



INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

NSW Chapter
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Dear Members,

ISAA NSW's AGM in May had a quorum, but it would have been good to see more members join us online. Following this meeting Christine Yeats is Chair, Christine Jennett is Immediate Past Chair and Acting Secretary, Rodney Nilsen is Treasurer, we don't have a Vice Chair, but we do have a full team of ordinary members in Lesley Potter, Michelle Cavanagh, Susan Steggall, Judith Bonzol and Alice Paul.

Our next events are as follows. In June Christine Yeats FRAHS will speak on her research about a renowned Sydney teacher of dance (p.2).

The Biography Reading Group are meeting by zoom at 2pm on Thursdays, duration up to 90 minutes. The next meeting will take place on 19 June when Jillian Graham's book *Inner Song: A Biography of Margaret Sutherland (1897-1984)* will be discussed. Alice Paul is Convenor of the Biography Reading Group.

The Public Affairs Reading Group next meets via Zoom on 25 June when Thomas Mayo's *Always Was Always Will Be*, will be discussed. Christine Jennett is Convenor of this reading group.

There will be a call for abstracts circulated shortly for the Workshop on *The Power of Fiction* that will be held on Saturday 22 November. Keynote speaker A/Prof Stephanie Russo.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, or interesting snippets of research, please send them to me by **23 July 2025** at: cjennett@ozemail.com.au.

Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor

NSW Chapter ISAA

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Dates for Your Diary

19 Jun: Biography Reading Group

25 Jun: Public Affairs Reading
Group

26 Jun: Work-in-Progress Christine
Yeats

22 Nov: Power of Fiction
Workshop

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

11.00am - 12.30 pm 26 June

Auditorium

History House

Speaker: Christine Yeats FRAHS

Title: *In search of Esther Vincent 'Hope' Ryrie: Renowned Teacher of Dance*

Abstract: Christine Yeats will discuss her biographical research study into the life and legacy of Esther Vincent 'Hope' Ryrie (1910-2003), a renowned teacher of dance whose influence spanned decades. Hope Ryrie's School of Dancing at 170 King Street in Sydney, which she opened in 1939, was still being referred to well into the 1960s. In tracing Hope's journey, Christine will aim to highlight how Ryrie's passion and expertise influenced generations of dancers and dancing educators.

About the Speaker: Christine Yeats FRAHS is an archivist and historical researcher. She is the Chair of the Jessie Street National Women's Library and a past President of both the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Federation of Australian Historical Societies. Christine chairs the Assessment Sub-Committee of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee and she is also the current President of the Randwick & District Historical Society. She has a wide-ranging interest in the study of Australia's colonial history. These include the pioneer botanist Sarah Hynes, the history of Romani people in NSW during the 19th and early 20th centuries and the attempts to introduce a silk industry in NSW. Christine has contributed to a great many publications; spoken at national and international conferences and presented talks and workshops for local and family history groups across NSW. Her recent publications include:

'Henry, William Ernest (Bill) (1920–1998)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography*, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/henry-william-ernest-bill-32799/text40801>, published online 2023.

'Romani – Towards an Understanding of their Place in Australian History', *ISAA Review ISAA Review* (The journal of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc.), Vol 19, Number 1, 2023.

Handy Guide: Convict Records of New South Wales: The Human Stories of the Transportation System, St Agnes (SA), Unlock the Past, 2021.

Essays — 'Elizabeth, Lady Gipps', 'Louisa, Lady Duff', 'Lady Edeline Strickland' and 'Margaret, Lady Davison' in Joy Hughes, Carol Liston, Christine Wright (editors), *Playing Their Part, Vice-Regal Consorts of New South Wales 1788–2019*, Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney, 2020.



RECENT EVENTS

Doing Research

Dr Deborah Campbell presented a very interesting and intriguing session in March on a topic that is not often spoken about these days, *The rise and fall of domestic science education for girls in NSW: 1913 to 1960: lessons learned*.

Deborah explained how her research came about as she initially planned to use her skills as a historian to write a history of her own High School, Randwick Girls High. Due to current issues with combining boys' and girls' schools this was a contentious topic and was discarded to focus on the transition of girls' Domestic Science schools to comprehensive high schools in New South Wales.

