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‘Personal exertion literary J. Lindsay’: Joan Lindsay papers at State Library Victoria

Introduction

Fifty-two years after Joan Lindsay’s novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967) was released, it continues to spark the public imagination, functioning as a locus of creative and scholarly engagement.¹ The book’s central event, the disappearance in 1900 of three schoolgirls and their teacher, creates a ripple pattern that continues to affect those involved.² Similarly, the story has had a rich and varied afterlife, manifesting in the intervening decades in unexpected and intriguing ways.

In 2012, the Italian dance company Bruzia Ballet performed *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, with Paolo Gagliardi as artistic director.³ A theatrical adaptation by author Tom Wright was performed at Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre in 2016.⁴ A number of scholars have engaged with the novel through a varied range of critical lenses.⁵ In 2017, journalist and author Janelle McCulloch searched archives and interviewed personal acquaintances of Lindsay in an attempt to discover if the novel was based on truth.⁶ The year after the novel’s 50th anniversary saw hundreds of people dressed as Miranda (as portrayed in Peter Weir’s 1975 film⁷) gathered at the rock to perform a choreographed dance.⁸ The Miranda Must Go campaign, by artist Amy Spiers, attempted to wrest the story of the missing white girls from Hanging Rock and direct

First edition of Joan Lindsay’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Melbourne: Cheshire Press, 1967), cover (detail). Cover design by Alison Forbes. Rare Books Collection, A823.3 L645P. Reproduced by kind permission of Alison Forbes.

JOAN
LINDSAY
PICNIC
AT
HANGING
ROCK



attention towards gaps in knowledge about the history and role of the rock in Aboriginal Australian communities.⁹ In 2018, the Australian cable television network Fox Showcase released a six-part miniseries based on the novel, with English actress Natalie Dormer playing the formidable headmistress Mrs Appleyard.¹⁰ Most recently, State Library Victoria included some *Picnic* artefacts in the *World of the Book* exhibition (2019).¹¹ This article examines the Joan Lindsay papers held by State Library Victoria in the light of this ongoing interest in her novel and other works, mapping out potential areas for future research.

Archive and provenance

The Joan Lindsay papers at State Library Victoria are on permanent loan from the National Trust of Australia.¹² They arrived in 1976 as part of a larger National Trust archive¹³ and comprise over 40 boxes of materials from Mulberry Hill, the house Lindsay shared with her husband, Daryl, in Baxter, Victoria, which was also bequeathed to the National Trust. The papers contain extensive material, some of which has never been published, from the 1920s to the author's death, in 1984. This includes stories, plays, novel drafts and excerpts of autobiographical material as well as drawings, paintings and photographs, reviews and translations of her works, and related ephemera, contracts and correspondence. The Library can provide researchers with a finding aid of box contents and a series of itemised spreadsheets listing contents in more detail. These materials complement related Lindsay archives at the Library, at the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, and at the National Library of Australia, Canberra.¹⁴ The papers of Joan Lindsay give a rich insight into the creative process of a dedicated writer over a long literary career. A brief indicative selection of highlights is offered below.

Unpublished works

Lindsay's papers preserve a wealth of unpublished materials with which future scholars may engage, including stories, plays, children's works and unfinished longer writing. Within his wider bibliography of Lindsay's works, scholar Terence O'Neill gave an overview of the collection's unpublished contents.¹⁵ Some of these are tantalisingly annotated by earlier archivists: 'Uncatalogued play MSS. found in writing room desk' (box 29), 'MSS typed. Story unknown' and 'uncatalogued MS. found in writing room desk 12.1.94' (box 30). Another is described as 'uncatalogued and unidentified fiction' (box 30).



Joan Lindsay's typewriter. Image courtesy The National Trust of Victoria



Mulberry Hill, the house Joan Lindsay shared with her husband, Daryl, in Baxter, Victoria. Image courtesy The National Trust of Victoria

Mulberry Hill typewriter room. Image courtesy The National Trust of Victoria

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

IV.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Mrs. Appleyard awoke from a long luxurious nap on the drawingroom sofa. She had been dreaming, as she often did, of her late husband. This time they were walking along the Pier at Bourneouth, where a number of pleasure craft and fishing boats were tied up. "Let us go for a sail my dear" said Arthur. A fourposter bed with an oldfashioned box mattress was bobbing about on the waves. "Let us swim for it" said Arthur, and taking her arm dived into the sea. To her surprise and pleasure she found herself swimming beautifully, cutting through the water like a fish, without using her legs or arms. They had just reached the fourposter and were climbing on board when the sound of whitehead running the lawnmower under the window put an end to the delightful dream. How Albert would have revelled in the respectable luxuries of life at Appleyard College! He had always, she remembered complacently, called her his financial genius. Already the College was paying handsome dividends..... A few minutes later, still in the best of tempers and determined to be gracious on this pleasant holiday afternoon, she appeared at the window. "Minnie, dear, I hope you have learned your poetry so that you can go into the garden for the rest of the afternoon. Minnie shall bring you some tea and cake."

