

**THE  
SOCIETY OF WOMEN WRITERS  
NSW Inc.**

**Centenary 2025**

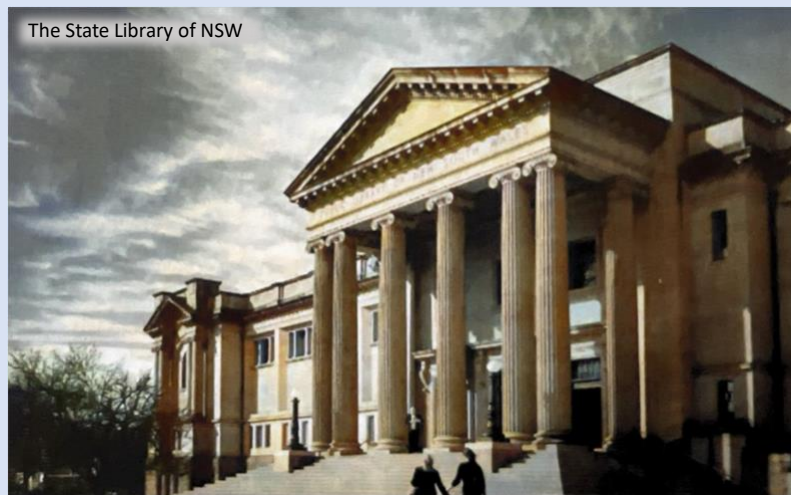
**REFLECTIONS**



Honouring and reflecting on the legacy and dedication of present and past presidents and supporters for their contributions in shaping The Society of Women Writers NSW as it stands today. Though some voices are now out of reach, their impact resonates. We especially remember the late Dr Hilarie Lindsay MBE OAM, a pioneering Australian author and businesswoman who championed women's rights leaving a lasting legacy in both literature and industry. The late Professor Emerita Elizabeth Webby AM FAHA, former Patron and Abbie Clancy Judge, and the society's much-loved photographer, the late Joy Williams.

Special acknowledgement to:

The State Library of NSW, and in particular to Mitchell Librarian and Director, Richard Neville, for the generous and continuing support of SWW NSW in giving women devoted to literature a venue to meet in the literary hub of Sydney – The State Library of NSW.



Professor Emerita Di Yerbury DBE AC, our Patron since 2005, and for your generosity in offering the annual Di Yerbury Writers' Residency in the UK.

**Launch of  
Di Yerbury Society of Women  
Writers' Residency in UK  
Members Room, Mitchell Wing,  
State Library of New South Wales  
Wednesday, 12 February 2014**

**O**ur patron, Professor Di Yerbury has generously offered the use of her one bedroom furnished flat in Barnstaple, North Devon for a female writer who must:

- be a member of the Society of Women Writers (NSW) for at least six months at the time of submitting their application;
- be over 55 years of age at the time of taking up the residency;
- be researching or writing a manuscript that is set in the United Kingdom.

The residency is for a period of three months: from February to April 2015.



Inaugural Di Yerbury Winner 2014  
Felicity Pulman (centre)  
Prof. Di Yerbury (L) Prof. Elizabeth Webby (R)

To all presidents, committee members, workshop coordinators and presenters, supportive members, e-newsletters and magazine editors, member and guest speakers, competition judges and sponsors, who have brought a richness and excellence to our meetings over the last 100 years, your vision and devotion is outstanding.

The collective service of these women, a tapestry of friendships, ideals and actions, reminds us of the enduring responsibility to continue building a better future for The Society of Women Writers NSW.





Back row - Pam Bayfield, front row L to R - Patricia Gaut, Hilarie Lindsay, Bridget McKern, Jennifer Rumsey, Prof. Di Yerbury, Valerie Pybus (Lewis), Lesley Walter.



Beverley Earnshaw



Pamela Rushby



Beverley George

Below: Some members who served ten consecutive years or more on committee.  
Amanda Mark continues to serve on the committee.



Lindsay Lewis



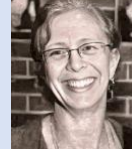
Vivienne Foster



Amanda Mark



Mary Ann Napper



Lynda Calder

The Society is proud to have supported a State Library of NSW project between 2016 – 2019.



## Presidents' Reflections Current – 2002



Pippa Kay — Co-President (2024-current)

I've been a member since 1995 and have seen significant changes but the one thing that hasn't changed is the friendship and support we receive from each other.

