

Secrets

Objects of Intrigue

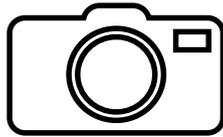
Large Print

Cultural acknowledgement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors are advised that this display contains images and objects of people who have passed away.

This gallery contains histories of government surveillance of First Nations and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Queensland Museum is committed to sharing all histories and invites visitors to exercise their discretion when entering the gallery.



Photography

Photography is permitted for personal use.
No flash, tripods or selfie sticks please.

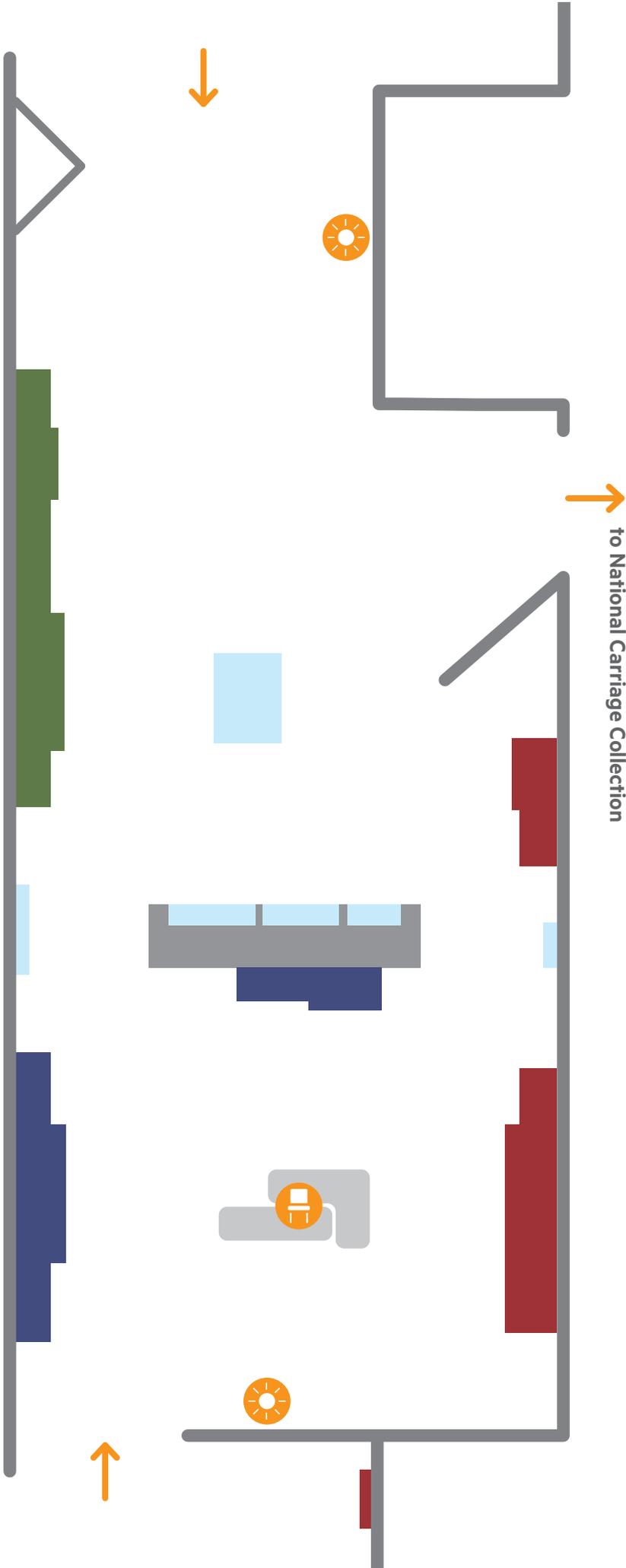


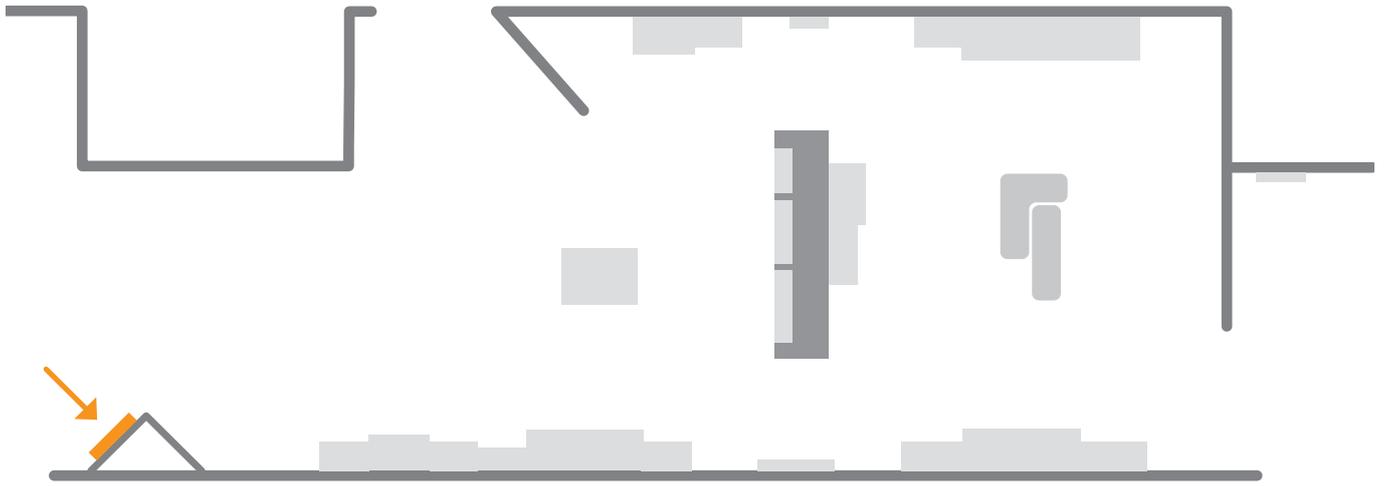
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@QldMuseum

Floorplan

Sensory map

-  Seating area
-  Projection/video





Introduction

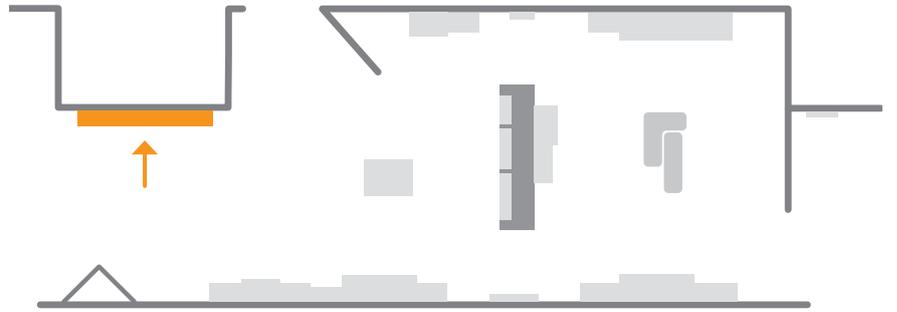
Secrets are at the heart of what it means to be human.

What we reveal, and conceal, from others shapes our identity.

Trading secrets has been part of human evolution and still contributes to social bonding as well as our cultural and political life.

Secrets are both deeply individual and a universal human phenomenon.

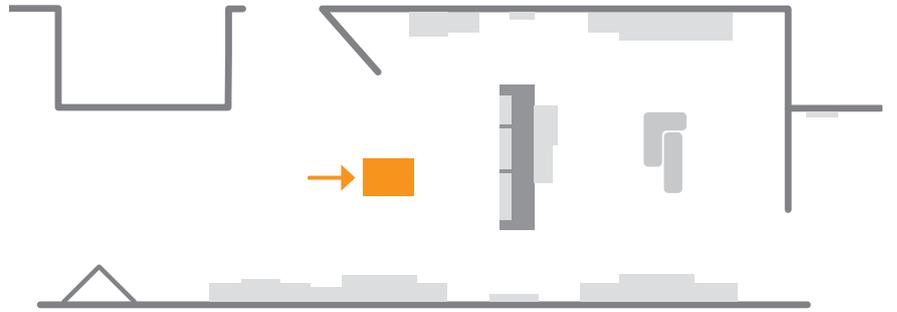
After all, we all have something to hide.



