follow up their sentiments with equivalent actions, then that will surely be the case.



Celebrating our **THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY**



Cameron Morley (Public Libraries Branch, SLNSW), Dr Caroline Butler-Bowden (State Librarian, SLNSW), Hon Michael Kirby (FOLA Patron)



Jack Goodman (FOLA President), Thomas Keneally (FOLA Patron), Gaby Meares (FOLA Board)



*Naomi Radford
(Library Manager, Narrabri Shire)*





Friends Room, Mitchell Library, Tom Keneally speaking.



Tom Keneally with his grandson

Greetings from **HUGH MACKAY AO**

Australian psychologist, social researcher and bestselling author

There was a time – I remember it well – when libraries were rather forbidding places. Silence was required (prominent signs said so). Librarians seemed rather stern and aloof. The sole purpose of entering such places was to sit quietly and read, or to borrow books ... and be fined if you failed to return them by the due date.

That was a different world. A different society. A different concept of a library.

In today's society, libraries have become vibrant, lively, engaging community hubs. They have reformed and reimagined themselves. Their purpose has been redefined in the light of radical changes in our society.

Who would have predicted 30 years ago, when FOLA was established, that social isolation would have become the #1 public health issue in Australia in 2024, or that we would be experiencing loneliness, anxiety and depression in epidemic proportions. Who would have predicted that 25 percent of all Australian households would contain just one person, or that between 35 and 40 percent of marriages would end in divorce, that the birthrate would plummet to a record low or that we would so enthusiastically embrace the information technology revolution that many of us would come to *prefer* communicating via screen-based devices to the face-to-face interactions that are so vital to the flourishing of the human spirit.

A more socially fragmented society is a wounded society. Social isolation is a dangerous state for 'herd animals' like us. We need communities of all kinds – families, friendship circles, neighbours, work colleagues, choirs, ukelele bands, book clubs, sporting clubs – to nurture and sustain us, and to give us that all-important sense of belonging that is so fundamental to the



mental and emotional health of members of a social species like ours.

Gradually, in response to these and other changes in our society – not least the decline of religion and the dwindling of local faith communities – it became clear that, properly conceived, libraries could play a crucial role in helping to heal the wounds of such a society.

How?

By opening their doors to members of the local community in ways that go far beyond the

provision of access to books! To start with their most needy customers: many lonely people (including the homeless) have found in the libraries of 2024 a place of physical and emotional security – a warm, comfortable, safe space to spend time and perhaps even to connect with similarly isolated people – especially since talking is permitted!

As one man in a difficult personal situation said to me recently: 'When I go into the library they smile and greet me, even though they know I'm only there to have a wash and use the loo and read the paper.'

Now, I'm not suggesting that libraries have been transformed only as refuges for the lonely – though that is a highly valuable contribution the modern library makes to the mental health of the community.

But today's libraries – and librarians – are so much more. Assistance with homework for young people struggling to master English – and, indeed, English conversation classes for recently-arrived adults (especially refugees), as well. Book clubs. Current affairs discussion groups. Author talks. Film nights. Even 'festivals of learning' designed to encourage engagement with ideas – especially those we find in books.

"Who would have predicted 30 years ago, when FOLA was established, that social isolation would have become the #1 public health issue in Australia in 2024"

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“Many students who could gain log-in access from home prefer to come into the library where they can combine work with social connections in the safe environment of the library ‘hub’”

All this ... while still providing, as they always have, book-reading and borrowing facilities, plus access – often free – to the latest technology. Many students who could gain log-in access from home prefer to come into the library where they can combine work with social connections in the safe environment of the library ‘hub’.

Oh, and if you do happen to need some silence, most modern libraries have dedicated quiet spaces, as well.

Today’s library staff will include event organisers, publicists and educators as well as those trained in the more traditional library disciplines. And, in my experience and the experience of the many people who have spoken to me about this, they will be unfailingly friendly, welcoming, tolerant of ‘otherness’, and kind.

Where else in our community do you find all this? Answer: nowhere. Nowhere else will you so

easily feel that ‘this is a place where they take me seriously; this is a place where I belong.’

Let us be grateful for the modern library and its role in helping to keep us sane, safe and secure – and well-informed. Let us celebrate the staff who facilitate all this. And let us also acknowledge the commitment that some enlightened local councils have made to the upgrading of library facilities. Though we still lag well behind world’s best practice when it comes to the funding of community libraries, smart councils know, as we – the friends of libraries – also know, that our society is immeasurably enriched by the libraries that open their doors to us every day.

Finally, let us acknowledge the vision, the wisdom and the energy of Daniel Ferguson. It was Daniel who brought FOLA into being and he is still its guiding light as Executive Director.

