State Library Victoria 2025-2029

# COLLECTIONS STRATEGY

Collect. Connect. Preserve. Innovate.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

State Library Victoria acknowledges the traditional lands of all the Victorian Aboriginal clans, and their cultural practices and knowledge systems.

We recognise that our collections hold traditional cultural knowledge belonging to Indigenous communities in Victoria and around the country. We support communities to protect the integrity of this information, gathered from their Ancestors in the colonial period.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, who have handed down these systems of practice to each new generation for millennia.

# CONTENTS

# FOREWORD FROM THE ACTING CEO

Within the walls of State Library Victoria lies one of Australia's most significant collections – a living resource that has supported learning, creativity and civic life since we first opened as the Melbourne Public Library in 1854. Conceived as 'the people's university', the Library has evolved into a cultural landmark and a trusted public institution that welcomes all Victorians to discover, reflect, create and connect.

Over the next 4 years, our ambition is to strengthen the Library's role as a must-do destination for cultural and intellectual engagement, supported by a world-class collection that is increasingly accessible in both physical and digital forms. We will continue to be a place where people come to explore ideas, encounter diverse perspectives and build new knowledge.

Our plan is shaped by 5 key strategies: becoming a must-do destination; creating a compelling digital experience; strengthening diverse communities; being an active voice for learning, knowledge and culture; and delivering innovative, sustainable operations.

This Collections Strategy sets out the significance of the Library's collections and outlines our priorities for their care, growth, accessibility and impact in the years ahead.

John Wicks
Acting Chief Executive Officer

# PURPOSE OF
# THIS STRATEGY

John COTTON
(1801-1849)

*Sketchbook of birds of the Port Phillip District*
Manuscript, 1844-49
MS 9817

**The Collections Strategy plays a key role in the Library's strategic planning. It articulates our passion to build and provide access to collections that help us better understand our past and inspire the future. The Strategy covers 4 financial years, from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2029 (FY2028-29).**

The Strategy outlines a direction that reflects the Library's aspirations for all its collections and access to those collections.

The framework for collecting, description, storage, management, preservation and innovation is based on the Library's overarching strategy, relating to each key goal.

The Library's collections are unique and of enduring value to the people of Victoria and to researchers across Australia and beyond. This Strategy sets out our commitment to achieving high impact by unlocking the knowledge held within our collections. By deepening access and engagement, we aim to advance research and industry, foster inclusion and community connection, inform policy, and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through self-determined access to our collections.

A range of policies and procedures will be developed or updated to ensure this Strategy's vision is embedded in our everyday work.

Articulating our strategic vision is intended to inform stakeholders, library users and the broader community to enhance collaboration for collection-building and access over the next 4 years.

# INTRODUCTION

The Library's foundation stones were set in July 1854 and the doors opened in February 1856. Central to this enduring role are the Library's collections, which capture the stories, knowledge and creativity that define Victoria and connect us to the wider world.

The Library is a treasure house of information containing works from around the world that define the experiences of Victorians and the creation of our state. From maps and surveys from 1801, to Melbourne's first newspaper published by John Pascoe Fawkner on New Year's Day in 1838, to zines and websites, these records provide insights for students, innovators, community members, family historians and policy makers. Our collections reach users throughout the world through digital platforms, loans to other institutions and inter-library loans.

Our collections trace the formation of knowledge about Australia - including records that document the experiences and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly those from Victoria. We recognise that these records often reflect external perspectives, and we are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to share and access their own knowledge on their own terms. Through culturally appropriate access and collaboration, we aim to nurture a living body of knowledge and stories for current and future generations.

Works created by and relevant to the experiences of diverse cultural communities in Victoria are a priority for the Library. Connecting generations of Victorians to their heritage and current experiences builds a foundation that is vital for vibrant communities.

Our collections provide the foundation for exhibitions and events that engage Victorians and Australians from all walks of life.

Our digital collections extend access to Victoria's heritage and enable new forms of use across industry, education, local government, social inclusion and cultural growth.

Our leadership in developing collections and expanding access enriches the experiences of all our users. Our work in collection development and access supports an informed and engaged public, helping people to navigate complex issues such as misinformation through trusted knowledge and shared stories.

Achieving the third highest visitation of any public library in the world speaks to the significance of our collections.

We partner with creators, communities and other diverse groups to build collections that bring knowledge and social benefit to all.
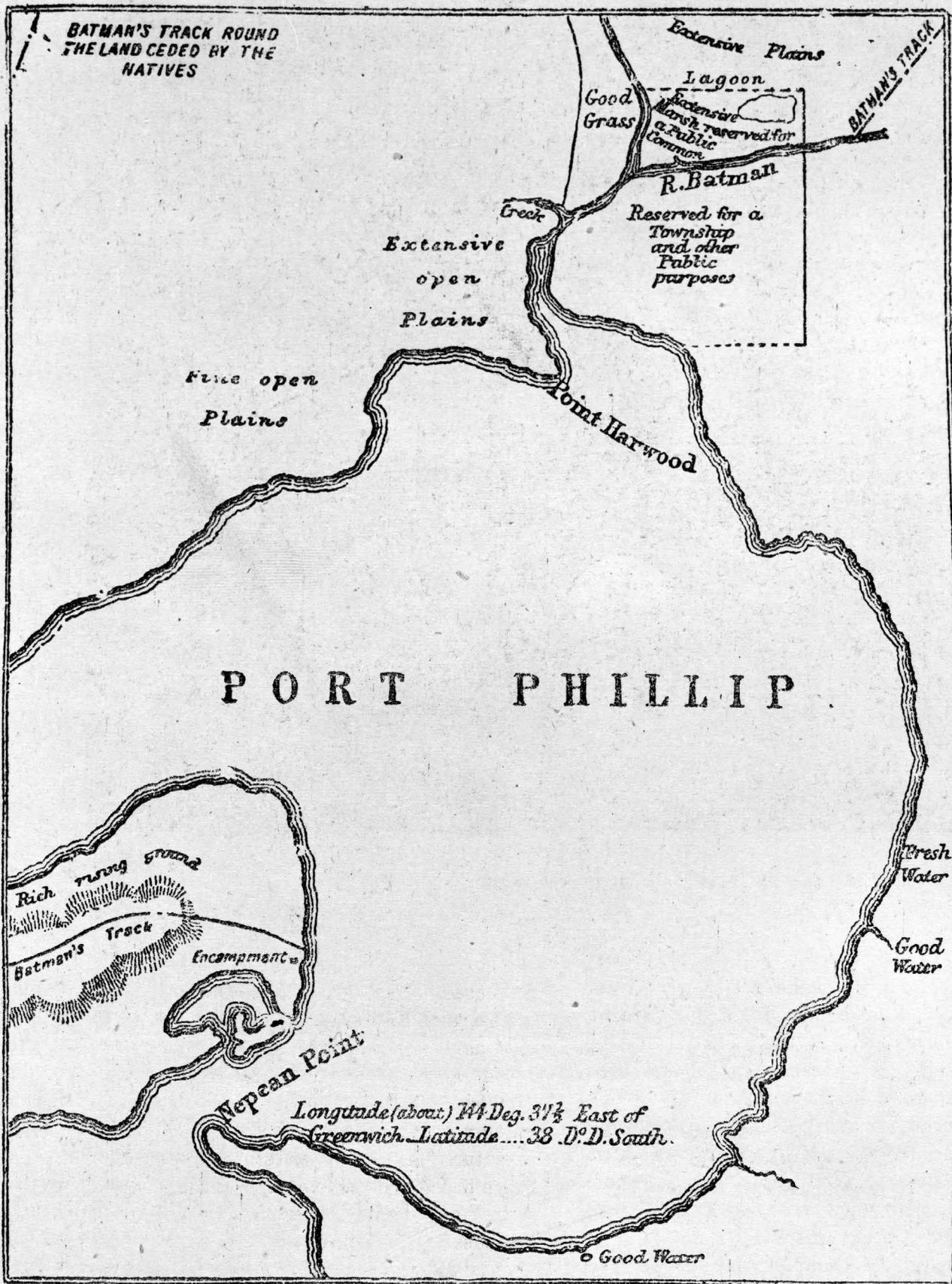
BATMAN'S MAP.

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The State Collection is central to the *Libraries Act 1988*. The first 3 functions of the Library Board of Victoria are:

(a)  to ensure the maintenance, preservation and development of a State collection of library material including a comprehensive collection of library material relating to Victoria and the people of Victoria; and

(b)  to ensure that library material in the State collection is available to such persons and institutions, and in such manner and subject to such conditions as the Board determines with a view to the most advantageous use of the State collection; and

(c)  to ensure the availability of such other services and facilities in relation to library matters and library material (including bibliographical services) by supporting a core function of enriching Victoria's cultural, educational, social, and economic life through inclusive, statewide public engagement.