Did you know that usually less than 1% of the 15.2 million objects in the care of the Queensland Museum are on display in a year?

Hidden behind the scenes, in the Queensland Museum Stores, many objects are carefully stored waiting for their story to be told.

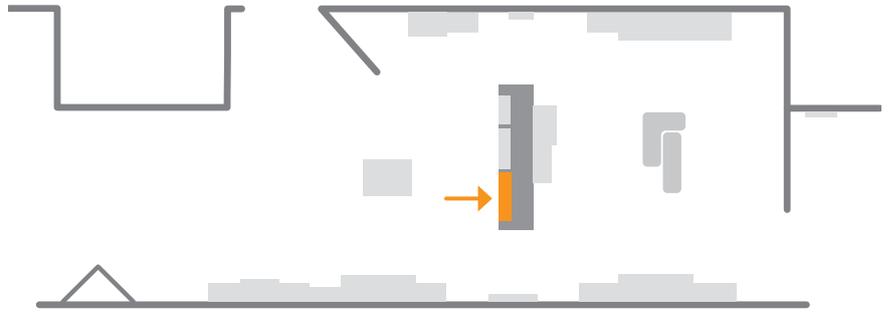
Video: Collated footage
from Queensland Museum
Collection Stores, 2024



Muzzle-loader cannon and beer-can ammunition confiscated from Finks Motorcycle Club during a police raid. Used as a test of courage for new initiates, beer cans filled with concrete were fired across a valley as potential members tried to dodge them.

Homemade cannon and projectile,
c. 1985

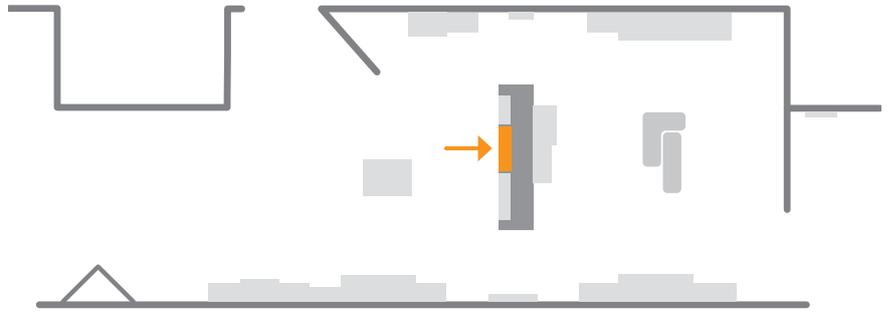
H44788.1-4



Printed on parachute silk,
escape maps were concealed
on a pilot's body and could be
used if their plane was shot down
in enemy territory.

RAAF escape map for Sumatra,
Borneo and Java, 1939–1945

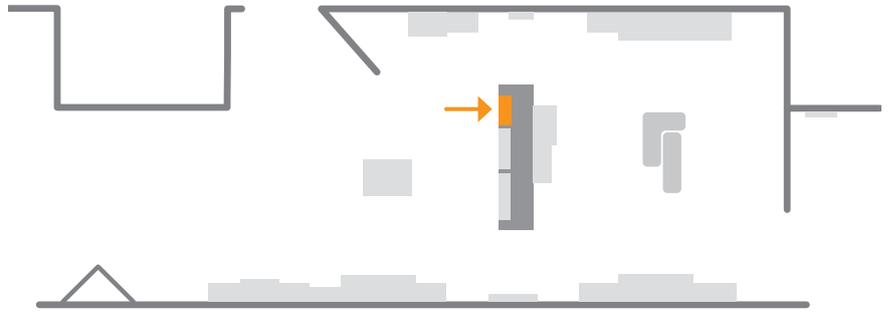
H26376



Inspired by the shape of an Aboriginal nulla-nulla and the markings on message sticks, the XII Commonwealth Games ceremonial baton also has a secret compartment. Unlocked at the Opening Ceremony in Brisbane, the compartment contained a message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

Commonwealth Games
ceremonial baton and key, 1982

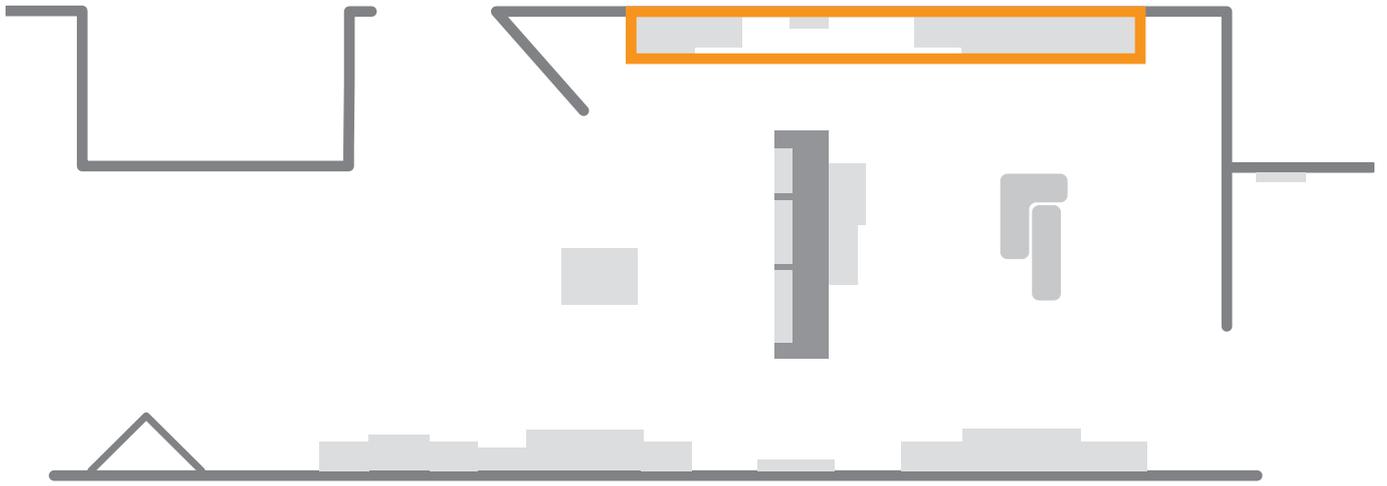
H16191.1 | H16191.5



Bible with secret compartment
containing matches and tobacco.

Prison bible, Sir David Longland
Correctional Centre, c. 1993

H45917

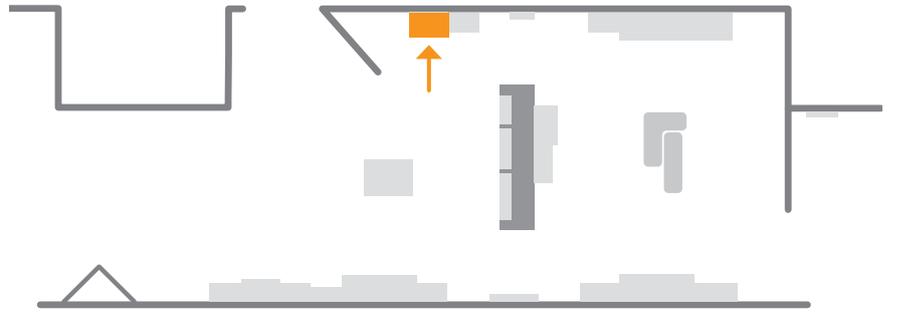


Secret lives of objects

Objects have lives of their own, influenced by why and how they are made, or for whom they are intended. Sometimes, they can surprise us.

