**FRYER Folios**

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**PLANNING FOR THE UQ ST LUCIA CAMPUS**

Peter Brown discusses the history of the early planning and construction of the UQ St Lucia campus.

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**A VERY SMALL ACORN**

Mark Cryle uncovers new information about the origins of Fryer Library and the man for whom it was named.

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**GEORGE WASHINGTON POWER**

John O’Keeffe examines the life of George Washington Power and his role in the establishment of the University.

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**CELEBRATING QUEENSLAND WRITERS**

Discover how UQ celebrated its Centenary with a showcase of writers—all of whom have a connection with the University—in this article by Tanya Ziebell.

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**WHAT’S NEW IN FRYER**

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**FRIENDS OF FRYER**

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**OBITUARIES: ROSS LAURIE AND BILL THORPE**

We sadly farewell two significant and influential historians of Queensland.

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Cover: Original architectural drawing for the St. Lucia campus drawn in 1936: the building layout was accepted although its orientation was rotated approximately forty-five degrees to face towards a proposed bridge to West End. Hennessy, Hennessy & Co., “University of Queensland St Lucia – Preliminary layout”, c. 1936. Collection of The University of Queensland, commissioned 1936. Original drawing held by the University of Queensland Art Museum, 1936.05.

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The University of Queensland began its life at Old Government House, George Street in 1911, with just 83 students in the Faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering. However, talks continued for years on planning for growth and the need for larger premises.

Sixty acres of Victoria Park at Herston had originally been set aside for a University site, but some members of the Senate favoured a much larger area of open land at St Lucia. Eminent persons interested in establishing a Medical Faculty pushed for the Victoria Park site as it was close to the existing General Hospital. So began a long and sometimes acrimonious debate.

With little money available, the debate was academic. As student numbers grew the University was forced to share space in the adjacent Central Technical College buildings and facilities (pictured at left), and later a University Library was built there.

A committee was established in 1921 to choose a new site, and the Department of Works provided designs for buildings at Victoria Park. The costs of levelling the land were high, however, so the site at St Lucia was once again considered.

Associate Professor ACV Melbourne saw the St Lucia location as secure in its isolation, 'never to be threatened with major road-works across the site', but Professor BD Steele vigorously opposed the site because of its remoteness. This was a time before cars were common, and the solution to easy access...
to St Lucia was a bridge across the river at West End, which would put the site within a short tram ride of the city centre. The medical fraternity continued arguing their case for Victoria Park; according to Dr Gibson, ‘fog often lay deep and heavy at St Lucia, and residents could die of asthma and pneumonia’.4

With the exception of Carmody’s dairy farm, the original bush and farmland of St Lucia had been subdivided for housing in the boom of the 1880s. However, its lack of access, the financial crisis, and the record floods of the early 1890s meant that little house-building began, and the land lay fallow thereafter. By 1925, a community had grown slowly at the western end of St Lucia as it was within walking distance of the railway and of a new ferry service from near Guyatt Park across the river to the tram stop at Hill End.5

The St Lucia Progress Association had been very active and had its own Progress Hall – now the University Avalon Theatre. In 1926 the Grand Council of Progress Associations asked the Lord Mayor of Brisbane to purchase the 200 acres at the end of St Lucia for the University, but Mayor WA Jolly advised that ‘Council could not afford the heavy expense involved’.6

Retired Superintendent of the General Hospital Dr James Mayne, and his sister, Miss Mary Emelia Mayne of Moorlands, stepped in and offered to donate the money needed to buy the land so that students could ‘stroll the river banks while arguing the problems that exercised their minds’. Council accepted the offer and the Maynes eventually donated £60,000 for the 222 acres acquired, including Carmody’s farm.8 It was not until 1931, by which time the number of students at George Street was approaching 1000, that the University finally decided to accept the land for its new home.

The Fryer Library holds probably the very first design for the new site at St Lucia. Hand-sketched by private architect AB Wilson, a friend of Engineering Professor R Hawken and drawn in 1926, the design was for the principal buildings on the crest of the hill facing a bridge over the river to West End, with a tram route across to the University. There was a surrounding outer ring of buildings, colleges on the southern higher riverbank, and sports fields on the lower flood-prone areas.9 This concept endured and is reflected in the layout of the University today. A perspective of probably the same scheme appeared in a newspaper in 1927.

With the onset of the depression, funds were still not available for construction work. Indeed, the Government leased the St Lucia land from the University to provide a Farm School where unemployed boys were trained in farm work.10

In 1932 Premier Forgan Smith established the ‘Bureau of Industry’ to select public works schemes that could relieve unemployment. For the University’s Jubilee in 1935, the Premier allocated £500,000 of borrowed government funding to the construction of buildings at St Lucia. The University (St Lucia) Building Committee was established, chaired by Prof ACV Melbourne, and included Dr J Bradfield (of Sydney Harbour Bridge and Story Bridge fame), who at the time was Chief Engineer of the Bridge Board and later took over as Chairman of the Committee. Other appointees were Mr AB Leven (Chief Architect, Department of Works), Mr TL Jones (Chairman of the Brisbane and South Coast Hospitals Board), and
Mr JD Story, (Public Service Commissioner and a member of the University Senate who later became honorary Vice-Chancellor, 1939-59).

The City Engineer advised the Committee that the road access should be via Boundary Street, West End, and a bridge over the river. The Surveyor General provided information on the sun angles. The Commonwealth Meteorologist provided information on the prevailing breezes. The Committee also arranged for the land to be surveyed on a forty-foot grid, and for aerial photographs to be taken. The University provided a list of its floor space requirements, and the Department of Education advised its floor space needs for a Teacher Training College. The University Sports Union listed the requirements for sports facilities, and land was needed for seven residential Colleges.11

The number of students provided for is not known, but JD Story believed that the University would never expand beyond a total of 6000 with further growth occurring through decentralisation.12

A number of people submitted plans to the Committee, which today are held by the Fryer Library. Engineering Professor R Hawken and graduate RM Wilson combined to produce a plan with no bridge but with a ferry to Dutton Park. Mr AB Leven submitted a plan that included a boat harbour. Dr FW Robinson carried out studies to establish the appropriate orientation for the buildings to maximise shade and ventilation, and his plan orientated the main buildings towards a bridge approximately in the position they are today. Dr Bradfield put forward a plan which included a semi-circular main building with cloisters, similar to the eventual construction.13

There was considerable discussion before the Committee produced a report to the Premier which combined aspects of all the submissions. The main buildings positioned on the crest of the hill were orientated towards a bridge, with the approach from the bridge to be ‘most dignified, and lead up a half-mile avenue to a large lawn at the front of the building’.

The principal building was part of a quadrangle where cloisters linked other buildings, and provided a central courtyard. All the buildings were to be two storeys high to avoid the need for lifts, and each would have a basement. The main building was to be of local stone or stone facing.

The Committee Report recommended that the main access to the University should be via the proposed bridge to West End. Seven colleges would be provided for near the river, lakes and a glen created, and three sports fields formed.14

The Premier accepted the Report and in 1936 appointed Hennessy, Hennessy & Co as architects. They subsequently produced a set of detailed design...
drawings showing the layout of the main buildings linked by semi-circular cloisters, thus enabling each Faculty to work in close cooperation with one another, but at the same time to be distinct in themselves.