Collecting contributes to all goals in the Library's Strategic Plan 2022–2026:

**Becoming a must-do destination** through collections that support research and study, and contribute exhibitions and events that spark creativity and attract diverse audiences.

**Creating a compelling digital experience** through expanded access to the collections via the catalogue and digital platforms, including digitised works.

**Strengthening diverse communities** by capturing stories through publications, oral histories and other formats, preserving and providing access to Victoria's diverse people and cultures.

**Becoming a trusted voice for learning and culture** by creating access to knowledge and sharing stories from Victoria, Australia and around the world.

**Delivering sustainable and innovative operations** through environmentally sustainable practices and world class collaborative projects with national and state libraries and other partners.

# KEY STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

**In continuing to build a collection of international significance the Collections Strategy aligns with a wide range of Library, state and national strategies relevant to collecting, collection description, access and engagement with the community, including:**

### State Library Victoria

- State Library Victoria Strategic Plan 2022-26
- State Library Victoria Programming Strategy 2025-29

### Victorian Government

- The Victorian Government's 4-year creative industries strategy, *Creative State 2025.* It sets out a path for the recovery, reactivation and growth of the state's creative industries.
- Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework
- Victorian Innovation Statement
- The Education State – Excellence in Every Classroom

### Australian Government

- National Cultural Policy — *Revive*: a place for every story, a story for every place. A 5-year plan to renew and revive Australia's arts, entertainment and cultural sector.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership | Office for the Arts
- Australian Government commitment to bring together State and Territory governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to work together.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Working Group on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- Attorney-General's Copyright and Artificial Intelligence Reference Group  (CAIRG), created to better prepare for future copyright challenges emerging from AI.
- Outcomes of the Ministerial Roundtables on Copyright held in 2023

**International**

Developments in international standards including:

• RDA (Resource Description and Access) is a major international cataloguing standard). In particular through the National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) Australia-wide project to transition the library and information sector to Official RDA. The project is a collaboration between Australian NSLA member libraries, and leverages the expertise of colleagues and practitioners across the collaboration, with the outcome of authoring the minimum critical documentation required to contextualise Official RDA for the Australian information environment in preparation for Official RDA becoming the preferred standard on May 2027.

# OUR COLLECTIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS: KEY INDICATORS

## Our collections are significant

4,135,581 physical items

403,828 electronic resources

**4,539,409 in total**

## Print collection access

In 2024-25 our patrons accessed

**135,383 works**

including material held on open shelves, and stored in the Ballarat Offsite store.

## Digital collection access

In 2024-25 our patrons accessed

**over 4.7 million items**

including 47,167 ebooks and 316,180 eresources (databases and Eserials).

## Our collections are in demand around the world

**Over 10,000**

items were shared with researchers and institutions in more than 40 countries, primarily through interlibrary loans and digital copy order services.

**Our collections are seen by audiences worldwide**

## More than 2.5 million

online visitors viewed digitised items from our collection including maps, manuscripts, rare books and photographs.

## More than 650,000

people viewed items from our collections in external exhibitions.

This includes at the Potter Museum of Art, MONA, Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney and the *Yalingbuth, Yalingbu, Yirramboi* community event at Coranderrk Wandoon Estate Aboriginal Corporation.

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**Our patrons seek**

- reliable information
- a connection to their stories
- education benefits at all stages of life
- representation of diverse communities in the collection
- transparent and streamlined access to find and obtain collection material
- stewardship of their history for long-term access.

# OUR GOALS

**Our users and potential users are at the centre of all collection work at the Library.**

Key goals:

- Equal access to our services and collections

- Overcoming barriers through accessibility

- Continued collection growth as the state collecting institution

- Connecting individuals to knowledge wherever they are

- Cultural sensitivity

- Building relationships with community

- Empowering researchers and building scholarly impact

- Sustaining collections

- Collection access that is seamless and centres on patron experience

- Preservation and conservation to enable current and safeguard future access

# COLLECTION
# PILLARS

**Building** the physical and digital collection

**Transforming** collection storage and retrieval focused on users

**Creating** access to enable all Victorians to find materials

**Preserving** the collection ensuring long term access

**Enabling** patrons to easily explore and reuse the collection

**Extending** access to all through digital
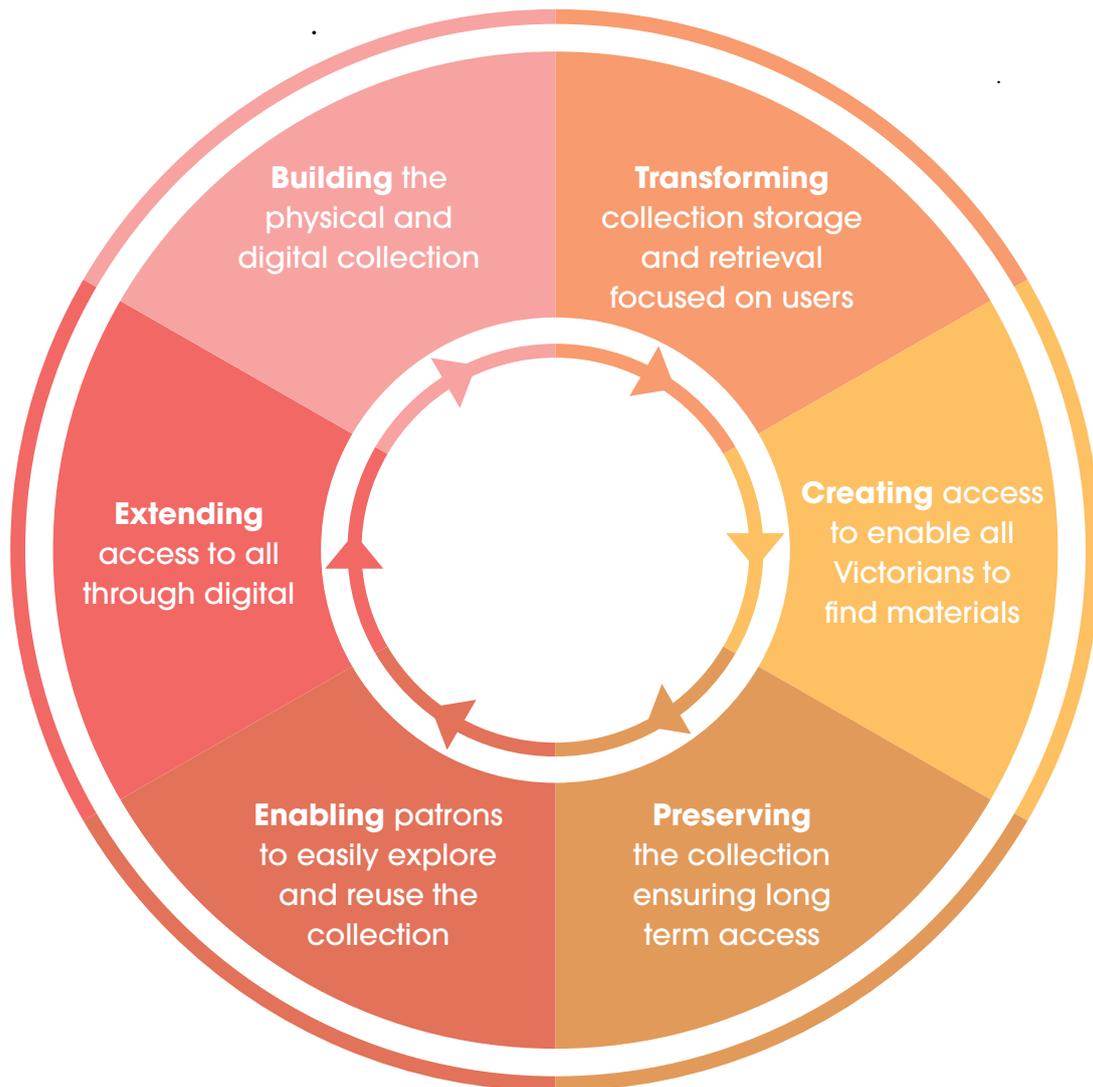
# OUR COLLECTIONS

## Heritage (special) collections

### Manuscripts Collection

Manuscripts are the unpublished records of individuals, groups, business concerns and other political or social organisations. They come in a variety of forms and include hand-written material such as letters, diaries, journals and notebooks, typescripts, microfilm, electronic and born-digital records including social media, plus other classes of unpublished records and social media digital productions.

