



migration. memories

A research project about making exhibitions of Australian migration histories from local and personal perspectives

Welcome to Migration Memories. The Migration Memories research exhibitions were developed through conversations between the researcher and curator Mary Hutchison and participants in Lightning Ridge and Robinvale. Showing the exhibitions in their localities and at the National Museum in Canberra brought many more people into the conversation about Australian migration history and ways of exhibiting it from personal and local perspectives.

This website extends the conversation to anyone who has personal, community, education, museum and academic interests in the research. Please let us know how you used the site by emailing Mary at: migration.memories@anu.edu.au

Explore the Migration Memories research and exhibitions >

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About the project

Migration Memories is a research project about creating museum exhibitions of Australian migration history from local and personal perspectives. As the idea was to try out some approaches in practice, exhibitions were developed in two regional locations with individuals interested in developing a personal migration story for display.



Migration Memories Lightning Ridge at the Lightning Ridge Historical Society Gallery.
Photograph: Ursula Frederick, 2006.



Migration Memories Robinvale at the Robinvale Leisure Centre.
Photograph: Jo Sheldrick, 2007.



Migration Memories: Researching Migration in Regional Australia at the National Museum of Australia.
Photograph: George Semes, 2007.
Courtesy NMA.

The two regional locations were Lightning Ridge, an opal mining town in central north NSW, and Robinvale, a horticultural town on the Murray River in north western Victoria.

The personal stories were chosen to show migration as an aspect of Australian history that reverberates in some way for all Australians. They covered migration histories from the colonial period to the present and included the impact of colonising migrations on Indigenous peoples' movements within Australia. They were developed from the participants' own experience, or their understanding of a forebear's experience, or their sense of the experience of people of the past who had inhabited a place that is dear to them. Seven personal stories were developed for each local exhibition.

Research material for analysis and discussion was provided by documentation of the process of exhibition development, the exhibitions themselves and conversations with visitors.

Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge was first exhibited at the Lightning Ridge Historical Society Gallery (18 August - 4 September 2006). *Migration Memories: Robinvale* was first exhibited at the Robinvale Leisure Centre (22 June - 2 July 2007). They were shown together at the National Museum of Australia (22 September - 28 November 2007). With the support of the National Museum the individual exhibitions have been returned to Lightning Ridge and Robinvale as a resource for the future.

The research was highly collaborative and many people were involved in the project. A full list of participants is available on the acknowledgements page.

About the research

The purpose of the Migration Memories research was to explore the practical dimensions of making museum exhibitions that might create empathetic contact between very different histories and experiences. The project was informed by several key theoretical concerns and discussions.

Critiques of the Australian 'multicultural' migration exhibition such as that provided by Ian McShane (2001) and Andrea Witcomb (2006; 2009) offered a basis for selecting content that would show the historical complexity of migration and suggest that cultural diversity is an active and productive engagement rather than a static tableau of cultures. Ruth Phillips' discussion of collaborative exhibitions and the examples of these that follow in Brown and Pears, *Museums and their Source Communities* (2003) as well as examples offered in other collections such as that edited by Karp, Kratz, Szewajda and Ybarra-Frausto (2006) informed the project's interest in working collaboratively with participants. Paolo Friere's approach to community education based on exchange between teachers and learners in which all are 'knowers' (1973) was also influential in this regard. The research also took up Tony Bennett's use of the term 'dialogic' to describe an interactive, democratic form of exhibition (2006) and, like many museological discussions, was also inspired by James Clifford's idea of the museum as a 'contact zone' (1997). Andrea Witcomb's discussion of the varying success of exhibitions in realising such 'dialogue' (2003) pointed the research to the importance of the representational strategies used in exhibition design and form. Here it also worked from Elspeth Probyn's discussion of empathetic contact across difference through the human capacity to imagine (1993), and sought practical direction from writing about creative practice such as that by Bell Hooks (1991) and Paul Carter (2004; 1994). Bell Hooks insists on the agency of subjects and, as a creative writer, uses the strategies of specificity and embodiment to achieve this. As a writer and historian, Paul Carter insists on the perspective of place and uses the 'fold' as a metaphor for historical interaction in the local context (1994). Theoretical frameworks for understanding representational form such as Bakhtin's 'dialogics' (Klages, 2006; Vice, 1997) also provided a platform for addressing interactivity at the level of design.

Migration Memories connects particularly with scholarly work on museum practice. Its focus on local and personal migration histories also engages with issues relevant to Australian migration history, history and memory, life story and autobiography. Its practical interest in imaginative representation and formal strategies of visual and aural design is related to creative practice-led research.

Research methodology and process

The research process had two dimensions: making the exhibitions, and documentation and analysis of the methods of exhibition making. In making the exhibitions, what the research particularly wanted to do was explore how theory may work in practice. To this end it made two experimental exhibitions, each in a small regional Australian locality with a rich and distinct migration history, and displayed them together at the National Museum of Australia. In documenting the methods of exhibitions the research was principally interested in qualitative material based on a reflexive approach. Key methods were discussed with participants and exhibition visitors. Photographs, material created through the process of development and the exhibitions themselves provide documentation of the processes, interpretive strategies and stylistic devices that were also explored.