Launching into her talk with gusto and passion, Deborah gave a comprehensive and detailed examination of the subject so that participants at this event were left in no doubt as to the historical progression of girl's secondary education from 1913 to 1960s.

In the nineteenth century it was the accepted view that the importance of schooling for girls was training for their natural destiny, that of wife and mother. Girls were to be prepared for their given role in the private sphere as

housewives and mothers as they were not capable of engaging in scientific or academic studies or participating in public affairs. This portrayal was underscored by the kind of dresses that were worn by waitresses, cleaning ladies and laundry maids.

The consequences of this focus on Domestic Science courses for girls was profound: they left school earlier than boys, it was schooling with no career structure and led to huge wastage of human resources.

While domestic ideology was accepted by many historians, Deborah's research showed that domestic science courses were never popular with parents nor with girls, many of whom chose commercial subjects, preferring commercial employment over domestic work and service.

Deborah gave a comprehensive overview of the changes in domestic science education in Australia for girls from the depression and as a result of the two world wars to the 1960s when advances in education reform and the role of women in society were made.

While Deborah's research (by examining the school's records) focused on Randwick Girls High School she also covered education reform at the New South Wales State and National levels. She observed that changes in the 1960s were the death knell for domestic science, especially post the Wyndham Report which gave girls stronger career paths to follow. Indeed, Australia benefited from improved and better education for girls. **Lesley Potter**

Open Forum

In May Dr Kate Laing gave a most engaging Zoom talk, despite the absence of the slides that she intended to illustrate it due to technological difficulties on the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Her book *Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915–2015* (ANU Press) is available through ANU Press Open Access (<https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/sisters-peace>).

WILPF was founded during the first World War, and it became the first peace society to gain status with the United Nations in 1948. In order to use their new-found voting rights women had to adapt the newly federated political system after Australia's six colonies federated in 1901. They chose a 'non-party' approach to participation in the political system. War emphasised gender differences, with men going to fight and women staying at home and supporting them. In 1918 they gathered in the Hague to discuss peace, using a gendered perspective.

An International Committee of Women for Peace was formed, and Australian women were drawn to it. The peace movement in Australia grew out of Dr Charles Strong's Church in Flinders Street, Melbourne in whose congregation were Vida Goldstein and Eleanor Moore. Dr Strong's wife Janet Strong, was also active in the movement. In Australia the sisterhood prioritised education and clearly articulated Christian Pacifism. In the 1960s WILPF began monitoring the Vietnam war and, after Prime Minister Menzies introduced conscription, other groups such as Save our Sons, joined the peace campaign. Imagery of 'protecting children' was prominent. Throughout the 1970s the new language and theory of the Women's Liberation Movement was confronting to WILPF women. Their response was to reassert WILPF's identity as a peace organisation rather than a feminist one. This was a difficult period for them as challenges to those who identified women as one group came from Indigenous women and others pointing to the diversity of those covered by the category 'women'.

1975 was International Women's Year and it was followed by the Decade for Women. WILPF did engage in these activities but was disappointed that there was not enough focus on peace. Some leading feminists criticised the 'national interests' focus of many who attended events for the year and the decade, both in Australia and internationally. However, from 1980 forward WILPF activists included the theory of 'patriarchy' in their analysis of the social structures affecting women's lives. Laing concluded that WILPF encouraged women to take prominent roles in society and they were able to have some impact on the promotion of rights for women and raise awareness of ways to promote peace. **Christine Jennett**



BOOK NOTES

Who is Government? *The Untold Story of Public Service*

Edited by Michael Lewis

Published by Allen Lane 2025 Hardback RRP \$55

I can sum-up this book in one word. WOW. I might even allow a certain amount of over excitement and add an exclamation mark – WOW! Now I will let the book speak for itself. It begins with a quote from President John F. Kennedy.

“Let the public service be a proud and lively career. And let every man and woman who works in any area of our national government, in any branch, at any level, be able to say with pride and with honor in future years: ‘I served the United States Government in that hour of our nation’s need.’”