State Library Victoria acquires private papers and records which document and reflect the full range of human endeavour as expressed in politics, the arts, and society. The Collection, therefore, plays a critical part in helping the Library fulfil its role as the guardian and source of both Victorian and Australian documentary heritage.

The Manuscripts Collection has a particular emphasis on Victoria. Colonial records are a feature of the collection. We also collect beyond this, recognising the migrant nature of the Victorian population and its diverse origins, as well as the broad collecting activities and international profiles of many Victorians. Consequently, the Manuscripts Collection also acquires non-Victorian and non-Australian materials.

### Pictures Collection

The Pictures Collection contains items which are of biographical, cultural, environmental, historical, sociological and topographical interest primarily relating to Victoria. The collection includes paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, sculpture, architectural drawings, posters, postcards and some printed ephemera and objects ranging from the 19th to the 21st centuries.
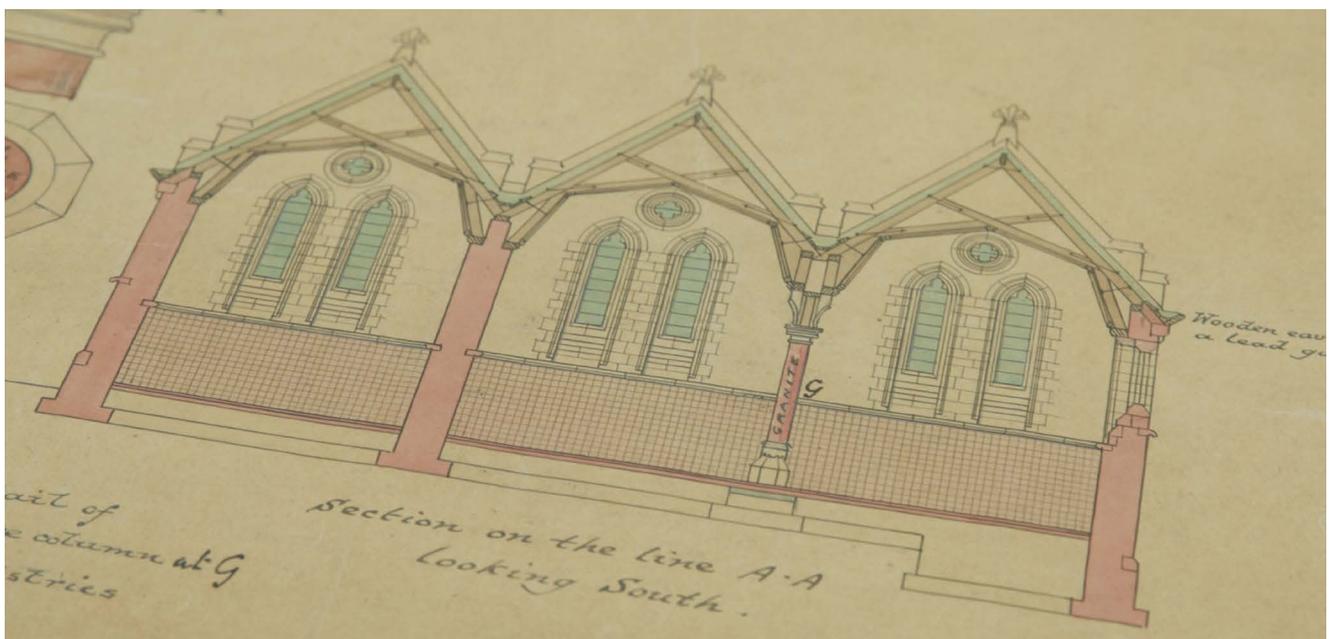
The primary emphasis of the collection is upon pictorial works that provide information about the geographical, historical and social development of Victoria. As an historical documentary collection, the focus is upon the information each image contains. Acquisition of information in visual records is not confined to specific mediums and, while the artistic conventions of a period are taken into consideration, the information content of an item is generally more important than whether the item is representative of a particular school or medium.

We selectively collect artistic works, recognising that historical evidence will be contained and expressed in many forms, such as works which depict landscape, the built environment, figures, faces, public and popular events and costume.

### Maps Collection

Australian maps, especially those covering Victoria, are the main focus of this collection, though the Library also has many maps from overseas.

As well as over 110,000 maps – enough to carpet metropolitan Melbourne – the collection includes geographical and cartographic reference books and atlases.

There is a wealth of rare and antique maps in the collection, including maps showing the first outlines of the Australian coast, charts by Matthew Flinders and early Dutch maps. The 19th-century township, parish, county and squatting maps can provide all sorts of leads for those investigating their family history.

Drainage plans produced by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) from the late 19th century to the 1940s give a fascinating historical record of Melbourne streetscapes and features.

There are several thousand auction plans showing the layout of suburban estates, and large collections of fire insurance plans, aerial photographs, geological and goldmining maps. We also have topographic maps from government agencies such as Land Victoria and Geoscience Australia.

Significant overseas holdings include maps by the British Ordnance Survey, nautical charts covering all corners of the globe, and 19th-century maps of India.

**History of the Book Collection (rare books)**
The Library has an outstanding collection that highlights the history of the book as both a mechanism for communicating ideas and as an object showcasing the art of book illustration, design and production techniques. From ancient clay tablets to contemporary deluxe editions, the collection includes medieval manuscripts, early printed works such as the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, private press editions and artist books. It also features a collection of rare works including first editions by significant literary authors, foundation works about Victoria and Australia, and a research collection of Australian children's literature.

## Some of our exceptional collections

The **WG Alma Conjuring Collection** of magic books, magazines, photographs, posters, detailed research files on individual magicians, and other magic memorabilia, as well as small tricks and models.

The **MV Anderson Chess Collection**, one of the largest chess collections in the world, with books, magazines and tournament reports. It includes a leaf from *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, published by Caxton in 1483.

The **Scholastic Dromkeen Children's Literature Collection** of original artwork, preliminary sketches and dummy books for many Australian children's picture books. Founded by Joyce and Courtney Oldmeadow, the collection was donated to the Library by the Trustees of Scholastic Australia in 2012.

The **John Emmerson Collection** of more than 5000 rare printed works, with a particular emphasis on the reign of King Charles I and the 1640s English Civil War. The collection was donated to the Library in 2015. It was amassed over 40 years by the late John McLaren Emmerson QC, a bibliophile and brilliant scholar who had careers as both an Oxford physicist and a Melbourne barrister.

# GENERAL COLLECTION

**Open collection**

The Library maintains 7 reading rooms, 6 of which maintain physical collections intended for visitors to access, browse and use within the building. These collections complement the eresources (databases and eserials) and ebooks and contain collection material covering all subjects..

The open access Reading Room collections are La Trobe (Australiana) in the Dome, Redmond Barry, Arts, Newspaper and Family History, The Ian Potter Queens Hall Collection of Australian Literature, Chess and Contract Bridge, and the Pauline Gandel Children's Quarter Collection. The Heritage Collections Reading Room is unique in being a space for accessing special collections requiring supervision, including original manuscripts and pictures, rare books and fragile items such as ephemera (for example, the Riley and AAA collections), elephant folios and hard copy newspapers. The subjects covered by the Reading Rooms include:

• Victorian and Australian history, culture, people, politics and literature focused in La Trobe (Australiana)

• World knowledge, including business, science and technology, law and government, social studies, history, literature, travel and architecture focused in Redmond Barry

• Visual and decorative arts, photography, music, theatre, dance, film, radio and television focused in Arts.Newspapers/Family History. The combined reading rooms share a stunning heritage gallery.

