

# Newsletter March 2026

A Quarterly Newsletter from The Friends of the State  
Library of South Australia  
Edited by Jane Walkley

**Friends**

STATE LIBRARY  
South Australia

## A Note from the President, Professor Rick Sarre



Greetings from my presidential desk.

Some of you will recall that about a dozen years ago everyone was suddenly using the term “segue.” The dictionary says it means: “move or shift from one role, state, or condition to another.” I had never heard of the word, but once it caught on, there was no stopping it. Forgive me. This column is designed as a series of segues!

The Tuesday Talks *Books in My Life* series has started on a great note, beginning this month with criminologist Professor Leanne Weber who spoke of the influences that helped her write her powerful memoir, *The Chosen Son*. Monash University’s Robyn Newitt writes, “The author’s experiences, although a mere fragment of The Stolen Generations history, of being a white child born into a white family following the forced removal of an Aboriginal boy has never been explored like this.” As I wrote in the June 2025 *FSL Newsletter*, I thoroughly enjoyed the book. Leanne’s talk was a wonderful start to the year.

Segue 1: Speaking of reading books, I took a bunch with me over the Christmas festive break. The first was *The Salt Path* by Raynor Winn (Penguin, 2019). “The most inspirational book of this year,” said *The Times* in 2019. Raynor (not her real name, apparently) narrates the tale of the journey she took with her very ill partner some 630 miles along the southwest coastal path in England, from Somerset to Dorset via Devon and Cornwall. A year or two after the book took the literary world by storm, doubts about the couple (and hence their story of ill-health and financial loss) began to emerge. You can read about it in the blog *The Conversation*. Search for “The Salt Path Scandal.” Whatever the truth, it is a good read. The author writes brilliantly of the triumph of the human spirit:

“Our hair was fried and falling out, our nails broken, clothes worn to a thread, but we were alive. Not just breathing through the thirty thousand or so days between life and death, but knowing each minute as it passed, swirling around in an exploration of time.”

Segue 2: Speaking of the human spirit, I was drawn to buy a copy of *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* by Max Porter (Faber and Faber, 2015). “Unforgettable,” said literary editor of *The Guardian*. To my mind the book is totally forgettable. Its bleakness and muddle-headedness (the author is writing about the pain of losing his wife) did not appeal to me. Moreover, some of you would be familiar with Emily Dickinson’s, “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” (c. 1861) as her exploration of hope as it underpins the human spirit. Like Max Porter, she, too, compares her feelings to a bird that perches in her soul and helps her through life’s harshest adversities. Max Porter borrows the allegory without any reference to Emily, which is strange.

## A Note from the President, continued...

Segue 3: much of the writing is completely bizarre:

“Some dads do this, some dads do that. Some natural evil, some fairly kind. Pollarded, bollarded, was-it-ever-thus. Elastic snaps, a sniff and a sneeze and we’re gone.”

To my mind, if you feel a need to explore loss and grief, access a copy of Peter Goers’ brilliant 2023 memoir, *In the Air of an Afternoon Almost Past: A Memoir of Loss*. Now *that* is worth spending money on.

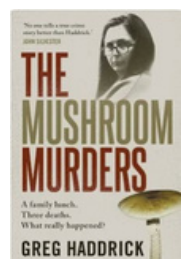
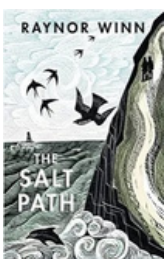
Segue 4: Feeling a need to explore loss, I decided to dive into *The God Who Doesn’t Exist* (ATF Press, 2025) by Adelaide’s own preacher, writer, and self-appointed founder of *The Anti-Theology Project*, Fergus McGinley. Having studied rudimentary (essentially process and liberation) theology in the USA in the late 1970s, I enjoyed his wrestling with the numinous, especially his revisiting (and rebuking) the challenge attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus that questions the compatibility of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God with the existence of suffering. It posits that if God is willing but unable to prevent evil, then God is not omnipotent. If God is able, but unwilling, then God is not benevolent; if neither power is present, then there is no God. If you are in agreement with Søren Kierkegaard that God cannot be proven (one way or the other) then you will not enjoy this book. I did not agree with much of what was concluded, but I enjoyed the author’s exploration.