Making the exhibitions

The methods used in making the exhibitions were based on the position that content, process and form are closely interrelated and that intentions for an exhibition must be followed through each. To achieve the intention of representing migration as a heterogeneous experience taking shape in the context of time, place and prevailing discourses, the research established a suite of approaches to content, development process and exhibition design. In summary these were:

- a focus on migration history rather than migrant cultures;
- an interest in cultural diversity as expressive of interaction between different people rather than a description of people who are different from the dominant culture;
- a focus on personal understanding of migration experience in relation to historical context;
- a focus on specific local migration histories and the material qualities of place;
- the use of collaborative methods of exhibition development with participants and professionals;
- the use of design strategies within visual and aural media that would engage audience imagination, support the agency of personal experience and suggest a sense of connection between the exhibits and with viewers.

Migration history and cultural diversity

In Australia 'migration' is often thought of as applying to people who arrived as part of the Federal Government's massive post-war immigration program from 1946 into the 1970s. 'Migrants' is often used to describe a particular group of people, generally those who came from non-English speaking countries in this period of mass immigration even though many also came from Britain. These understandings are often part of migration exhibitions in Australian museums.

Alternatively, Migration Memories saw migration as an historic theme. It took the position that Australian history since 1788 has been shaped by the arrival of people from elsewhere – more specifically, by the way relationships between newcomers, and between newcomers and Indigenous people, have been managed, negotiated and changed in the context of prevailing discourses and political structures. The research also wanted to show cultural diversity in terms of interaction between different groups of people in this migration context – interaction that may vary from violence to generosity, reinforce the status quo or change it. Migration exhibitions in Australia were initially developed to celebrate and raise awareness about the many different non-British cultures in Australia.

Personal and local perspectives

To show migration as something that touches the lives of all Australians, but is experienced differently across time, place and cultural background, the material for the research exhibitions concerned local and personal perspectives on migration in the frame of wider migration history. An important consideration in this approach was the idea that the detail of specific local and personal histories provides evidence of history. Historical context was not provided in the abstract but in relation to the evidence of experience and in the words of the curator as a particular named identity. The personal histories were selected to highlight critical local migrations. They were also provided in the words of particular identities – both telling and reflecting on the experience that was significant to them. Artefacts were selected by individuals to express that experience rather than because of their value as cultural items – though sometimes there was a strong connection between the two. Specific local context was provided through brief introductory material and the use of contemporary and historical photographs and maps. By grounding and embodying different views and experiences of migration, the exhibitions intended to create tangible contact points between them.

Collaborative exhibition development

Following through the intentions to create exhibitions that highlighted individual perspectives in historical context, the development process involved reciprocal and collaborative work with local community organisations, individual participants – the 'storytellers' – and professional designers and photographers. Collaborations with organisations and individuals are very much part of the landscape of

contemporary museum exhibition making but the intentions for the Migration Memories exhibitions required a particular approach. Because the focus was on distinct individual perspectives rather than categories of difference such as ethnicity, the project did not consult ethnic organisations as representatives of particular kinds of migration experience. It preferred to connect with such organisations through individual participants if appropriate from the participant's point of view. The first community points of contact were community organisations concerned with the locality as a whole. These were historical societies and community welfare organisations. Collaborations with designers and photographers are less usual in the museum context. For this the project drew on models such as those used in theatre, other arts based projects and ethnographic film making

Design strategies

Migration Memories took the position that formal strategies of exhibition design are as vital to fulfilling exhibition intentions as content and development process. For instance, graphic devices such as quote marks, italics and shading construct hierarchies of text. Migration Memories experimented with showing text authored by the curator and individual storytellers in an egalitarian, conversational relationship. The first names of the authors were used with their respective pieces of text and spatial relationships as well as other devices such as font and size of typeface were carefully considered in graphic presentation.

Another important aspect of design was to invite an audience to step into the exhibition on their own terms. In fabricating the exhibitions the idea was to create them display on a human scale so issues such as the height of panels and the extent to which it was possible to move around and through them, were taken into account. Such approachability was important in achieving connection between audience and material. Similarly, devices that invited audiences to feel as well as think about a situation were used. For instance the particular quirks of an individual's turn of phrase were retained in text, and items created by the storyteller, such as a sketch of a childhood place drawn from memory, were included. Images such as this were juxtaposed with memories and feelings rather than explained. This method of presentation was seen as important in creating space for audiences to imagine what the storyteller's experience meant to them. Working collaboratively with designers from an early stage in the exhibition making process was a critical part of exploring these strategies.

Documentation and analysis

Documentation of the research that provided material for analysis included:

- discussions with individual participants and community organisation members
- reflections on the experience by designers and photographers
- discussions with exhibition visitors
- curator's journal notes
- briefs and project plans
- notes of meetings
- drafts of display ideas and designs
- the exhibitions themselves

A reflexive and dialogic approach was used in recording conversations with participants, community organisation members, practitioners and visitors. For instance, the curator conducted three electronically recorded interviews with each individual participant during the process of developing their individual displays. These focused respectively on decisions about inclusions and focus of the display, decisions about the design, and the experience of seeing the display as part of a whole exhibition. Across the interviews, the process of development was discussed with attention to how the relationship with the curator was developed and negotiated over time. Open-ended conversational methods of collecting responses from visitors were used with the intention of finding out what audiences 'made' of the exhibition rather than what they 'thought about it' at an evaluative level. An interest in inviting a literal 'making' had to be shelved due to budgetary and time constraints. Discussion with audiences in the exhibitions own localities and in a removed 'national' environment suggested many more questions about representational strategies in relation to the agency of the local.