• In the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust Family History Reading Room, one of the Library's most hands-on research spaces, patrons can access the Library's renowned family collection, widely regarded as the most popular family history collection in Australia. It contains over 6000 print titles and over 2800 microfiche titles, as well as nearly 500 microfilm titles. In the Herald and Weekly Times Newspapers Reading Room, the newspaper collection is renowned for its comprehensive scale, including approximately 100,000 volumes and 40,000 reels of microfilm covering 4000 Victorian, interstate and international titles.
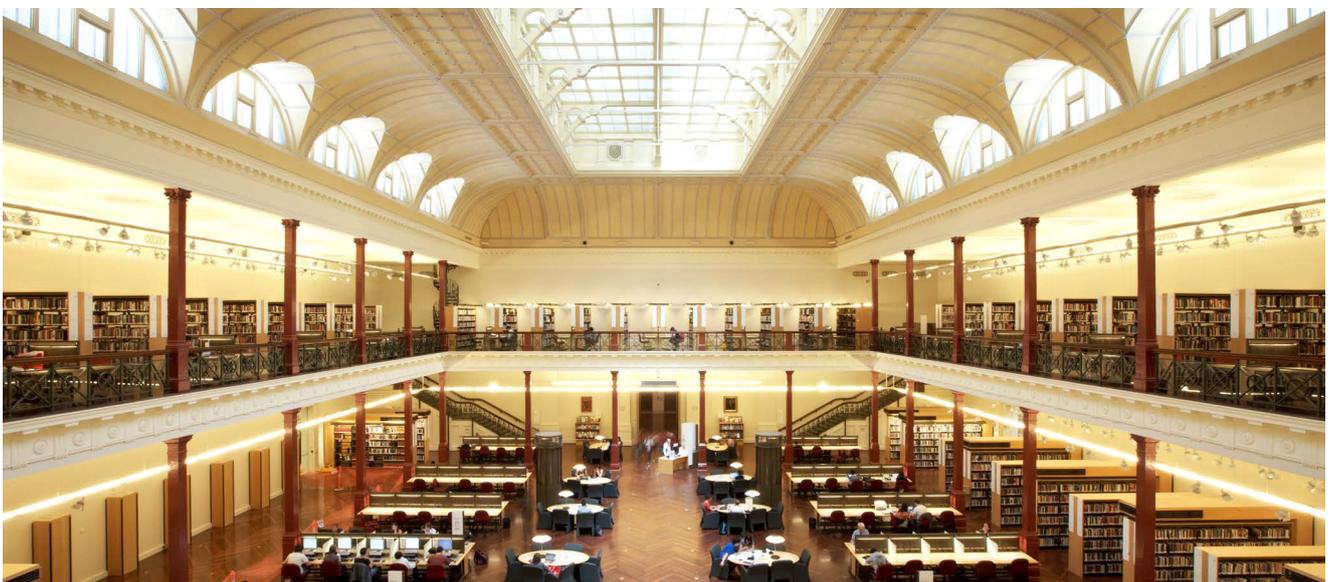
The Children's Quarter collection is an open access collection for children aged 0-12, focusing on board books and picture books, in English and with picture books in community languages including First Nation languages and braille, information books and chapter books for older children, including graphic novels. The children's browsing collection is a dedicated collection for children and families, designed to enhance literacy and encourage reading and learning, to surprise, delight and foster the curious minds. This is the only collection intended as a collection for children to enjoy and is regularly refreshed with new titles.

**Offsite and onsite stack collection**
The Library develops the State Collection as defined by the *Libraries Act 1988*. Works are retained permanently. Most items begin their life in a reading room, and as they age, become damaged, or are superseded by later works, they may be moved to closed storage. Closed storage is usually onsite to allow ready access, but items of lesser general value may be moved offsite, remaining available to researchers as needed.

Collections not on open shelves include items that cannot be accommodated due to the scale of the overall collection or that are unsuitable for open access because of age or format. Material in storage includes large runs of hard copy Victorian, interstate and overseas newspapers; and extensive holding of journals and magazines; government publications; older or care-worn books; legal deposit copies; and fragile items such as pamphlets and ephemera; and audiovisual materials.

Rare books and original materials, including manuscripts, pictures and oral histories are not suitable for open access except under supervised conditions, within exhibitions or as digital content.

Offsite and onsite stack collections are still made available on request through the catalogue and, depending on the access conditions are delivered to either Redmond Barry Reading Room or the Heritage Collections Reading Room.

The distinction between onsite and offsite stack collections has traditionally been determined by how much can be maintained onsite. As a result, large collection components – starting with newspapers, serials, government publications, and extensive manuscript collections such as the Records of Coles Myer – have been moved offsite. Collection storage management will continue to move older, less-used material offsite.

# DIGITAL RESOURCES

The Library's digital resources are multifaceted, providing patrons with significant access to a world-class collection. Users benefit from enhanced access to works digitised by the Library, as well as by content acquired from a range of other sources, with access provided wherever possible to Victorian library members. Victorian publications received via legal deposit through National eDeposit are also available, with access conditions set in accordance with publisher requirements. These resources are able to be accessed through the State Library Victoria catalogue and Trove.

The Library is increasingly acquiring born-digital materials, including photographs, maps and manuscripts and research datasets.

Victorian websites- web archiving

National eDeposit works published in Victoria

Victorian Government publications

Born-digital materials

Newspapers digitised and available through Trove

eBooks acquired (subscription or permanent access)

Digitised works from the State Collection

eSerials acquired (subscription or permanent access)
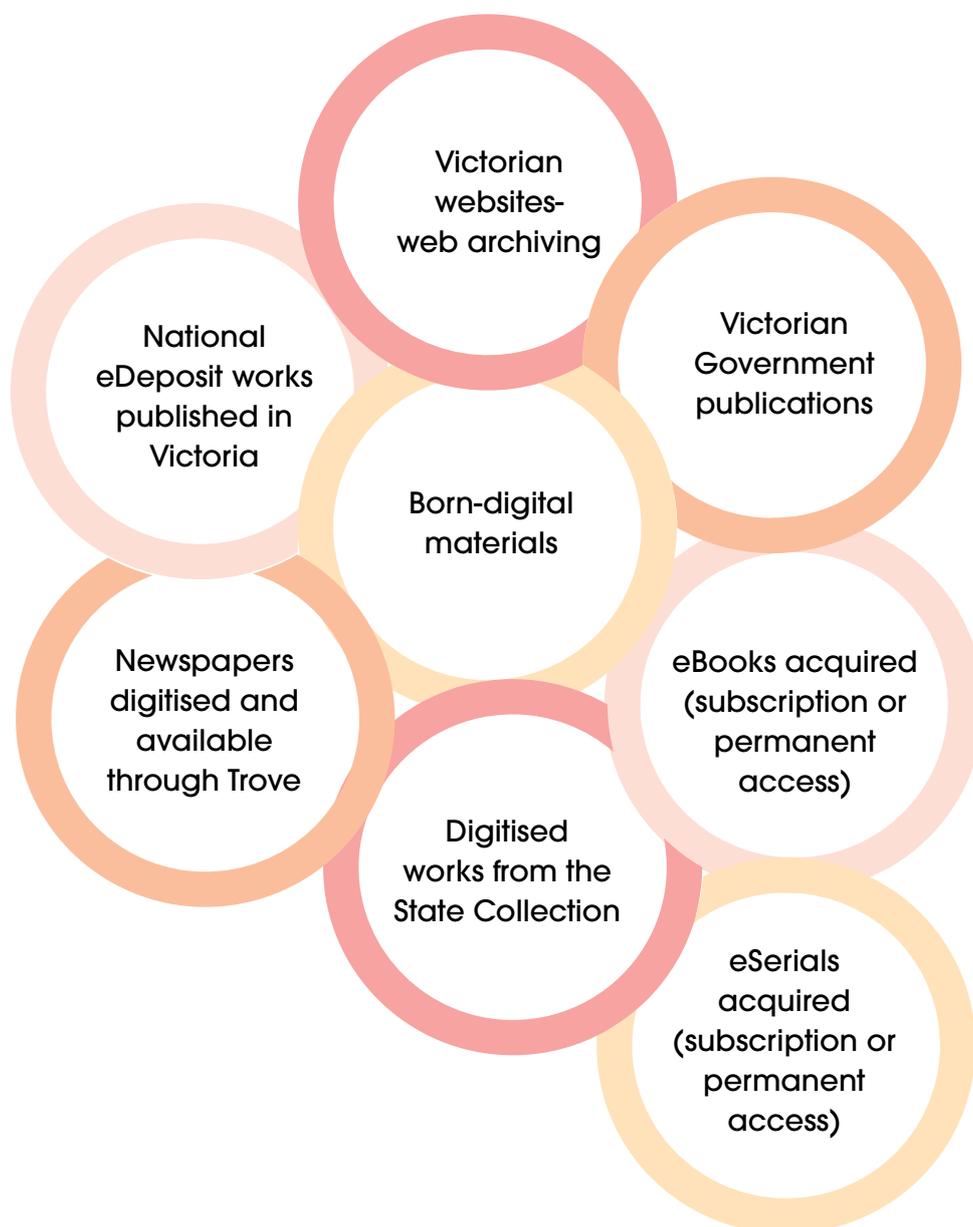
# PILLAR 1:
# BUILDING THE PHYSICAL
# AND DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

**Our collections are internationally recognised as world-class. For over 170 years the Library has collected the stories of Victoria, Australia and humanity, connecting Victorians to the world and sharing Victoria's knowledge with global audiences. Our collections serve as a gateway to discovery for both local and international users.**

The special collections acquired provide extraordinarily rich resources that attract scholars from around the globe. The rich diversity of pictures, manuscripts, oral histories, digital and published works speak to the breadth of the collections.