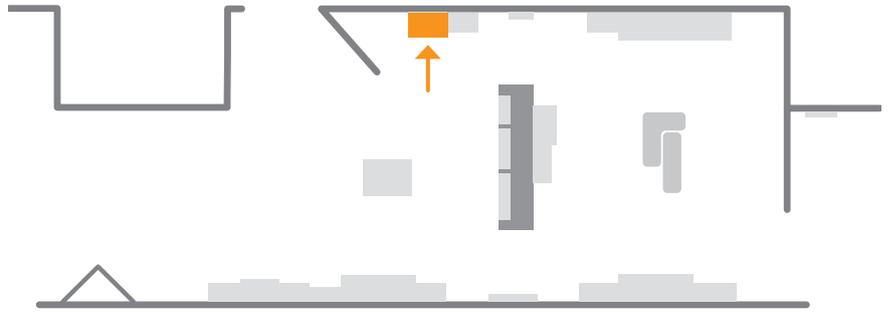
These objects have secret compartments or functions. Some of them are not what they seem.

Each reveals human desire: to trick, to disguise, to conceal.



Secrets behind bars

Incarceration creates an environment that encourages secrecy and ingenuity. Objects can be modified, or improvised materials used, for a specific function or purpose. Keeping secret objects may give prisoners a sense of autonomy in a system designed to depersonalise them.



These seemingly innocuous objects were made by prisoners and are concealment devices for contraband.

Books with hollowed-out sections for concealing objects, Sir David Longland Correctional Centre, c. 1994

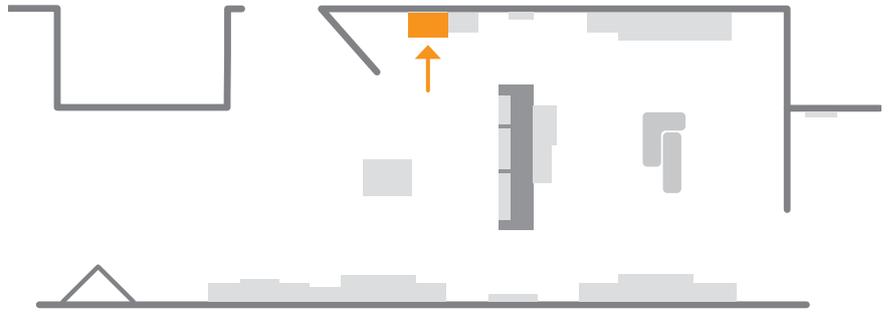
H45978.1-2

Prison issue thong, with secret compartment and blade, Sir David Longland Correctional Centre, c. 1995

H45985.1-5

Painting with hidden compartment containing pornographic material, Sir David Longland Correctional Centre, prior to 2001

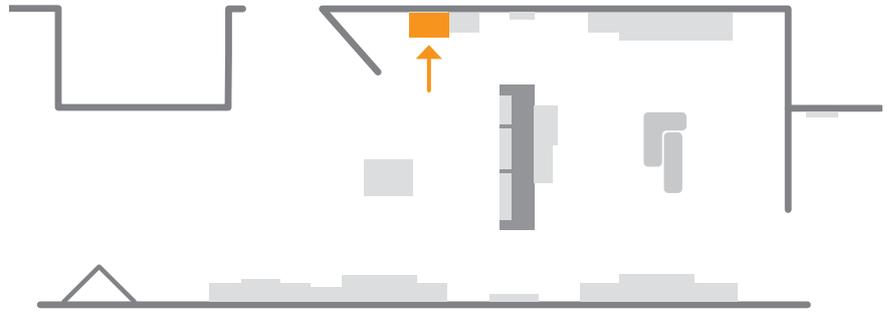
H46029



Tattoo machines were illegal in prison, particularly because prisoners were required to maintain the same appearance during their sentence. Despite this, secret tattooing was rife in the Queensland prison system.

Prison-made tattoo machine,
HM Prison, Boggo Road, c. 1986

H46385



In times of conflict, communication is a lifeline. For prisoners of war, withholding communication and connection to the outside world was a form of torture. Prisoners often found ingenious ways to receive and transmit information to raise morale and endure separation from loved ones.

Built by imprisoned Queensland soldiers in Java during the Second World War, this radio inside a Dutch gas mask holder was made with parts obtained over time. Kept in the ground under a square of concrete, the radio picked up several radio stations. There were many spies among the 10,000 internees in the camp, so during use, great care and secrecy had to be exercised.

Radio, c. 1942–1945

H570.1–2

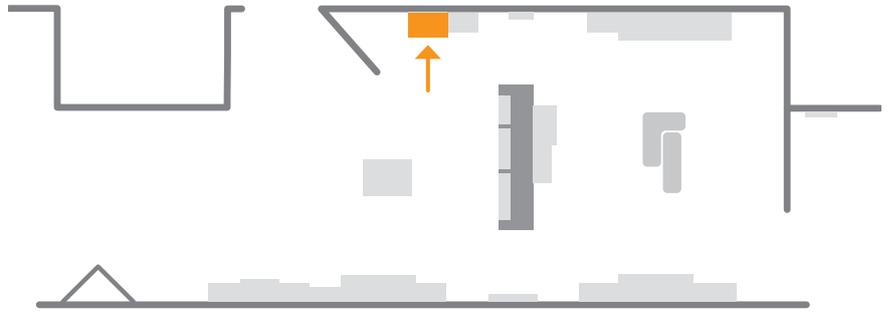
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Radio, c. 1942–1945
H570.1–2

This Dutch bulletin announcing the end of the war was dropped into the prison in Java by air. This method of delivery ensured prisoners would read it and prevented Japanese guards from prolonging their incarceration.

Replica of bulletin, 2 September 1945
L20005



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Replica of bulletin, 2 September 1945

L150003

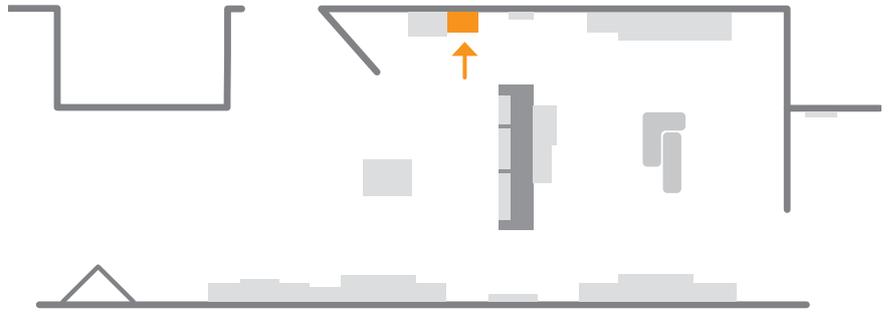
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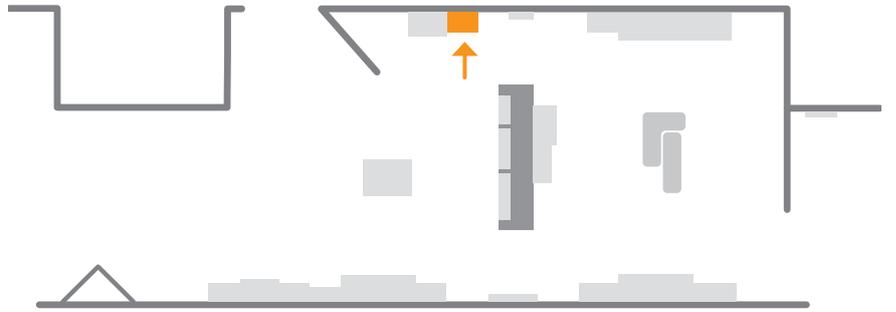
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Covert communication

As an expression of the private self, sealed and sent to another person, letter writing implies secrecy. For much of Western history, exchanging letters was how people negotiated and built intimate relationships. There are also other, much earlier, forms of communication based on graphic or aural transmission.



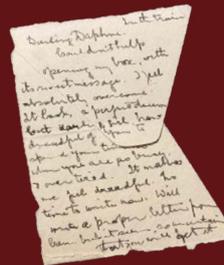
These letters between Queensland sculptor Daphne Mayo and painter Vida Lahey are a fascinating insight into their respective artistic practices and domestic lives, as well as their shared emotional intimacy.

