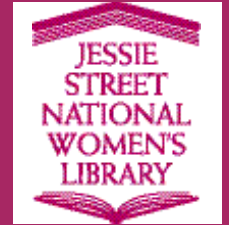


NEWSLETTER

To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful — Ursula Le Guin



2024 Annual Luncheon speaker: Virginia Bell

The Library is delighted to announce that the speaker at this year's Annual Luncheon on Monday 16 September will be the Hon Virginia Bell AC, SC. She served as a Justice of the High Court of Australia for 12 years, from 2009 to 2021, capping a prestigious legal career and a long commitment to law reform.

Virginia Bell was educated at Sydney Church of England Girls Grammar School, where she established a club whose particular aim was to avoid mandatory school sport. She then went on to the University of Sydney, graduating with a Bachelor of Law in 1977.

She was admitted as a solicitor in 1977. Between 1978 and 1984 she worked at the Redfern Legal Centre, the first community law centre to be established in NSW. She was admitted to the Bar in 1984 and was appointed a Senior Counsel in 1997. She became a judge of the Supreme Court in 1999.

Speaking of her work in law reform, Virginia says: 'I was active in the prison reform movement. This commenced in the aftermath of the Nagle Report into NSW Prisons which revealed systemic abuses in prison administration. I was also involved in the campaign for reform of the law relating to sexual assault, dating back to when we still had the offence of rape which focussed on proof of penetration of the vagina by the penis, rather than the violence associated with a range of sexual assaults. I was a member of the NSW government's Sexual Assault Committee. I was also active in advocacy on behalf of women prisoners, which included with respect to the harsh operation of the law with respect to the partial



defence of provocation in the case of women convicted of the murder of their partners after they had been subjected to a long course of domestic violence. I was a member of the NSW government's Women in Prison Task Force.'

Between 1994 and 1997, Virginia was Counsel assisting the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service. She served as President of the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration between 2006 and 2008. She was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2012 for eminent

service to the judiciary and the law through judicial administration, and as an advocate for the economically and socially disadvantaged. In 2022, she conducted an Inquiry for the Commonwealth into the appointment of the former prime minister to administer multiple departments of state.

She is currently the patron of the NSW Women Lawyers Association, president of the Australian Association of Constitutional Law and a member of the Board of the AustLii Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation which provides free electronic access to the decisions of all the Australian courts and legislatures together with other legal research materials.

The July Newsletter will contain more information about the Luncheon and Virginia's planned address to the Luncheon on 16 September 2024.

Jan Burnswoods

Annual Luncheon booking forms and raffle tickets will be included with the July Newsletter.



Recent acquisitions

A few interesting titles selected from many recently acquired:
It Isn't Nice (1972) by Dr Bertram Wainer. Wainer showed great courage opposing injustice which arose concerning women's right to medical abortion in Victoria which was illegal at that time. Police corruption and protection rackets thrived as women's exploitation continued under repressive laws.

An interesting selection from the series *In The National Interest* published in 2021 and 2024 by Monash University Publishing:
Power and Consent by Rachel Doyle
Towards Reproductive Justice by Ronli Sifris
Time to Reboot: Feminism in the Algorithm Age by Carla Wilshire
Easy Lies and Influence by Fiona McLeod

Fifty Years: Stories of Women's Lands

Volume 3 curated by Sand Hall.

A historic look at 25 women (mostly lesbian) with connections to The Lands.

Introducing new Board member Christine Kibble

As a child I wanted to be a Librarian when I grew up, so I was very pleased to accept the invitation to join the Library's Board.

I learnt to be a feminist at my mother's knee and have always strived to advance the cause of women. I served on the executive of Labor Women for many years until it was disbanded. I was president of the Australian Society of Accountants Women Members Group; I also served on the Womens Advisory Council to the Premier, Neville Wran. I became a chartered accountant and held a number of leadership roles before moving to the NSW Public Service. When I retired I was CEO of the New England Area Health Service.

Since retirement I have been active in a number of organisations including Emilys List founding member and coordinator NSW, Uniting Care board member and returning officer for university student associations and Domestic Violence NSW. I am currently treasurer of The Sydney Lyceum Club Inc, Sydney University Women's Group, and Graduate Women NSW (City Branch).