The cherubly big eyed child who had automatically risen from the desk when the Headmistress entered, was shifting wearily from one black shockheaded spindle-shank to another. "WELL! Stand up straight when you answer me please and put your shoulders back. You are getting a dreadful stoop. Now then. Have you got your lines by heart?"

"It's no use Mrs. Appleyard. I can't learn them."

"How do you mean you CAN'T? Considering you have been alone in

here with your Reader ever since luncheon?

"I HAVE tried" said the child passing her hand over her eyes.

"But it's so silly. I mean if there was any sense in it I could learn it over so much better."

"Sense! You little ignoramus! Evidently you don't know that Mrs. Felicia Heymans is considered one of the finest of our English poets."

Sara scowled her disbelief of Mrs. Heyman's genius. An obstinate difficult child. "I know another bit of poetry by heart. It has ever so many verses. Much more than the Vesperus. Would that do?"

"Yes... What is this poem called?"

"An Ode to Saint Valentine" for a moment the little POINTED face brightened; looked almost pretty.

"I am not acquainted with it" said the Headmistress with due courtesy. (One couldn't in her position be too careful; so many quotations turned out to be Keats or Shakespeare) "where did you find it Sara - this, or, Oh?"

"I didn't find it. I wrote it."

"You WHO? Oh! No, I don't wish to hear it thank you. Strange as it may seem, I prefer Mrs. Heymans. Give me your book and proceed to recite to me as far as you have gone."

"I tell you, I can't learn that silly stuff if I sit here for a week."

"Then you must go on trying a little longer" said the Headmistress over the Reader, outwardly calm and reasonable and sick to death of the sullen sinnissippi child. "I shall leave you now, Sara, and expect you to be word perfect when I send Miss Lunley in half an hour. Otherwise I am afraid I shall have to send you to bed instead of sitting up until the others return for supper after the picnic. The schoolroom door closed, the key turned in the lock, the hateful presence swept from the

A highlight is *Floreat Angleasea*, an undated one-act play that features the ghost of English artist and poet William Blake and fictionalised versions of the Lindsays, with an author's note: 'Every character except that of THE GENTLEMAN is taken from life. Anyone wishing to sue the author for libel should get in touch with 107 Powlett Street, East Melbourne'. *This Modern Art* is another one-act play, which was performed at Melbourne's Lyceum Club for women, at its Christmas party in 1951 (box 29).

There are also drafts of satirical works, including comical ideas for Mothers' Day (1978), 'Aunt Morgiana's helpful household hints' (undated), 'The animal alphabet for adults' (undated) and 'Mrs Buster's annual report of world philanthropy' (1979; box 30). These demonstrate the range of Lindsay's writing and the streak of humour which characterised so much of her work. At times my laughter broke the silence of the reading room. A sample from 'The animal alphabet': 'The pigeon is not by nature carnivorous. It is however occasionally known to indulge in a species of ritualistic cannibalism ... particularly at the hight [*sic*] of the mating season'. This work came with multiple endorsements, including one from Serena Livingstone-Stanley, the 'author' of Lindsay's 1936 satirical travel work, *Through Darkest Pondelayo* (box 30).¹⁶

Some of these materials have been utilised by scholars. Janelle McCulloch, for example, used a number of unpublished autobiographical manuscripts to develop her work *Beyond the Rock* (2017).¹⁷ Many more have yet to be investigated fully.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

The Lindsay papers offer compelling resources for her most famous work, including a typed copy of all chapters of the published novel except 9 to 11, with a note from the author that these were 'to be typed at Cheshire's from Dr. Fabinyi's personal copy' (box 18). This is more extensive than the manuscript held by the National Library of Australia, which contains chapters 1, 2, 4, 6 and the beginning of chapter 7.¹⁸ The paper is thin, almost translucent in places, and Lindsay has made amendments in red and blue ink or pencil, with small sections inserted or pasted in.