This design made provision for some ten faculties, a library, an administrative building, a teachers college, a hospital, residential colleges, sports facilities, a swimming pool, glasshouses, an open-air theatre and space for future developments. A Great Hall was proposed at the western end of the main building, where the Mitchie Building now stands. Construction materials to be used included Greymere granite, Helidon freestone, local timbers, and spotted and blue gum parquetry flooring from Maryborough.15

The concept was accepted by the Premier except for the building orientation, which was to revert to that of the Committee Report – facing the bridge.16

Premier Forgan Smith laid the foundation stone at a ceremony in March 1937, and this today can be seen in the foyer of the Forgan Smith Building. Benefactors of the land, Dr and Miss Mayne, made a rare public appearance and Dr Mayne said, ‘I am very happy to be here to see the beginnings of the new buildings, but I am not going to make a public speech.’ The naming of the current Mayne Centre recognises the contribution of the Mayne family. The principal building was later named Forgan Smith after the Premier who raised the funds for its construction, and who was Chancellor of the University, 1942-53.

A newly created ‘Bureau of Industry University Works Board’ decreed that the project be regarded as employment-giving, with the buildings to be constructed by day labour, absorbing skilled workers. The grounds were to absorb unskilled labour, with expenditure to be met from Unemployment Relief Funds.17

Work began and continued for three years until the demands of World War Two reduced the available funds, manpower and materials. When work stopped in 1941, the external walls and roof of the main building and the chemistry building were complete, and internally a great deal of the wall and ceiling plastering was finished, with much of the parquetry flooring laid.18

In 1942, General Thomas Blamey, Commander-in-chief of the Australian Military Forces, established his headquarters in the nearly completed buildings. A plaque in the foyer of the Forgan Smith Building records the period.

After the war, work was slow to re-commence, and it was not until 1949 that the University was officially opened by Premier Hanlon and relocation from George Street began. The University buildings have grown in number to keep pace with increased enrolments and today the campus serves more than 35,000 students and 5000 staff.

The long proposed cross-river bridge was never constructed, initially due to lack of funding. Later, as cars and buses became more common, students became more mobile coming from all directions and the need for a costly bridge could not be justified. The Dutton Park ferry came into operation in 1973 and was replaced by the Eleanor Schonell Bridge in 2006; the fast CityCat service began in 1996.

We should be grateful to the pioneer University staff, the St Lucia Progress Association, Brisbane City Council, the Mayne family, and the State Government, for having enough foresight in 1926 to acquire such a magnificent site for The University of Queensland.

PETER BROWN, historian, writes on behalf of the St Lucia History Group for more information, please contact (07) 3403 2520 or visit the Ward office, 50 High Street, Toowong.

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At a meeting of the Student Benefactions Fund Committee of The University of Queensland Union on 17 November 1926, the Chairman informed the Committee that the ‘Dramatic Society had donated a gift of money to be utilised in founding a JD Fryer Memorial Library of Australian literature’.1 This event, as much as any other, marks the official birthday of the Fryer Library.

The Library’s conception, however, dates from early February 1923 when the then Head of the Department of Modern Languages and Literature, Professor JJ Stable, met with a newly recruited lecturer, FW Robinson (‘Doc Robbie’), and advised him of an intention to include Australian literature in the first-year course at UQ.2 On the day before their meeting, a former student of Stable’s, John Denis Fryer, died at his parents’ home in Springsure in Central Queensland. Robinson never met Fryer, but their lives and careers—the latter’s tragically cut short by tuberculosis at the age of twenty-seven—and the coincidence of these two events are interwoven in the story of the genesis of the Library which would bear Fryer’s name and whose long-time custodian, Robinson, is acknowledged in the name of its Reading Room.

Born 11 September 1895 in Springsure, Fryer had enrolled in an Arts degree at the University in 1915 after winning a scholarship from Rockhampton Grammar School. By the end of his first term, the First World War had overtaken his scholastic career. He wrote to his sister in May 1915 of the depletion of student numbers as a result of military service. ‘They are drizzling out even now by twos and threes and I don’t want to be one of the last.’3

Fryer enlisted in the AIF a month later, embarked from Australia in October and, after an interlude in Egypt and officer training in Britain, was thrown into the conflict in France and Belgium in February 1917. In the summer of 1918, the 51st Battalion was in the line near Amiens. Its diary tells us that at 3am on 4 August 1918 ‘the enemy attacked four of our posts and succeeded in driving them back to the village of Hourges’.4 Among the casualties was Lieutenant Fryer who suffered wounds to the arm, leg and thighs.

In one sense, Fryer’s war was over. After being hospitalised in Britain, he returned to Australia and to civilian life in July 1919. After a sojourn back at Springsure, Fryer re-entered UQ as an enthusiastic Arts student in March 1920. He involved himself in extra-curricular activities, editing the University and college magazines; winning sporting accolades in rugby and cricket, and acting as Vice-President of the Dramatic Society. One of his contemporaries at St John’s College also recalled that, ‘He was intensely interested in his academic work—mainly English and French—and in the opportunities thus afforded for wide reading, thinking, and above all talking’.5 The same source also noted that Fryer was ‘public-spirited almost to a fault in University and College affairs’6 and that he was ‘a willing horse, allowing himself to take on more than a fair share’.7

In 1920 Fryer contributed to the recently founded St John’s College magazine Argo a light-hearted war story entitled ‘Paddy at Pozieres’.8 He signed it ‘Chut’, a nickname he had acquired whose origins are uncertain, but which may be a shortening of ‘chutney’ and which may have derived from his pro-
By May 1921 Fryer was editing the recently revived university student magazine *Galmahra* with the mercurial PR ‘Inky’ Stephensen. He occasionally contributed humorous verse under the name ‘Chut’. *Galmahra* also published a darker poem of Fryer’s, ‘Corruption’ under the pen name ‘Gheluvelt’. The poem described a scene Fryer had probably witnessed at Bulgar Wood during the battle of Ypres:

Extended stark in mute array  
Upon that sombre, sodden field  
Those foul, exhumed bodies lay;  
Grim in the dawning’s half-light gray.  
Green blotches on the dark brown clay  
Corruption all revealed!  

‘Universally regarded as the best of fellows’ as the Warden of St John’s College later wrote, Fryer clearly cut a popular figure on the campus in the early 1920s. There seems little evidence to suggest that Fryer was embittered or hardened by his war experience. On the contrary, many contemporaries particularly noted what one called, ‘the tolerance of a capacious heart’. Fryer showed a passion for poetry, jokes and story-telling. ‘Chut the Merry Jester’, this ‘ardent lover and discriminating critic of verse’, entertained fellow students in the Common Room and in the vestibule of the main University building before and after classes. Robert Hall recalled that ‘he was never a bore: a born teller of stories and especially of his own experience’. EN Dimmock remembered his ‘phenomenal memory for stories, mostly wartime and rude’.

In August 1922, Fryer, the ‘friend of all the world’ wrote to his mother of his hectic student life, ‘it took up a terrible lot of time and wore me down’. While he remained upbeat in his correspondence home, Fryer’s health began to decline quickly. In September he was hospitalised for tuberculosis, firstly at Rosemount Hospital and then at an army sanatorium, Ardoyne, on the Brisbane River at Corinda. Ever positive, he wrote to his mother in early October, ‘There is really nothing so very serious if I look after myself and carry out medical instructions’. In December Fryer’s mother travelled to Brisbane and in early January brought her ailing son back to the family home at Springsure where he died on the morning of 7 February.