The exhibitions themselves provide a rich text for analysis from perspectives that concern changing understandings of Australian migration history and experience as well as those interested in museum exhibition practice. The website project is a further iteration of the exhibitions, using another frame for display and discussion, and in this sense extends the research into a further phase.

For further discussion of the research see Discussion papers (link)

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The researchers were Professor Howard Morphy (Chief Investigator) and Dr Mary Hutchison (ARC Research Associate). Mary carried out the research with the support of the Museum and is the author of this website. Pip Deveson (Project Officer), Ursula Frederick (Project Officer) and Katie Hayne (Digital Media Project Officer) provided expert assistance in developing the website.

Lightning Ridge exhibition

Local organisations

Lightning Ridge Historical Society
Lightning Ridge Opal and Fossil Centre
Lightning Ridge and Region Transcultural Community Council

Individuals and groups

June Barker
Roy Barker
Barriekneal Housing and Community Ltd
Black Opal Tours
Jenni Brammall
Rubina Canfell
Jennifer Colless
Belinda Colless
Len Cram
Vicki Drackett
Elena Edgely
Ted Fields
Dora Garcia
Bob Hewlett
Gwen Jenkins
Christina Johansson
Wolfgang Johansson
Dusan Malinovic
Slavka Matjasic
Lovelyn Miglietta
Barbara Moritz
Gabor Nagy
Sheila Nagy
Neighbourhood Centre staff
Gyorgyi Nyers
Elisabeth Pal
Drago Panich
Frans Persson
Eva Petersen
Slavica Scekcic
Margaret Schofield
Nezakot Schulz
Frank Svehla
Michael Taylor
Lloyd Thompson
Joan Treweek
Rory Treweek
Edith van der Chijs
Yuwaalaraay language program, Lightning Ridge Central School
Cilka Zagar

Robinvale exhibition

Local organisations

Euston-Robinvale Historical Society
Regional Arts Victoria
Robinvale Network House
Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery
Swan Hill Rural City Council

Individuals and groups

'Alefosio 'Ale
Len Amott
Beryl Amott
Wal Baxter
Glen Bussell
CDEP Robinvale
Liz Duthie
Euston-Robinvale Historical Society
Maamaloa Fine
Katarina Funaki
Tony Gaby
Brock Gallo
Darrell Grant

Jayson Groenewald
 Kay Grose
 Marianne Guetta
 Talenoa Hala
 Ralph Harradine
 Lucy Havea
 Chris Katis
 John Katis
 Wendy Katis
 Rose Kirby
 Karen Kirby
 Mele Kirirua
 Ram Lal
 Jesse Lazzara
 Maamaloa-Fine family
 Julie McMonnies
 Bun Mak
 Carolyn Martinussen
 Olga Martinussen
 Susan Mesec-Burkett
 Tory Pisasale
 Pam Pisasale
 Aslam Reza
 Staff of Robinvale Printers
 Robinvale Leisure Centre
 Robinvale Secondary College
 Szewczuk family
 Seventh Day Adventist Church
 Judy Shevlin
 The Rural Life Museum
 Sothea Thea
 Robyn Till
 Tongan Christian Fellowship
 Tongan Council
 Ian Tully
 Lomani Uilou
 Dawn Wolf
 Kathrine Zambelakis

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 Lightning Ridge documentation photography: Jenni Brammall
 Lightning Ridge fabrication: Screenmakers
 Lightning Ridge scanning: Rob Little Digital Images

Robinvale exhibition and graphic design: Paula McKindlay
 Robinvale photography: Jo Sheldrick
 Robinvale fabrication: Thylacine

Lightning Ridge and Robinvale sound design and recording: Lea Collins

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Robinvale sound recording special thanks to: Glen Barrow, Alan Hicks, Tony Pyrgos, Robinvale Secondary College, Seventh Day Adventist and Tongan Christian Fellowship choirs, Greg Wallace

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 Ursula Frederick
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Web design adapted from original designs by Paula McKindlay and Iona Walsh

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Development process

Introduction

This section discusses how components of the exhibitions were developed as part of a collaborative process.

While there are many examples of collaborative development of museum exhibitions that involve curatorial staff working with community participants, it is more unusual to include design professionals in the collaboration. The Migration Memories exhibitions were developed with community participants, the curator, design professionals and photographers. While the project had clear research intentions, the exhibition development process was a responsive one which was open to ideas and developments along the way.

The individual stories

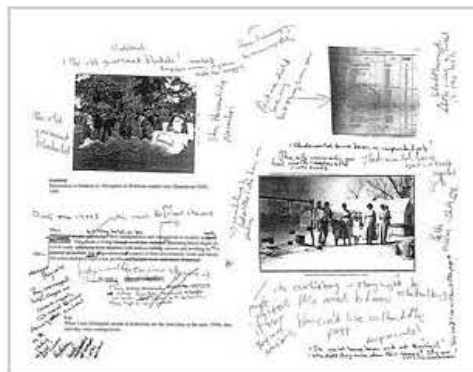
In the first stage of the process the curator worked in detail with the storytellers to develop and select material that would tell their story as they saw it. In Robinvale, where images of objects were used in the display, the photographer also contributed to this stage of story development.