Above:

Daphne Mayo and Vida Lahey, c. 1930s

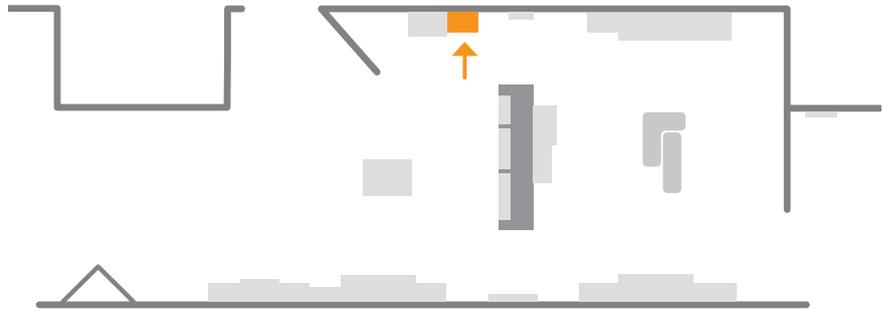
Above right and below:

Selection of letters and cards between Daphne Mayo and Vida Lahey, c. 1940s–1960s



Even a letter's composition can reflect intimacy. This missive was written on part of an envelope during a train journey.

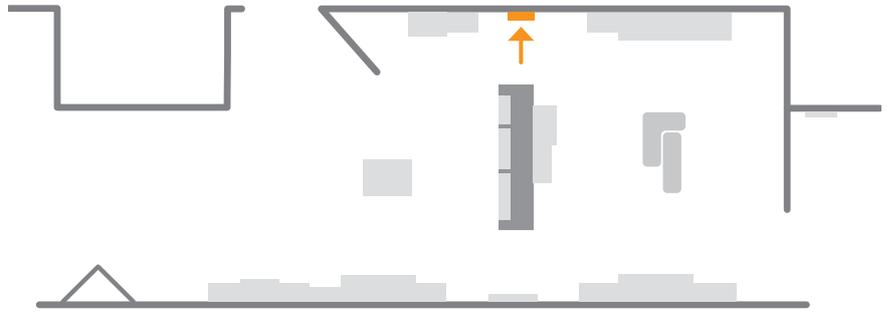
Loans, courtesy: Fryer Library, University of Queensland Library



Bu shells were used to secretly communicate across the islands of Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait). Different tones might warn of approaching strangers or be a call to arms. Today they are used to announce community events like weddings, funerals and tombstone unveilings.

Bu shell, Henry Kabare, Mer, 1979

QE12713

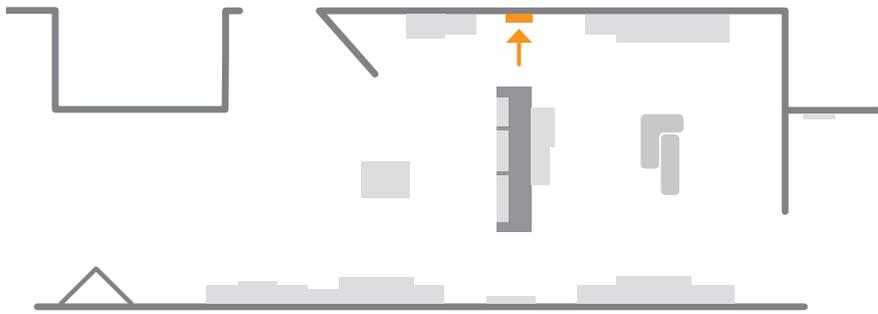


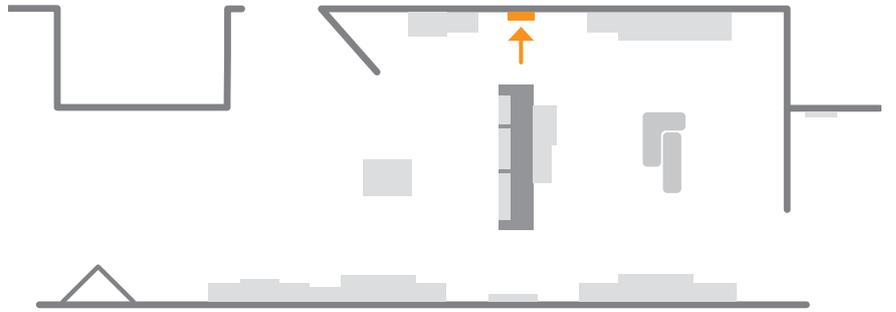
Stitched-in secrets

This piece was embroidered by Jessie Porter in April 1900. Conservators removed the frame to reveal the original vibrant thread colours at the embroidery's edges.

Jessie lived with her husband Henry (Ernie) and their children Eric, Alan and Dorothy in their home *Glenroy* in Toowoomba. When she was creating this embroidery, she hid their names and the name of their property in the design.

Can you spot them?





Left:
Embroidery, 1900

H51131

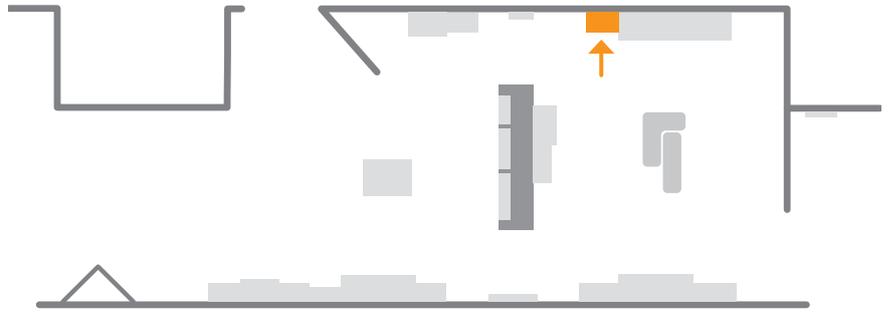
Right:
Keith (grandson), Dorothy, Jessie,
Ernie, Alan and Eric on the steps
at *Glenroy*, 1916

Courtesy: Richard Barnes



Smuggled secrets

These items, known as foreigners, were secretly made by workers at the Ipswich Railway Workshops. Crafted on company time, they had to be carefully smuggled out. Workers often wrapped them in overalls or walked out of the gates ‘stiff legged’ with items in their trousers. These decorative household items were made by workers for their wives.



Decorative dish, 1904

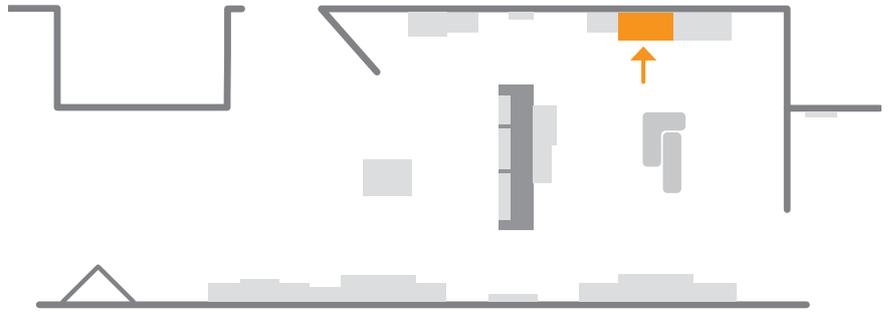
R6176

Talcum powder bowls, undated

R19159

Timber jewellery box, 1953

R6212

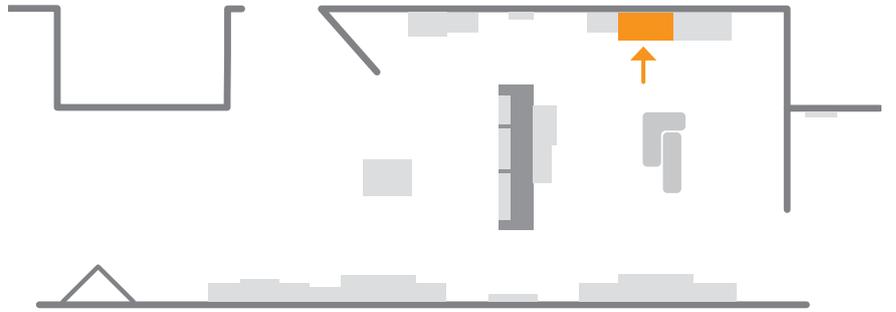


Our secret selves

Secret places have a strong appeal, as do secret pleasures. What happens behind closed doors has a titillating quality, possibly because the home is where we manage the needs and desires of the body.