In October 1922 *Galmahra* noted Fryer’s absence from the University giving a different cause for the health problems: ‘JD Fryer is to leave us for hospital; mustard gas is the trouble, none the less virulent for its delayed action.’ This claim was repeated in PR Stephensen’s obituary of Fryer published in *Galmahra* the following May, ‘Chut’s death is one other of the tragic after-effects of the War. Of all the hideous weapons of modern scientific warfare, none is so detestably cruel and wicked as the use of poisonous chemical gas, which works silently and insidiously in the systems of its victims.’ In an account of his life written many years later Fryer’s sister Elizabeth Gilmour also mentions the ‘gassing’ but states that...
they have no specific date for the incident.22

There is, however, no compelling evidence that he was gassed. Fryer’s army record gives quite specific details of his appointments, leaves, and medical care. He was never treated for gas poisoning. Nor does his Battalion Diary, which also gives specific details of casualties, leaves, etc. and is available from the Australian War Memorial, make any mention of such an incident. In his letters home both from the front and from hospitals in Brisbane, Fryer never claims that being gassed was the cause of his illness. We know that mustard gas was being used in the areas in which he saw action and it is possible that Fryer did have some exposure to it which he considered sufficiently inconsequential at the time not to mention. Yet he does furnish details of his consultations with his doctors when writing to his mother from Ardoyne in October and November 1922 and makes no mention of ‘gassing’ as being even a contributory cause. Rather, he assigns his failing health simply to his undertaking too much at University: ‘I tried to do too many things and I knocked myself up.’23

Fryer’s cause of death according to his death certificate was pulmonary tuberculosis. He notes in a letter to his mother, ‘The tubercular germs are just beginning to get active after being quiet for so long’.24 There was a high prevalence of the disease in northern France during the war. Poor sanitation, hygiene and food deficiencies were all contributing factors.25 There can be no doubt that numbers of returning Australian soldiers had contracted the disease in the years immediately after the war—there was even a Tubercular Soldiers and Sailors’ Association formed to provide for their welfare26—so it is not unreasonable to suggest that Fryer may have become infected while on service in Europe, even though it lay dormant for some time. Fryer was playing rugby as late as July 192227 so he was obviously healthy enough three years after his return from the war to play vigorous sport. It is also possible, of course, that the infection was acquired after his return to Australia and that there were other contributing factors. We know, for example, that Fryer was a heavy smoker. How much, if at all, his war service contributed to his terminal disease cannot ever be known.

Notwithstanding the actual facts of his illness, Fryer’s place in the consciousness and memory of his fellow students and teachers was universally that of a ‘fallen digger.’ There prevails in the telling of this particular Anzac story that ‘reverence divorced from understanding’ which Martin Crotty has noted elsewhere.28 When the University War Memorial was unveiled in May 1925, Fryer’s name was included on it and he is specifically mentioned in the Governor’s address which accompanied the unveiling as ‘the lingering victim to enemy poison gas’.29

The coincidence of Fryer’s death and Robinson’s meeting with his Head of Department Stable on the following day in February 1923 is conspicuous. It is less surprising that Stable’s thoughts should have been focused on the teaching of Australian literature. In an Arts Faculty Board meeting a few months
earlier, his colleague ACV Melbourne had been advocating the inclusion of Australian history in the curriculum. Australian born, though largely educated in Europe, in the early 1920s Stable was actively promoting the study of Australian literature. In 1924 he published *A book of Queensland verse* and in the same year another anthology *The bond of poetry: a book of verse for Australasian schools* in which the verse nearest to the pupil in place and time came first, beginning with Henry Lawson and ending with Shakespeare. In the preface to that text Stable wrote:

> In Australia...where a distinct national development is now evident, contemporary local poetry should be studied...We must admit frankly that there is a gulf, one gradually widening, between English life to-day and Australian life, and therefore between English and Australian sentiment...Australian literature, Australian poetry especially, if we know how to use it, will give us insight into the underlying motive of our national aspirations.

Stable advocated strongly for the inclusion of Australian literature, especially poetry, in the curriculum at school and university level. In May 1922 Stable also wrote to the editors of *Galmahra*, Fryer among them, about the recently inaugurated Queensland Authors and Artists’ Association. This organisation, of which Stable was the founding President, ‘was formed for the purpose of fostering and encouraging our national literature and art’. He nonetheless remained equivocal, not to say sceptical, about its intrinsic ‘artistic merit’. As Leigh Dale has pointed out, Stable asserted the pre-eminence of English poetry over the provincial. The bond of poetry was an imperial one linking the dominions to their colonial parent. ‘In this country a literature worthy of the progress achieved and of the future indicated has not yet arisen,’ Stable wrote.

Many years later, one of his university contemporaries recalled, ‘To my knowledge Fryer had no special interest in Australian literature. I know no one who was so interested then.’ Yet there are ways in which Fryer was inevitably connected with Australian literature even if he did not study it formally. Fryer’s sister remembered their father teaching the children to recite the poetry of AB Paterson and AL Gordon from an early age. In 1921 Fryer was on a committee to select Queensland verse to contribute to *Australian university verse: an undergraduate anthology*. None of his own poems appeared there but his friend and fellow student Jack Lindsay had four contributions selected for publication. Fryer too, it seems, along with PR Stephensen, hatched the plan to rename the university student magazine ‘Galmahra’, a local Aboriginal word for ‘poet, seer, teacher’ suggested to them by Archibald Meston – ‘an offensively Australian retort to the University of Sydney’s *Hermes* magazine’ as Craig Munro points out. *Galmahra* was an outlet for local student poetry and short stories and extolled the virtues of an Australian flavour in literature.

In the wake of that ‘profound act of national creation’, the Gallipoli/Anzac experience, there is evidence that Australians were developing a greater
sense of the significance of their own national culture. Men who went to the war to fight as ‘Britons’, returned with a revised identity. They had experienced and performed their ‘difference’ in battle and on leave. The virtues of their national characteristics had been trumpeted by war correspondents such as Keith Murdoch and Charles Bean. Many, like Fryer, returned with less than complimentary accounts of the behaviour of British officers and of Britain itself. The trauma and suffering of the diggers seemed to demand what has been called a ‘new and vast national obligation’.

These Australian nuances and inflections, discernible among students and faculty at The University of Queensland in the early ‘20s, are consistent with this dynamic. In September 1922 the editorial in Argo noted, ‘We would echo, in this small community of ours, a little of the growing spirit of Australian nationalism, for the spirit of our returned Diggers has infected us, and we have gained to some extent an appreciation of the Digger outlook.’

In August 1925, Robinson wrote a lengthy article for Galmahra advocating a plan for student benefactions, comparing the paucity of community financial support for the university here with the relative largesse of southern and American universities. Stocking the library was his first priority for any funds gleaned through the initiative. In subsequent issues he reported on the progress of the scheme. He also wrote to the Brisbane Courier promoting and reporting on his plans.

From 1921 at least, and probably earlier, the University’s Dramatic Society had donated some of the profits from its productions to worthy causes on an annual basis. In 1922, £40 was given to the University War Memorial Committee. In 1924 money was donated to the Women’s College Campaign Fund and in 1925 money was allocated to buy books for the Society’s own library. The following May, Robinson announced, in what had become his regular column on student benefactions in Galmahra, that a donation of five guineas each had been received in memory of two former AIF servicemen, KM Brydon, killed in action in 1917, and JD Fryer. Robinson stated, ‘The opinions expressed when these gifts were handed over showed clearly that the use of the names of the AIF men was no mere fiction to make giving possible, but that it covered a real sense of ever present debt to the dead.’