Mary Hutchison, researcher for the project and curator

"My work with the storytellers was central to the project. We spent a lot of time together! We were also working in quite an intense way on material that was often of great personal meaning. I was always conscious of the good will of each person who worked with me and wanted to make sure it was an experience that could be of value to them. It's odd really to make such an in-depth connection with people more or less out of the blue – and then it feels odd not to have it. Even though we have little contact now, each of the storytellers has a very vivid presence for me."

Jo Sheldrick, photographer, Robinvale

"I loved meeting the participants – hearing the stories and making that personal connection. I think it's very important in capturing people in photos. Even in capturing their objects in a sensitive way it was important to make that connection. Me being a portrait photographer came in handy with taking the photos of objects – I wasn't cataloguing, I was representing people's stories through an object. The objects were the key to unlock the stories – like a photograph album where the photos lead to stories."



Curator Mary Hutchison's mock-up drawing for Kay Grosse's Robinvale story.

In the next stage of refining direction and content, the curator made a mock-up of the way images, text and objects would be used in each story. This made it possible for the story tellers to get an initial visual idea of what would be in the display and to suggest further refinements.

The designer then started to work the refined content into design form. This was a stage of experiments and further refinements in which both curator and designer were involved. Draft designs were shown to the storytellers and their permission was sought to finalise the designs and produce them for the exhibition.

Iona Walsh, designer, Lightning Ridge

"Having direct contact with the participants was unusual. We were seeking their permission to show the material but it wasn't the sort of approval process you go through when you present a design to a client. It was more collaborative. And it wasn't set up as a formal meeting between professionals and participants in a community hall. We went to meet them where they lived."



Designer Iona Walsh discussing designs with Dusan Malnovic. Photograph: Jenni Brammall.

The sound installations

The intention of the sound installations was to create a sense of local cultural diversity primarily through the sound of voices. The involvement of local participants was crucial to their success.



The Tongan Choir, Robinvale, 2007.

Lee Collins, composer and sound designer

We were never collecting material from people and taking it away. We were always working with them and wanted them to hear what the whole thing sounded like before it was finalised. I think interest in and respect for people is part of making this kind of work.



Recording session at the Lightning Ridge community radio station Opal FM. Clockwise from front: Mary Hutchison, Dora Garcia and Edith van der Gijp.

In Robinvale the sound of Tongan choir was an important element of the local soundscape. The Tongan Christian Fellowship arranged for Migration Memories to record a joint service with the Seventh Day Adventist Church. In return the project provided them with their first CD. In Lightning Ridge people were recorded talking with each other in their own languages and in English.

Exhibition elements that emerged through community participation

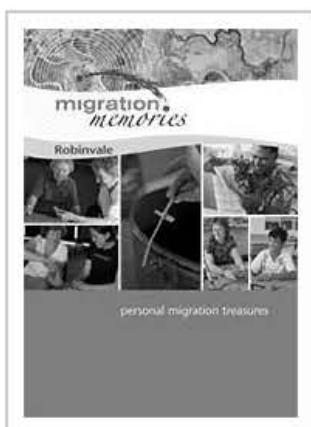


Flip book of object images and text developed for the Migration Memories: Robinvale exhibition. Artwork Paula McKinlay.



Lifestyle surveys on display in the Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge exhibition. Photograph: Ursula Frederick, 2008.

The collaborative development process in each locality produced exhibition elements that had not been previously considered. In Lightning Ridge, Christina Johansson conducted some 'lifestyle surveys' which gave a vivid impression of living on a camp on the opal fields. In Robinvale, a wider exploration of interpreting artefacts of migration through image and text, strongly supported by Regional Arts Victoria and Robinvale Network House, led to the development of a 'flip book' for the exhibition. During the process a number of these stories and images were published in the *Robinvale Sentinel*.



Cover of book of object images and text developed for the Migration Memories: Robinvale exhibition. Artwork Paula McKinlay.

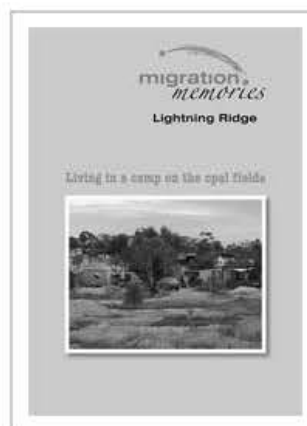
Liz Duthie, Regional Arts Development Officer

I think the show and tell sessions broadened out the project and gave other ways for people to be involved – especially through the school. They were a way of bedding the project into the community more deeply. The book was a lasting thing that could go into different contexts. When you see your story in a book, it gives it weight.

Christina Johansson, President of the Lightning

Ridge Transcultural Community Council

I think the survey collection paints a picture of the people who actually come to Lightning Ridge and the choices they make. I wanted to show the mix of people who live here, not because they have to but because they have made a choice to live out on the opal fields. I didn't want to be too personal or too imposing. I just asked a few simple questions about why people moved here, what sort of accommodation, water and power supply they have, and their main expenses. That sort of information makes people here think 'this is us'. And for other people it's interesting to see.



The Lightning Ridge surveys were presented as a book at the National Museum exhibition. Design: Iona Welsh.