Annual General Meeting 2024

The Library's AGM was held on 16 April in the Meeting Room of Customs House Library. Chaired by Christine Yeats, the meeting was attended by 20 members. The minutes of the 2023 AGM were accepted as a true record of that meeting. The 2023 Annual Report and 2023 Audited Financial Report were presented and accepted. The Annual Report is available for download from the website.

Jessie Street National Women's Library Board of Management now consists of Chair Christine Yeats, Vice Chair Suzanne Marks, Treasurer Jean Burns, Secretary Sherri Hilario, and members Michele Ginswick, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Christine Kibble, Janet Ramsay and Beverley Sodbinow.

The Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) 2023 Annual Information Statement has been submitted and the ACNC Charity Register updated.

Sherri Hilario

Jessie Street National Women's Library

Australia's National Women's Library is a specialist library, its focus being the collection and preservation of the literary and cultural heritage of women from all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

Aims

To heighten awareness of women's issues.
To preserve records of women's lives and activities.
To support the field of women's history.
To highlight women's contribution to this country's development.

Patrons

Quentin Bryce AD CVO; Elizabeth Evatt AC; Dr Beverley Kingston; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney.

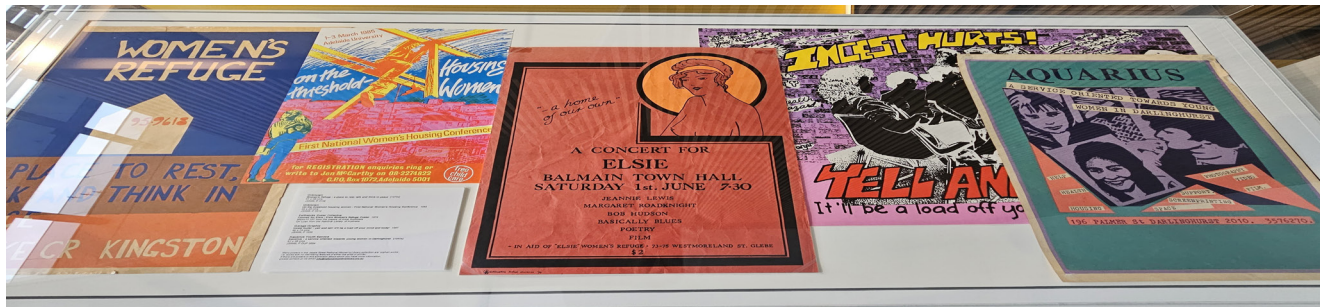
Board of Management

Christine Yeats, Chair; Suzanne Marks, Vice Chair; Jean Burns, Treasurer; Sherri Hilario, Secretary; Michele Ginswick, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Christine Kibble, Janet Ramsay, Beverley Sodbinow.

Editorial Team

Kris Clarke, Jessica Stewart, Jan Burnswoods, Editors; Margaret Knowlden, Proofreader.

Celebrating Services and Achievements – Elsie Women's Conference, March 2024



The Elsie Conference, hosted by the University of Technology, Sydney, brought together over 500 people, mainly women, from across the nation to celebrate the history and achievements of the women's refuge movement. Jessie Street National Women's Library supplied

a range of posters from its extensive collection for an exhibition highlighting feminist activism in domestic violence, sexual assault and many other issues.



The event marked the opening of Elsie Women's Refuge on 16 March 1974 when a group of Sydney Women's Liberationists broke into vacant houses in Westmoreland Street in the Glebe Estate and started cleaning and preparing 'Elsie' and 'Minnie' to accommodate women and children fleeing domestic violence.

The break-in, led by Anne Summers, laid the foundation for the establishment of women's refuges in all parts of Australia. Professor Summers retold the story with some of the original group of women. CEO of Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Centre, Christine Robinson, a Bundjalung woman who has worked in domestic, family and sexual violence for over 30 years delivered the opening address: **Journey to Justice**. She shared her harrowing personal experience of domestic violence over two decades, stressing that the physical and psychological trauma is deeply embedded and healing and recovery takes time. Her presentation was graphic and deeply moving, reminding all participants of the horror and tragedy for so many blighted by this social scourge. It laid the foundation in lived experience for the entire conference deliberations.