In his INTRODUCTION TO A JOURNALISTIC GOLD MINE, Lewis writes: ‘After Donald Trump won his first presidential election, I had one of the strangest experiences I’ve ever had as a writer. The federal government had set aside a big pot of money for the candidates of both parties to staff their presidential transition teams. Trump and Hilary Clinton had both built massive teams of people ready to enter the 15 big federal departments and hundreds of smaller federal agencies to learn whatever was happening inside. A thousand or so Obama officials were waiting for them, along with briefings that had taken them six months to prepare. But then, days after the election, Trump simply fired the 500 or so people on his transmission team. “Chris, you and I are so smart that we can leave the victory party two hours early and do the transmission ourselves,” he told the perplexed Chris Christie, who’d assembled the team.’

Lewis decided to investigate the most obscure and infrequently visited corners of the (USA) federal government. He never found anything less than wonderful characters engaged in work ‘critical to the fate of the country and our species’.

Various authors tell the tales of dedicated individuals in many departments. These include Heather Stone of the Food and Drug Administration. Ronald E. Walters of the National Cemetery Administration. Christopher Mark of the Department of Labor. Mark was a former coal miner. He invented and led the development of industry-wide standards and practices to prevent roof cave-ins in underground mines, leading to the first year (2016) of no roof fall fatalities in the United States. Previously there had been hundreds. Pamela Wright of the National Archives and Records Administration founded a digital reference platform called History Hub. Anyone, anywhere may submit a query free of charge and a roster of archivists, other federal staffers and civilian volunteers will provide answers and follow-up questions or advice on where to look to find out more.

Lewis briefly mentions other achievements. A doctor at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designed and ran a program that delivered a billion vaccinations and eradicated polio in India. Another man inside the Energy Department had been sent to a massive nuclear waste dump outside Denver, containing enough radioactive gunk to fill 90 miles of railroad cars. He was told to clean it up. He finished the project \$30 billion under budget and 60 years ahead of schedule – and turned the dump into a park.

On the book’s back cover Lewis states: ‘My own ambition for this book is that it would subvert the stereotype of the civil servant. The typecasting has always been lazy and stupid, but increasingly, it’s deadly. And everyone can now see the threat.’

So why do I love this book? Because, apart from the interesting information – it’s just wonderful to read about good men and women who try to make things better. I’m tired of second-rate politicians, greedy oligarchs, power hungry dictators, feeble-minded voters, technology bullies, money-grubbing CEOs, biased journalists, sadistic groupies, psychopaths and prissy influencers. (Have I left anyone out?) Give me a good adventure story and a few heroes any day. Lewis says: ‘Democratic government isn’t really designed to highlight the individual achievement of unelected officials.’ I might add that there are those who are out to destroy them. The world at the moment seems swamped with anti-democratic villains. **Brian Nicholls**

Public Affairs Reading Group April Meeting

Eric Beecher - *The Men who Killed the News: The Inside Story of How Media Moguls Abused their Power, Manipulated the Truth, and Destroyed Democracy*

Scribner, 2024

The book is an account of the power held by media moguls over the last 200 years, the way in which most of them have abused that power, and the cumulative damage this has inflicted upon liberal democracies. The abuse of power is at the heart of the book - how the abuse works, its impact on society and how the perpetrators get away with it.

The book covers a wide range of characters, 26 of whom are listed in a two-page 'form guide' at the start of the book. Rupert Murdoch is the most prominently covered, but much is also said about the giants of the past (e.g. Hearst, the two Northcliffes, Beaverbrook, Pulitzer, and Luce), more recent notorious ones (Maxwell and Black), and the current titans (Zuckerberg and Musk). The major focus is on Australia, UK and US, but it covers some of the best (e.g. *Le Monde*) and worst (e.g. Berlusconi) from other nations.

Beecher has worked in the media since the late 1960s, primarily as a publisher and editor (including for Murdoch) rather than a journalist, which has put him close-up to much of what he talks about. He did not take a payout from Murdoch so as to avoid signing an NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement), which enables him to speak much more freely.

The two major themes of the book are ethical failure (over many years) and commercial failure (as the old business model has been substantially undermined in recent years).

His major concern is with what he describes as 'the paradox at heart of a free press', the owners of which are entrusted to hold the powerful to account and protect society but incentivised to exploit this position for their own benefit. Moreover, 'media power is built on the gigantic loophole in democracy that protects the freedom of the press without requiring any ethical, moral or societal responsibility'. The key 'operating levers' for the moguls are access, information, and fear, while their influence is 'unregulated, unaccountable, and usually invisible'.

