



The art of giving

During the First World War a large Australian Army camp was set up on a property near Weymouth in Dorset, England. The owners of the property, the Richardsons, entertained many soldiers and officers from the camp, impressing them with their collection of bibles, early printed manuscripts and herbals.

In 1917, the Richardsons wrote to the Australian Museum offering the collection to New South Wales, noting:

We have liked ... the Australians so much, that it occurred to us that it would show ... our appreciation of the Australians and the noble way in which they have come forward to help us in this war, and all the sacrifices they have made, if we were to arrange that these bibles should eventually find a home in Australia.

After negotiations between the Richardsons, the Australian Museum and the State Library of New South Wales, Mr Richardson's widow sent the collection to the Library in 1926. This collection of 300 items — named the Nelson Moore Richardson and Helen Morewood Richardson Collection of Bibles and Early Printed Books

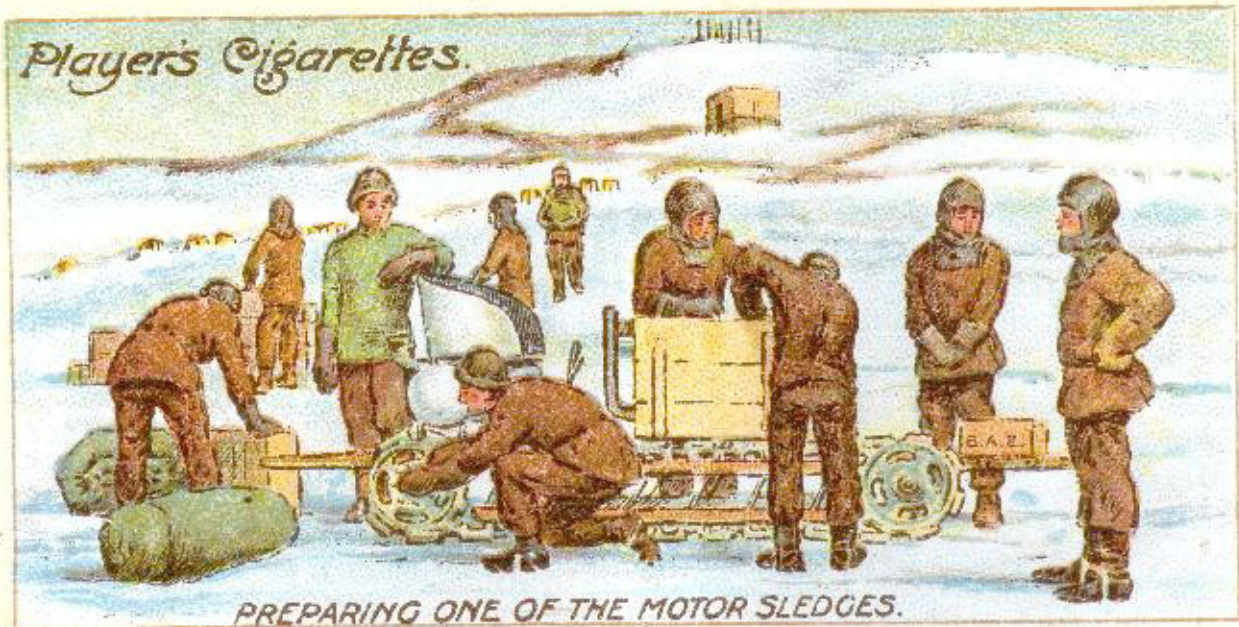
— includes the medieval illustrated work, the *Rimini Antiphonal*.

The *Antiphonal: Common of the Saints*, 1328, is thought to be the work of the illuminator Neri da Rimini. His work is now widely studied and examples of it can be found in collections around the world. The State Library of NSW is the only Australian cultural institution to hold an example of Rimini's work.

This masterpiece is on display throughout the year in the *Nelson Meers Foundation Heritage Collection*.

Had it not been for the generosity of the Nelson Meers Foundation, this and many other precious artefacts from the Library collections may not have been publicly displayed. The foundation generously gave money to the Library (and therefore to the people of New South Wales) to refurbish a gallery of the Mitchell Wing, and to

Christ blessing four saints (detail); Neri da Rimini (illuminator), 1328, *Antiphonal: Common of the Saints*, bound manuscript on vellum, Richardson 273, folio 71r.



prepare displays of significant items. The gallery opened in 2003 and, for a decade, will display rare, famous and historically significant items from the Library collections.