Discussion papers

Hutchison, Mary, (Unpublished paper, 2010) Personal histories/collective biography: ideas for a biography of place suggested by two local exhibitions of personal migration histories. (Download PDF, 3MB)

Hutchison, Mary, (2009) "Dimensions for a folding exhibition: Exhibiting diversity in theory and practice in the Migration Memories exhibitions", in *Humanities Research Vol XV. No. 2. 2009 Compelling cultures: Representing cultural diversity and cohesion in multicultural Australia*.

http://epress.anu.edu.au/hij2009_02_citation.html

Hutchison, Mary and Collins, Lea, (2009) "Translations: experiments in dialogic representation of cultural diversity in three museum sound installations", *Museum and Society*, July 2009, Vol 7 no. 2.

<http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/museumsociety.html> (Download PDF)

The sound installations were an integral part of the exhibitions. They were designed to give an aural sense of local cultural diversity and were composed primarily of people's voices, speaking in a number of languages, including English. The voices were often in conversation and sometimes in song. This aural texture was part of the experience of walking around the whole exhibition.

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Conversation from sound installation, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Recording: OpaFM. Design: Lea Collins.

Content on this page requires a newer version of Adobe Flash Player.



Tongan Christian Fellowship Choir from sound installation, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Recording and design: Lea Collins.

The personal and historical

The idea was that the personal perspectives should speak for themselves. The seven personal stories in each local exhibition were presented as distinct stand-alone displays. Within each individual display, relevant historical context was provided in dialogue with the personal story. This was achieved through text identified with either the curator's or the individual storyteller's name. It was also conveyed by using documents and photographs which set the historical scene as well as personal photographs and memorabilia (see *Showing history and place* for more details).



Dusan Melinovic display, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Photograph: Mary Hutchinson.



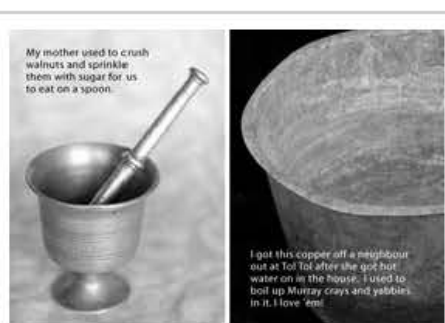
Detail from Sothea Thea, panel two, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Design: Paula McKindley.

Personal objects

Objects were used for the personal memories they embodied rather than their cultural meaning. Each storyteller was asked to choose an object, or group of objects, that expressed their story. In the exhibitions, ways of presenting the objects at the heart of each individual display were explored, with the inclusion of the actual objects in the Lightning Ridge exhibition and photographs of objects in Robinvale.



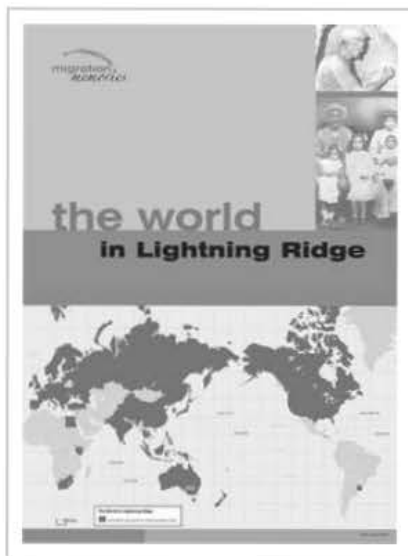
Jennifer Colless' grandfather's opal cutting machine, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Photograph: Ursula Frederick.



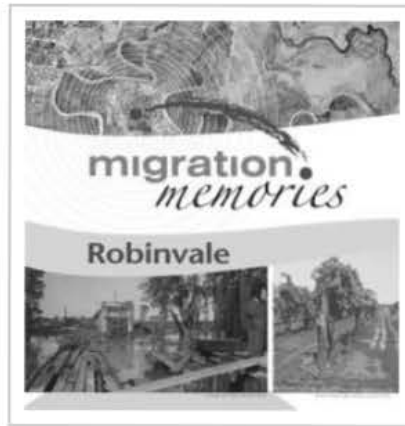
Panel showing John Kettle's mother's mortar and pestle, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Photograph: Jo Sheldrick.

The local

The exhibitions experimented with ways of conveying a sense of each locality and its different cultures in both visual and aural forms. Introductory panels highlighted the peopling of the locality with maps that showed 'the world in Lightning Ridge' and 'the world in Robinvale'. Contemporary and historical images of the particular place were another introductory feature. The Robinvale design used an orthophoto of the River Murray as a panel graphic.



Detail from Introduction, panel two, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Design: Iona Walsh.



Detail from Introduction, panel one, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Design: Paula McKinlay.

The local venues

The exhibition venues in each location were very different. The Lightning Ridge exhibition was developed for display at the Gallery of the Lightning Ridge Historical Society; a heritage building that was originally constructed as the bush nurse's residence and hospital in 1915. In Robinvale a room designed for childcare in the recently constructed Robinvale Leisure Centre, became an exhibition venue.



Barbara Moritz, Secretary of Lightning Ridge Historical Society, outside their gallery. Photograph: Len Crum, 2006.



The Robinvale Leisure Centre. Photograph: Mary Hutchison, 2007.

From the local to the national

At the National Museum, the exhibitions were displayed together in a temporary exhibition space adjacent to a complex of galleries dedicated to the Museum's own permanent exhibitions of Australian culture and history. An important question for the research was how the focus on personal histories within the shared experience of place would come across in a venue concerned with the national experience as a whole.



National Museum of Australia, Canberra. Photograph: Pip Deveson, 2009.