Segue 5: Speaking of exploration, and while holidaying near Encounter Bay, I picked up a copy of *Ill-Starred Captains: Flinders and Baudin* by Anthony J. Brown (Crawford House, 2000). It is a huge tome, some 512 pages, and I confess I did not read every word. But if you enjoy tales of nautical exploration, it is a magnificent reference tool. Flinders set sail from Portsmouth, bound for the south seas, in July 1801, nine months after Baudin left France. The book maps both journeys to and from Australia, predominantly using the captains’ own logbook narratives. I was amazed by the ingenuity and bravery of both sailors, given the uncertainty of the outcome, and the privations that they and their crews experienced.

Segue 6: Something that wasn’t uncertain was the jury verdict in the Erin Patterson trial. On 7 July last year, in the Victorian Supreme Court, a jury convicted Patterson on three murder charges and an attempted murder charge. On 8 September 2025, Justice Christopher Beale sentenced her to life imprisonment with a non-parole period of thirty-three years. Astonishingly, two books on the case appeared within a month, *Recipe for Murder* by Duncan McNab (Hachette, 2025), and *The Mushroom Murders* by Greg Haddrick (Allen and Unwin, 2025). Both are very readable. My reviews of them are found as ‘Two Crime Books on the Mushroom Trial are out’, in *The Conversation*, 14 October 2025. Search for “Sarre + mushroom.”

Segue 7: Finally, speaking of crime, it is a crime that Writers Week collapsed this year. Given that I am running a political campaign seeking to be elected in the March 21 election, and since we are now in “caretaker” mode, it would be inappropriate for me to say too much more about the circumstances that gave rise to the cancellation. What I can say with assurance is that the 2027 experience will be worth waiting for.

Finally, segue number 8: Speaking of waiting, FSL members will need to wait a little longer for our Board’s plan for an extended series of scholarly talks in 2026. Something will emerge, but not just yet! We seek your forbearance.



# Get to know the Friends' Board members

## Featuring: Emma McEwin



### What place is top of your bucket list?

Anywhere in Europe that I haven't been such as Sicily or Portugal.

### If you could have a fictional character as a best friend, who would it be?

Probably Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) because she's wise, level-headed, and has a good sense of humour.

### If you could turn any activity into an Olympic sport, what would you win a gold medal in?

Losing or breaking things!

### Which 2 books would you take to a desert island?

It would depend on my mood, but I'd choose books I've read and loved, such as *Olive Kitteridge*, by Elizabeth Strout and *The talented Mr Ripley* by Patricia Highsmith. If I felt like a classic, I might take *Crime and Punishment* and *David Copperfield*.

### Which animal do you think best represents your personality?

I'm not sure, but one animal I aspire to be like is an elephant because elephants are deeply empathetic.

### What was your favourite book as a child?

*Hansel and Gretel*. I remember being captivated as much by the illustrations as I was by the story.

### Where did you grow up?

On a dairy farm in Inman Valley.

### Do you collect anything?

Apart from books, I collect stamps and tickets and other material traces for making collage gift cards and bookmarks. It's my way of memorialising printed paper and printed words and the uniqueness of printed documents in an increasingly digitised world.

### What is your idea of a perfect vacation?

One that allows lots of time for reading and walking, and includes a room with a view, and/or one that involves lots of trips to the theatre.

### If you could have 1 superpower, what would it be?

The ability to produce more time to do things.

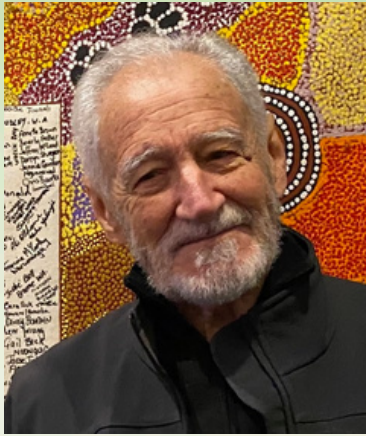
### What was the last book you read?

*Gertrude Stein: An Afterlife* by Francesca Wade.

### If you could be fluent in a language you do not know, which would it be?

Latin because it would help me with French and Spanish, and even English!

# BOOKS IN MY LIFE - A Tuesday Talk



Rev Dr Jonathan Barker, a  
Uniting Church Minister, gave  
us a wonderful talk in  
December 2025. Access his  
presentation and list of  
books [here](#).