It's an honour to be Co-President this Centenary Year with Liz Newton. We hope to make this a memorable and celebratory year for all our members and lay the foundations for the next hundred years.

Our founding members used pen and ink or typewriters in 1925. What would they think of us with our laptops? Will AI be writing our stories and poems for us in 2125? I hope not!



Liz Newton — Co-President (2024-current)

I became Co-President of SWW in late 2024 along with Pippa Kay, just in time for the upcoming celebrations in our Centenary Year of 2025. It has been a steep learning curve and a busy time, yet I feel honoured to be able to fulfil this role and awed by past presidents and their achievements.

I joined the SWW a decade ago, where I met other women writers keen to share ideas and friendship in a supportive space. This breadth of knowledge combines into an organisation which remains '100 years strong'





Maria McDougall (2021-2024)

My most treasured memory is the joyful feeling of being among supportive accomplished women. The members of the Society of Women Writers stand upon the shoulders of women who have continued to support each other 100 years strong, giving women a voice. In my role of centenary coordinator, the significance of the legacy and rich body of work that has gone before us is not lost. It has been an honour and privilege for me to be working with the wonderful committee and team of colleagues confirming the sisterhood, working together towards the next 100 years

In 2022, the Society donated books to libraries affected by the Lismore floods.

In 2025, many successful functions were organised in celebration of the Centenary.



Beatie Bow Walk 2025



Gatsby Night 2025



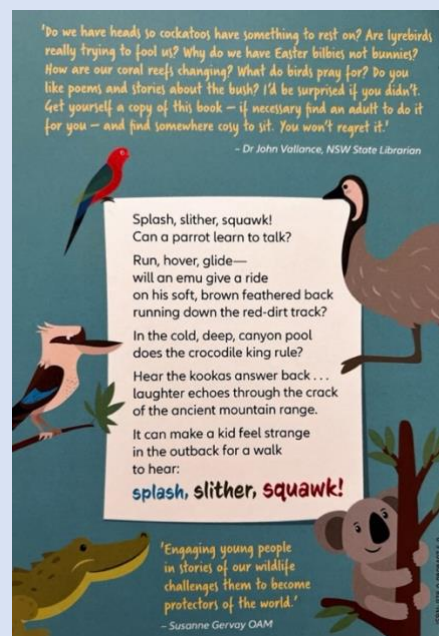
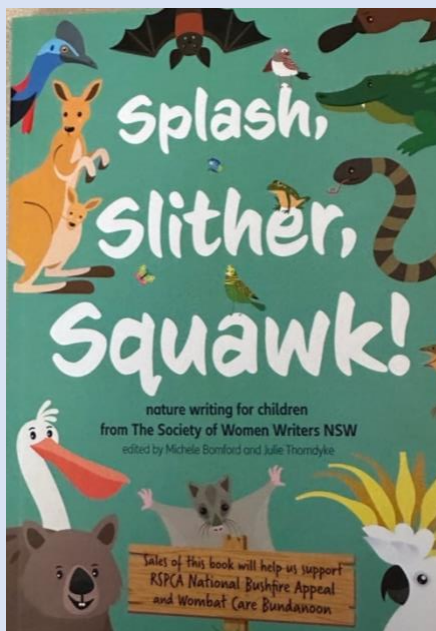


Janette Conway (2019-2021)

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.' Within months of my taking office, the world, Australia and the Society were plunged into change. Bushfires and flood decimated country, the deadly Coronavirus isolated people across nations and neighbourhoods.

In 2020, despite the forced changes, the Society survived to mark 95 years in Zooming style with comedian, Jean Kittson. Two years of uncertainty for the world but the Society remained strong. From isolation, members enjoyed workshops, monthly speakers, contributed to competitions, newsletters and *Women's Ink!*

A children's anthology *Splash, Slither, Squawk!* was launched.



In 2021, following the Black Summer Fires, the Society supported Wires and Wombat Care, Bundanoon with funds raised from the *Splash, Slither, Squawk! Anthology* written by members and illustrated by children, and edited by Michele Bomford and Julie Thorndyke.

2025 – I am currently the editor of *Women's Ink!* and have compiled the Centenary Issue.

Supported by Committee, I grew in knowledge and confidence. The period of my presidency is one that, I hope, will remain unique.