Entry to the exhibition at the National Museum. Photograph: Lannon Harley, 2007. Courtesy National Museum of Australia.

Tim Moore, exhibition designer, *Thylacine*

The challenge with the NMA exhibition was that the space available was quite restrictive and there were two exhibitions. We used new introductory graphics to bring them together. We decided to divide the space between the two exhibitions so people could see that they were

from two distinct places – if we'd had more space I would definitely have emphasised the distinction between places. As it was we were lucky that a lot of the material could sit against walls and the 3-D material went into the middle of the room.



Inside the exhibition at the the National Museum.
Photograph: Lannon Harley, 2007. Courtesy National Museum of Australia.

Professional collaborations

This section provides reflections on the collaboration between professionals which was central to the way Migration Memories approached making the exhibitions.

In many ways the designers and photographers involved in the visual and aural realisation of Migration Memories were co-researchers. They provided insights from their own professional perspectives that refined the overall interpretation and reflected on their experience of the process.

Mary Hutchison, curator and researcher for the project.

I wanted to establish the work as a project which was based on the engagement and interest of professionals working together rather than simply meeting deadlines. My feeling is that this approach supports coherence and depth in the overall interpretation as well as being individually much more satisfying and enjoyable – personal interest makes better outcomes.



Mary Hutchison, photograph: Jo Sheldrick.



Iona Walsh, photograph: Jenni Brammall.

Iona Walsh, designer, Lightning Ridge

As a general rule it's assumed that the designer will be more engaged with visuals than text and that you don't need to know much about how the two make meaning. It's almost a decorative approach. You're working within boxes: colour palette, typeface selections etc. and slotting text and image together. Collaboration opens up the possibility for the designer having a greater role in making the exhibition.

Lea Collins, composer and sound designer

In the whole process I felt certain that the outcome would be more than the sum of the individual parts – which is not always the way in my experience. The reason I feel this is to do with the form of the collaboration – the possibility of being able to refine and refine and interrogate what we were doing. I didn't work directly with the others but I met them and I was aware of the wider process. That again gave me confidence in the whole project, which in turn made me think harder and take the work further.



Lea Collins, photograph: Jo Sheldrick.

Paula McKindlay, designer, Robinvale

The working relationship with Jo (the photographer) was really important. And I couldn't have done it without Iona Walsh's support. I needed someone to tell me that what I was thinking was possible because I



hadn't had experience with exhibition making. And because I work freelance and I live in a small country town, it was great just to have some conversation with another designer. Tim Moore at Thylacine found a way of fabricating the panels in the curved form that I wanted. He thought it would be tricky, but he never said 'no'.

Jo Sheldrick, photographer, Robinvale

It was fantastic for me personally and professionally. We had the opportunity to build from something that had already begun but in a way starting it from scratch from our own perspectives. I was really excited about the collaboration with professionals in different fields from me. It was fascinating seeing the process evolve. Most photographers take the photos and that's it.



Jo Sheldrick. Photograph: Mary Hutchison.



Tim Moore, National Museum Installation. Tim also worked on the design for Robinvale. Photograph: George Serras. Courtesy National Museum of Australia

Tim Moore, exhibition designer, Thylacine

As a 3-D designer it was an enjoyable challenge to work with Paula as a graphic or 2-D designer. She was very upfront about saying, 'this is the idea I want, but I don't know how to do it'. It led me to experiment with materials that I wouldn't have. On a limited budget, and knowing that it would have to travel, the curved form was as beautiful as we could get it. It would have been lovely if we could have floated the curved panels in space rather than fitting them into a rectangular base.

Jenni Brammell, photographer, project officer, Australian Opel Centre, Lightning Ridge

As a local photographer I was able to identify what is important to the people living here. It's hard for an outsider not to miss the important things. I was also able to see the exhibition development as an insider. My observation was that people were enriched by their participation because of the collaborative process. Being involved in making the exhibition gave something to participants, including me, even before the exhibition was mounted.



A photograph taken by Jenni Brammell of a familiar site in Lightning Ridge. Courtesy National Museum of Australia.

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Selecting locations and people

Why Lightning Ridge and Robinvale?

Lightning Ridge and Robinvale were selected as the locations of the research because they had distinct and rich migration histories. The population in each locality includes people from over forty different countries – a significant diversity in populations of around 7- 8,000 (see local migration histories).

They were also selected because the relevant community organisations in Lightning Ridge and Robinvale were enthusiastic about hosting the research and felt that their communities would benefit from being participants. The idea of a two-way process between Migration Memories and those involved was central to the research.

The importance of support from community organisations

Community organisations were the project's guides to history, place and people. They provided background information and contacts with potential participants. They provided office space and equipment and provided or helped secure exhibition venues. They organised meetings and activities to support the research and they were the main organisers of the exhibition launches and publicity.



'Show and tell' event to share migration objects organised by Robinvale Network House as part of the Robinvale Multicultural Festival. Photograph: Jo Sheldrick, 2008.



Meeting to discuss exhibition designs at Lightning Ridge Historical Society Gallery. Photograph: Jenni Brammall, 2008.

In Lightning Ridge the support organisations were the Lightning Ridge Historical Society and the Lightning Ridge and Region Transcultural Community Council. The Australian Opal Centre also played an important support role and Opal FM radio station hosted a recording session for the Lightning Ridge sound installation.