## Program for 2026

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>3 February</b>  | <b>Prof Leanne Weber (criminologist)</b>                |
| <b>March</b>       | <b>Break for Adelaide Writers' Week</b>                 |
| <b>7 April</b>     | <b>The Honorable Chris Schacht (former senator)</b>     |
| <b>5 May</b>       | <b>Dr John Mayo (historian)</b>                         |
| <b>2 June</b>      | <b>Monica Oliphant AO (scientist)</b>                   |
| <b>7 July</b>      | <b>John Murray APM (former ACT police commissioner)</b> |
| <b>4 August</b>    | <b>Jacinta Thompson (Director Hawke Centre, UniSA)</b>  |
| <b>1 September</b> | <b>Richard Muncey (engineer)</b>                        |
| <b>6 October</b>   | <b>Dr Heather Robinson (writer)</b>                     |
| <b>3 November</b>  | <b>Dr Melissa Bochner (surgeon)</b>                     |
| <b>1 December</b>  | <b>Dr Sandra Kearney (historian)</b>                    |

# BOOKS IN MY LIFE - A Tuesday Talk

## Professor Leanne Weber

### February 2026



Leanne is Adjunct Professor of Criminology at the Canberra Law School. She has published academic works on the policing of minorities, human rights and border control.

She spoke to the Friends on February 3 about the books that inspired her to write *The Chosen son – a memoir of love, loss and colonisation* (2024). This is the story of her struggle to come to terms with the role her family played in the separation of aboriginal children from their families.

Leanne grew up in Adelaide in the 60s and 70s with 3 other siblings, one of whom was Len, an indigenous foster brother. He had been born in Koonibba, a former mission some distance from Ceduna. He had club feet and so was separated from his family and sent to Adelaide for medical treatment at a very young age. Authorities thought it would not be suitable for him to return to his family so eventually Leanne's kind, church-going family became his foster carers.

Leanne's memoir is painful to read as Len becomes caught between 2 cultures; he spends time later as a ward of the state in different institutions and seeks comfort in his teenage years in alcohol. Works that helped her to understand the racist but well-meaning experiment of the Stolen Generations are the *Bringing them Home* report (1997) and *Broken Circles – fragmenting indigenous families 1800 – 2000* by Anna Haebich.

Other memoirs, such as *Tell me why* (2019) by Archie Roach and *The Hate race* by Maxine Beneba Clarke (2018) and many other books are listed as being an impetus to the telling of the story of the chosen son. It was particularly difficult as most of Len's records had gone missing. Leanne gained some help and comfort from Len's birth family after Len's death at the age of 26.

She writes in *The Chosen son*, p.108: "I hope that speaking this truth about my early life with Len will transform the too-heavy burden of grief and shame that I have carried for so long into something still real, but at least a little lighter for being shared."

By Jane Walkley

#### Other books mentioned:

On Indigenous perspectives:

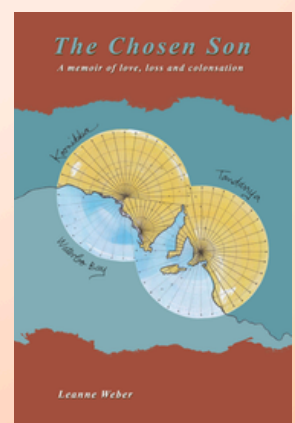
*Growing up Aboriginal in Australia*, by Anita Heiss (ed) (2018)

On 'race':

*A Letter to my Nephew*, by James Baldwin (1962)

On trauma:

*Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, by Gail Honeyman (2017)



# Our Annual Book Sale will be Friday 12 June to Sunday 14 June



Clean up, recycle your collection and feel good!

Book Donations wanted

Drop off your pre-loved books to the Friends' office.

Call Marianne on 08 7424 6310 for more information

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## Tour of the Roche Gallery

20 members toured the Roche Gallery on January 28. Of special interest was the Art Deco collection