It is uncertain whether this was the same donation from the Dramatic Society, now revalued at £10, that is minuted in the Committee meeting noted above.

Fryer left the university in 1922. Most of the students in the Dramatic Society in 1926, enrolled in three- or four-year degrees, would not have known him personally. But Robinson had strong associations with the Society and JJ Stable was its President at the time of the benefaction and had been in 1922 when Fryer was its Vice-President. Stable thus provided the link with Fryer’s time at University. Robinson was actively pursuing benefactions. Both men were preoccupied with promoting the study of Australian literature and both were on record as being highly critical.
of library resources at the University and elsewhere. These imperatives probably combined to produce the gift that was minuted on 17 November 1926 and announced in Galmahra the following February.

In his ‘Student benefactions’ column in Galmahra in April 1927, Robinson gave a brief account of the transaction under the heading ‘Fryer Memorial Library’. In August of that year he gave an update on progress … ‘the University has purchased a book case big enough for the needs of some time to come. The book case is well-made, of well seasoned Queensland cedar and has an individuality in keeping with its purpose.’

Robinson has been cast as the principal midwife at the Fryer Library’s birth and as the nurturing influence in the early growth in the study and teaching of Australian literature at The University of Queensland. There can be little doubt that he was the major caregiver in the Library’s formative years and that it grew under his stewardship. As we have seen, however, Stable’s role in the creation of the Library was equally vital.

There were large numbers of war dead from the University who might have been honoured by such a dedication. Why Fryer? Many years later Robinson noted that it was Fryer’s ‘strong qualities of character which inspired affection as well as respect among his fellow students’. Fryer’s popularity was widely attested to by his contemporaries, virtually none of whom were actually at University in 1926 when the donation was made, however. Argo recorded in 1922 that the word ‘Anzac’ had ‘become sacred to Australian patriotism, honour, valour, and death’. There can be little doubt that Robinson used the emotional connection with the Digger myth to attract benefactions to the University. While Fryer’s direct relationship with the students of 1926 was somewhat tenuous, it was nonetheless stronger and the memory fresher than those University men who had gone to the war in 1915 and never returned. In a manuscript note, possibly written in preparation for a talk, Robinson commented:

Reading the recollections of “Chut” Fryer written by C Bingham one feels that Bingham is describing the ‘Australian or the ‘Digger’ at his best with his cheerfulness, sense of human values, fellowship, sacrifice and the rest. Add his individual zest for learning, for literature, drama, as well as sport and the name of Fryer for a Library of Australian Literature acquires new significance.

Fryer’s contemporary, Robert Hall, later reflected that his friend ‘Chut’ was ‘to hand, so to speak, as a past officer who was available to be commemorated’. Fryer represented the tragedy of a generation and a nation traumatised by the war experience. He represented too a new national spirit seemingly forged in the fires of World War I battlefields. It was JD Fryer as symbol which influenced the decision to name the Library after him and which inspired the £10 donation that Hall noted many years later was such ‘a very small acorn for what has become so solid an oak’.

MARK CRYLE is Manager of the Fryer Library.
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George Washington Power

JOHN O’KEEFFE EXAMINES THE LIFE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON POWER AND HIS ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY.

The enrolment of the first students at The University of Queensland in March 1911 was the culmination of a long and often fraught campaign to establish an institution of higher learning in this state. One of the University’s early champions was George Washington Power. Sadly, Power never saw this dream come to fruition. Power was a member of the first Senate of The University of Queensland, having been appointed by Order in Council gazetted on 16 April 1910. He attended the first meeting of that Senate but died on 19 May 1910 before its second meeting. Fryer Library has recently acquired a number of Power’s papers that give insights into his role in the establishment of the University and its predecessor, the University Extension Council.

George Washington Power was born at Jamieson, Victoria, on 13 October 1865, the eldest child of William Grene Power and Mary Teresa Power (née Perkins), both of whom were immigrants from Waterford, Ireland. William Grene Power left Ireland in 1849 at the end of the Famine, and travelled first to New York with his cousin Desmond Power. Both young men there joined Americans flocking to the gold fields near Sandhurst (now Bendigo) in Victoria. William Grene Power was very impressed with the Americans and their happy, prosperous way of life. This resulted in his calling his first born George Washington Power. William moved from Bendigo to Jamieson where he married Mary Teresa Perkins and where most of their seven surviving children were born. The family moved to Brisbane in 1873, their first home being Silverwells which still stands at Kangaroo Point. William was very successful in business. Among other endeavours, he was the managing partner of the brewer Perkins and Co and a director of The Queensland Deposit Bank (1886-92). He was also a member of the Legislative Council from 1893 until his death in 1903.

His son, George Washington Power, was an outstanding academic. The Courier of 20 May 1910 described him as one of the keenest and most cultured scholars in Australia. His entry to the Normal School began a brilliant scholastic career. In 1877, aged eleven, he won a state school scholarship and in the following year he began studies at Brisbane Grammar School. In the 1879 Sydney University Junior examination Mr Power gained first place, winning silver medals in four out of seven subjects. In the Senior examination of 1881 he also excelled, gaining the university prize, seven silver medals, the John West medal for general proficiency and winning an exhibition to the University of Melbourne and a scholarship to Trinity College. During his time at Trinity he took out the College’s Debating Society Prize in 1899 as well as prizes in Classics, Art, French and German, graduating with first-class honours in Arts (in English, French and German). He also won the Shakespeare Scholarship and various other scholarships in Law. He took a Master of Arts degree in 1888, secured the law scholarship in 1889, and completed a Master of Laws in 1891.

After a year teaching languages in Melbourne he was called to the Victorian Bar on 16 July 1890 and admitted in Queensland on 7 October 1890. He first read in the chambers of TJ Byrnes, at that time Solicitor-General, before going into practice at Town Hall Chambers. When the Queensland Bar Association was officially formed in 1903, GW Power was a foundation member. From 1898 until 1907 he was certifying barrister under the Friendly Societies and Building Act.

George Washington Power was described as a reserved gentleman. Although he practised at the Bar, it seems that he concentrated on non-advocacy matters, probably because of his poor health.
He received a number of Government retainers to act as Crown Prosecutor in the District and Supreme Courts and from 1890 he was a Deputy District Court Judge on the Central District Court Circuit in Roma. Much of his time in practice was spent drafting legislation such as the Lands (Consolidation) Bill of 1896-97, and revising statutes. He also prepared a work on labour laws during Tom O'Sullivan's period as Attorney-General. As an ardent democrat and believer in individual freedom, his interest in political issues extended to taking an active part in the extra-parliamentary National Liberal Union. He was narrowly defeated as candidate for the Fortitude Valley seat in 1907.

In 1897 he co-authored with LE Groom and AD Graham a digest of Queensland Supreme and District Court cases decided between 1861 and 1896. That led to a compilation of Reports of cases heard in the Supreme Court 1860-1881 which was offered for sale in 1898. In 1899 the three co-authored *The Torrens Australian Digest*, a digest of real property cases decided in the Supreme Courts of the Australian Colonies between 1860 and 1898. Together with his co-authors, he followed up that success three years later with the publication of an annotated edition of *The Real Property Acts*, and in 1907 Power and Graham produced the second digest of Queensland case law.

GW Power married Josephine Philomena Kennedy, the daughter of William Francis Kennedy, a grazier who was the member for Maranoa in the second Queensland Parliament. They lived at Chesney in Moray Street, New Farm, a home which still stands and in which their two daughters were born. They had three children, Thomas, Mary and Josephine (known in adult life as Dr Thomas Felix Washington Power, Mrs Mary Katharine O'Keeffe, and Mrs Josephine Dorothy Tully).