Two highlights were the rap dancers from Condell Park Primary School who energetically performed a sensational 'respect women' song, and the women from Taree who organised the procession of women in shrouds representing all women who had been killed since the beginning of 2024.

The Women's Poster Exhibition accompanied the Conference. Over 60 posters, most from the Jessie Street National Women's Library collection, were selected by Sherri Hilario and Anne Summers and curated by Stella McDonald, Curator and Manager, and Janet Ollevou, Assistant Curator, UTS Gallery and Art Collection. The posters were from the 1970s and 1980s and placed the emergence of the women's refuge movement in Australia in the context of the widespread activism of feminist and women's liberation campaigns, marches, rallies, protests and political lobbying, covering issues that affect women to this day: domestic and family violence, pay equity, employment rights, health, sexual assault and rape, reproductive rights, housing and homelessness and so on.

The Conference called on the Labor Government:

To end the practice of tendering for women's services where criteria privilege cheap service delivery over excellence.

In future funding rounds, prioritise community-based and run services which have a demonstrated history of promoting and supporting women's rights, including reproductive rights and equal pay and which must be women-led and have mechanisms for lived experience in and across decision-making.

The Conference culminated in honouring the labour of the thousands of women who worked in refuges for the last 50 years with an Elsie Award for one woman for each of those years. The Library congratulates all recipients and Dr Anne Summers and the UTS Business School on this initiative.

Sue Wills – her Library Legacy

Dr Sue Wills passed away in August 2022. We honoured her with an article in the November 2022 Newsletter.



Sue's political passions permeated her life and her extensive library of books and documents reflected her very broad political preoccupations with Australia's feminist, cultural and social history.

Sue left the Library an impressive and somewhat daunting collection of her personal papers and diaries. They are a

treasure trove of personal memories of a defining period of women's movement history in NSW as well as her association with the gay movement and her employment at the University of Sydney and Macquarie University.

Our Library volunteers scoured her shelves months before her passing for all the titles we did not hold and swept up her collection of feminist posters. There was a large collection of books and serials on her shelves which were boxed and sent to the University of Sydney Book Fair for sale.

She had recorded and transcribed interviews with many Sydney Women's Liberationists for her work on the **First**

Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation. All original documentation in relation to this work undertaken over two decades or more, partly with Joyce Stevens, had been lodged with the State Library of NSW. There were some draft chapters written but, in the main, it was a work-in-progress. There is a stand-alone chapter titled: *The Great Spartacist Debate* (200pp) which may merit publication on its own given that it touches on the controversy in Sydney Women's Liberation created by the disruptive tactics of the Spartacist League.

All the audio files and transcripts with some photos taken by Digby Duncan have been left to the Library. Professor Emerita Heather Goodall has had some of the files audio-enhanced and these represent a precious and rare record of the memories of feminist activists of the 70s in Sydney. These include taped interviews with: Aileen Beaver, Anne Roberts, Camille Guy, Deirdre Ferguson, Julie Gibson, Kris Melmouth, Martha Ansara, Mavis Robertson, Pam Stein and Peggy Hewitt. There are also transcripts of interviews with Fran Jelley, Margo Moore and Sandra Hawker among others.

When her will was finally processed by the Public Trustee, the Library was left a third of the Estate with two Indigenous organisations left the other two thirds. The considerable financial legacy was very generous and unexpected and the Library will take good care to apply it to its objectives. The Library Board is giving consideration to how her legacy may be marked in perpetuity.

Jozefa Sobski

Sam Mostyn for Governor-General

The Library congratulates Sam Mostyn for her well-deserved appointment as the next Governor-General. She is the second woman to hold the post, after Quentin Bryce.

Her address to our Annual Luncheon in 2022 was testament to her wisdom, deep compassion and commitment to the well-being of our country.

Her selection is a tribute to her exceptional leadership qualities, dedication and service to our nation.

Sam Mostyn trained as a lawyer and has had extensive experience in business, especially in telecommunications and insurance, locally and globally. Her non-executive board roles have included the boards of Transurban, Virgin Australia,



and chairing Citibank Australia. She is presently chair of AWARE Super and Alberts Music Group and is on the Mirvac board. Sam was a commissioner of the Australian Football League – the first woman to be a commissioner – helping develop its Respect and Responsibility policy, and a driver of the AFL (Women's) (AFLW).