Gwen Bitti (2017-2019)

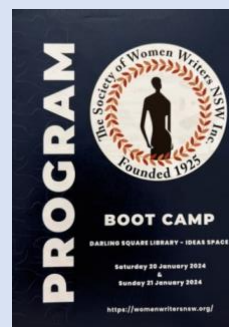
My tenure was book-ended with facilitating the 2017 Writers Retreat, and initiating the Biennial Writers Grant in 2019. I was proud to represent the Society on the Mitchell Library Consultative Committee. In 2024, I enabled a Writers Boot Camp.

My fondest memories are of my regular chats with the late, Dr Hilarie Lindsay, who was a gold nugget and powerhouse of information on SWW NSW. Hilarie told me, ‘...in the early days, committee provided lunch for members. And during the war years, when food was rationed, committee members provided lunch with their rationed food...’

I thank all the women who have supported me.



Robyn Elliott, Gwen Bitti and Hilarie Lindsay



Boot Camp - 2024





Dr Susan Steggall (2016-2017)  
Co-President (2015-2016)

Member since 1996

An unexpected situation after the 2015 AGM saw Susanne Gervay and I becoming Co-Presidents. It was a positive experience and set a precedent for similar arrangements in future years.

A highlight during my 2016-2017 presidency was editing the publication *INK 3* (the shortlisted entries for the 2015 SWW poetry, short story and non-fiction competitions). At several meetings, instead of a Member Talk, I instigated Open Forum sessions for members to present 'news bites' about their work. I also coordinated the revamping of the SWW website.



Back row – Di Morrisey launched INK 3. Front row L to R – Susan Steggall, Cynthia Rowe, Pauline Harvey, Judith O'Connor, Colleen Keating, Carol Middleton is hidden behind Pippa Kay, Lynne Cook, Valerie Pybus and Bridget McKern.

I firmly believe women's writing belongs in the public arena. Ten years on I am again editing a SWW publication – *INK 4*, the 2025 Centenary Anthology.





Susanne Gervay OAM Co-President (2015-2016)

SWW is meaningful. My writing was first recognised with the SWW short story prize.

As President, the best memory was the incredible 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. With an amazing Committee, we decorated the Dixson Room for a packed audience. Richard Neville, Mitchell Librarian and Director gave the address. Secret - I loved teasing him. 'Believe in your SHELF.' It was hilarious. Then, a huge stuff-up ensued when caterers didn't serve delicious salmon. Platters of salmon sandwiches were everywhere. An uproar ensued. I calmed everyone down. The caterers were already fishing on rowboats! The jokes came loud and fast. Yes, we ate salmon sandwiches. The salmon never appeared. I love the SWW.



Susanne Gervay and 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Keynote Speaker, Jessica Rowe.

2017 Writers Retreat - Wilton



Sharon Rundle, Susanne Gervay, Catherine Milne





Dr Maria Hill (2013-2015)

I was proud to be a part of establishing the 'Di Yerbury SWW UK Residency' and transforming the SWW Newsletter, 'Images' into the Women's Ink! magazine. Also to revamp and introduce a new look e-newsletter. The 'Abbie Clancy Award' was promoted to a wider audience.

The 'Women Writers Retreat' held in Wilton in March 2014 remains for me one of the most memorable and inspirational events of my presidency. It was also exciting to host the launch of the inaugural SWW Literary Festival at the State Library of NSW in October 2014. I was honoured to participate in the planning of the SWW 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2015.





Bridget McKern (2010-2013)

I want to acknowledge Pam Bayfield for her mentorship during my presidency. Between 2011-2013, it was my joy to initiate the Kookaburra Poets, an online postal group of members who loved writing poetry.

It was my pleasure in 2015 to craft memorable pottery figurines and beautiful porcelain cups for the Society's 90th Anniversary celebration at the State Library of NSW, which followed a grand reception at Government House, Macquarie Street. In 2017, again I crafted figurines in celebration of the 'Spinning Straw to Story Gold' retreat at Wilton.

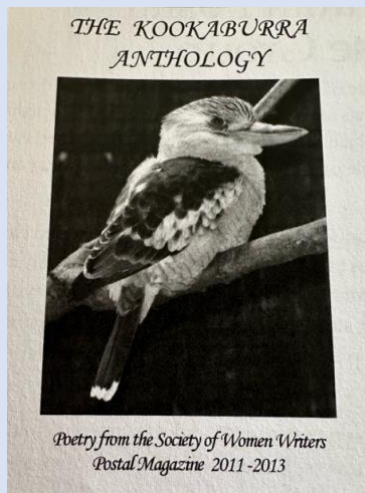
I treasure the memories of conversations with long-time members, Jo Fisher and the late, Joy Williams, our photographer at meetings. This Society is an amazing legacy for Australian Women Writers – encouraging and sharing our skills.