Generous philanthropy has enabled the Library to build outstanding collections for special interests. For example, the Women Writers Fund is a pioneering fund that seeks to redress the historical gender imbalance in the State Collection by acquiring works by under-represented 19th and 20th-century women writers. The work of the Women Writers Fund gives future generations access to more diverse and representative voices from different times, cultures and disciplines.

To date, the Fund has enabled the Library to purchase more than 140 significant texts by female authors, including a first edition of *Institutions de Physique* (1740) by Emilie du Chatelet, a complete run of the short-lived suffragette and socialist journal *Germinal* (1923-24) edited by Sylvia Pankhurst, and a third edition of *Frankenstein* (1832) by Mary Shelley. Numerous additional works remain a priority for acquisition.

Filling collection gaps of works published in and about Victoria in the 19th century remains a significant goal. While diligent collecting means the majority of the works are already held by the Library, ongoing efforts are needed to fill gaps through purchases, gifts and collaboration with other collecting institutions. Digital reproductions may also be acquired when physical copies are unavailable.

# CASE STUDY

## John Emmerson Collection

The John Emmerson Collection of rare books includes more than 5000 items bound in 3500 volumes. One of the world's largest collections of rare British printed works, it features books and pamphlets from the 15th to 18th centuries, mostly produced in England.

The collection has a particular emphasis on the reign of King Charles I and the English Civil War, fought during the 1640s. The only comparable collections belong to the British Library and Oxford's Bodleian Library.

Spanning political, religious, philosophical and literary works, the collection is a rich resource for historians, artists and literary scholars. Its significance lies not just in the sheer quantity and quality of the books, but also in the important provenance of items, including works originally owned by significant figures at the time of Charles I's reign.

Highlights include:

- The collected writings of King James I, printed in 1616 and given to his son Charles, then Prince of Wales, who would later become King Charles I. The copy is cased in a personalised binding.

- A 1485 bible printed in Nuremburg. The copy belonged to William Juxon (1582–1663), Bishop of London and later Archbishop of Canterbury, and is signed by him.

- A bound volume of the illustrated news sheet *Mercurius Civicus Londons Intelligencer*, covering the early years of the English Civil War from 1643 to 1646. Published weekly, it is considered the first major city newspaper.

- Early editions of literary greats including John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, along with editions of works by John Dryden, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Daniel Defoe.

- A vast number of pamphlets and tracts printed and circulated during the English Civil War of the 1640s.

John Emmerson was a distinguished scholar and barrister. The collection is valued at up to $8 million, containing many early editions of noted writers including Chaucer, Milton, Defoe and Swift. It is the single greatest bequest of rare books in the Library's history.

Users can explore  digitised material from the collection and stories about how the books reveal the lives of people in early modern England  in turbulent times by visiting online exhibition, *Beyond the Book: A Digital Journey through the Treasures of the Emmerson Collection*

# PILLAR 2: TRANSFORMING COLLECTION ACCESS THROUGH STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL

**To fulfil the Library's founding principle and the vision of our Corporate Plan, our collections must be accessible. Stewardship of the State Collection requires that it is safely and effectively preserved, while remaining available to patrons wherever they are.**

The Library's focus on users and user experience requires ongoing commitment to storing materials in ways that maximise their longevity. Collections are housed onsite and offsite, with facilities maintained to contemporary standards and materials organised for efficient access by patrons. The digital collection also requires significant storage and maintenance.

Major reviews undertaken in 2025 to develop a Collection Storage Master Plan and introduce a modern retrieval approach have highlighted the need for significant changes to policies, systems, collection organisation and workflows. Implementing these changes will realise a client-centric approach that is clear, consistent, improves access to the collections and provides a more reliable user experience. Delivering the recommendations will require ongoing investment in time and technology throughout the period of this Strategy.

Our digital delivery services will also be reviewed to streamline workflows, improve transparency, manage requests more effectively and provide a consistent user experience.

We aim to provide users with the resources they need, through the channels and methods that suit them best. Service principles including the promotion of collection access and request management will be central to this work.

# CASE STUDY

## Collection Retrieval Service

The Library's current collection retrieval processes reflect the scale and complexity of its holdings, which span more than 20 formats and are stored across multiple locations. These practices have evolved over time and now present a valuable opportunity for modernisation to better serve patrons and staff.

The retrieval service is shaped by:

- a diverse physical collection described using over 200 unique prefixes/collection codes

- delivery coordination across 3 patron request points and 9 staff request locations

- 6 open access collections (5354 linear metres), 19 distinct storage areas (stacks) onsite (40,805 linear metres) as well as 2 warehouse-style stacks offsite in Ballarat (58,335 linear metres)

- a city-block footprint at Swanston Street comprising 23 buildings.

Currently, around 5 per cent of the collection is available on open access and approximately 95 per cent (99,140 linear metres) is held in closed stacks, with 59 per cent of that material stored offsite. These figures highlight the scale of the Library's stewardship and the logistical challenges involved in retrieval.

Processes supporting the Heritage Collections Reading Room are being reviewed to improve efficiency and reduce reliance on manual systems, with a focus on enhancing service delivery.

A review conducted in 2025 identified several areas for improvement:

- The current configuration of the Library's management system (Alma) limits automation and requires significant staff mediation

- A range of workarounds has been developed to bridge system gaps, indicating a need for more integrated functionality

- Internal tracking of collection movements between locations and teams can be strengthened

- Delivery times vary significantly depending on request type and location, which can affect user experience

- Record descriptions, particularly for heritage materials, would benefit from greater consistency and detail.

These findings are informing a strategic approach to redesigning retrieval workflows, improving system capabilities, and enhancing access to the Library's rich and diverse collections.

# CASE STUDY

## Collection Storage:
## A foundation for the future

In 2025, the Library completed a comprehensive Collection Storage Master Plan, setting a clear direction for the long-term stewardship of its physical collections. This plan reflects a commitment to balancing access, preservation, and operational efficiency, ensuring the Library's collections continue to support research, learning and cultural engagement well into the future.

While digital access continues to expand, the physical collection remains a vital institutional asset. Most collection storage areas are in good condition and support current needs. However, there are opportunities to enhance certain facilities and systems to better support future growth and long-term sustainability.

The Collection Storage Master Plan outlines several key recommendations to guide future development:

- Strengthen governance structure to support consistent and strategic decision-making
- Optimise space allocation through improved sequencing of collections
- Expand use of offsite storage to relieve pressure on high-growth onsite areas
- Reconfigure open access shelving to increase storage density and improve user experience
- Develop long term-plan for additional offsite storage capacity

Together these initiatives form a cohesive framework to ensure the Library's collections are well-managed, accessible and resilient. The Collection Storage Master Plan provides a strong foundation for ongoing planning and investment, positioning the Library to meet evolving needs throughout the period of this Strategy.

# PILLAR 3:
# CREATING ACCESS TO
# ENABLE ALL VICTORIANS
# TO FIND MATERIALS

**Our collections must be accessible to all patrons to support research, study, industry, community development and policy work. Collections are made discoverable through detailed metadata describing the works.**

Metadata for all collections is available through the Library catalogue. Our archival management system provides specialised access to heritage collections such as manuscripts, pictures and original digital works. To assist users, the Library also produces a range of tools including finding aids that list individual items within manuscript and other original material collections. Increasingly, the Library is acquiring and describing datasets of research by Victorians, including government data.

Priority is given to cataloguing Victorian publications and original materials. For works published elsewhere, records are mostly acquired from publishers, Trove or other library catalogues.

As the collections have been catalogued over many decades, there are a variety of records which require periodic rectification or improvement. Efforts to improve these records, as resources permit, focus particularly on works relating to the history of Victorian Aboriginal people and the state's diverse communities.

The Library catalogue and archival management systems rely on data that is consistent with international data standards. Catalogue data is shared through the Australian National Bibliographic Database available through Trove.

Collaboration with content creators is a feature of our approach to metadata. Works published in Victoria must be deposited in the Library in accordance with the *Libraries Act 1988* (s. 49). Where these are deposited digitally through the National eDeposit scheme, depositors – primarily Victorian Government, community groups and publishers – provide descriptive metadata as part of the deposit process.