ABOUT HUGH MACKAY

“bestsellers have included his communication classic, Why Don’t People Listen?”

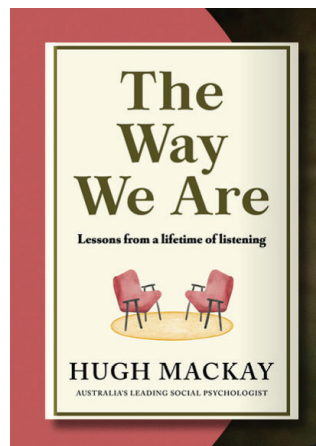
“the state of the nation starts in your street”

“greater social cohesion, in turn, helps us develop the emotional resilience we will need for dealing with the even more profound changes – ecological, economic, cultural and technological – that lie ahead.”

Often described as ‘the man who explains us to ourselves’, Hugh Mackay has had a 60-year career studying and interpreting Australian social trends. As a social psychologist, his emphasis has always been on the personal: how we as individuals, families and communities are both contributing and reacting to these trends.

Shrinking households, less stable relationships, increasing busyness, greater mobility, changing patterns of work and leisure, challenges to old ways of thinking about gender, religion and politics, new forms of addiction (especially to our smartphones), declining trust in many of our institutions ... these and many other social changes have been the focus of his research, writing and public speaking.

One of his key themes is that ‘the state of the nation starts in your street’; that personal and local responses to social change are the best way of resisting the many threats to our



social cohesion. And greater social cohesion, in turn, helps us develop the emotional resilience we will need for dealing with the even more profound changes – ecological, economic, cultural and technological – that lie ahead.

Hugh’s latest book is *The Way We Are: Lessons from a lifetime of listening*, published in May 2024 by Allen & Unwin.

His first book of social analysis, *Reinventing Australia*, was published in 1993; a second edition followed in 1994, and the book ran to 14 printings over 20 years. Other bestsellers have included his communication classic, *Why Don’t People Listen?* (1994), *Generations* (1996), *Right & Wrong* (2004, republished in a new edition in 2019), and *What Makes Us Tick* (2012, also republished in a new edition in 2019).

He is also the author of eight novels, including his latest, *The Question of Love* (2020) and *Infidelity* (2013).

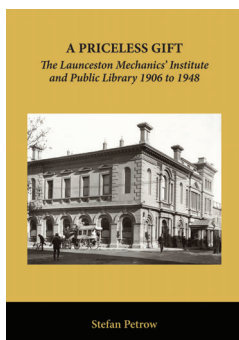
Inspirational Friends



Headlines from the FOLA NewsUpdate Archives

LAUNCESTON (TAS)

Friends of the Library
Launceston Publishing Program



"The book was launched by Dr Eric Ratcliff, noted local historian, and is on sale through Friends of the Library Launceston and local booksellers."

BYRON BAY (NSW)

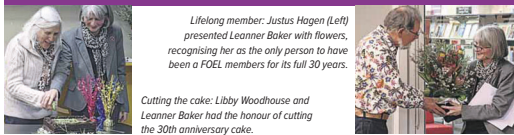
The 10th Anniversary celebration
of Byron Bay Library



EUROA (VIC)

MANSFIELD (VIC)

Another Bookshop opens
FRIENDS OF
MANSFIELD LIBRARY (VIC)



Lifelong member: Justus Hogen (Left) presented Leanne Baker with flowers, recognising her as the only person to have been a FOEL member for its full 30 years.

Cutting the cake: Libby Woodhouse and Leanne Baker had the honour of cutting the 30th anniversary cake.

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY (NSW)

Celebrating 60th Anniversary
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY,
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY



"May it continue for ever as the source of light and learning to the inhabitants of Australia. This generation will soon pass away but the torch of learning will be handed down by the influence of this great library to generation after generation of Australian scholars."

WAGGA WAGGA (NSW)

Gretchen Sleeman

(PRESENTATION SPEECH TO GRETCHEN
BY PRESIDENT DR ANNEMAREE LLOYD)

Life Membership 9 December 2021

We are here today to celebrate Gretchen Sleeman's significant contribution and support for the Wagga Wagga City Library.

Gretchen has been a passionate supporter of Wagga Wagga City Library since the Friends of the Library group commenced. She was the President for many years and is currently Vice President. Over the years she has combined her professional knowledge as a librarian at CSU and her commitment to her local community. She led the group's strong advocacy for more State government funding in the form of letters to politicians and supported initiatives like the very successful Renew Our Libraries campaign, that resulted in a funding increase over 4 successive years for public libraries in NSW.