In Robinvale the organisations were Robinvale Network House, Euston-Robinvale Historical Society and Regional Arts Victoria. The Robinvale Secondary College, the Robinvale Sentinel, Swan Hill Rural City Council and the Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery also supported the research's activities.

A simple form of Memorandum of Understanding concerning the research and the contribution of the main support organisations was drawn up at the beginning of the research process. The project provided a modest honorarium in consideration of the support provided.

Selecting the 'story teller' participants

The first stage in selecting individual participants was to identify key periods and types of migration to the particular locality. The second stage was to find an individual with a story that connected with each significant migration. It was important for potential participants to be happy to develop their story for public display – and to work closely with the researcher/curator over the better part of a year.



Jennifer Colless working with Mary Hutchison for Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Photograph: Jenni Brammall 2005.



Rose Kirby working with Mary Hutchison for Migration Memories: Robinvale. Photograph: Jo Sheldrick, 2007.

The community organisations in each place played an important role in the selection process. They suggested people known to them who might be prepared to participate and who might also feel that they would get something out of the process for themselves. The process of 'selecting' was generally one of 'finding' people who were interested and had enough spare time.

Showing history and place

One of the important strands of Migration Memories was to show the experience of individuals in its historical context. What social and political conditions of the time influenced their experience? As part of this it was seen as important to show the places that people left – as they were at the time of leaving. The local Australian context of migration history was a further important theme. What qualities of Lightning Ridge and Robinvale shaped their migration histories and the experiences of people who came to live in them? The exhibitions sought to show this by providing a strong visual and aural sense of each place and its character as a culturally diverse community.

Historical context

The exhibitions provided historical context alongside personal stories through the use of text by the curator and visual documentary material from national and state archives. Context for post-war migration stories was found in Commonwealth migration records held by the National Archives of Australia. Participants were provided with copies of their family records and through this often found out more about their migration history.



Detail from Dusan Malinovic, panel two, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Design: Iona Welsh. Poster image courtesy the National Archives of Australia.

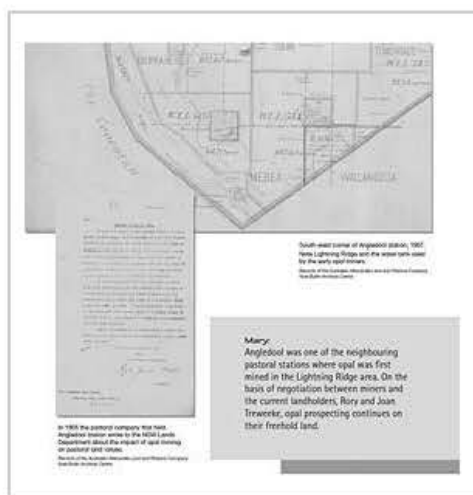
In the 1950s and '60s, the Commonwealth Government put a lot of effort into advertising Australia to potential migrants. Posters, pamphlets, photographs and films were all part of promotion campaigns that provided information in various European languages as well as in English. For Dusan Malinovic's display a typical immigration poster was chosen to go with his memories of the 'land of milk and honey' impression he had gained from this material.



Detail from Gabor and Shelle Nagy, panel one, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Design: Iona Welsh. Document images courtesy the National Archives of Australia.

Official immigration documents played an important part in representing Gabor Nagy's story as he had kept very little of his earlier life. In this case they gave a sense of his personal story as well as its context in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The official photograph taken of Gabor at the Displaced Persons camp in Naples provided the Nagy family with the only photo they have of him as a young man.

Records of pastoral settlement helped tell Joan Treweek's story of the cultural connections made during the nineteenth century in Lightning Ridge. Shipping records of the same period were used to show the context of John Grant's migration to Robinvale.



Records of Angledool Station are part of the Australian Land and Mercantile Finance Company collection held at the Noel Burtin Archives Centre, Australian National University. Joan Treweek, panel one, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Design: Iona Walsh.



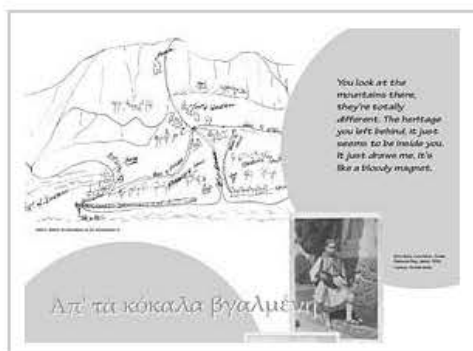
The surgeon's report for the voyage of the Henry Forster, 1840, is held in records at The State Library of Victoria. The painting is held by the National Library of Australia. Kay Grose, panel two, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Design: Paula McIndley.

Localities of emigration

The places that people left exist as actual places in time and as places of memory. The exhibitions worked with both of these.



Joan Treweek, panel three, Migration Memories: Lightning Ridge. Design: Iona Walsh.



John Katis, panel three, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Design: Paula McIndley.

Mary's research to give a visual sense of the world that the Chinese gardeners on Angledool station had left behind started with the website of the Chinese Museum in Melbourne. It included the Historical Chinese Postcard Project 1896-1920 and ended with Hong Kong University academic, Michael Williams, who offered his own collection of postcards for use in the exhibition. As there were no images of the Angledool gardens, one of a typical Chinese garden in Brisbane was used with a memory of Angledool, to show how knowledge and skills from China shaped the Australian colonial landscape.