The book records the feeble attempts by governments to limit the reach and power of the moguls, given that politicians see their survival as dependent on media coverage. However, what effect do bodies such as News Corp now actually have on elections? Politicians fear what they can do, and the rest of the media insist on following up their spurious agendas - but there is much evidence to suggest that the popular/populist media *follow* rather than determine the public mood, and that (as in Australia in 2025) they do not drive election outcomes.

The overall picture that emerges from the book is the lack of any form of moral compass amongst many of the moguls, coupled with hypocrisy and a glass jaw. For Beecher, their talents are fearlessness, boldness, audacity, combined with arrogance and over-confidence. Above all, they are motivated by making money and building empires, which trumps any ideology. Many are 'machine-like and emotionless', with a ruthlessness that gets applied to both business and family. They know that if they go down-market to greater sensationalism, 'everything else goes up' (circulation, revenues, profitability). Nevertheless, some have tried to maintain an ethical basis for operating while remaining commercially successful (e.g. Luce, Thomson, Ochs, the later version of Pulitzer, and Fairfax).

The long-established business model of the older ('legacy') media has been undercut in recent times by the development of the internet, social media, algorithms, AI, and 'alternative facts'. In turn, these have enabled the emergence of new titans such as Zuckerberg and Musk, who do not actually produce any new content, but whose reach is far beyond what the older moguls ever achieved. Beecher says this led to him to change the overall message of the book during the ten years he was developing it. He began by it being about press barons behaving badly, but that it is now also very much about the power of machines and that are controlled by people behaving badly.

There are four main parts to the volume - how the media empires emerged, grew, and in some cases fell; how they gain and exercise power; the ways in which they misbehave and the moral and legal lines that are crossed; and the future, looking at the new moguls, the broken business model of the old media, and Beecher's thoughts about how media might be commercially viable while remaining ethical. It has a thematic approach, continually returning to each of the major players to illustrate the commonalities and differences between how the various moguls have

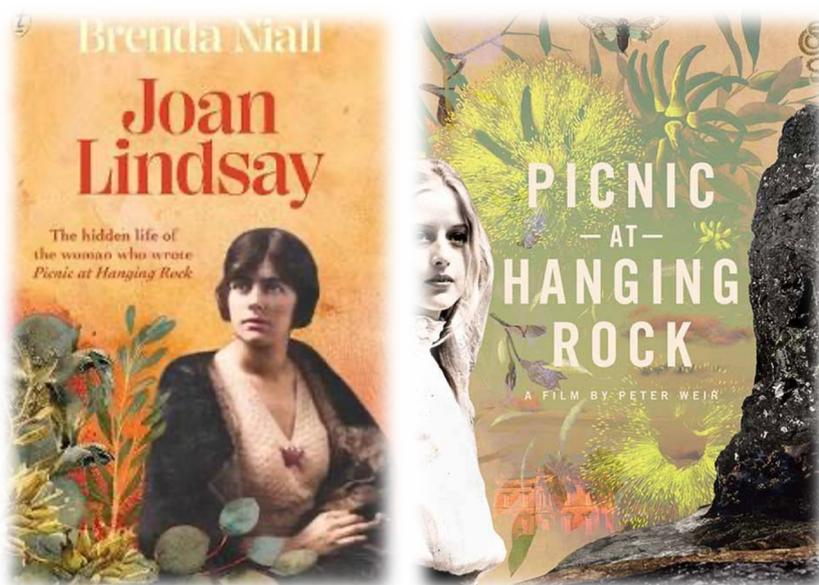
operated. This may be off-putting for some readers, but it is at the heart of Beecher's goal of showing the intrinsic and essentially irremovable dynamics that create the 'paradox of the free press' controlled by powerful individuals. Even for those who have read a lot about Murdoch and the other moguls, there are many great anecdotes, which are both humorous and chilling, for example the times when he considered one of his papers proposing capital punishment for young people putting graffiti on trains, or when he waited until an editor returned from his father's funeral to sack him.