# CASE STUDY

## Tools to help patrons find resources in heritage collections

Many treasures exist within our collections of original materials such as drafts of award-winning novels, records of notable businesses and organisations, architectural drawings, large collections of photographs, and artists' archives.

To enable users to find the material they wish to use within collections that may be housed in hundreds of boxes, drawers or folders, staff prepare tools called finding aids. These are structured listings of the contents of collections of original materials. They help Library users navigate collections of related materials, like letters, diaries, business records, architectural drawings, sketches, drawings, photographs and negatives. They also support the discovery of works that document Victoria's culture and history, such as the Records of Coles Myer, the Vali Myers Archive, and the Records of the Burke and Wills Expedition.

Finding aids have been created by Library staff over many decades. Many are fully searchable via the catalogue, but some are only available in handwritten, typed or older digital formats. Around 600 finding aids are not yet available online, and a further 600 are accessible only as non-searchable PDF files not linked through the catalogue. These finding aids are less accessible due to complex processes required to update and move this information into modern Library systems.

In mid-2019 a program commenced to convert old finding aids to modern formats, to make their content fully searchable online, enabling users to find material within collections. Progress has been made with great work by staff to continue to make older finding aids accessible to users. Over 340 older finding aids with 45,000 lines of descriptive information have been made available online through the Library's viewer. Work continues to make more finding aids available, with 40 per cent of the Library's remaining finding aids in older formats (more than 250) now converted to modern data templates and either ready for loading or undergoing final checks. There is potential to use artificial intelligence tools to streamline the work of converting more finding aids, ready for publication online.

# PILLAR 4: PRESERVING COLLECTIONS TO ENSURE LONG-TERM ACCESS

Stewardship of the world's most significant collection of Victorian, along wilth extensive holdings of other materials, requires a well-researched and planned program of activities to ensure works are conserved, preserved and effectively managed for continued access.

Works may be fragile and require special treatment to stabilise the physical form. Works in particular physical or digital formats may come to the end of their life requiring work to migrate content, for example magnetic materials such as films and tapes. Overall conditions of storage and environmental conditions need to be assessed and managed to optimise the life and safety of the collections. It is a complex and critical area of concern for the Library.

There are many demands on collections including use by individuals, for exhibitions on and off site, as well as for conservation and preservation activities. Balancing these needs and the work required to ensure the optimal lifespan of collection material requires expertise and careful prioritisation to responsibly manage access, storage, preservation and conservation activities.

Our staff are guided by international best practice and ongoing research to develop approaches that improve the life cycle of both physical and digital collections. This is a significant task. We hold around 2 terabytes of born-digital original materials, including Peter Carey's laptops containing drafts of his books. Fragile works on paper and textiles exist within the maps and manuscripts collection, while diaries of early Victorians written in pencil are visibly losing graphite and becoming increasingly unreadable.

An important program of work is required to identify 'at-risk' material – items that will be lost or rendered unusable without intervention. Within the developed framework, priority will be allocated based on format and significance to identify immediate, medium and long-term actions to ensure continued access to both historic and newly acquired collections.

# CASE STUDY

## Oral histories

The Library's oral history collections provide a rich, personal perspective on historical events, cultural practices, and social experiences. Oral histories recorded on magnetic formats such as audio cassettes and reels are now reaching the end of their lifespan.

The National Film and Sound Archive reports 'all tape-based formats created in the 20th century are now obsolete. Tape that is not digitised by 2025, we risk losing forever' (*Deadline 2025: Collections at Risk 2017*).

These collections hold over 9000 interviews capturing the voices and memories of those involved in the visual and performing arts, literature, politics, sport, the media and events of world significance. It also includes recorded speeches, talks and live broadcast recordings of unique events. This includes:

- Valuing our Veterans – interviews with 20 Victorian men and women, covering World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the East Timor Conflict

- the papers of BA Santamaria (1915–98) – a collection of nearly 400 tapes of speeches and talks given by this prominent political activist

- Wendy Lowenstein (1927–2006) – over 100 field recordings on Australian folklore and social history from this peace activist and co-founder of the Victorian Folklore Society

- the Christopher Bantick Collection – over 600 taped interviews from this Melbourne-based journalist, reviewer and teacher, including conversations with Peter Ackroyd, Gerry Adams, John Banville, Graeme Base, Geoff Blainey, John Button, Peter Carey, Helen Garner, Sonya Hartnett, John Hirst, Les Murray, Brenda Niall, and others

- the Norman Banks Collection – over 200 tapes and broadcast records from this Melbourne radio broadcaster, who made significant recordings over 50 years, starting in the 1930s

- interviews from Patsy Adam-Smith – 169 interviews with veterans, shearers, railwaymen and other occupational groups by this Australian author, historian and servicewoman.

Other highlights include the Writers in Focus Collection and a series of interviews with Victorian high-country cattlemen.

Creative Victoria's Legacy Data Project has made a major contribution funding the digitisation of over 1400 audiovisual recordings. A further 3000 recordings have been digitised with valued philanthropic support.

Future work includes making these materials accessible through transcription and digtisation as part of a major program focused on 'at-risk' materials.

# CASE STUDY

## Butterfield Plans

In late 2022, the Library commenced a significant conservation initiative aimed at preserving 154 original architectural drawings by the esteemed Gothic Revival English architect William Butterfield. These drawings, created from 1878 for the construction of Melbourne's iconic St Paul's Cathedral, encompass detailed plans – some measuring up to 5 metres in length – that constitute a rare and fragile visual archive of one of Victoria's most prominent architectural landmarks.

Recognising the cultural and historical significance of this collection, the Library strategically focused its 2022 End of Financial Year Appeal to secure funds for its preservation. With generous support from both public and private donors, the Conservation team undertook a rigorous treatment process encompassing cleaning, flattening, repairing, and stabilising each drawing to ensure its long-term preservation. We are grateful to donors for their support in ensuring the long-term preservation of this valuable collection.

Following the completion of conservation and appropriate rehousing, smaller-scale plans have been made accessible to the public, with the intention to digitise material to facilitate wider access.

Through the preservation and enhanced accessibility of these drawings, the Library not only safeguards a critical component of Victoria's architectural heritage but also furthers its strategic objectives related to education, cultural enrichment, and the global dissemination of knowledge – thereby ensuring this invaluable legacy continues to inspire future generations.

# PILLAR 5: ENABLING PATRONS TO EASILY EXPLORE AND REUSE THE COLLECTION

**Ensuring our digital resources are accessible to patrons worldwide is a key goal of the Library. Our robust digitisation program focuses on opening up content to meet the diverse needs of the Victorian community, supporting education, research, community engagement, industry, policy and government.**

The Library was an early adopter of digitisation, with the first 100,000 historically significant images from the State Collection captured on videodisc in the mid-1990s. Since then, our digitised collection has expanded to over 950,000 items. Materials made available for public use include newspapers, photographs, rare books, maps, architectural drawings, pamphlets, serials, realia and artistic works.

We do not achieve this alone. Our partnerships with local historical groups and the National Library of Australia have resulted in the digitisation of over 380,000 issues from Victorian newspapers. Government and philanthropic funding have been key in enabling the Library to reach its digitising goals.

Born-digital works are increasingly being collected and made accessible, with ongoing actions to support their preservation and address the many challenges of management and access.

We are committed to providing high-quality digital materials consistent with user expectations, international standards and best practices. Our aim is to deliver content that can be used for publishing, research and other purposes, meeting current and future needs. Digital works require significant measures to ensure their preservation. Digitisation assists in the preservation of works in 'at-risk' formats that deteriorate over time. This represents a distinctive and important service that supports long-term access to our shared cultural heritage.

Our patrons increasingly need access to works in digital form to create new knowledge. Complex issues such as copyright and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) frame new conversations required to support responsible reuse.

# CASE STUDY

## Opening up images to the Victorian community

The copyright-free image collection brings together almost 230,000 historical images from the Library's collections, including pictures, maps and architectural drawings. These images are copyright-free  and available as high-resolution downloads. The collections are expanded daily as new items are digitised, including advertising posters, vintage postcards, colour and black-and-white photographs depicting Victorians at work, home and at leisure, studio portraits, streetscapes of Melbourne and regional Victoria, aerial photography, architectural plans of Victorian buildings, parish maps, newspaper photograph archives, gardens, fashion and more.