Power was, in 1893, a founding member of the University Extension Scheme which was formed to urge the establishment of a university in Queensland. The Scheme provided tuition for students undertaking matriculation exams for Melbourne and Sydney Universities. Power lectured on a range of literary topics. Fryer Library holds handwritten notes of his lectures on Shakespeare, Emerson and Tennyson. Significantly, Power also showed an interest in Australian literature. His lecture notes on Henry Kendall and on Marcus Clarke's *For the term of his natural life* are an early manifestation of the incorporation of Australian poetry and prose into the curriculum.

As the historians of the early development of the University have shown, its formal establishment through act of Parliament in 1909 was by no means a foregone conclusion. From the 1870s there had been debate in the Parliament, the press
and elsewhere about the value and nature of such an institution for Queensland. Resistance had been strong. A particular kind of anti-intellectualism prevailed which was typically articulated in terms of its cost, and the belief that a university catered to impractical elites, especially Brisbane-based ones. At the University Congress of November 1906 Power presented his views on the importance of the establishment of a university in a paper ‘Lose and Gain—A Retrospect and a Prospect’, the original of which is held by the Fryer Library. ‘A university is not a luxury’, he claimed; rather it was ‘the coping stone of the educational edifice’. He argued his case on solidly utilitarian grounds: the cost to Queensland of a ‘brain drain’ to other states and of a reliance on technical know-how from outsiders was high. A university would provide training for the engineers and agricultural scientists of the future, better equipping Queensland to exploit its abundant natural resources.

While Power had the satisfaction of seeing the legislation for the University passed and was doubtless honoured by his appointment to its Senate, his untimely death in May 1910 meant that the fledgling institution never really benefited from his intellect and guidance in its formative years. At the Senate’s second meeting the Chancellor, Sir William MacGregor, moved ‘that the members of the Senate deeply regret the untimely death of their colleague, the late George Washington Power, who, by character, education, and experience, was so eminently qualified to render valuable assistance in establishing the Queensland University, in which he took a great interest.’ The Vice Chancellor, Mr RH Roe, in seconding the motion, said that in his long experience of over thirty years as a school master he had never met a pupil who was more devoted to his old schools and colleges, and to the advancement of educational institutions generally, than the late Mr Power.

JOHN O’KEEFFE is a UQ law graduate and solicitor who served on the Law Faculty Board in 1980-81. He is the grandson of George Washington Power.

Below: Dart’s Mill, 1891 — view of the St Lucia site before the establishment of The University of Queensland
Fryer Library, University of Queensland Photograph Collection, UQFL466 AB_P2
THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND—OR ‘THE PEOPLE’S UNIVERSITY’, AS IT IS CALLED IN A NEW BOOK THAT COMMEMORATES ITS FIRST 100 YEARS—WELCOMED THOUSANDS OF VISITORS TO ITS ST LUCIA CAMPUS ON 18 APRIL TO CELEBRATE ITS CENTENARY WITH A DAY OF ACTIVITIES PROVIDING A GLIMPSE OF UNIVERSITY LIFE. TANYA ZIEBELL SHARES SOME SPECIAL MOMENTS SPENT AT THE WRITERS’ HUB, ONE OF THE DAY’S HIGHLIGHTS.

Acknowledging the enduring appeal of music, art, and literature the University opened its museums, galleries, libraries, and its heart, the Great Court, to the public.

Taking the opportunity to recognise the achievements of the fine writers who share a history with the University and to celebrate our literary heritage, the Library presented one of the highlights of the day in The Writers’ Hub.

Acclaimed and emerging UQ alumni writers returned to the University to share fine writing and their memories of UQ with readers and aspiring writers. The broad program of panel discussions, talks, readings, and in-conversation sessions had wide appeal, and even early autumn showers were no deterrent to the crowds who responded with enthusiasm to the more than thirty writers who shared their words and tales with generosity.

Above: UQ Tales speakers: Matthew Condon, John Birmingham, Nick Earls, and Andrew Stafford
• In ‘Life, Love, Murder, and Mayhem: Stories of Brisbane’, Sue Abbey spoke with writers Simon Cleary (The comfort of figs), Manfred Jurgensen (Under the skin) and Rosamond Siemon (The Mayne inheritance)

• Stephany Steggall, Craig Munro, and Annette Henderson, writers of biography and autobiography, talked about writing personal stories

• University Librarian and Director of Learning Services Keith Webster introduced a session, ‘Inside the Novel’, where Kate Morton and Kim Wilkins shared their experiences as writers

• UQ’s former Vice-Chancellor John Hay introduced the keynote speaker, acclaimed author Dr David Malouf AO, who recalled his time as a student at The University of Queensland and paid tribute to the Fryer Library as one of the nation’s most important collections of Australian literature

• Following his address, Malouf joined other UQP published writers, Nick Earls and Larissa Behrendt, in a panel discussion chaired by 4BC Radio’s Alex Bernard

• In a much-anticipated session, Matthew Condon (The trout opera), Nick Earls (Perfect skin), Andrew Stafford (Pig city), and John Birmingham (He died with a felafel in his hand) delighted audiences with their UQ tales

• UQ Vice-Chancellor Paul Greenfield introduced Janette Turner Hospital who read short extracts from three novels, Charades, Oyster, and Orpheus lost, which demonstrated her passion for the rainforest and the outback

• Legal eagle Chris Nyst joined fellow author Katherine Howell in a popular crime writing section, chaired by Peter Spearritt

• Toni Johnson Woods spoke with a panel comprising Michael Bauer, Richard Newsome, Toni Risson, and Christina Alexander, all of whom have followed very different paths that led them to writing

• Radical legend Humphrey McQueen spoke in conversation with Peter Spearritt

• Playwrights Ian Callinan and Stephen Carleton discussed writing drama with Joanne Tompkins

• Brisbane bards Bronwyn Lea, Pam Schindler, and Ross Clark read from their poetry

• UQ Creative Writing Students Sree Ramachandran, Poppy Gee, Sam Burch, Leigh Cato, Rebecca Hazleden, and Nicole Holyer performed readings.
The event was also an opportunity to acknowledge donors and inspire researchers by highlighting the important work of Fryer Library as a repository of research material and manuscripts of Australian writers. A donation does not have to be huge to have significant benefits, which was a point made by David Malouf when he spoke of the modest beginnings of the Fryer collection. Under the early custodianship of Dr Frederick Walter Robinson it grew from a donation to fund the purchase of Australian literary works in memory of UQ graduate John Denis Fryer into an important resource for scholars of Australia’s literary heritage.

In addition to providing a venue for the writers’ sessions, Fryer Library also presented a display of items from its collections, some of which will feature in a book, *Found in Fryer*, to be published later this year.

Other branches of the UQ Library participated in the day too. The Walter Harrison Law Library had a display entitled UQ law graduates: contributing to the profession; the Biological Sciences Library offered tours of its ‘next generation’ spaces; and in the foyer of the Duhig Building visitors could view a display on 100 years of student experiences at UQ and a portrait of sculptor Dr Rhyl Hinwood by artist Terry Bouton.