Why read the book? First, it demonstrates the intrinsic structural features of commercial media that all too often leads to entertainment in place of accurate reporting and, more deeply, to an unending assault on democracy. Then, even for those who have previously read widely about the moguls and how they operate, the many personal touches and anecdotes increase the understanding of the deeply narcissistic, greedy, and anti-social people many of them are. Genuine reform is not possible, merely containment. **Bob Davidson**

Biography Reading Group, April Meeting

Joan Lindsay – The hidden life of the woman who wrote Picnic at Hanging Rock

Brenda Niall (Text Publishing, 2025)



Regrouping on Thursday 24 April, we discussed the recently published biography of Joan Lindsay (1896-1984). Brenda Niall, an accomplished biographer of writers and artists – among others, Martin Boyd, Arthur Boyd, Barbara Baynton, Ethel Turner and Mary and Elizabeth Durack - explores the life of Joan Lindsay, initially a painter and later a writer. Niall emphasises that Joan Lindsay's public success occurred late in life: she was 71 in 1967 when she published her celebrated novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. That her book was made into a film of the same name directed by Peter Weir and released in 1975 contributed to the acclaim. Fifty years later both the book and the film endure. What could we learn of the life and times of its author?

Brenda Niall's biography is a beautifully written account of Joan Lindsay's life and times. For those of us who knew nothing about her background it was a revelation. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of art in Australia, particularly the establishment of the National Gallery of Victoria. Joan was a cousin of the famous Boyd family, she studied under Frederick McCubbin at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School and her husband, Daryl Lindsay, was one of THE Lindsays, brother to Norman, and director of the NGV, 1942-1955.

Niall has chosen to write Joan's biography as a thwarted creative life, "known as much for her flower arrangements as for her ideas". There is no doubt that her husband's career was given priority, as was typical for marriages in that period, and it's true that Joan gave up art after her marriage, despite praise for her early works. But Joan's life after marriage strikes me as creative and fulfilled. While Daryl's memoir asserts that Joan was only a 'minor talent', she has a long list of achievements: she co-authored books, wrote a couple of memoirs, published articles, reviews,

and stories, assisted Daryl at the NVG, worked for charities, as well as acting as a superlative hostess to an endless line of illustrious visitors at their home on the Mornington Peninsula.

Niall's speculation that Joan's life was unfulfilled because she didn't have children is not entirely convincing. She interprets the lost child motif in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as Joan's longing for the child she couldn't have. She presents Joan's involvement with the film as a joyful time of creativity and collaboration, when in fact Peter Weir said that Joan had reservations about the film and felt that its tone was not as she intended.

Niall has cast Daryl Lindsay as the villain in the relationship, much like Anna Funder did with George Orwell in *Wifedom*, at times with some justification. But her account of Daryl's WW I active service in France lacks compassion. She admits he was not psychologically equipped for his post-war role as medical artist, drawing the faces of damaged soldiers in the plastic surgery unit at Queen Mary Hospital, but says he was not up to the task because he lacked the necessary technical skill. The psychological damage he must have suffered is given little consideration.

Judith Bonzol

Few of us knew Joan Lindsay's (1896-1984) name as the author of *Picnic* and contributor to the more famous film (20,000 views Wikipedia per month).

Our discussion confirmed my first impressions of this short book: superbly produced and another enjoyable volume from Australia's distinguished biographer.

Niall's prologue on meeting with her subject, Joan Lindsay (née Weigall) raises questions to us as readers, about Joan Lindsay's life and alerts us to the markers in her life and the influence of family, hers and husband Daryl Lindsay and Boyd cousins. Joan's central legacy, physically, was her farmhouse at Mulberry Hill, on the Mornington Peninsula, now with the National Trust.

My enjoyment is due to Niall's knowledgeable confidence in writing about the experience of women, the many interesting characters and institutions, especially the National Gallery of Victoria which shaped Joan's life. Niall's details on Joan's early attraction to landscapes in paintings and, during the First World War, her studies with Fred McCubbin, infuse the book. Niall conveys Joan's sustenance from company at the Lyceum Club as well as her nurturing young artists at the NGV when Daryl became director with Keith Murdoch's assistance.