Some of the significant collections in the copyright-free image collection include:
• the Argus collection of war photographs
• the W.G. Alma Conjuring Collection of photographs and posters
• over 57,000 rare glass plate negatives and lantern slides
• studio portraits from the Rosenberg collection by Vincent Kelly.

The images have been used in local newspapers through out Victoria, history society journals and books published in Australia and internationally. The collection has made a significant impact on Victorian communities.

The copyright-free image collection currently doesn't include images from multi-page sets like sketchbooks, photo albums or book illustrations, though the intention is to continue to expand this collection to support open scholarship and community use. Providing a set of images without copyright restrictions promotes experimentation, reuse and digital innovation. An example of this is SLV LAB's ManIIIFestor Browser Extension.

# PILLAR 6: EXTENDING ACCESS THROUGH DIGITAL

**Exploring digital innovation is key to improving access to and preserving our collections, ensuring a vibrant service to Victoria.**

In this complex landscape we believe that the core principles of integrity, ethical responsibility and supporting democratic principles should frame the work that is undertaken to be an active participant in digital spaces.

The Library is strongly committed to contributing to debate around misinformation and serving as a trusted source of information. Recognising that misinformation has shaped life and culture, our digital initiatives include collecting discussions from the public sphere and making them available for future readers. Working with national and state libraries across Australasia, we are exploring opportunities to share collections digitally, including through Pandora and the National eDeposit program, while experimenting with ways to expand content to reflect public discourse.

A key part of our digital environment is Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Library is experimenting with AI tools to enhance the management of collections and metadata. Our access systems such as the catalogue are increasingly integrating AI-driven interfaces which will be actively assessed and implemented where appropriate to improve the user experience.

Our custodianship of collections also requires ongoing consideration of how digitised works – whether created by the Library, acquired as born-digital materials, or digitised by others – are used within AI systems. Ethical management of these resources is an evolving area which will require considerable discussion and action.

# CASE STUDY

# AI theatre program project

Have you ever wondered how the Library innovates for the mountain of materials that are collected?

One idea has sparked a groundbreaking experiment to improve discovery and management of our theatre program collection. Emerging from a Code Club skills development program, the concept involved capturing low-quality images of every program with a phone camera and using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to digitally 'read' the text – a major departure from traditional processes.

The desire to achieve access to a greater number of programs, speed up processes and create records with more detailed information was the stimulus for experimentation.

Two staff members set up the experiment using open-source OCR engine Tesseract OCR engine Tesseract to carry out this work.

Theatre programs contain details not often recorded in catalogue records such as performers, dates, and full details of the show itself. Researchers and the community find this information invaluable. The solution brought together patron needs and our capability to deliver information in a simple and effective way. It also addressed the challenge of processing around 37,000 items with limited staff resources.

Hugging Face – an online community for sharing machine learning models and datasets – was key in delivering the solution. Iterative development was used to enhance the process.

Assessing the learnings from the project and continuing to experiment and innovate will provide opportunities to increase staff knowledge and skills while delivering improved access to the collection.

Visit the Hugging Face space to try the prototype.
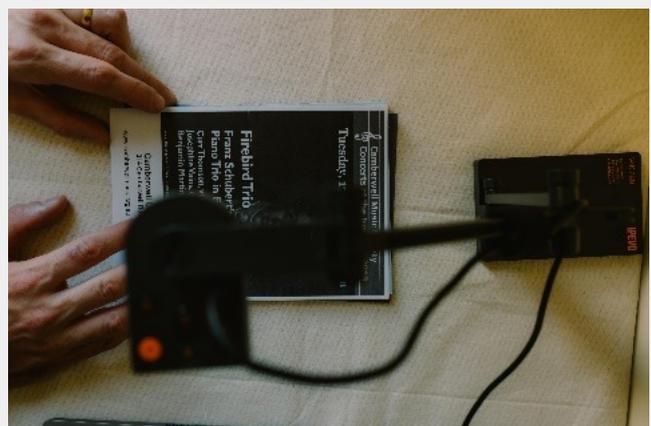
# COLLECTING PRINCIPLES

**State Library Victoria collects with intent to connect people to a world of knowledge in all forms.**

Our decisions to build the collections are based on the principles of:

- Content and relevance

- Impact for our users

- Viability

- Accessibility

We apply these principles to the selection, description, care, storage, digitisation, discovery, access, engagement and deselection of works. Significant decisions relating to what we accept, decline and exclude are informed by these criteria. Ensuring the Collection aligns with the Library's mission to serve the people of Victoria requires careful consideration. All decisions are informed and intentional.
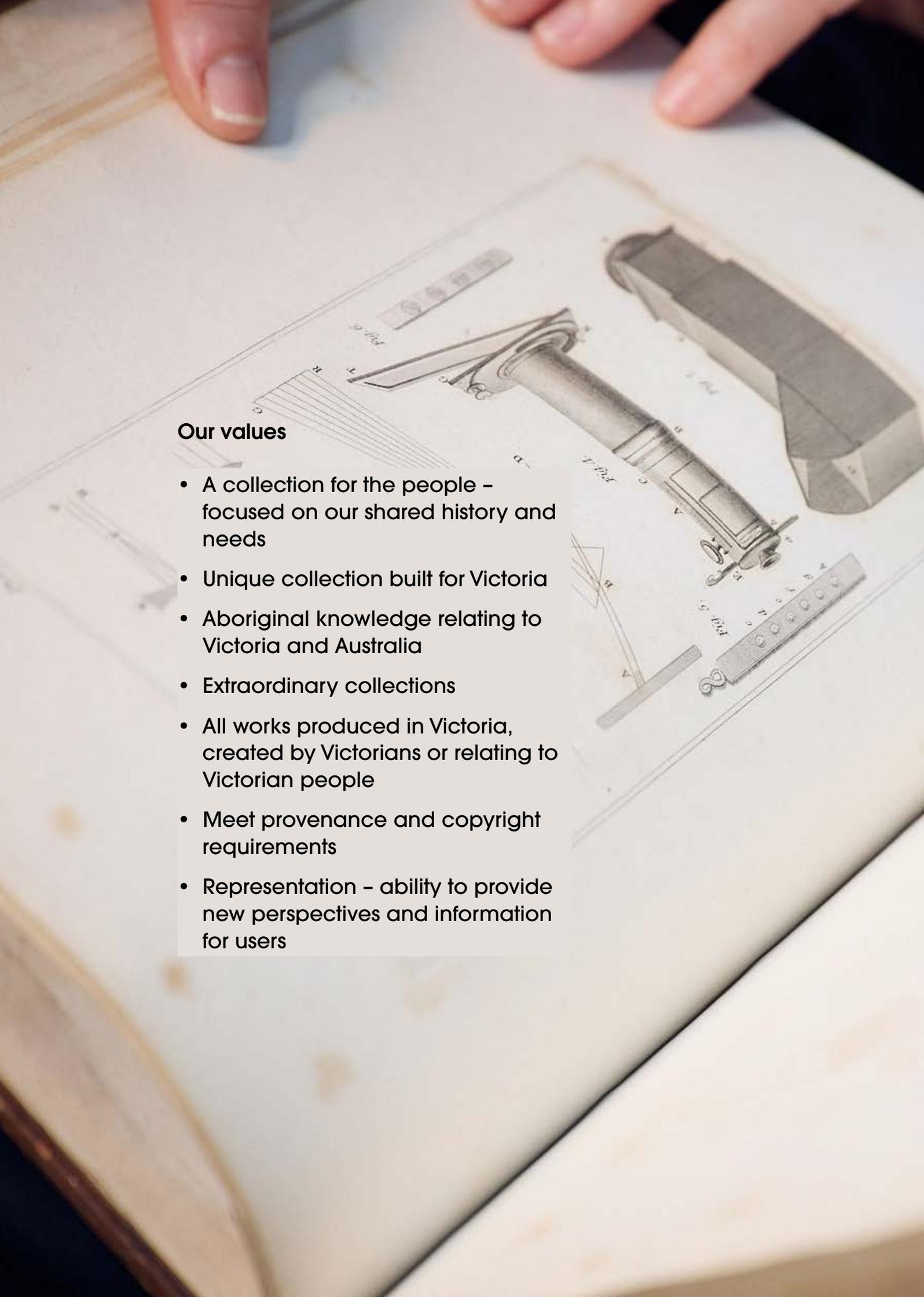
**Our values**

- A collection for the people – focused on our shared history and needs

- Unique collection built for Victoria

- Aboriginal knowledge relating to Victoria and Australia

- Extraordinary collections

- All works produced in Victoria, created by Victorians or relating to Victorian people

- Meet provenance and copyright requirements

- Representation – ability to provide new perspectives and information for users

**Impact for our users**

A collection that:

- will be impactful for education, industry, policy-making, social inclusion, community knowledge or to support diverse communities

- evolves to accept material in new formats to keep pace with changing knowledge forms

- has the ability to enable, establish or grow connection with diverse audiences and communities.