In the same box are page proofs for the novel from Lindsay's Melbourne publisher FW Cheshire (box 18). This shows small but significant changes to the typed copy, especially in the pivotal scene where Edith calls after the departing Miranda. On the proofs this has been heavily worked, with an amendment pinned to the paper and additions in red, others crossed out in black. From the typed manuscript: 'She felt herself choking and called "Miranda!" as loud as she could. The strangled cry came out as a whisper'

(box 18). From the page proofs: ‘She felt herself choking and tore at her frilled lace collar. “Miranda!” The strangled cry came out as a whisper’ (box 18). The addition of the lace collar is a small change, but it heightens the intensity of the novel’s defining moment. It adds a pause, or a beat, and emphasises Edith’s final cry by letting it stand alone.

Materials in the Lindsay papers also document the author’s involvement in the development of director Peter Weir’s 1975 film. A letter from Weir written in that year shows his commitment to maintain the spirit of the novel:

It’s not been an easy film to make Joan + that’s because I’m trying to give the audience some of the extraordinary flavour of your unique novel. I hope I’ve achieved this ...

P.S. We’ve dropped the idea of a womans’ [sic] voice reading the opening lines. It will now be a written card! I know you’ll be pleased! (box 20)

There are also extensive clippings of reviews of her works, and of Weir’s film, from around the world (box 20).

Other material includes copies of screenwriter Cliff Green’s screenplay drafts for the film marked with Lindsay’s desired changes (box 19). Her notes cover the dialogue, soundtrack, elimination of characters and Mrs Appleyard’s ending. The Valentine’s Day setting of novel and film is highlighted with a gold and lace Valentine’s card made to be a prop in the film, a Valentine’s heart on arithmetic paper and decorated with numbers and a Lavender Fairy card for Lindsay signed as if it were from the central characters Irma, Marion, Sara and Blanche (box 19).

Held in the collection is also the launch invitation for Lindsay’s novel (box 17), celebrated on 1 November 1967 at Capers Courtyard in Collins Street, Melbourne, by ex-prime minister Robert Menzies, alongside details of the film’s Melbourne premiere, in October 1975, held at the Bercy Cinema in Bourke Street, Melbourne, and followed by a chicken and champagne dinner at the nearby (but now-demolished) Southern Cross Hotel (box 17).

Creative practice

The scale and richness of the Lindsay papers demonstrate the author’s dedication to the practice of writing across multiple genres. It is clear not only that her focus was on the published end products but that the process itself was a vital part of her life. In a 1962 interview for Melbourne’s *Age*, she stated,

home once. The same big frightened eyes. I looked after it for weeks but Mama said it would never survive in captivity.'

'And did it?' they asked.

'It died. Mama always said it was *doomed*.'

Edith echoed, '*Doomed*? What's that mean, Irma?'

'Doomed to die, of course! Like that boy who stood on the burning deck, Whence all but he had fled, Tra . . . la . . . I forget the rest of it.'

'Oh, how nasty! Do you think I'm *doomed*, girls? I'm not feeling at all well, myself. Do you think that boy felt sick in the stomach like me?'

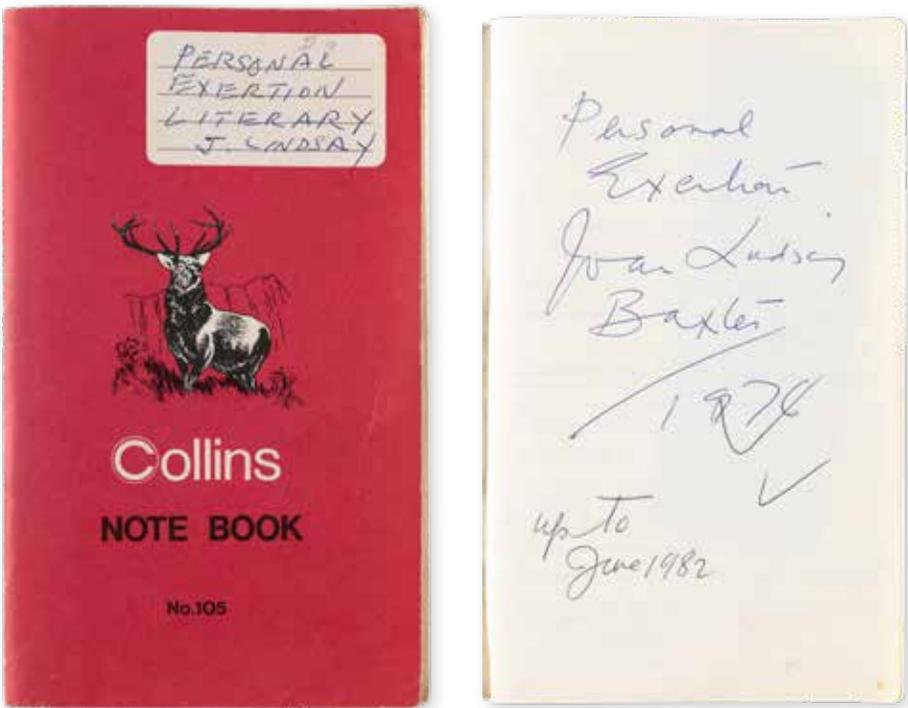
'Certainly—if he'd eaten too much chicken pie for his lunch,' Marion said. 'Edith, I do wish you would stop talking for once.'