Sam has chaired many not-for-profit bodies, including Beyond Blue and Australian Volunteers International. She chaired the 2022 Women's

Economic Equality Taskforce, charged with developing a national strategy to achieve gender equality.

We wish Sam all the best as she embarks on this new chapter. May her tenure as Governor General be marked by profound achievements, meaningful connections with Australians from all walks of life, and enduring contributions to the fabric of our society.

Christine Yeats

Lunch Hour Talk

The Lucky Ones

22 February

Melinda Ham

When Melinda Ham was asked why she put together this collection of voices of those who have escaped persecution in their homelands, she replied that, while the stories are horrific and traumatising, they need to be told. The migration experience since World War II is a familiar story but there is a humanity in sharing and understanding the refugee experiences.

Jozefa Sobski, former Chair of the Library, whose story is recounted in the book, was there at the talk, facilitating the Q & A. Introducing Melinda, she spoke of meeting her at a function in Canberra, where Jozefa agreed to be interviewed.

Canadian-born Melinda's own story is also recounted. Surrounded by racism and injustice, she became an anti-apartheid activist in 1986 while studying at McGill University in Canada, realising that she wanted to make a difference. Later, studying for a Masters Degree, she engaged in an extended sit-in at the London School of Economics, resulting in the university divesting from companies with financial interests in South Africa. She decided to become a journalist, and began her career in South Africa, where she worked as a writer and journalist across a range of international publications.

In the 1980s, she travelled to one of the poorest nations in the world, Malawi. She spoke of the warm and friendly welcome of the villagers towards the many refugees. Of the population of eight million, one million are refugees. Another pivotal experience came in 2021 while she was working in India and a powerful earthquake struck. She was able to record the victims' heartbreak at first hand.

In the mid-1990s, Melinda and her partner migrated to Australia. Melinda joined the Asylum Seeker Centre, an organisation which reached out to refugees, and listened to their stories. It was then that she decided to write their stories.

Jozefa spoke of her own background and the ways in which her family was different from other Australians. As displaced persons from Poland, they arrived by ship in 1948.



There was a strong sense of the strangeness of this place. Though they both spoke German, her parents had not had the benefits of much education – her mother had to leave school aged 12 to work. Being from a rural village, they were used to a kind and generous community atmosphere. The family was sent to the Bathurst migrant camp, 26 km from the town, to pay for the passage to Australia. There would be no returning to Poland; their village had been bombed. Her father Wojciech, with his impossible-to-pronounce name, was known as 'Burt' and worked for the Water Board for 35 years. He had taught himself English by reading Zane Grey westerns.

Asked how she chose the stories to be included in the book, Melinda said that her strong sense of redressing the balance led her to choose women, particularly those not so well-known. Too many refugee stories were written by well-known men.

The journeys are placed in their historical context, spanning 70 years. There is a Vietnamese 'boat people' story; a Tibetan couple who were arrested and tortured by Chinese guards; human rights campaigners in Zaire whose risky actions led to trial and detention. There is an Iraqi family, who were subjected to religious persecution, and a couple with two children in Afghanistan who were targeted by the Taliban and paid a people smuggler to take their son to Australia.

Comments from the audience lamented the loneliness and isolation of migrants, the success of sponsorships and resettlement, and sadly, the end of government support.

As Melinda says, the stories of those who survived upheaval and trauma and migrated to Australia, the 'lucky ones', need to be told as 'they have much to share'.

Kris Clarke

Lunch Hour Talks

Venue/Time: 12.00-1.30pm
Customs House Library, 31 Alfred St, Sydney — on Circular Quay
Enter via front of Customs House
Cost: \$20 (members) \$25 (non-members) including light lunch. Pay at the door. Book by noon Monday before the talk.
Ph (02) 9571 5359

20 June

Nadia Wheatley, *The End of the Morning*

Nadia's new book, *The End of the Morning*, was published in April. Edited by Nadia, this is an unfinished autobiography by Chamian Clift but it stands alone as a novella. This is the first time it has been published and the volume includes a selection of Clift's essays.