TANYA ZIEBELL is the UQ Library’s Manager, Marketing and Community Outreach.
LEADING AUSTRALIAN LITERARY FIGURE AND ONE OF FRYER LIBRARY’S MOST DISTINGUISHED LONG-TERM DONORS, PROFESSOR THOMAS SHAPCOTT, WAS RECENTLY PRESENTED WITH A DOCTORATE OF LETTERS HONORIS CAUSA AT A CEREMONY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND’S IPSWICH CAMPUS. PROFESSOR RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM, EXECUTIVE DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND ANOTHER LONG-TERM FRYER SUPPORTER, READ THE FIRST TWO POEMS FROM PROFESSOR SHAPCOTT’S SHABBYTOWN CALENDAR AT THE EVENT.
The honorary doctorate is the most recent of many prestigious awards won by poet Thomas Shapcott throughout his career. AustLit: the Australian Literature Resource lists twelve awards, including the Order of Australia for his services to literature (1989). In 1989 he was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Macquarie University.

Thomas Shapcott was born in Ipswich in 1935. He gained degrees in Accounting (1961) and Arts (1967) at The University of Queensland. In 1972 he established his own accountancy firm, specialising in taxation for writers, artists and academics. In 1973 he was appointed to the first Literature Board of the Australia Council and served as its Director from 1983 to 1990. He sold the accounting practice in 1975 and was awarded a three-year fellowship from the Literature Board. In 1978 he became a full-time writer, receiving a number of literary grants and fellowships to continue his writing. He was the Executive Director of the National Book Council from 1991 to 1997. In 1997 he became the inaugural Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide, retiring from the position in 2005.

Professor Shapcott’s association with Fryer Library extends back to 1974, when he made his first donation of papers to the library. Since then, he has made many additions to the collection, with the most recent donation being last year. The collection of his papers in Fryer Library now comprises sixty-nine boxes. It includes manuscripts of published and unpublished works – poems, opera librettis, short stories, novels, some early musical manuscripts, playscripts, articles, and reviews. There is substantial material relating to Shapcott’s work as an editor of anthologies, as a reader for publishing houses, and as a member of literary and cultural boards and committees. There are also personal papers, photographs, memorabilia and correspondence. The correspondence includes letters to and from family, friends, publishers, and fellow authors, with many of Australia’s significant writers of the last forty years represented in the collection. There are also, in addition to paper records, paintings and objects. Perhaps the most notable of these is the Golden Wreath Award from the Struga International Poetry Festival in the Republic of Macedonia, presented to Shapcott in 1989 (pictured at right). Shapcott is one of only six English-language poets to have received this award throughout its forty-four year history.

The collection reflects Shapcott’s career as a writer, editor, arts administrator and prominent member of Australia’s literary community for almost half a century. His involvement in all parts of the process of literary production in Australia over such a long period makes his collection a particularly valuable resource for scholars. Fryer Library is proud to be the repository for this collection.

CATHY LEUTENEGGER is a librarian in the Fryer Library.
WHAT’S NEW IN FRYER LIBRARY

2010 Fryer Library Award

The Fryer Library and the Faculty of Arts of The University of Queensland have announced that Adjunct Associate Professor Cheryl Taylor (pictured below) of James Cook University is the recipient of the Fryer Library Award for 2010.

Professor Taylor received her BA from The University of Queensland in 1968, her MA from the University of Leeds in 1974, and her PhD from James Cook University in 2000. Professor Taylor is an expert on the literature of tropical northern Queensland and her project will involve working with Fryer's Thea Astley collection. This collection contains research material and drafts for all of Astley's novels, as well as correspondence with publishers, other authors and family members.

On receiving the award, Professor Taylor said, ‘I much admire Thea Astley as a writer who satirised the powerful, exposed the mealy-mouthed, and championed marginalised groups, especially women and Indigenous people. In the two conversations that I had with Thea during her visits to James Cook Uni, she expressed frustration that her fiction had not been adequately interpreted or understood. I hope that my exploration of the Thea Astley collection in Fryer under the Award will begin to fill this gap.’

For more information on the Fryer Library Award, including guidelines for 2011 applicants, see: www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/awards/awards.html.

Collections

A Very Significant Letter

Fryer Library was delighted to receive a donation from the Redland Museum of a letter written in 1927 by Dr James O’Neill Mayne to Brisbane’s first Lord Mayor, William Jolly, discussing his aspirations for the university to be built at St Lucia. Jolly’s granddaughter Wendy Ruwoldt had given the letter to the Redland Museum.

The museum’s exhibitions officer, Rick Thomason, and president Ross Bower recognised the significance of the letter for The University of Queensland, particularly in its centenary year, and presented it to Fryer Library. In the letter, Dr Mayne refers to a picture depicting a ‘peaceful and happy looking’ St Lucia and writes, ‘When the university is situated there, it will have its “separate community”, its “hortus inclusus” where it can “create its own atmosphere”, “vision its own ideals” and “mould its own traditions” to its greater glory.’

The letter is a reaffirmation of the strong personal relationship between Dr James Mayne and William Jolly, which had a large impact on where the university was located. For most of the 1920s there had been debate about a potential site for the university, which had outgrown Old Government House. The St Lucia site had the support of the Lord Mayor, but it also had its detractors, some of whom argued against it on the grounds of inconvenience. The decision by Dr James Mayne and his sister, Mary Emelia Mayne, to finance the resumption of sufficient land at St Lucia for the university ended the debate and set the course for the university’s future development. Fryer Library houses other manuscripts relating to the Maynes and the university’s history and the letter will be added to the collection and be available to researchers.

Papers of Caroline Kelly

Fryer Library has also been fortunate to acquire the papers of Australian anthropologist Caroline Kelly. Kelly started her career in 1920s Sydney as a playwright under the name Carrie Tennant. Fryer already holds a small manuscript collection relating to this period of her life.

In the 1930s, however, Kelly became an anthropologist, researching Aboriginal culture at Cherbourg and in northern New South Wales. She recorded kinship practices, traditional ceremonies, language, territorial knowledge and genealogies. Her research fills large holes for today’s anthropological study. Later, Caroline Kelly became involved in post-war immigration issues and researched the social aspects of Sydney’s early urban planning in the 1950s and ‘60s.

The collection also includes private letters.
and photographs from her friend, the famous American anthropologist Margaret Mead, correspondence likely to add to the knowledge of Margaret Mead’s ground-breaking work.

Other Additions to Manuscript Collections

Significant new acquisitions include a large body of material on Aboriginal linguistics received from Emeritus Professor Bruce Rigsby, six boxes of material on revolutionary socialist organisations from Professor Carole Ferrier, twenty-one additional playscripts for the Hanger collection, eight boxes of records from the Queensland Arts Council, an addition to the Children by Choice collection (UQFL488), ten boxes of research material on Queensland writers to add to the JSD Mellick collection (UQFL108), and a large collection of architectural plans from the estate of John Morton of the firm Lund, Hutton, Ryan and Morton.

Additions to Rare Book Holdings

Fryer Library has been fortunate to receive as a donation a copy of Lewis Bayly’s The practice of piety, a popular devotional work of the early seventeenth century, reprinted innumerable times into the eighteenth century. Fryer’s copy dates from 1723.

In addition, Fryer has purchased three rare editions of Mrs Campbell Praed’s works. Over the sea: stories of two worlds (1891) is a rare anthology of children’s stories including one by Mrs Campbell Praed. Coo-ee: tales of Australian life by Australian ladies (1891) is another short story anthology that includes her work, first published in an English edition of 1000 in February 1891 by Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, with the colonial edition following later that same year. Copies of the English first are extremely rare and Fryer has been fortunate to secure one, as well as the English first of Mrs Campbell Praed’s Mrs Tregaskiss (1895). Mrs Campbell Praed, who died seventy-five years ago, was probably the most important Queensland author before Federation.