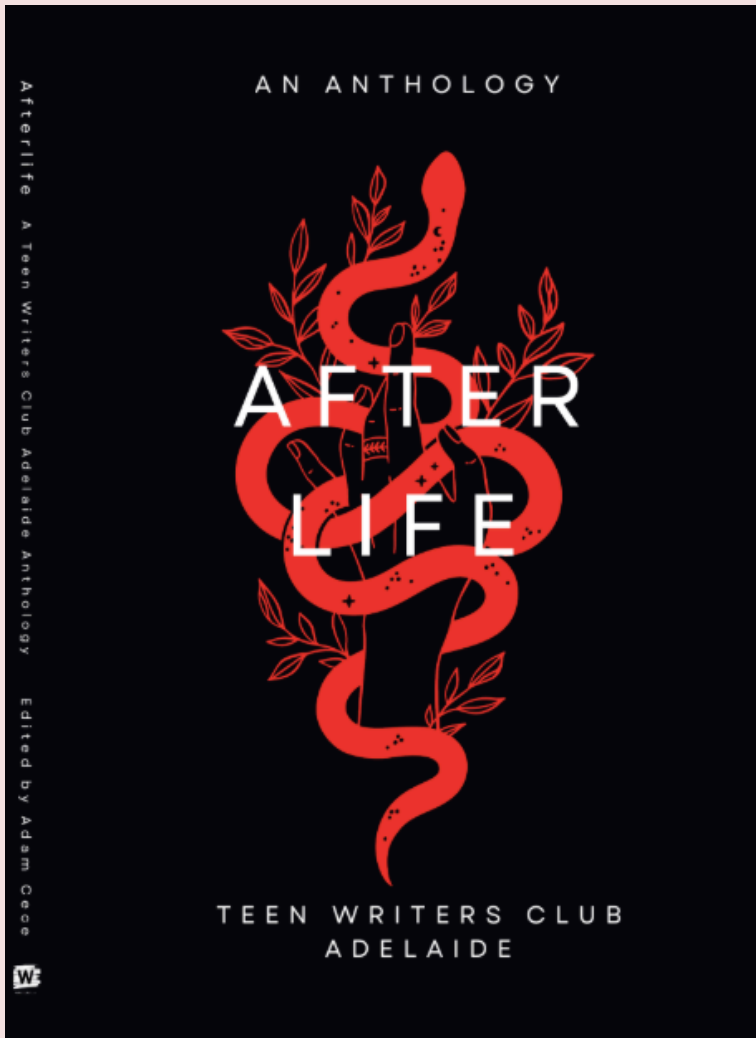
Picture: Susan Ditter



Picture: Susan Ditter



Picture: Rick Sarre




Thanks to the support of Friends of the State Library, Writers SA published an anthology featuring 20 pieces from participants in the past two years of our Teen Writers Club.

The theme for this collection was "Afterlife." This publication offered an invaluable opportunity for our teens to receive professional editorial guidance from Adam Cece, the current leader of the Teen Writers Club, and most importantly, a chance to see their work in print.

The book launch held in the City Library on February 7 provided a fitting conclusion to our time hosting the Teen Writers Club in that location.

By Katherine Woehlert

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Effective Living Centre

## 2026 Wilks Oration

### *The Future of Memory*

Re-thinking Australian war remembrance

## Professor Peter Stanley

Former Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial


**Friday 17 April**

7.00pm - 10.00pm

Effective Living Centre

26 King William Road

Wayville



Drinks, nibbles and music by the **Fiddle Chicks** from 7.00pm, formal proceedings from 7.30pm, supper afterwards


Tickets: \$40 General admission

\$30 Concession

\$10 live stream

Bookings essential:

<https://events.humanitix.com/2026-wilks-oration-professor-peter-stanley>



# What's on at the State Library?



[Adelaide Fringe 2026: The Courtyard of Curiosities at the State Library](#)  
Thursday 19 February to Sunday 22 March

## Leading the Nation

50th anniversary of South Australian  
gay law reform 1975 - 2025

Fifty years ago, South Australia changed the nation, and the story behind that moment still sparks conversation today. *Leading the Nation* revisits the turning point triggered by the death of Dr George Duncan and the wave of public pressure that followed. It's a story of courage, activism and a community refusing to stand still.