Chloë Mason

I knew almost nothing about Joan Lindsay and had not made the connection with *the* Lindsay family of artists before opening the biography. The section dealing with Daryl's appointment to the NGV brought back aspects of my PhD thesis on art historian Joan Kerr – namely the beginnings of formal art history courses in Australia and the roles played by Joseph Burke, Franz Phillip and Ursula Hoff. Bernard Smith was the link between art history in Melbourne and the Power Institute of Fine Art at Sydney University, of which he was the first director/professor. He employed Joan Kerr as lecturer and then as editor of *The Dictionary of Australian Artists*.

For all Brenda Niall's scholarship, Joan Lindsay seemed a somewhat distant figure in her own story, although towards the end of the biography, after the publication of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Joan comes into her own. I would have liked more excerpts from Joan's earlier writings, such as *Time without Clocks* and some of her journalism, to get a sense of her 'voice', rather than Niall's paraphrasing of it.

The biography comes alive when Niall is discussing Joan's novel, in particular aligning the 'fey' side of Joan to the mysteries in the book. Niall evokes well Joan's love of, and talent for, landscape painting and frequently likens Joan's impressionistic paintings to her lyrical descriptions of landscape. Niall is a renowned Australian biographer with a conversational yet professional style which would appeal to a general readership and especially admirers of Niall's work.

Susan Steggall

The next Biography Reading Group by zoom will be on Thursday 19 June 2025 at 2pm.

Alice C Paul, Convenor

ART NOTE

Residue + Response (Connecting Histories and Futures). A touring exhibition for the 5th Tamworth Textile Triennial, Manly Art Gallery & Museum, 21 February–6 April 2025.

Curated by Dr Carol McGregor, *Residue + Response* showcased the best of textile art from across Australia in twenty-five works by artists from diverse backgrounds to mark the 50th anniversary of the National Fibre Art Collection. This collection was established in Tamworth in 1973 as an annual initiative of the Tamworth Arts and Crafts Society.

Since 1973, the Tamworth Regional Gallery has focused on developing an Australian textile collection that embraces all related art and craft forms. That textiles are no longer seen as a female-focused ‘craft’ has been partly a result of the shift towards gender equity, which has helped to validate the practice of textile artists and increase their national recognition. For this triennial, artists expanded on the conventional perception of textile practice. Several artists created works with natural plant dyes on fabrics and fibres. Others adhered to sustainable studio practice that incorporated recycling and sourcing of remnants – residuals – into their work.

Anne Graham’s studio is situated on a hillside above the Duiwan River in the Kanimbla Valley, in the Blue Mountains (Gundungurra Country). Over time there have been significant, destructive, human influences on this river system due to urbanisation and mining. With the closure of power stations in the region and raised environmental awareness, the river is recovering, and native animals and birds are returning in increasing numbers. The waters of the river flow and swirl around formations of rounded granite rocks that are covered in delicately coloured patterns of red, brown, yellow and purple, blue and green made by lichens. The installation *Returning River* explores the soft colours of the river lichens as they change throughout the day, ‘from dawn to dusk, from wet to dry’.

Returning River consists of metal bowls of various sizes which form the bases for the rounded forms of the granite boulders in the river. The artist sourced woollen blankets from second-hand and opportunity shops which she transformed by roughing up, dyeing and then cutting into intricate, fractal-like layered shapes. These are glued onto the bowls to create Graham’s sculptures. Displayed across the floor of the art gallery, each series follows a meandering river ‘bed’ from small to large in forms so tactile it was difficult to resist the temptation to touch them.

Graham’s work draws attention to the importance of saving and looking after all river systems. In a combination of creative imagination and technical expertise allied to an intense appreciation of the natural world, artists such as Anne Graham are well placed to raise environmental awareness. **Susan Steggall**



Anne Graham, Returning River, 2023.

Stainless steel bowls, dyed felted woollen blankets, adhesive, plywood (photographs: Susan Steggall).

SOURCE: ‘Textiles connect history and future at Manly’, <https://www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au/media-releases>.

Verbalising Can Clarify

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful, and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

cjennett@ozemail.com.au

Book Notes Exhibition Notes Film Notes

Research Snippets

If you have read a book, seen an exhibition or a film of substance lately or come across a snippet of interesting research that you would like to share with fellow ISAA members send in a piece (up to 300 words) containing its key insights and arguments to: cjennett@ozemail.com.au by **23 July 2025**.