Fryer has also acquired The Arthur Streeton catalogue, the first catalogue raisonée of Streeton’s works, published in Melbourne in 1935 in an edition of 500 copies with each signed by the artist.

Unique to Fryer?

Research for Fryer’s upcoming publication Found in Fryer: stories from the Fryer Library collection has shed further light on some rare and even possibly unique items in the Fryer collection. One of these is a nineteenth-century French children’s book entitled Album merveilleux: illustré de 300 sujets, published in Paris by Alphonse Desesserts. Children’s books are generally subjected to rough handling, and their survival is always uncertain. This copy has survived in remarkably fine condition, with bright, clear plates. WorldCat lists Fryer Library as the only location for this book.

Treasure of the Month

Fryer Library continues its ‘Treasure of the Month’ initiative, designed to highlight and promote significant and interesting items in its collections. Each month, a chosen ‘treasure’ is displayed in a special case in the Fryer Library Reading Room and an accompanying online display at: www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer makes the item available to a wider audience. Items profiled from March to June were the papers of Brisbane musician George Sampson, the original artwork for a series of murals created in the 1950s in UQ’s Geology Building (excerpt pictured above), an illuminated manuscript commissioned by Father Hayes from Queensland artist Lilian Pederson entitled Gleanings from Australian Verse (featured in Fryer Folios, January 2009), and a collection of memorabilia related to Brisbane’s Regent Theatre to mark its closing in June.

Website

A new online exhibition highlighting the work of Queensland sculptor Daphne Mayo (1895-1982) is now available on the Fryer Library website at: www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/mayo/. The exhibition not only examines Mayo’s sculptural output but also her lifelong commitment to the role of art in education and public life, which made her one of the most prominent supporters of Queensland’s public art institutions and truly ‘a significant woman of her time’.

From her early student works that earned her the nickname of ‘Miss Michelangelo’ to the monumental public sculptures that still dominate Brisbane today, the online exhibition, curated by Cassie Doyle, explores the career and impact of this extraordinary Queensland artist.

Pictured above is Daphne Mayo’s The Return of the Prodigal Son (1923), clearly showing the influence of Michelangelo’s famous Piétà.

Finding photos much easier

A new guide to Fryer Library’s photograph collections designed to make it easier to locate images is now available at: www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer.photocollections/photosubjectlist.html. The guide provides summary information about all of Fryer’s manuscript collections that contain significant numbers of photographs and links to detailed listings of the photographs.
MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION
If you would like to become a Friend of Fryer please go to the website at:
www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/friendsoffryer/
Click on Become a Friend of Fryer now. Complete the membership form and send the form with your $40 (individual) or $50 (household) payment to the address provided on the form.
Alternatively, please contact:
The Secretary
Friends of Fryer
Fryer Library
The University of Queensland
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Friends of Fryer

Upcoming Events

September: Brisbane Writers Festival
Fryer Library will be sponsoring two sessions at the Brisbane Writers Festival this year, both on Saturday 4 September at the State Library of Queensland. From 1-2pm, Keith Webster, University Librarian and Director of Learning Services, will be discussing the craft of short story writing with author Peter Goldsworthy. From 4-5pm, Anna Goldsworthy, internationally acclaimed concert pianist and author of Piano Lessons, and Linda Neil, contemporary and classical violinist and author of Learning to Breathe, will discuss their careers as musicians and writers. On Monday 6 September Peter and Anna Goldsworthy will appear together at The University of Queensland St Lucia campus. All Friends of Fryer will receive an invitation to this event.

November: Launch of Found in Fryer: stories from the Fryer Library collection
In November, Fryer’s book profiling one hundred of its treasures for the UQ Centenary will be launched at a special party to which all Friends of Fryer will be invited. Pictured below is one of the illustrations from the book, an architectural plan by Will Haenke (1875-1952), from the article on the Haenke collection by Don Watson.
Recent Events

22 March: Lecture on Daphne Mayo by Dr Jane Hunt and Launch of Daphne Mayo online exhibition

The first Friends of Fryer event for 2010 featured Dr Jane Hunt, 2009 Fryer Library Award winner, who discussed the life of acclaimed art educator and sculptor Daphne Mayo, as well as her own work on the Mayo collection.

Professor Peter Spearritt, Chair of the Fryer Library Advisory Council, also launched Fryer’s online exhibition, A significant woman of her time: the Daphne Mayo collection, curated by librarian Cassie Doyle (see: www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/mayo).

The event drew a capacity crowd with relatives of Daphne Mayo in attendance to mark the occasion.

18 April: UQ Centenary Celebration Day

Fryer Library was host for five sessions in the Writers’ Hub program, with more than thirty authors participating in a series of presentations, in-conversation sessions, panel discussions, and readings.

It also participated in the campus-wide ‘Vote for Your Favourite Treasure’ competition run by UQ’s five museums (Fryer Library, the Anthropology Museum, the RD Milns Antiquities Museum, the Physics Museum, and the UQ Art Museum). Contest participants had to have their entry card stamped in all five locations and could then nominate their favourite treasure among all the items displayed at the various museums. The winner was eight-year-old James Hudson who voted for the mummy mask at the Antiquities Museum, and who won a limited edition print by artist Alick Tipoti. Fryer Library had over 450 visitors to its treasures display. The most popular item was Fryer’s prized copy of Louisa Anne Meredith’s Bush Friends in Tasmania (1891) (pictured below right). One visitor commented on the entry card, ‘Wonderful! Even though we have to put on gloves, we feel that we can touch history!’

2 June: Tour of 100 Years: Highlights from the University of Queensland Art Collection with Michele Helmrich, Curator, University of Queensland Art Museum

Friends of Fryer were given a special tour of The University of Queensland Art Museum’s exhibit in honour of the centenary of the university. Michele Helmrich, Curator, UQAM (pictured above), explained the rationale for inclusion of items in the exhibit and explored the history of UQ’s art collection from the first painting donated in 1929 to the present. The collection’s aim from its inception has been to make innovative contemporary art accessible in Brisbane and for the University to take a constructive part in Australia’s art world. Michele is a graduate of UQ and has curated exhibitions for the Queensland Art Gallery, the Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane), the Museum of Brisbane, QUT, and UQAM.

Below, from left: Dr Jane Hunt, Cassie Doyle, and Mayo relatives: Suzanne Cogzell, Lindy de Simone and Renee de Simone at the Daphne Mayo lecture and online exhibition launch.
It was only two years ago that Dr Ross Laurie (pictured above) and Dr Joanne Scott delivered a lively talk to the Friends of Fryer on the Brisbane ‘Ekka’ ([www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/friendsoffryer/events/events_ekka.html] celebrating the recent publication of their book, Showtime: A History of the Brisbane Exhibition and their Brisbane Museum exhibit ‘Ten Days in August: Memories of the Ekka’.

It was fitting that Ross and Joanne published such an erudite book on such a popular and uniquely Queensland phenomenon. Few have the love of Queensland that Ross had, and fewer still possess his breadth of knowledge of Queensland popular culture.

Ross was never far from the forefront of Queensland historical research, and he played his own part in modern Queensland history as a political activist in the labour movement in the 1980s. He contributed to the corpus of political and labour history with his published works on state enterprises, gender studies, and social history. He presented research in Australia and overseas on such topics as indigenous artefacts at the Brisbane Exhibition, the White Australia policy in the popular press, military recruitment, and Anzac history in Queensland historical research, and he contributed to the book, Radical Brisbane (2004), typified his lifelong commitment to the academic research of conflict history. At the time of his death, he had just returned from Canberra where he had completed research into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with Dr Scott and their research team. This research was due for publication in 2011.