A few tears were trickling down Edith's pudgy cheek. Why was it, Irma wondered, that God made some people so plain and disagreeable and others beautiful and kind like Miranda; dear Miranda, bending down to stroke the child's burning forehead with a cool hand. An unreasoning tender love, of the kind sometimes engendered by Papa's best French champagne or the melancholy cooing of pigeons on a Spring afternoon, filled her heart to overflowing. A love that included Marion, waiting with a flinty smile for Miranda to have done with Edith's nonsense. Tears sprang to her eyes, but not of sorrow. She had no desire to weep. Only to love, and shaking out her ringlets she got up off the rock where she had been lying in the shade and began to dance. Or rather to float away, over the warm smooth stones. All except Edith had taken off their stockings and shoes. She danced barefoot, the little pink toes barely skimming the surface like a ballerina with curls and ribbons flying and bright unseeing eyes. She was at Covent Garden where she had been taken by her grandmother at the age of six, blowing kisses to admirers in the wings, tossing a flower from her bouquet into the stalls. At last she sank

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into a full-blown curtsey to the Royal Box, half way up a gum tree. Edith, leaning against a boulder, was pointing at Miranda and Marion, making their way up the next little rise. 'Irma. Just look at them. Where in the world do they think they're going without their shoes?' To her annoyance Irma only laughed. Edith said crossly, 'They must be mad.' Such abandoned folly would always be beyond the understanding of Edith and her kind, who early in life take to woollen bedsocks and galoshes. Looking towards Irma for moral support, she was horrified to see that she too had picked up her shoes and stockings and was slinging them at her waist.

Miranda was a little ahead as all four girls pushed on through the dogwoods with Edith trudging in the rear. They could see her straight yellow hair swinging loose above her thrusting shoulders, cleaving wave after wave of dusty green. Until at last the bushes began thinning out before the face of a little cliff that held the last light of the sun. So on a million summer evenings would the shadows lengthen upon the crags and pinnacles of the Hanging Rock.



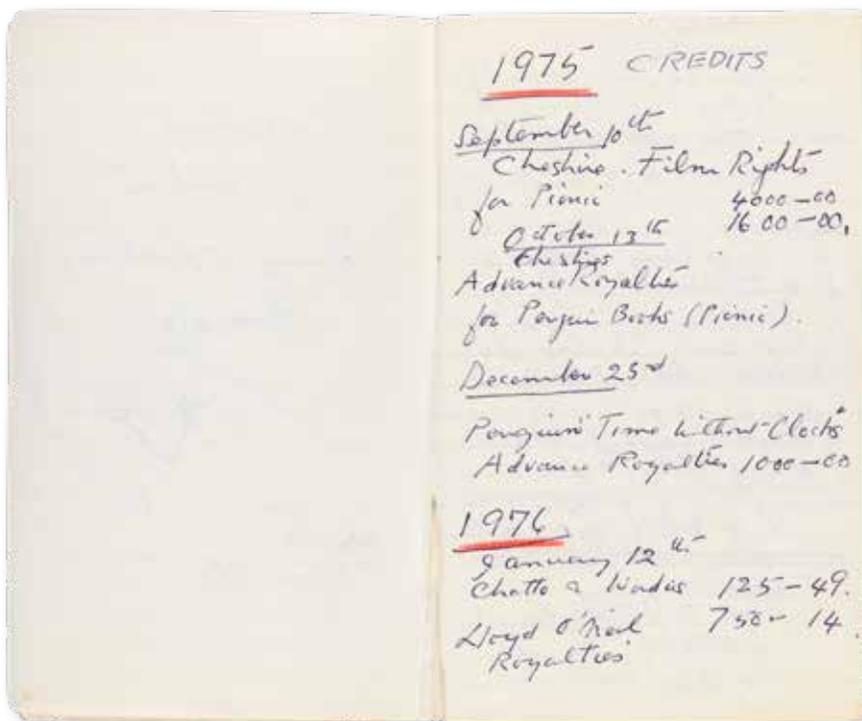
Cover of Joan Lindsay's journal, inscribed 'Personal Exertion Literary', 1975–76. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 15936, Box 13 PA 99/139

Opening page of Joan Lindsay's journal. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 15936, Box 13 PA 99/139

I have always loved writing, and have a lot of stuff put away. It has been my way of relaxing ...