This is a gallery for treasures — items that tell us stories about who and what we are — and of the events, personalities and efforts that have contributed to our history.

Already, we have marvelled at great individual endeavours and outstanding intellectual achievements. In 2003, when the *Nelson Meers Foundation Heritage Collection* opened with its initial display, community reaction was swift and full of praise. On display were the many journals and accounts of the First Fleet; Bligh's logbook recording the Mutiny on the *Bounty*, and Shakespeare's First Folio, the only volume in existence

in the Southern Hemisphere. All of these items came to the Library through purchase and through benefaction.

Other remarkable stories have been told in the gallery. One of these was through the letters of Australian nurse Muriel Knox Doherty. When we read Doherty's letters, and the supporting material available, we realise the enormous significance and humanity of her work. Doherty was the Chief Nurse and Principal Matron in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen just after the end of World War II. Her writing reveals the daily grind of her work — occasionally enlightened by the recovery of ex-prisoners to a more normal, more peaceful life.

In 2007, the Library celebrates the contributions made to its collections, and to the Australian story, by people who choose to donate material through bequests and other acts of philanthropy. On display in the *Heritage Collection* are items from the famous David Scott Mitchell and Sir William Dixon bequests, as well as items from other bequests, such as the Richardson and Patrick White bequests.

Patrick White, so often characterised as angry and even mean-spirited, gave several times to the Library. In 2007, the fascinating book covers made for several of White's novels by Sidney Nolan are displayed. Set beside the published versions, these engaging images tell the story of an interesting relationship between two of our most successful creators. Their presence in the gallery is the result of White's generosity.

Also showing in the gallery, from October 2007, is a series of brilliantly coloured cigarette cards. Chosen in part for their dramatic effect and bright appearance, the cards may not at first strike the visitor to the *Heritage Collection* as of high cultural significance.

But it is the stories within the cards, and their unique popular appeal, that make them treasures, as well as their collectability and increasing monetary value. Take, for example, the Polar Exploration set, produced for John Player & Sons in about 1916. Here is an attractive



set of cards with well researched information about polar exploration. The details of clothing and equipment are remarkably accurate. The cards are small and engaging sources of historical information.

Also on display this year are the delightful watercolours of fairies, painted by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite (1888–1960), for books that she produced herself, and in collaboration with her elder sister, Annie Rattray (1882–1978). Originally in the Museum of Australian Childhood (a part of the Thynne Reid Trust) they were donated to the Library by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) when the museum closed in the mid-1990s.

Reflecting the growth of the Library collections, the *Nelson Meers Foundation Heritage Collection* is a constantly changing, and unique and entertaining source of interest and knowledge. The production of yearly printed gallery guides and a range of delightful and informative images on the atmitchell.com website (see below) ensure that the gallery displays are given context and meaning. The website also extends appreciation of these treasures far beyond Australian shores.

Bequests and philanthropy are two very important ways that the Library develops its collection. Of course, there are the significant benefactors like David Scott Mitchell, Sir William Dixon, Jean Garling and the Nelson Meers Foundation. Add to these the many, many bequests, donations and gifts that have contributed to the wonderful richness of the State Library of New South Wales, and we have a thriving collection — a true treasure house of information and an enduring record of our history and culture.

Stephen Martin

Coordinating Curator

Nelson Meers Foundation Heritage Collection



Above top: *Felis Yagouaroundi* [jaguar], attributed to GR Waterhouse, hand-coloured engraving, *Mammalia, Pt. 2. Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle ... 1832 to 1836*, London: Smith Elder, 1840–1843, Pl 8, DSM Q591.9/D/Set

Fairies on leaves above pool, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, watercolour, pen and ink sketch, copyright V & S Martin, PXD 725/966

Opposite page top: *Preparing one of the motor sledges*, c. 1916, from *Polar Exploration* series of cigarette cards, John Player & Sons, ML Safe 1/197

Book jacket design for Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*, 1958, Sidney Nolan, oil on paper, original Sidney Nolan artworks reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Sir Sidney Nolan Trust, ML 745