After completing his PhD thesis on masculinity in popular Australian magazines and comics, Ross made the Fryer Library his research home. He was a fixture in Fryer in the Reading Room or at the microfilm readers, mining decades of ephemera for elusive insights about Man magazine, Queensland’s Jubilee celebrations (Queensland Review, December 2009), the Queensland Premier’s Department (The engine room of Government: the Queensland Premier’s Department 1859-2001), government butcher shops (in Transforming labour: work, workers, struggle and change), and women in the Queensland Parliament (Queensland Review, November 2005).

While technology was never his friend, Ross was most commonly found hunched and squinting over the microfilm viewers, paying the price for his devotion to primary research. He passed on his love of the Fryer Library to his students at the seemingly distant UQ Ipswich campus by incorporating the Fryer facilities as an essential component of his courses on research methodologies. Many of his students, thus inspired, went on to complete projects which centred on the expansive and unique Fryer collection.

But this sketchy outline is so much less than the whole of Ross Laurie, and it will ring hollow to those of us who knew him. He was an academic’s academic, attacking his research with clarity and vision and documenting his insights in the minutest detail. He was not just a chronicler of popular culture, he was also a voracious consumer of that culture, which proved invaluable on trivia nights. And most definingly, he was a foul-weather friend; someone who was at his very best when you needed him the most, often when you didn’t realise you needed him at all.

His death in February this year robbed us all of his future contributions to Australian and Queensland historical scholarship and some of us of a warm and staunch friend.

DR TONI JOHNSON-WOODS is a lecturer in Contemporary Studies at The University of Queensland.

Dr William Louis Thorpe

Bill or William Thorpe—he wrote and published under both names—was born in the war-engrossed industrial centre of Newcastle in August 1943 and lived his first thirteen years close by the local steelworks. He had a difficult upbringing. Following a relatively unassisted birth in a hospital that his father would describe as ‘a chamber of horrors’, Bill’s mother succumbed to post-partum depression, a prelude to a series of nervous breakdowns and long bouts of incarceration in Morisset Mental Hospital. Her travail cast a long shadow over Bill’s childhood and teenage years. He was raised substantially by his father, a well-read, largely self-taught shop assistant (and later storeman and packer), in a modest working-class home; and such hard, early years would influence and colour the kind of Australian history that Bill ultimately chose to write.

In the mid-1950s the family moved to Sydney where Bill attended Randwick Boys High School, a tough and lively institution replete with many so-called ‘problem youth’—i.e. ‘bodgies’—and regimes of heavy corporal punishment. One of his class-mates later helped found the famed Atlantics instrumental group that developed the new Australian ‘surf sound’ in the early 1960s. Yet, by this time, Bill, now working as a layout artist in various Sydney advertising agencies, had gravitated to progressive jazz, particularly the sounds of Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker. Both these developments speak eloquently of Bill’s diverse creative talents—a prodigious skill at graphic art, painting, design and penmanship, and an encompassing love of music that led on to his eventual professional mastery of the mellow saxophone.

By the mid- to late 1960s, like many of the deeper-thinking members of his generation, Bill had developed a strong commitment against Australian and US military involvement in Vietnam. His cartooning portfolio burgeoned from this time. Eventually, he would publish acerbic, graphically arresting cartoons about the Whitlam Dismissal, militarism, environmental crisis and the excesses of the Bjelke-Petersen regime in such journals as Green Leaves and The Cane Toad Times. As part of this political flowering, Bill developed a deeply considered Marxian critique of Western capitalism that found him increasingly at odds philosophically with his chosen career in advertising. Encouraged by his lifelong...
partner Claire Williams, the well-known leftist sociologist whom Bill met at this time, he embarked upon an academic path. He studied for his O-Levels in Britain in the early 1970s while working as part-time fruit-picker and builder’s labourer, and performed brilliantly. After the couple moved to Brisbane soon after, Bill enrolled as an Arts student at The University of Queensland where I first encountered him while working as a history tutor, teaching a course in Tudor and Stuart Britain.

Bill found himself drawn to history, writing outstanding papers on the Tudor social structure and the enclosure movement; then, later, as I graduated from the teaching of British to Australian History, the destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines and the Queensland Aboriginal reserve system. This work led logically on to Bill’s Honours thesis of 1978, ‘Archibald Meston and the Aborigines, Ideology and Practice 1870-1970: An Exploration in Social History’, for which he was awarded a first class degree. A large segment of this study is devoted to a pioneering investigation of the Deebing Creek and Purga Aboriginal Missions outside Ipswich, largely prompted by his meeting with Aboriginal Elder and activist Les Davidson who was campaigning for the preservation of the Deebing Creek Aboriginal cemetery, then overgrown with bushland and otherwise forgotten. This campaign became a life-long preoccupation with Bill as well, cementing his close personal and cultural relationships with Davidson’s family, particularly his daughter, Frances Wright; and the eventual publication of Remembering the forgotten: a history of the Deebing Creek Aboriginal Mission in Queensland 1887-1915 (2004)—a publication central to the recent official gazetting of the cemetery. The painstaking biographical research in this book has been of enormous importance to Aboriginal peoples of south-eastern Queensland, helping them to rebuild fractured genealogies. In 2006, when Bill spoke of this project before a largely Aboriginal audience at the Beenleigh Family History Museum, he was honoured by being welcomed to the podium by a loud chorus of Aboriginal clap-sticks.


Bill’s composite overview, in contrast, is academically rigorous, theoretical, deeply critical and globally focused. He also contributed sections of brilliant analysis on the role of the State, industrial relations and Aboriginal employment to Beyond industrial sociology: the work of men and women (1992) in collaboration with its principal author, Claire Williams; while together in 2003, the pair (along with Carolyn Chapman, an Aboriginal project officer) wrote Aboriginal workers and managers: emotional and community labour and occupational health and safety in South Australia, a work of enormous practical and professional significance to health workers throughout Australia. Bill and I together produced a series of historical interventions in various scholarly journals and books on the Australian convict system and racial frontiers that have contributed to the recent ‘Convict Workers’ and ‘History Wars’ debates at both a national and international level. We had first met as student and teacher, became collaborating fellow historians in the Brisbane ‘salon’ of the Koala Club in the late 1970s, and finally emerged as a well-oiled team of co-writers during the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout we shared a deepening friendship.

Overall, Bill wrote with a characteristically fluent and incisive style, and a prodigious clarity of vision about the dispossessed, disempowered and marginalised peoples of Australia’s past: Aborigines, convicts, and the struggling and intermittently militant white working class. He wrote revealingly on imperialism, colonialism, racism and genocide. He contributed pioneering work on the environment; particularly the human assault on other sentient beings—a subject still struggling for a history in Australia. He also produced biography and championed oral history and people’s history against prior elitist preoccupations. Everything he wrote is painstaking, trail-blazing and important.

But Bill was considerably more than his impressive curriculum vitae. He was a principled, forthright and empathetic man—gentle, humorous, committed and genuine: a brilliant, dedicated teacher and communicator, an outstanding scholar and writer, a skilful artist and cheeky cartoonist, a polished musician, a superb athlete and runner, a tenacious activist for social justice, and a loyal, truehearted friend and companion. With every passing day, he is sorely and inconsolably missed.

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