[Explore the  
online  
exhibition](#)



For any questions regarding State Library  
events, please contact  
Email: [slsa.programs@sa.gov.au](mailto:slsa.programs@sa.gov.au)

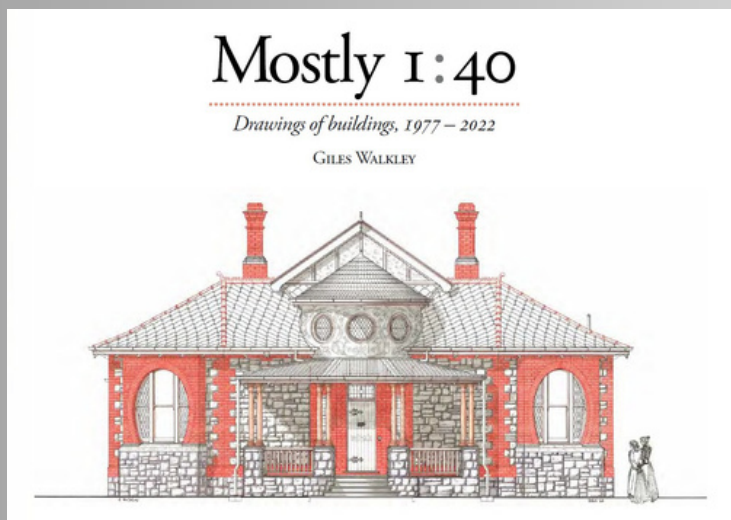
**State Library of South Australia**  
The stories that make us.



# Authors we support

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOOK which colourfully represents the heritage of Adelaide and South Australia in words and pictures, look no further than MOSTLY 1:40.

- Expertly hand-ruled architectural drawings, artfully arranged by John Kingsmill in a spacious A3 format, are laid out to scales large and small.
- Intriguing buildings, structures, gateways and designs in stained glass appear page by page, some shown in plan as well as from the front.
- Examples from other states, countries and periods are mixed in to provide unexpected contrasts.
- An informal but learned commentary gives the history of the subjects and, in many cases, how the drawings came about.
- This is a handsome collection of South Australiana from which, once bought, you will be reluctant to part.

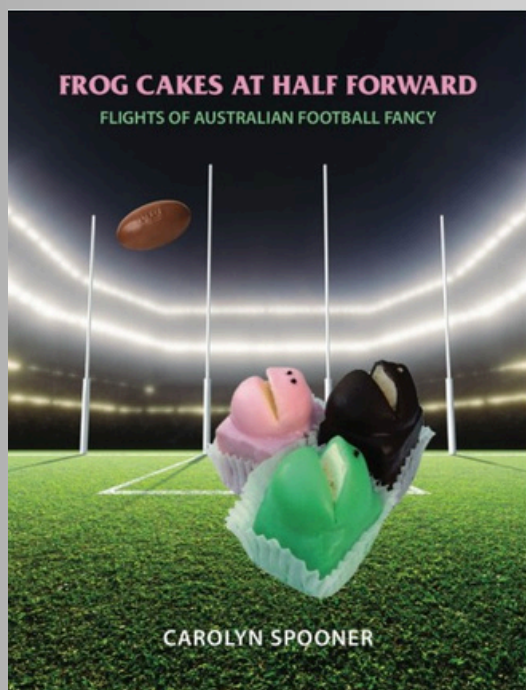


Paperback and spiral-bound copies are available at \$125-00 and \$95-00 respectively, from the office of the Friends of the State Library, Institute Building, North Terrace, Monday-Thursday 10-2pm or from the author via 0456 488 287.

Delivery (within reason) or packing and postage at cost can be arranged.

There is a share being donated to the Friends by the author, Giles Walkley.

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Australian Rules Football has a rich history dating back to the 1850s. Carolyn Spooner adds to this history with a piece of creative non-fiction that matches the interesting exponents of each of its playing positions on the field with categories of everyday things.

You will meet old-timers and current players as well as Indigenous and women stars from across the country. South Australian heroes Shine Hosking and Ken Farmer rub shoulders with Zak Butters, Tex Walker, Gavin Wanganeen and Erin Phillips OAM. They are matched with icons of South Australian history and culture: the Frog Cake, Coopers Ale, Holden Ute, RM Williams, Opal, Leafy Sea Dragon, Old Gum Tree, Stobie Pole, Police Greys, and aviators Sir Ross Smith and Sir Hubert Wilkins. The rich collections of the State Library of South Australia illustrate each story.