Historically, there has been great secrecy around the home as a backdrop to power, gender, the family, privacy, consumerism, design and the decorative arts.

These domestic objects all have something to hide.



Secret compartments or hidden functions built into furniture were popular during the 19th century, often for aesthetic purposes. Both decorative and useful, concealed bathroom furniture was seen as good taste in the Victorian-era home.

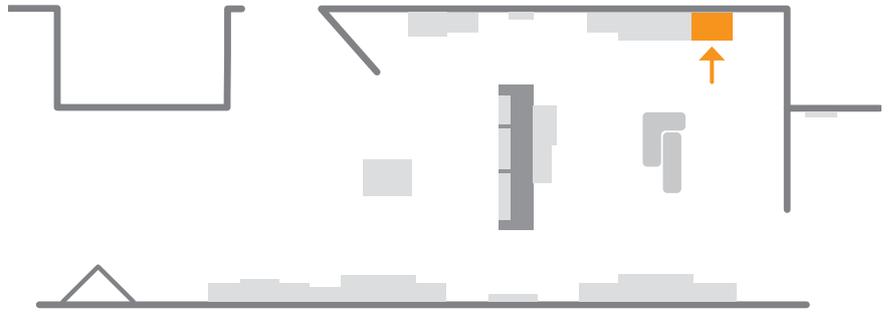
Wooden pedestal concealing wash basin, c. 19th century

H25537

Designed to look like steps, this commode has a concealed storage section and chamber pot.

Commode, c. 19th century

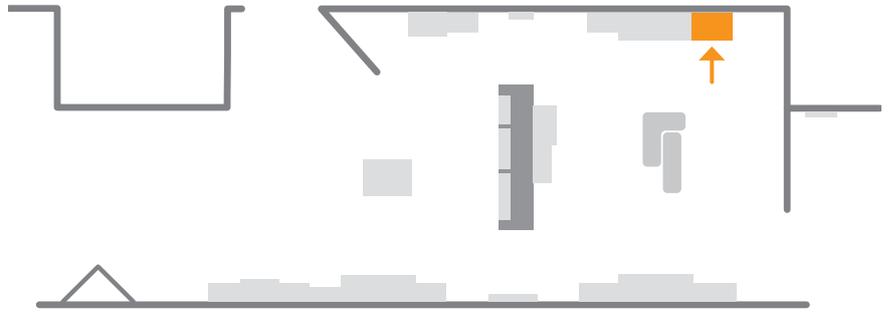
H25622



Secret to vitality

Originally prescribed as a cure for hysteria in the late 19th century, the electromechanical vibrator found clinical application as a medical therapy for decades. Devices were marketed as consumer appliances in the popular press, but subversive strategies had to be used to circumvent anti-obscenity laws.

Despite the secrecy around these devices, ‘vibration therapy’ was so popular during the early 20th century that they became the fifth electric appliance to arrive in the home – after the sewing machine, fan, tea kettle and toaster.



Can you match the part
to the purpose?

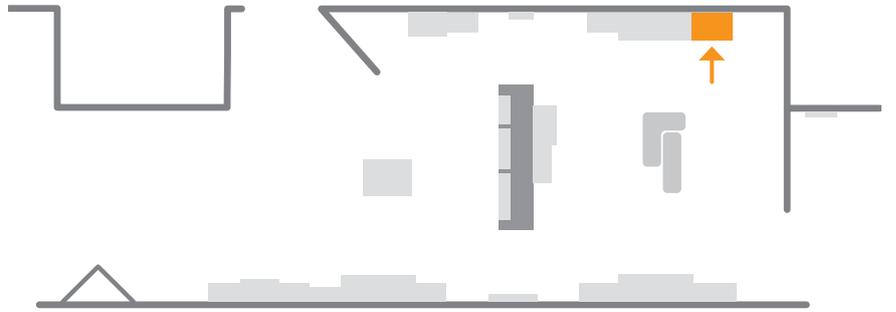
Below

Rogers Vitalator attachments, c. 1935

H14002.6-9

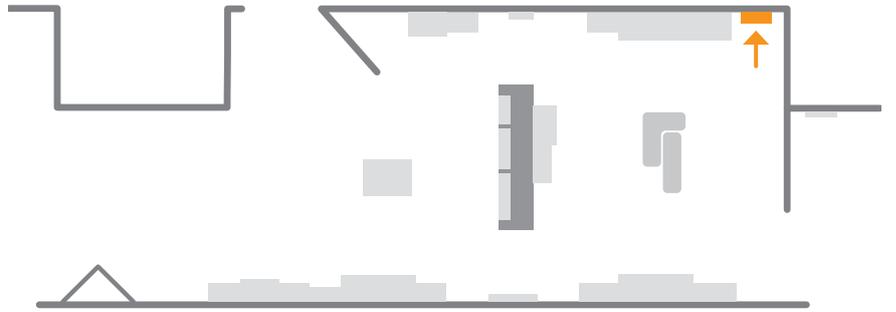
Rogers Vitalator operation manual,
c. 1935

H14002.3



'Ultrasan' High Frequency
Electrotherapeutic Vibrator, J Platus,
c. 1940s

H27397

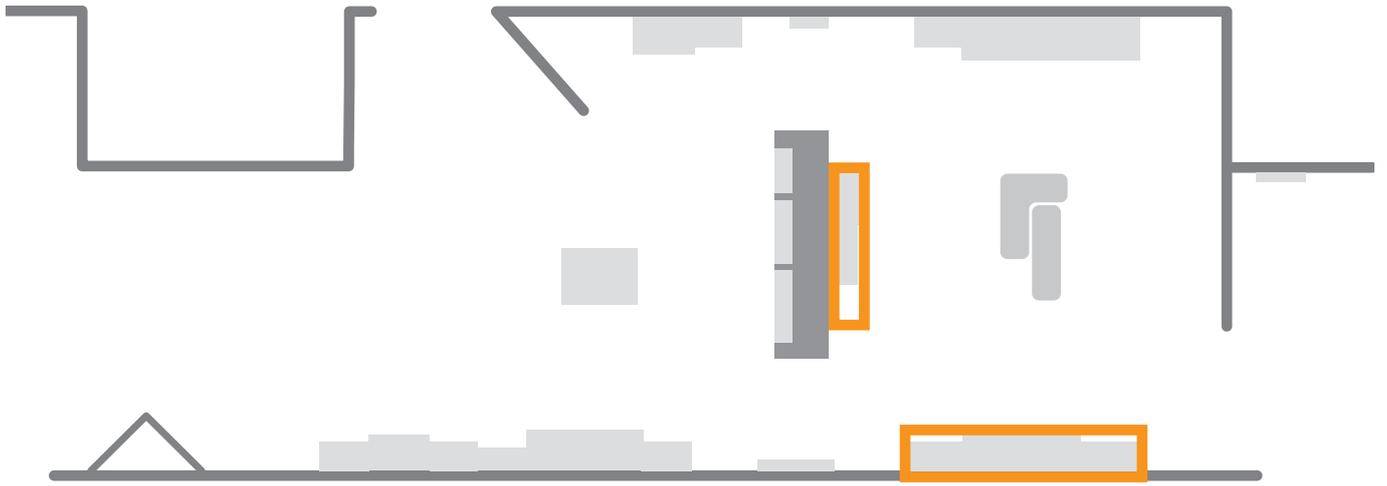


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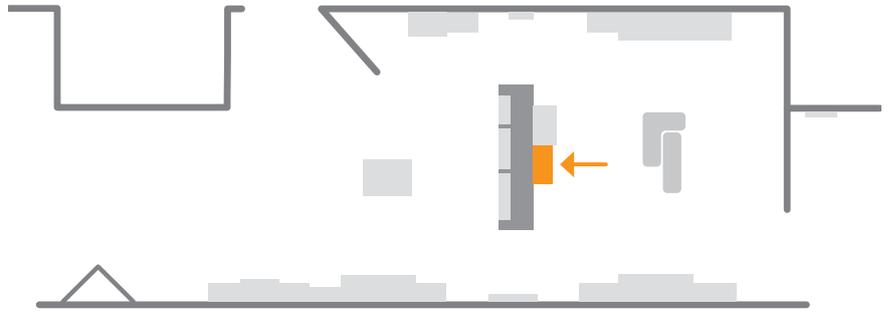