John Katis had a vivid visual memory of the village of Leonidion in Greece which he left at the age of eleven in 1955. A quick sketch he made brought his childhood memory and his love for his village into the present.

In Cambodia today museum exhibitions of the skulls exhumed from mass graves provide a shocking sense of the killing fields which dramatically marked Sothea's young life. But the skulls as they are shown in museums are not scenes that are part of Sothea's memory of the Cambodia he left. Political historian Kelvin Rowley's 1981 photograph of a mass grave and other images of the impact of long years of civil war taken by Australian photographers during the 1991-3 United Nations Transitional Authority were used to give a sense of Sothea's landscape.



Sothea Thea, panel two, Migration Memories: Robinvale. Design: Paula McGinley.

Local context

The exhibition used panel graphics and fabrication to highlight the landscape of each locality. Historical and contemporary images were also used to create a visual sense of place.

Lightning Ridge



Jack Phillips' hut, c. 1885. Courtesy: Lightning Ridge Historical Society



Opal mine, Lightning Ridge. Image used in the slide show presented at the National Museum exhibition of Migration Memories. Photographer: Jenni Brammell

Robinvale



Pipeline construction, Robinvale irrigation settlement, 1957, State Rivers and Water Supply Commission. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria



Olive grove near Robinvale. Image used in the slide show presented at the National Museum exhibition of Migration Memories. Photographer: Jo Sheldrick

Visitor responses

The idea was not to evaluate the Migration Memories exhibitions but to find out what they led people to think and feel. The documentation of open-ended conversations between visitors and researchers was the main form of collecting visitors' responses.



Mary talking notes at the Robinvale exhibition.
Photograph: Laura Hartley



A Lightning Ridge exhibition visitor.
Photograph: Ursula Frederick

Collecting conversations

At Lightning Ridge, the verandah of the Historical Society Gallery provided an easy and natural space for talking to people. At Robinvale the openness of the space allowed room for small groups to converse and the outdoor play area provided further room. At the National Museum conversations were held in one of the Museum's café spaces.

In documenting conversations with visitors, Mary worked with Ursula Frederick in Lightning Ridge, Laura Hartley in Robinvale, and Ange Casey in Canberra. One of the things they noticed was that the familiar, domestic quality of the local venues seemed to put people at ease. What Ursula called the 'breathing space' between the exhibition and everyday business encouraged conversation. It also gave young visitors room to move physically in and out of the exhibition. At the local venues visitors also often made return visits; to see more, to talk more, to bring someone else along.



The verandah of the Lightning Ridge Historical Society gallery.
Photograph: Ursula Frederick

Responses to the three exhibitions

A different mix of visitors came to each exhibition. At Lightning Ridge a significant proportion of visitors were tourists. At Robinvale the great majority of visitors were local residents. In Canberra at the National Museum most visitors had come to see the Museum itself and were not familiar with either of the localities.

A striking theme in local residents' responses in both Lightning Ridge and Robinvale concerned learning more about their community through the exhibition. The conversations in Canberra generally reflected a stronger connection with the stories than the places.

Robinvale 23/6/07 (conversation 8)

I know there are all these different nationalities here in Robinvale. You live in the middle of it, but you don't really know. You don't think about what it has taken to get here.



Visitors to the Robinvale exhibition. Photograph: Mary Hutchinson

Lightning Ridge 4/9/06 (Interview 1)

... and learning so much more – what one never knew about the individuals or families... It's like you have walked into a huge living room and there are all these people who have all known each other but [the exhibition] actually connected some of them more to each other.



Lightning Ridge opening. Photograph: Ursula Frederick

NMA conversation 20/11/07

I felt 'in the people' but not 'in the place'... The thought provoking thing is that you realise how every Australian has a migration story and [that they often have] things that have been kept and treasured – things from 'home' that have been passed down.



Visitors at the NMA exhibition. Photograph: Lannon Hartley

Researcher's reflections on the conversations at each venue

Collecting conversations was an experiment in ways of gathering visitor responses. Researchers involved with the exhibitions commented on the conversations themselves and on what they revealed about exhibiting Australian migration history as something relevant to all Australians.

Ursula Frederick

Through their comments people were constantly making personal connections. The exhibition made them really think about their own family's place in Australia; how they came to be there and where they were from. They were more interested in talking about this than answering questions about the exhibition itself.

Laura Hartley

That question about what people 'make' of things – how to catch that in a way that isn't too co-constructive. You need a light question. And then there's how something about the exhibition might surface later or become a reference point – how can you capture this?

Ange Casey

It was interesting to talk to visitors some time after they had seen the exhibition because the process of memory distillation was already well and truly on its way... The collecting process was a dialogue and inevitably became a meandering multilayered response to the exhibition that was ultimately about the resonance an exhibition can create.

Mary Hutchinson

Talking with people reinforced how much both immediate frame of mind and established viewpoints can impact on the way people 'see' exhibitions. But people were also very open to information that gave them new insights. Some were very moved by the stories and keen to talk about what had touched them. I'd like to find a material way of collecting visitor responses – what object would you bring to put in this exhibition?

New conversations

One of the most interesting outcomes of the exhibitions was that they created conversations between people that might not otherwise have happened. A highlight of the project came with the opening of both exhibitions in Canberra which brought participants from each locality together.



Conversations at the lunch for participants after the National Museum Australia launch of Migration Memories. Australian National University, September 2007. Photograph: Pip Deveson.