

MEDIA RELEASE

National Biography Award shortlist announced

2/4/08

Six “wonderfully diverse” stories have been shortlisted for the \$20,000 National Biography Award 2008, the State Library of NSW announced today [Wednesday 2 April].

The shortlisted books are:

<i>Napoleon, 1769-1799 The Path to Power</i> by Philip Dwyer (NSW)	Bloomsbury
<i>Lucy Osburn, A Lady Displaced</i> by Judith Godden (NSW)	Sydney University Press
<i>A Thinking Reed</i> by Barry Jones (VIC)	Allen and Unwin
<i>The Mascot</i> by Mark Kurzem (VIC)	Penguin/Viking
<i>Jonestown: The Power and the myth of Alan Jones</i> by Chris Masters (NSW)	Allen and Unwin
<i>These Few Lines: A Convict Story – the lost lives of Myra and William Sykes</i> by Graham Seal (WA)	ABC Books

Australia’s richest prize for biographical writing and memoir attracted 33 entries, featuring an amazing range of topics from grand historical biographical material to extremely moving autobiographical accounts.

On announcing the shortlist, the Award judges commented, “Biography is a category of non-fiction that offers writers and readers scope to explore life in a formal, scholarly mode, or in more individual ways, and it was with considerable pleasure that the judges were able to weigh up the effects of the diversity of work on offer.

“The level of book production was also highly interesting, with some books being presented in a most lavish fashion, while others, more humble, spoke in a quieter voice.”

The judges for this year’s Award are critic and writer Carmel Bird, academic and writer John Dale and author Gideon Haigh.

The winner will be announced at an award ceremony at the State Library of NSW on Thursday 10 April at 6pm.

The National Biography Award is administered and presented by the State Library on behalf of Geoffrey Cains and Michael Crouch AO.

Shortlisted authors & judges are available for interviews

MEDIA CONTACT:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager
State Library of NSW
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vbond@sl.nsw.gov.au



National Biography Award 2008 Shortlist Judges' comments

***Napoleon* by Philip Dwyer**

There is a lifetime's learning in 'Napoleon' but the book wears it lightly, and it is refreshing to see an Australian historian lifting his gaze to distant shores and world-shaping events.

***Lucy Osburn, A Lady Displaced* by Judith Godden**

Judith Godden saves from obscurity the founder of modern nursing in Australia. Lucy Osburn was an envoy of Florence Nightingale, and she transformed both standards of patient care and notions of women's work in the colony of New South Wales, running a gauntlet of male intolerance and female distrust. This book is a real labour of love.

***A Thinking Reed* by Barry Jones**

An engaging and intelligent autobiography of a familiar and much-loved Australian public figure. It contains some inspiring quotations from philosophers and writers which give a density and polyphonic texture to the prose.

***The Mascot* by Mark Kurzem**

This psychological portrait raises issues of guilt and complicity in time of war, and foregrounds the lives of people in the Australian Latvian community. It is a gripping narrative with the mystery unfolding in a series of suspenseful scenes, and is a most unusual war story.

***Jonestown: The Power and the Myth of Alan Jones* by Chris Masters**

This story of myth and power has just about everything – delusion, money, poverty, privilege, sex, controversy, family, the law, police, politics, the media, guilt, religion, leaked documents. There is at times even a kind of tenderness and sadness.

***These Few Lines: a convict story – the lost lives of Myra and William Sykes* by Graham Seal**

Intrigued by a number of slender pieces of written documentation, Graham Seal was inspired to follow the fragmentary nineteenth century story of a convict and his wife. He has constructed a powerful, moving and uncommon biography, giving readers and students of Australian colonial history a most valuable resource.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Vanessa Bond, State Library Media & Communications Manager
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vbond@sl.nsw.gov.au