



Australian Historical Association Statement on the National Library of Australia Manuscripts Closure

The Australian Historical Association deeply regrets that the National Library of Australia has found it necessary to close access to almost all of its manuscript materials for a period of about seven months from 5 September 2022 until late March 2023 due to building repairs and the danger of further damage to its collections. That interruption will be a major blow to historians undertaking projects that require access to its unique materials, to research students with theses to prepare, and to honours students expected to produce major research work in the space of an academic year. It will require historians, in some instances, to renegotiate commercial contracts with funders and publishers, and it will disrupt the activities of major national projects such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography that serve all Australians. The AHA will work with its members and their students to support them during this unexpected and unwelcome interruption to what we consider one of the country's principal laboratories of the humanities.

It is alarming that the state of the building is such that collections are vulnerable to the elements. The AHA fully supports strenuous efforts of National Library of Australia staff to protect the nation's cultural heritage. This disturbing situation is the result of decades of underfunding by government and a negligent attitude to cultural heritage on the part of too many governments. It is also the result of the misallocation of resources, in which the taxpayer is invited to hand over more than half a billion dollars for an extension to the Australian War Memorial while other cultural institutions are allowed to disintegrate to the point where they need to close their doors to researchers.

The AHA calls on the present government to inject emergency funding into the national cultural institutions before some of our most precious materials are lost forever, and to secure the democratic right of all Australians to have access to the cultural heritage of which these institutions are the national custodians.

Frank Bongiorno AM, President, Australian Historical Association

Michelle Arrow, Vice-President, Australian Historical Association

Enquiries: executive@theaha.org.au