Jo Fisher



Spinning Straw to Story Gold



Joy Williams





Pam Bayfield (2006-2010)

Leading the Society over consecutive terms was a special and rewarding experience. I truly valued those years with a strong membership base, and many established authors, who offered support and guidance, especially to emerging writers.

Our meetings transitioned from formal two-course lunches, to sandwich affairs however, sitting around circular tables, many close connections were formed before the formal presentations with a member and guest speaker.

I fondly recall sharing rides with my dear friend, Catherine Smith to meetings, as well as our numerous outings in search of potential future presenters. I am grateful for the many long-lasting friendships made through those years.



L to R — Catherine Smith, Robyn McWilliam, unknown, Pam Bayfield



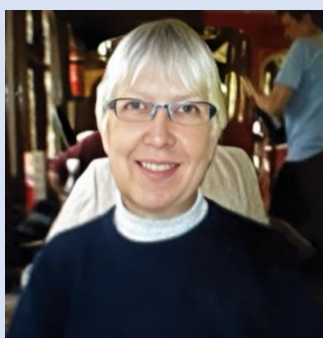


Valerie Pybus (2004-2006)

It was Wednesday, Women Writers Day. I sat rocking in the train as my memory travelled from the days of the “Six O'clock Swill.”

The open doors on the train let in a breeze. I adjusted the cake box on my lap, my annual gift to the Society, a lavishly decorated Christmas cake.

I carefully walked up the steps at Martin Place Station, when *Splat*, My Cake Box hit the concrete. A cheeky Irish voice loomed in my ear, “Are ye alright me darlin?” I was alright and so was the cake and it was very welcomed as a prize draw.



Dr Jennifer Rumsey 2002-2004

There were many highlights of my term as President. The most notable being the warm friendship of the members, the strong support from my committee and my involvement with the past presidents.

One of the most memorable events we held was a workshop at Rozelle called ‘*Sharing the Landscape*’.



## ***The Society's long-time members and tireless supporters***

Robyn Elliott - Member since 1967

In 1967, at the age of 25, I became an associate of the Society. I remember diminutive Dymphna Cusack, a lifetime friend of Dame Mary Gilmore. Poet, Valerie Newsome took me under her wing and Pixie O'Harris told me: 'Always believe in yourself and write from the heart.'

As a country girl, I worked part-time on our local newspaper but felt isolated and inadequate to go further. In 1978, Susan York, co-president of the Society began a correspondence course for isolated writers. She taught and encouraged each woman and this became an important lifeline for women writers who lived on farms.

I fondly remember, two Pats, Pat Richardson OAM and the late Patricia Gaut, who studied together for their writing degree at the University of Technology. Pat Richardson became Mayor of Nambucca and travelled for many years to meet with her friend, Pat Gaut, and sit with her at the Society's monthly meetings.



Libby Hathorn - Member since 1975

As a member since the mid-seventies, I have always benefitted from the Society's warmth of friendship and literary activities. For the Centenary, I was delighted to produce the two-minute video animation **100 Years Strong** to celebrate this achievement.

A cherished memory is being seated near member Margaret Whitlam, wife of the then PM, and a strong supporter at one of the monthly luncheon meetings; and another is being recipient of the coveted Alice Award in 2014 and travelling to Perth to receive it.

In seeking the great Australian poet Dorothea Mackellar's grave site, a family one, at Waverley Cemetery, I was amazed to see the unexceptional size of her headstone. Both her father and her brother had substantial ones in comparison. So, I approached our enthusiastic then President, Gwen Bitti, and this wonderful society, asking to raise money (some \$4000 was needed for a substantial memorial) to properly mark Dorothea's resting place and quote some of her famous poem, *My Country*. Over many months, hosting special events we collected the money and unveiled the addition to the site in 2017, the then Mayor of Waverley presiding. It is, and always will be a great pleasure to walk by or to visit, and a credit to our Society.



**CONGRATULATIONS  
LIBBY HATHORN  
ALICE AWARD WINNER 2014**



Libby being presented The Alice Award for 2014  
by Rosemary Syer, Chair of Writing W21

We extend our warmest congratulations to Libby Hathorn who has been named as the national *Alice Award* winner for 2014.