State secrets, spies and surveillance

Spying has always been a feature of government, although the purpose and target may change over time. In Australia, as in other colonised societies, First Nations people have long been subject to surveillance by state agents and institutions.

Surveillance is sometimes conflated with national security. During the First World War, the government created intelligence agencies to deal with perceived threats within Australia. Secrecy was encouraged as a patriotic duty and so-called ‘enemy aliens’ were surveilled by civilians and military alike.

In the decades after the Second World War, the definition of national security expanded beyond military threats to justify surveillance and persecution of marginalised communities.



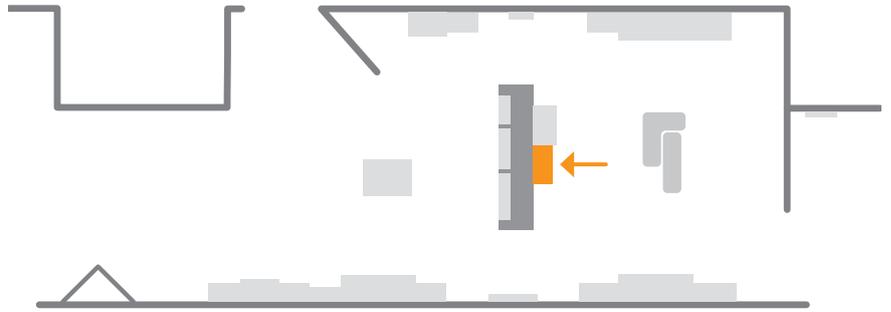
Surveillance

Surveillance is an enduring characteristic of colonialism. The government has a long history of keeping tabs on First Nations peoples: from the policing of racial curfews in settler towns and the regulations imposed under the ‘Protection Acts’ to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation’s (ASIO) surveillance of Eddie Mabo during the 1970s.

As a child, I remember my Dad (Eddie Mabo) getting death threats because he cared deeply and fought for our community. He kept a gun hidden in the roof and had it nearby at night to keep our family safe.

We had a strict curfew, not just because of the government surveillance, but also due to threats from people in the community who wanted to harm us because of my Dad’s advocacy work.

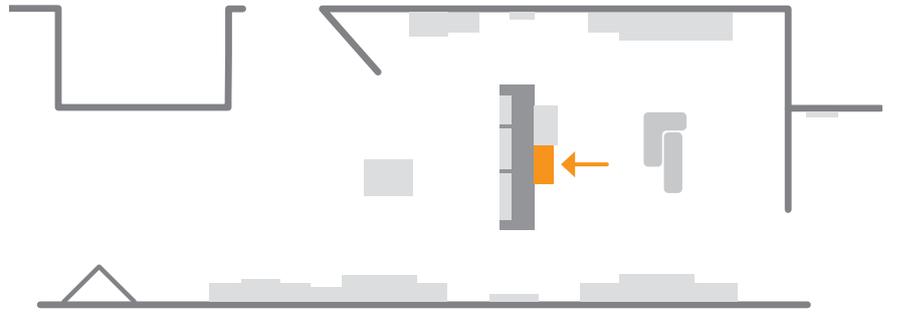
Gail Mabo



This pamphlet, addressed to then-Colonial Secretary of Queensland Horace Tozer, formed the basis for the first *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*.

While the policy reinforcing the Act changed over time, in effect this gave government a means of controlling the lives of many Aboriginal peoples. Rules mandated where they could live, who they could marry, where they could travel, and how they could earn and spend money.

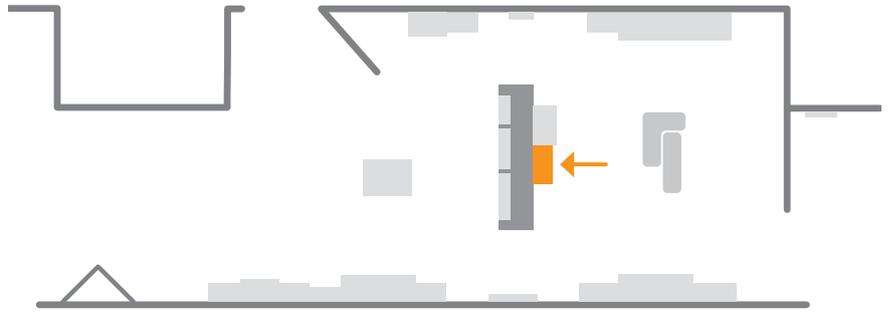
L826



This is one of a series of secret notebooks kept by Jinibara elder Noel Blair recording police interventions on First Nations peoples. Blair worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service from the late 1970s and was committed to truth-telling about corrupt police activities. He kept a recorder and notebook in his breast pocket to do this surreptitiously, recording and then transcribing what he saw.

Notebook, Noel Blair, 1980

Loan, courtesy: Ration Shed Museum, Cherbourg



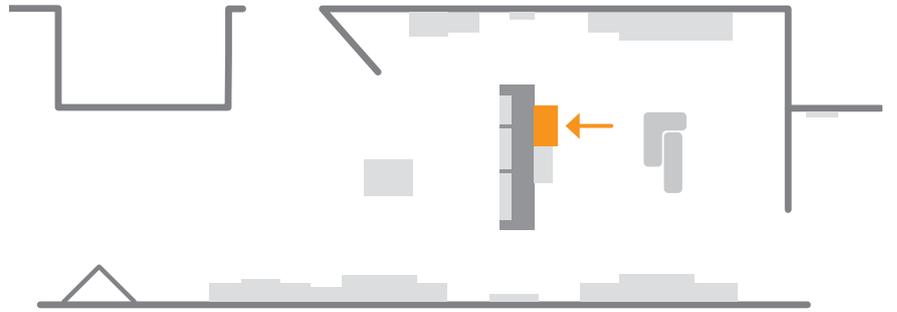
Above:

Photograph of Eddie Mabo
from his ASIO file, 1966

Background image:

Photograph of Eddie Mabo
from his ASIO file, 1966

Courtesy: National Archives of Australia



Under the Act, many First Nations children were removed to government reserves or church missions where every aspect of their lives was controlled. They had to use secrecy to communicate with each other, practice culture and even play.

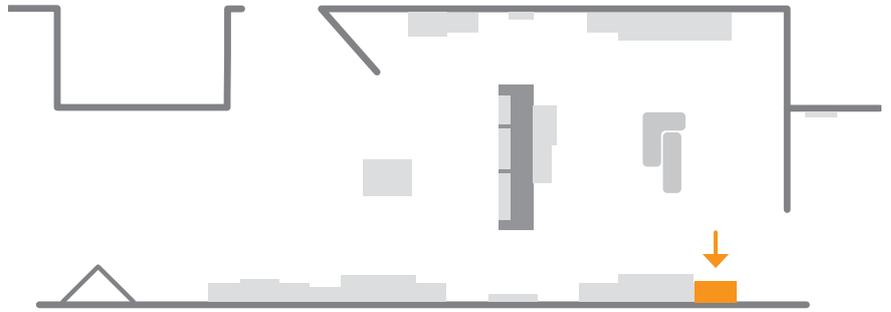
This cache of toys was found beneath the Cherbourg boys' dormitory building during a recent renovation. Gathered by different boys through generations of the dormitory system, they had to be played with in secret and hidden from sight.