22 August

Helen Topor, *Neither King nor Saint*

Trying to understand who her father was and what he went through, Helen provides fascinating insights into the culture and climate of post-war Australia, the failure of Australia's settlement policies and the consequences these have had, not only on migrants but also on their descendants. Helen is an award-winning Canberra author, editor, mentor and voluntary guide at the National Gallery of Australia. *Neither King nor Saint* (2022) won a MARION ACT Notable Book Award for nonfiction in 2023.

17 October

Kate Ramsay, *Smashing the glass for women at work*

Kate Ramsay has over 35 years experience as a consultant specialising in gender-based equal employment opportunity. She draws on her research and the experiences of women she interviewed over a range of topics including the ongoing gender pay gap in Australian organisations and why some women are still having to navigate not just glass ceilings but class cliffs and glass labyrinths at work. She will also share her recommendations for what else is needed to achieve the goal of fully diverse gender workplaces in Australia.

Lunch Hour Talk

18 April

Rose Ellis on Bee Miles

Bee (Beatrice) Miles was famous as a larger-than-life character. She hitch-hiked widely and ‘jumped rattlers’ during the Depression, travelling to cities and towns across the continent before taking up residence on the streets of Sydney. Born into a wealthy family in 1902, Bee moved in Australia’s artistic and literary circles in the 1920s and 30s, and achieved notoriety for her acts of defiance and frequent refusal to pay taxi fares. She drew large crowds for her Shakespearean recitations and was once voted more famous than the Prime Minister.

Rose Ellis’ book on the ‘untold story’ of Bee Miles was published in September 2023. She described her extensive PhD research process which informed this text. Amongst her readings were Bee’s unpublished manuscripts held by the State Library of NSW, as well as diaries kept during her frequent incarcerations in Sydney’s mental hospitals. The health system at that time did little to help those suffering with a mental illness – a diagnosis challenged by Ellis’ research. Her research led her to consider a range of contributing factors which undermined Bee’s mental health and made her rebellious of authority, commencing with her father and including the predominantly male members of Australian institutions especially the police, the judiciary and the mental hospital staff. What emerged was a picture of persecution and intolerance bordering on torture.

Ellis illustrated her talk with a selection of photos illustrating Bee’s decline from her privileged early life as an attractive young woman on the cusp of adulthood to an obese and dishevelled woman after a lifetime of homelessness and sleeping rough in her later years. We saw the family mansion, Ambleside, the grand 1880s Ashfield home of her Sydney-born public accountant father, William John Miles. William had married Maria Louisa Binnington, a ‘sewing maid’ from Queensland; the match did not fit comfortably with the middle-class values of his mother’s family and caused a ruction. Bee’s family left Ashfield and moved to the North Shore where Bee attended Abbotsleigh, one of Sydney’s leading private schools. There she showed her academic capability and was amongst a small number of women to attend Sydney University, studying Arts and Philosophy, graduating in 1919. Her early promise derailed not long afterwards in 1920, at the start of her medical degree when she became ill with the disease *encephalitis lethargica* – a lethal epidemic at the time. The few that recovered were often mentally impaired, experiencing personality changes, loss of inhibition and inability to control impulses.

Ellis uncovered a background of domestic violence at the hands of her controlling father, as well as the possibility of other abuse, perhaps sexual, to which Bee occasionally alluded. Her father became increasingly violent towards her and, eventually, when he could not control her Bohemian behaviour, he had

her committed to a ‘lunatic reception house’, and she was forcibly hospitalised for three years in multiple institutions, including Callan Park and Gladesville Hospital. There she was kept ignorant of the medical reasons for her incarceration despite her repeatedly questioning the superintendent about her diagnosis.

Ellis emphasised that the treatment of mentally ill patients, especially women in the 20s and 30s, was both primitive and Gothic. Escape became her only means to obtain the freedom she craved. She travelled to Brisbane and Melbourne only to be brought back to Sydney and returned to hospital each time. Eventually her father granted her a living allowance and she was able to earn some extra money as a proofreader and occasional writer for newspapers. Writer Dymphna Cusack recalls Bee as ‘outspoken but sane!’ She was repeatedly persecuted by police, arrested for vagrancy and thrown into prison including Long Bay Reformatory. Gregarious by nature, she rode the trams of Sydney engaging in conversation with passengers and continuing her Shakespearean recitations. As her general health declined, however, she relied on charity for food and shelter, firstly by a Christ Church St Lawrence priest and lastly by the Little Sisters of the Poor at Randwick who cared for her until her death in 1973.