Libby's books have played an important part in Australian childhoods for generations. They range from the ever popular *Tram to Bondi Beach* to *Thunderwith* that was made into a Hollywood movie with the title *Echo of Thunder* starring Judy Davis. Her book *Outside* was launched at the Society of Women Writers Inaugural Literary Festival *Dare to be an Author*.

With more than 50 titles to her name, Libby is a prolific and powerful voice in the area of children's literature as well as writing for adults. She is a passionate advocate for the teaching and reading of poetry and for the healing, formative power of literature. Many of her books have been translated into other languages, including Italian, Greek, Dutch and Mandarin. Libby's work has also been presented as plays, operas and online.

Since 1992 she has been an Australia Day Ambassador each year and her work has been recognised in national and international honours and awards that include The Kate Greenaway Medal, The Children's Book Council of Australia and KOALA (Kids Own Australian Literature Awards).

The Society of Women Writers NSW is proud to have Libby as a keen and active member. We are thrilled to see her receive this new accolade and wish her every success.


- Yvonne Louis on behalf of the Society of Women Writers NSW

Summer 2014 | www.womenwritersnsw.org | Women's Ink Magazine | 27

Come and visit the new memorial for

*Dorothea Mackellar*

*"I love a sunburnt country"*



at **Waverley Cemetery** close by the "jewel sea" from Australia's best loved poem, *My Country*.

Memorial put in place by The Society of Women Writers NSW.

Beverly Earnshaw - Member since 1977

It was through Susan York, mentor, teacher, encourager and President of the SWW NSW that I joined the Society. Years later and again through the Society of Women Writers I was accepted as a contributor to Australia's Bicentennial History Project and writing history became my area of expertise.

Judith O'Connor - Member since 1980

I recall my first SWW meeting - Trim, Mathew Flinders' cat, a mound of bronze nestled in the grounds of the State Library. Paw raised; head cocked upwards. A statue of Flinders nearby - I still cut through the grounds, not as nimbly, but I always make a detour to say hello to Trim.

Robyn McWilliam - Member since 1996

I joined SWW after entering their writing competition in 1995 which led to publication in *No Thanks or Regrets*. Years later, I contributed as Workshop Coordinator for three years. I enjoyed mixing with colleagues in the good old days of lunch and wine in the Dixson Room while listening to the speakers.

Pamela Rushby - Member since 1999

Several years ago, through the generosity of Di Yerbury, I was fortunate enough to be awarded a writers' residency in Barnstaple, Devon. The resulting middle-grade novel, *The Mummy Smugglers of Crumblin Castle*, was published by Walker Books in 2020. I'm very grateful to Di Yerbury and The Society of Women Writers NSW. Happy Centenary!



Beverley George - Member since 2000

I was always grateful to share different writing styles and linked interests with the Society's many wonderful women. In 2013, I facilitated a 'Poetry Without Borders' workshop with Carmel Summers, which included Japanese haiku, and found that participants were ready to explore every genre. I enjoyed editing the Society's *Newsletter* from 2004-2006.

Colleen Keating - Member since 2014

I remember as a fledgling member, I found myself one meeting sitting beside Margaret Whitlam. By then she was an iconic elder. She told me she loved our meetings. She said she always bought the books on display to encourage women writers. This was an encouraging and motivating moment.

Amanda Mark - Member since 2014

As an aspiring writer, I joined in 2014 to attend some workshops and create a writing life. Instead, I discovered a group of incredibly talented women, generous, nurturing, supportive, and now lifelong friends. Every event is inspiring, motivating, and full of useful writing tips. My aspirant writing journey continues with SWW by my side. I look forward to the next 100 years!

Dr Sharon Rundle - Member since 2017

Admiration for the Founders of the Society of Women Writers is foremost. Women writers of substance who supported each other to prove their worth. It's an honour to belong and to have served as Editor of SWW newsletters and *Women's Ink!*; and judge the Di Yerbury Residency Award. Happy Centenary!

Julie Thorndyke - Member since 2018

Inaugural Winner of the SWW NSW Writers' Grant 2019, I was sponsored to attend a year's workshops and meetings. Participating on the committee allows me to give back to help other writers. Our unique society works to ensure that women's voices and stories continue to be heard into the future.



Thank you to all contributors.

Historical images courtesy of The Society of Women Writers NSW Inc. Magazine Archive. Additional photographs supplied by the generosity of contributing members.

Gwen Bitti, Editor