Loan, courtesy: Ration Shed Museum, Cherbourg

Background image:

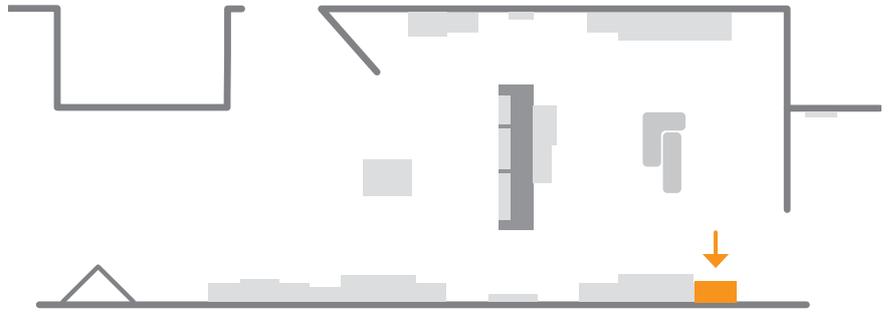
Boys at Cherbourg, 1952

Courtesy: State Library of New South Wales



Secret solidarity

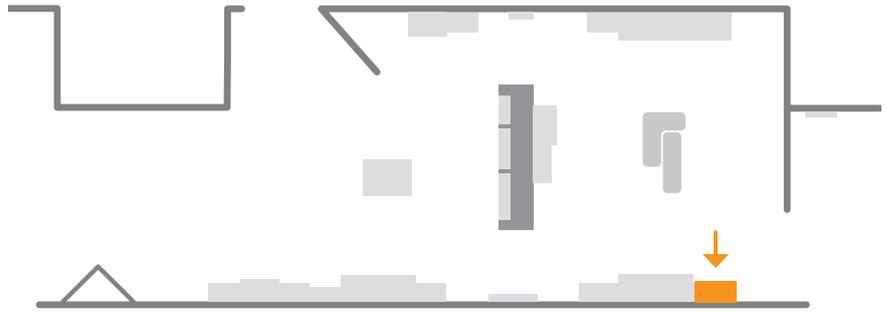
Prior to 1991, under Queensland law, same-sex attracted men were considered deviant, subject to intense surveillance and criminal prosecution. All non-heterosexual relationships carried stigma, and a hostile social climate meant that many members of the community kept secrets out of necessity. Flyers, pamphlets and posters were a way of covertly disseminating critical information, organising events and creating a sense of solidarity for a community not supported by mainstream society.



LGBT organisations made sure people knew they had a right to privacy, despite legislation that policed their bodies and choices.

North Eastern Australia Gay Guide,
Edition 3, 1984

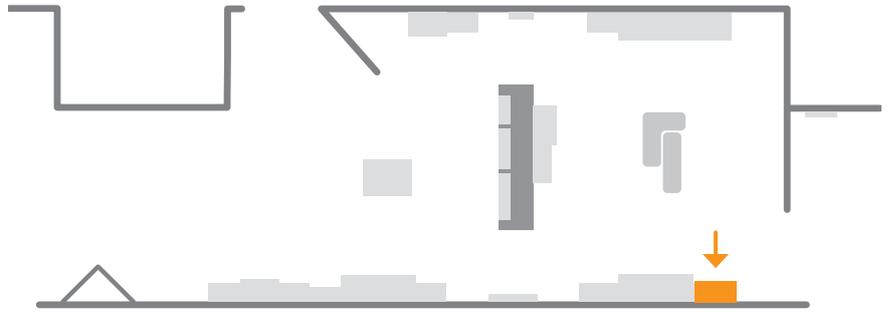
Loan, courtesy: State Library of Queensland



By the late 1980s, the idea of anti-discrimination had taken root due to decades of activism.

Rally for Gay Law Reform poster,
1989

Loan, courtesy: State Library of Queensland



Throughout history, LGBTQIA+ communities developed ways of identifying fellow community members and fought hard to create spaces of physical and emotional safety and acceptance. Coded language and imagery were used to create a sense of inclusion and wellbeing.

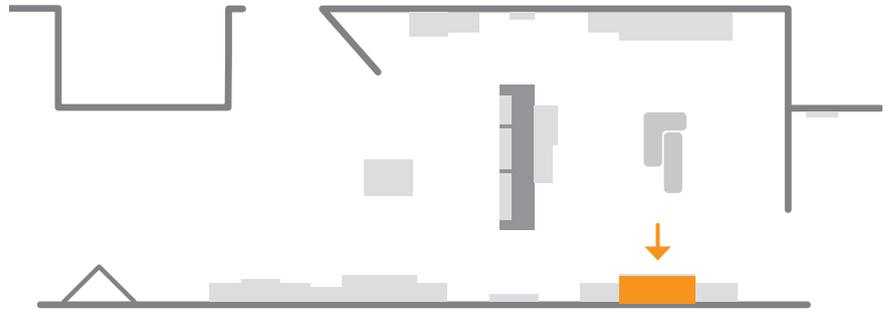
Clockwise from left:

Flyer from the first Queensland Pride Week, 1990

Safe and Deadly Spaces flyer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service, Brisbane, c. 2000s

Bookmark, LGBT Peer Support Project, 2001

Loans, courtesy: State Library of Queensland



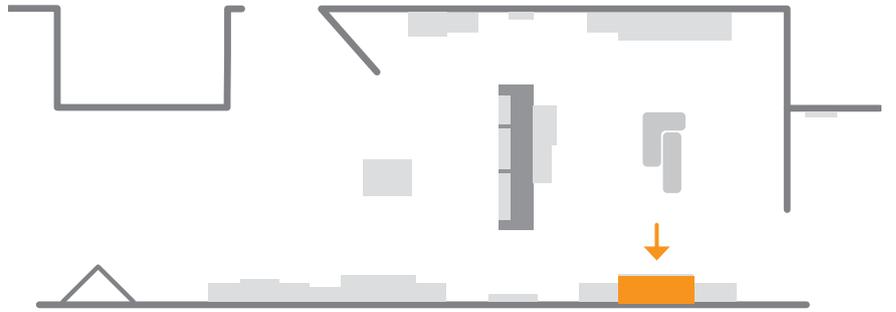
Military secrets

In times of war, secrets might mean the difference between winning or losing – life or death.

Technology was developed to help learn opposition secrets and the public were warned not to gossip about the military in case they were overheard.

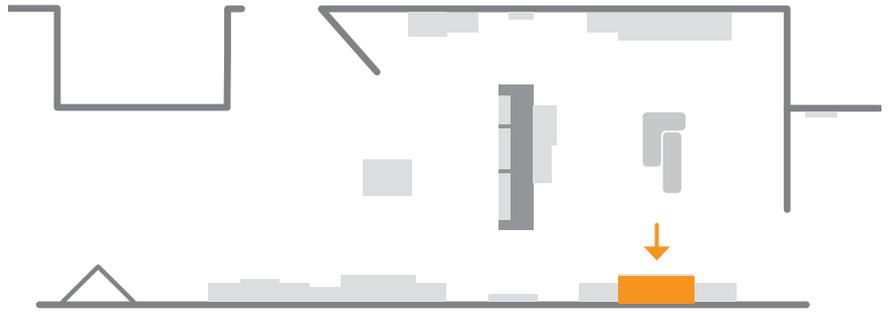
Secrets as a concept were also weaponised.

Security concerns, nationalist mobilisation and spy fever transformed migrant citizens into individuals whose loyalty and accountability were monitored and scrutinised.