My curiosity writing this piece led me to my local library where I found an unpublished bibliography of Bee Miles compiled by Lurline Campbell in 1988. In it, I found this direct quote from Bee:

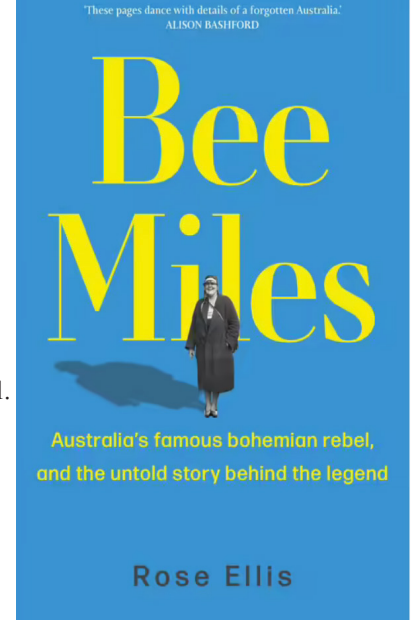
‘It takes a man or a woman of great moral courage, a man or woman almost unique ... to dare to take the risk of being himself or herself, all the time never posing, never acting or affecting. It is a dangerous business being yourself. I know of nothing more certain to provide the almost always false epithet ‘mad’ or to deprive that man or woman of his or her identity.’

Barbara Henery

Louisa Lawson Correction

In the July 2023 Newsletter article on Louisa Lawson House by Eloise Watts, we wish to clarify wording which may have given the wrong impression. Paragraph two states that Louisa ‘lived inside psychiatric institutions herself’, perhaps inferring that she was insane. It has been drawn to our attention by her great granddaughter Olive Lawson that in the later years of her life, Louisa suffered from forgetfulness, now known as dementia, which resulted in her admission to Gladesville Hospital.

- The Editors



General donations since February 2024

New members

Margaret Cunningham
Alison Reeves-Oliviere
Emma Wallhead
Alison Wishart

Since it was launched in September 2009, the Capital Investment Fund has reached over \$681,998. Our target is \$1,000,000, which will provide essential support for Library operations.

CIF donations since February 2024:

Frances Lemmes
Helen Tuckey
Kay Vernon



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☐ make a donation ☐ become a Library volunteer.

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Name: _____

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☐ Please send Newsletters by email instead of hardcopy.

☐ Full member \$70 ☐ Life member \$1,000
☐ Organisation \$140 ☐ Student (conditions apply) \$25
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A membership year runs from 1 January to 31 December. Members joining after 1 October are financial until the following year.

☐ I wish to make a donation of \$ _____

☐ _____ to the Library for general purposes

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☐ I am happy to have my name published in the Newsletter.

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☐ to charge this, and all future membership renewals as they fall due to this credit card number.

☐ to charge \$_____ annually to this credit card as a donation to:

- ☐ the Library for general purposes
- ☐ the Library's Capital Investment Fund

Signature _____

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and we will contact you.

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Note: Please advise the Library if your contact details have changed.

Visit us:

523–525 Harris Street (cnr William Henry Street), Ultimo
Enter through the Ultimo Community Centre, Bulwara Rd
Please use the intercom for admittance

Opening times:

The Library is open to the public Monday to Friday 10 am to 3 pm

Borrowing policy:

The public can access items using the interlibrary loan system. The public cannot borrow items but may use them in their library of choice.

How to reach the Library:

- * The Library is a 20 minute walk from Town Hall Station through Darling Harbour or from Central Station via the Goods Line walk or via Harris Street
- * Bus 501 (Railway Square to Ryde/West Ryde) at Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre stop
- * Bus 389 (Maritime Museum to North Bondi) at Harris and Allan Streets stop
- * Light rail from Central Station or Dulwich Hill to Exhibition stop
- * There is limited two hour street meter parking available

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