History is made by those who participate. Gretchen has worked at many many Book Sales and helped pack up hundreds of boxes of leftovers at the end of the day. The Friends and Library Staff, appreciate Gretchen's leadership and commitment to hard work. Over the years the funds raised have supported library programs like One Book One Wagga, the Language Cafe, school holiday programs, author talks and collection purchases.

The staff have always appreciated the acknowledgment and recognition by the Friends over the years, for the programs and services the library provides every day. These celebrations included annual get togethers for dinner or morning tea. Wagga Library has one of the most enduring Friends groups in NSW public libraries.

It is fitting that we celebrate that achievement in this thirtieth year and mark the Life Membership awarded to Gretchen.



Dr Annemaree Lloyd on left and Gretchen Sleeman



Gretchen Sleeman on her seat with plaque acknowledging her 30 years of service

"History is made by those who participate. Gretchen has worked at many many Book Sales and helped pack up hundreds of boxes of leftovers at the end of the day."

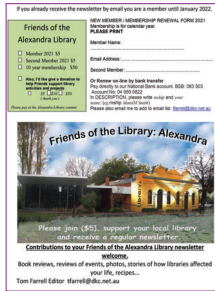


Inspirational Friends

ALEXANDRA (VIC)

*Friends of the Library
Alexandra and District Inc*

OUTSTANDING FRIENDS LEADERSHIP



STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*Remembering Friends
Dr Alan Brissenden AM*



Alan Brissenden was born 13 October 1932 at Griffith NSW and died on 9 September 2020 Adelaide.

The son of a school teacher, Alan attended Sydney University where he gained a BA Hon and a Diploma of Education. He moved to the UK to undertake postgraduate study at the University of London. He was joined there by Libby King and they were married in Chelsea in 1960. In 1963 they returned to Australia where Alan was appointed lecturer in the English department at the University of Adelaide.

Alan was interested in the various collections of rare books available in South Australia, and so became a supporter of the Friends of the State Library of South Australia, and later became the President of the Friends from 1994-2000. During this time he introduced the monthly meetings of *Wednesdays at One*, where people spoke about the part books played in their life. He was instrumental in acquiring rare books and items for the State Library collection. As Past President he continued on the Friends Committee and was influential in the selection of rare items for purchase. As a chairman he was always firm and fair and allowed Committee members to have their say.

"He and I were born in the same year and I can still hear his voice saying, "1932 was a vintage year."

Gerrit Stafford (past Vice-President, Friends of the State Library of South Australia)

From 1968 to 1976 he was Chairman and Vice President of the SA division of the Arts Council of Australia. From 1970 to 1992 he served on the University's Committee for the Performing Arts, and 1981 to 1994 on the board of the Governors of the Adelaide Festival of Arts. He also reviewed dance for 'The Advertiser' and 'The Australian' for nearly thirty years. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Arts in 1996.



TOOWOOMBA (QLD)



**THANKYOU FRIENDS
A NEW LIBRARY FOR TOOWOOMBA**

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA (ACT)

*Friends of the National
Library of Australia*

Friends Travelling Fellowship GREAT IDEA FOR FRIENDS GROUPS

A challenge for the Friends in 2020 was to fund the FNLA Creative Fellowship, FNLA Travelling Fellowship, and the gift to the NLA for the 50th anniversary of the building. This was achieved with the funds of \$29,255 being met from operating funds.

The 2019 Friends Travelling Fellowship was awarded to Rachael Eddowes. Rachael commenced working in the IT section of the Library in 2015, working to help connect the collection to those who use it. Rachael's Fellowship involved travelling to the United Kingdom to survey digital engagement and discovery and attend the library user experience conference UXLibs. She toured libraries in Edinburgh, Aberystwyth, Oxford

and London, as well as the conference at the University of London Royal Holloway. Rachael gave a presentation at the Friends 2020 AGM. Among her activities, she presented a conference poster from the Reading Room to the Living Room, explored strategies for digital engagement at the Welcome Collection, and digital discovery at the Science Museum. She has since contributed her findings to Blueprint and other review processes at the Library and applied her knowledge in the redesign of Trove.

The funding of a Fellowship to undertake research, study or travel for a library staff member is something ALL Friends groups could consider. This is a project that many Friends of Library groups have undertaken in the USA.

ALTONA (VIC)

*Margaret Broeks (1931-2020)
delivering friendship*



Margaret Broeks being presented with Life Membership by FOLA President, Dr Alan Bundy AM at the University of Melbourne, 9 December 2009.

"She became treasurer of FOLA at our establishment in 1994 and continued in that role until 2008. During these 14 years she undertook the voluntary role with complete professionalism and dedication"

STIRLING (SA)

Christl Markovic

A remarkable woman and an inspiration to all Friends



Membership Application

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Kristina Barnett, 42 Marian Place, Prospect SA 5082

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