I write sitting on the floor, surrounded by sheets of paper, in a sort of fairy ring. It's bliss.²⁹

The documents preserved in the collection provide insight into Lindsay's approach to drafting her work. Many handwritten or typed drafts have notes from the author about what to keep or remove, either on the copy or on separate pages: 'needs slight editing' and 'Keep for John Taylor. Some pages missing but I can find them I think. It's rather good' (box 26). On the envelope of a play, she wrote, '1978 MSS – probably to be torn up' (box 29). Subsequent drafts were typed, by herself or others. The papers contain carbon copies as well as some originals. Within it are letters from Lindsay to typists and a 1952 letter from Dora Robertson, who typed the play *This Modern Art* for her (box 29). These drafts are corrected in pen or pencil, with additions inscribed on, or pasted or pinned to the page.



From Joan Lindsay's journal, inscribed 'Personal Exertion Literary', 1975-76.
 Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 15936, Box 13 PA 99/139

Many plays are listed under the pen name Beckett Lindsay (box 29). These include *Cataract* and *Spring Tangle*. *One, Wolf*, was co-written by Beckett Lindsay and Margot Neville; the latter, according to Terence O'Neill, was another pen name, for a collaboration between Margot Goyder and Ann Joske.²⁰

Lindsay's changing understandings of the right form for various pieces comes through from the collected materials. The undated draft of one play, *Trouble in Mayfair*, has had its title and description ('a farce comedy in three acts') struck through in red pencil, with 'novel' inscribed instead (box 29). While better known for her writing, Lindsay incorporated her early visual arts training into many of her works. The archive contains her original photo-montages for *Pondelayo* (box 15). Lindsay illustrated most of the unpublished satirical works listed earlier. There is also a sweet handmade book for a child about bears, in pencil and with sketches (box 30), along with more sketches and watercolours.

Lindsay's involvement in the professional aspects of her work comes through clearly in her papers. In a red notebook inscribed with 'personal exertion literary J. Lindsay', the author recorded royalties and costs associated with her work from 1976 to June 1982 (box 13). These sit beside formal royalty statements and contracts from her agent and publishers, and documentation of her involvement in these negotiations.

Publishing

Researchers of publishing history will be drawn to correspondence from Chatto & Windus in London about publication of Lindsay's novel *Through Darkest Pondelayo*, which demonstrates their great interest in the work: 'It is perhaps not very business-like to go ahead with the printing before the contract is signed, but we are in fact doing so' (box 15). Other documents reveal the publication history of many of Lindsay's works, including discussions of rights, contracts, sales figures and letters (box 20). Especially interesting are those which relate to a breach of copyright issue with *Picnic's* paperback edition in Australia; they provide a fascinating snapshot of the specifics of this struggle.

Personal life

Lindsay's life was complex and layered, and her papers show clearly how its various parts overlapped. Many of the drafts were typed on the reverse of old National Gallery of Victoria documentation, offering intriguing snippets of information about Lindsay's husband's role as director there but also a sense of how their professional lives intersected. She noted this in the 1962 interview for *The Age*: 'I put aside my writing to help Daryl prepare for his exhibition last year, then he uncomplainingly accepted disruption in domestic routine while I wrote'.²¹ Clearly she still had responsibility for those domestic routines, even while writing, as demonstrated by a handwritten list for 'Thursday':

Check current Nat. bank account for David's pay
 Ring Hilary Passy
 Check their number with Amvis if changed
 Boiled egg – toast
 Fish lunch
 Lamb stew – add tomato and cook an hour slowly
 Look through short stories (box 26)

Contained in the papers are a number of small diaries, although none for the year in which *Picnic* was written. In another notebook Lindsay poignantly recorded a checklist of her daily medication from June 1984, which continues until just a few weeks before her death, in December that year (box 13). The urge to write, to record, remained until almost the end.

The future

The Joan Lindsay papers provide a remarkable glimpse into the working and personal life of one of Australia's most well-loved authors. For those readers



Album of photographs, c. 1920–30, compiled by Joan Lindsay, p. 5, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 15936

who know Lindsay through her published works, which perhaps for many is only through *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the documents offer a strong sense of her personality: multi-talented, keenly observant, dedicated to her craft and rippling with wicked humour. It is both a treasure and a time capsule of Lindsay's remarkable oeuvre. While researchers have engaged with some of these materials, there are manifold opportunities to further understand Lindsay's literary legacy. State Library Victoria is planning conservation work on the Joan Lindsay papers to ensure the safe preservation of its rare and sometimes fragile materials for future generations of readers.