**Viability**

- Can be managed appropriately within the State Library

- Can be stored sustainably to meet user needs

- Is able to be made accessible for use

- Can be sustainably managed

- Is fully assessed for whole-of-life costs

- Relates to the needs of the State of Victoria

**Accessibility**

- Can be managed for long-term access

- Can be stored and described for access by users within the resources available in the Library

- Access restrictions such as conditions of use do not unreasonably limit the community's ability to engage with material

- Conditions of storage and management, such as co-location of material in individual collections, can be reasonably met

The Collection Development Policy and related guidelines provide more detailed information in relation to the acquisition of collection materials.

# OUR MAJOR ACTIVITIES FOR 2025-29

**Developing our collections and putting the user at the centre of the collection experience involves a range of projects across the Library and engagement with collaborators in Victoria, Australia and across the globe.**

Our environment is a dynamic and challenging one. Scholarly publishing – including books – has undergone a significant transformation in the past 4 years, shifting to digital-first and digital-only publishing. Open access has resulted in more content that ever being available without restriction. Continuing to adapt our work practices to create and manage metadata for discovery in this new world requires new skills, systems and partners. Major projects in partnership with national and state libraries across Australia will evolve significantly in the coming years, enabling us to adapt to respond to new forms of publication and the growth of open science.

Contemporary cultural heritage material is increasingly digital. This presents a significant challenge to the future of our collecting. Developments to technology and systems for large file transfers (larger than 100 terabytes) and multimedia also require new skills. For original heritage materials, the Library is increasingly acquiring digital content – including creators' laptops and other born-digital files – which often contain complex formats that require new solutions for long-term access and preservation. Work towards long term access will depend on organisational and technological infrastructure as well as partnerships with cultural institutions to develop state and national approaches that share best practices and infrastructure.

In this dynamic world there are significant issues that also need to be addressed for high-quality patron experience and effective processes for our current collections.

**Key priorities include:**

- collection storage with a new master plan
- a new solution and workflows for collection retrieval
- a program to digitise 'at-risk' material to ensure long-term access and preservation in digital form
- work towards harnessing new metadata standards and systems.

# POLICIES
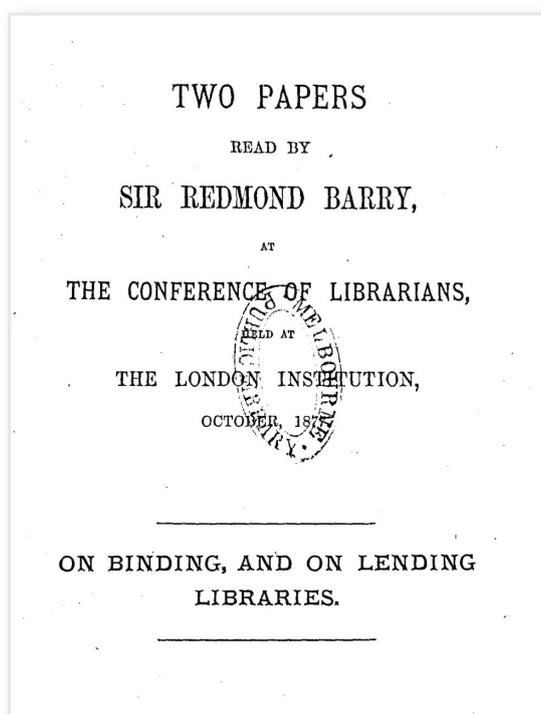


State Library Victoria - Two papers read by
Sir Redmond Barry, at the Conference of Librarians,
held at The London Institution, October, 1877.

**To be updated or developed in 2025**

- Collection Development Policy
- Australian Manuscript Access Policy
- Inwards Loans Policy
- Outward Loans Policy

**To be updated or developed in 2026-9**

- Preservation Policy (potential to include Digital preservation)
- Metadata Policy (will replace Cataloguing policy)
- Intellectual Property Policy (Collections input on rights and permissions for collection use)
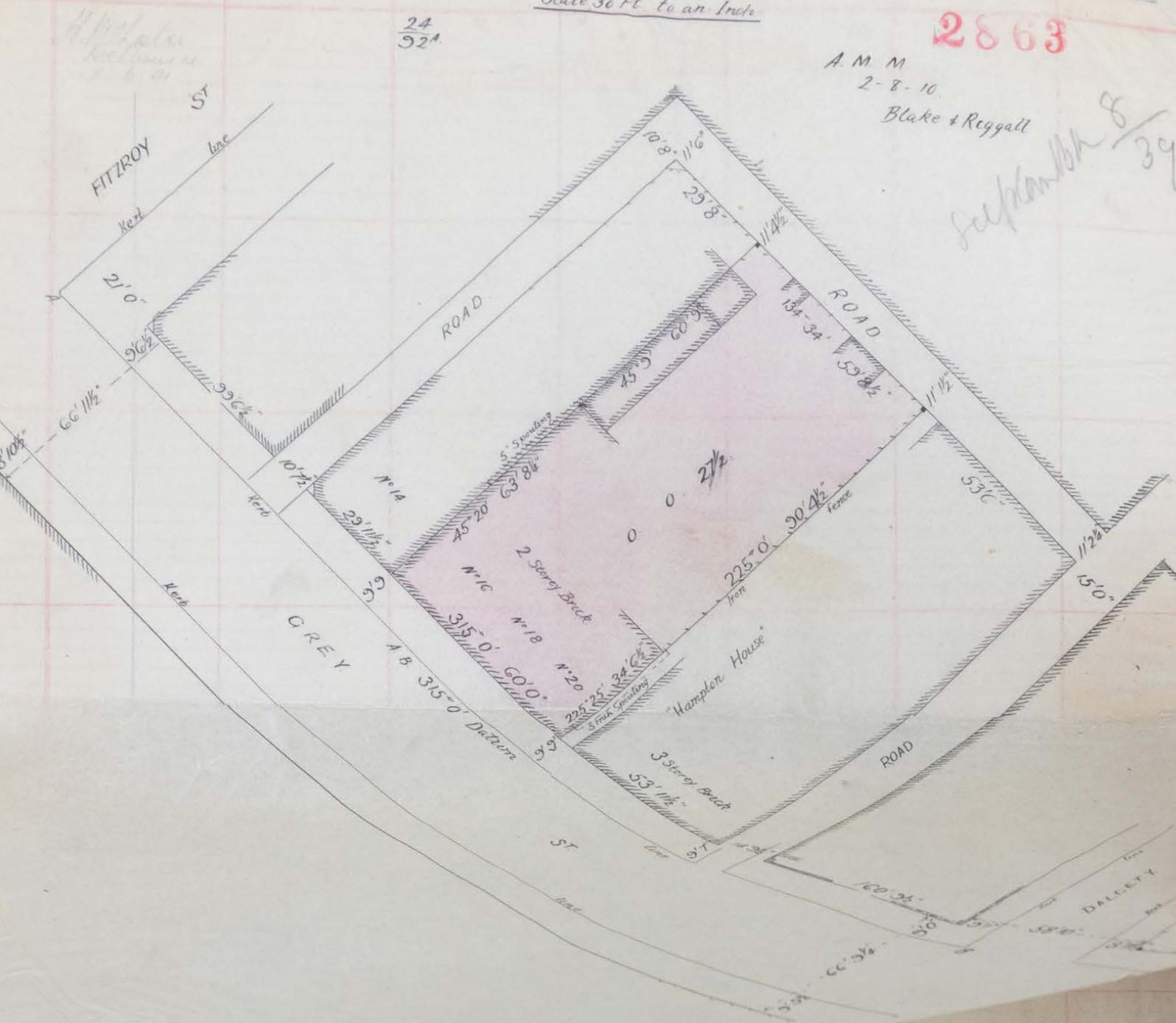- Inter-library Loan Policy

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*Blake & Riggatt*

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FITZROY ST

ROAD

ROAD

GREY

ST

No 14

No 16

No 18

No 20

2 Storey Brick

2½

"Hampton House"

3 Storey Brick

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AB 315'0' Datum

ROAD

DALGETY

M. 3-8-10
*Dunlop & Hunt*

HIGHETT ST

Kerb line

Kerb line

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