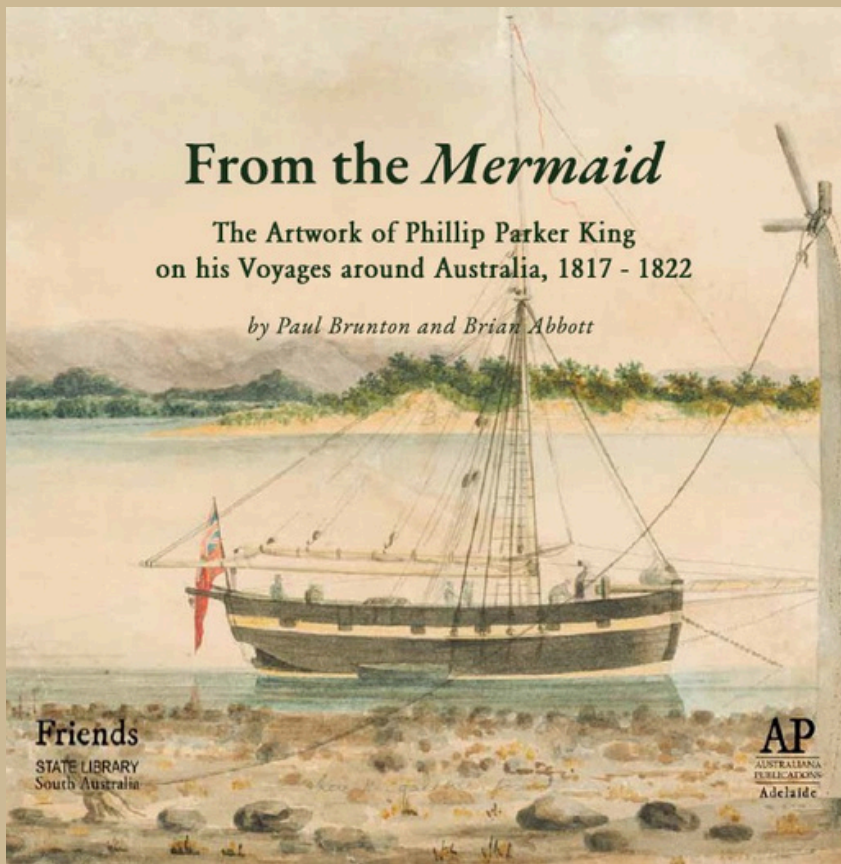


Since 1964 Carolyn has been a knowledgeable observer of the SANFL and VFL/AFL scene, admiring players from all teams. From 1978 to 2023 she was a librarian at the State Library of South Australia, writing stories for its website, curating exhibitions and helping customers. You may have met her when pursuing your own research quests or at one of her popular talks on State Library collections.

*Frog cakes at half forward* is by one of our beloved members Carolyn Spooner, who was a librarian at the State Library for 45 years. The Friends are a nominated agent for Carolyn. Books can be purchased for \$35 from the Friends office, with a share being donated to the Friends by the author.

Carolyn describes this book as a kind of love letter to Aussie Rules Football, to the State Library, and to South Australia's history and culture. The book has colourful illustrations from State Library collections, such as a page from a Sands & McDougall postal directory, a map by WH Edmunds, and gems from the Children's Literature Research Collection. Carolyn has managed to sneak in references to three of her South Australian heroes: Sir Ross Smith, Sir Charles Todd and Sir Hubert Wilkins.

**Both books are available for sale in the Friends' Office & Bookshop**



**AP**  
AUSTRALIANA PUBLICATIONS  
Adelaide

## ***From the Mermaid***

Australiana Publications  
forthcoming book.  
To be published later in  
2026.

Details out soon.

## **DONATING TO THE FRIENDS**

Thank you for being a member of the Friends. Your membership is vital to the work we do supporting our State Library. Thanks to your subscriptions, donations, both large and small, benefactors, and bequests we have, over the years, been able to annually gift substantial works to the State Library that deepen their collection of our South Australian history. This support began in 1932, at the time of the Great Depression, and still today the State Library is often dependent on the Friends to donate significant works to their collection, such as the Frank G. Hankey, Panorama of the Port River & North Parade, Port Adelaide, 1855. But we too find ourselves in straitened times.

- Gift a \$60 membership to family, friends or work colleague.
- Support Australiana Publications re-publish Australian books of historical significance by:
- Becoming a Subscriber and receive a handbound copy of our latest publication for \$375, with your name in the book.
- Becoming a Sponsor and receive a beautiful leather handbound copy in a slipcase, with original artwork by Stephen Bowers for \$2500.
- Donating any amount to support the Friends. Any donation over \$2 is fully Tax Deductible.

**Friends**  
STATE LIBRARY  
South Australia

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