Allied propaganda posters, c. 1939–1945

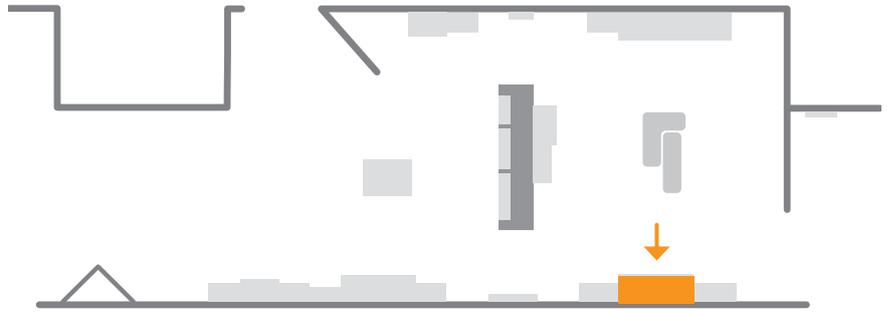
Courtesy: Alamy



Matchboxes often featured novelty pictures on the reverse, encouraging collecting. During the Second World War, Duncan's matches took a more serious tone, reminding users not to spread gossip about the military.

Duncan's matchboxes, c. 1939–1945

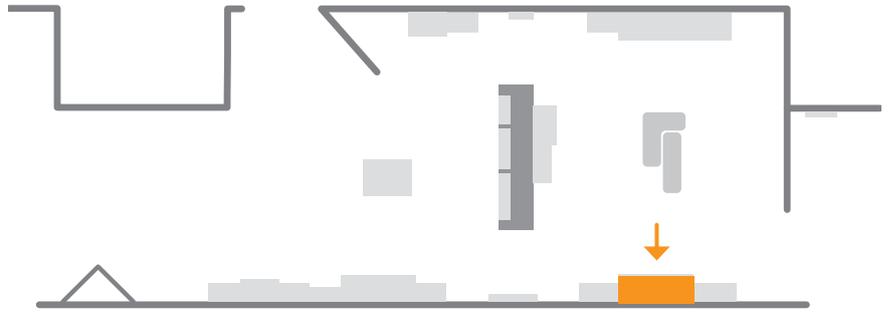
H25096.3 | H25096.4 | H25096.5 | H25086.1



Tiny escape compasses and parachute-silk maps were secretly worn on the bodies of air crew so they could find their way home if their aircraft was forced down in hostile or remote areas. This compass and map were used in the South West Pacific area during the Second World War.

United States Airforce escape compass and map, c. 1930s

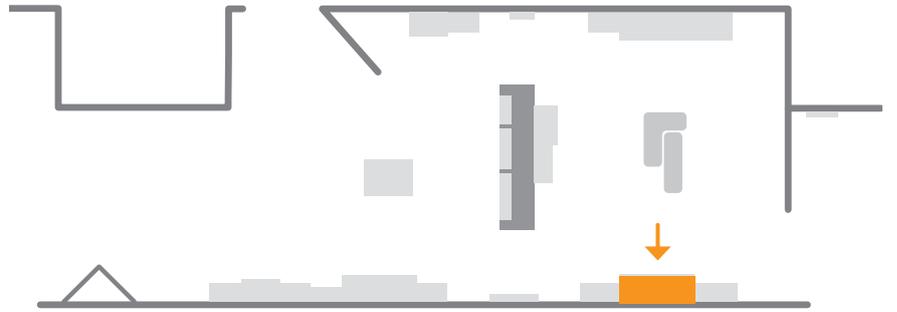
H2038 | H2039



Enclosed in what might pass for a humble brown suitcase, this MK II (or B2) spy radio set was used in occupied territories during the Second World War. Designed by Major John Brown (then Captain) in 1942, the MK II was issued to agents, resistance groups and special forces.

Type 3, MK II suitcase transceiver,
c. 1942–1951

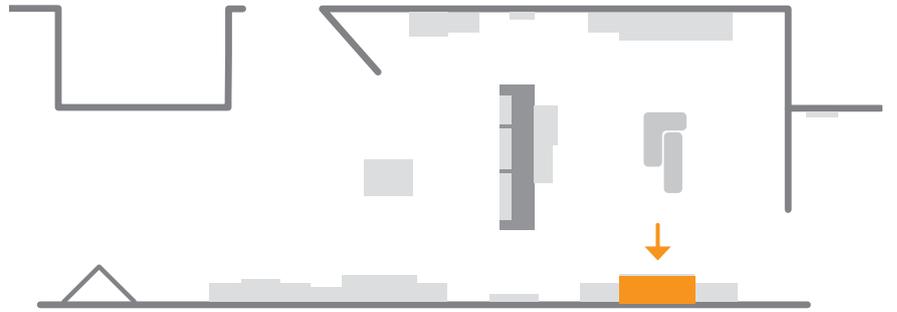
H17530



The Minox subminiature camera was used by intelligence agencies in America, Britain, Germany and the Eastern Bloc during the Second World War. Later versions, like the Minox C, were used by Soviet spies during the Cold War period. Its close-focusing lens and small size made it perfect for surveillance and covert document copying.

Minox subminiature camera,
1969–1979

H44592



Ruby Lum was born on Thursday Island and lived in Toowoomba with her Chinese husband Diamond Lum. They were respected members of the community, running their Chinese import store *Kwong Sang & Co*, raising their family and promoting Australian-Chinese relations in Queensland.

Due to Ruby's Japanese heritage, she had been surveilled by the government during the Second World War as early as 1941. In 1942, she was sent to Tatura Internment Camp for almost a year. When Ruby returned to family life and work as purchaser for the store, her everyday movements were restricted and reported until after the war ended.

Back panel:

Excerpt from Lum, Kazu [Ruby],
Queensland Investigation Case File, 1945

Courtesy: National Archives Australia

Photograph of Ruby and Diamond Lum,
c. 1930s

542253

Identity card of Kazu Ruby Monchin-Lum,
1943

527063



I spy secrets

The obsession with spies, clandestine lives and state secrets that developed after the Second World War intensified during the Cold War period. It was reported in newspapers, fictionalised in movies and television, and even reflected in children's toys. Today, espionage remains an enduring trope in popular culture.



Many espionage-related toys and gadgets were produced during the 1960s and 70s.

Above:

Secret agent fingerprint kit
Recordex, c. 1960s

H27787

Back panel:

Transformer spy gun, inspired by
James Bond, that converts from
a camera

H27596



Adapted from Ian Fleming's novels in the 1950s and 60s, James Bond is one of the longest continually-running series and focuses on the titular character, a British Secret Service agent.

Back panel:

007-themed Monopoly game
Winning Moves, 2021

Diamonds are Forever LP
John Barry, United Artists Records,
1971



Spying permeated every aspect of pop culture in the 1960s and 70s, from TV and movies to comic books and card games.

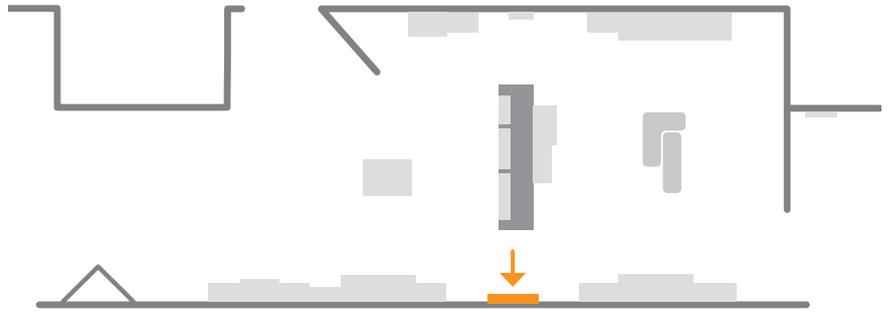
Above:

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. card game
Ideal, 1965

MAD magazine's long-running *Spy vs Spy* comic parodied the political ideologies of the Cold War period with two espionage agents pitted against each other.

Back panel:

MAD *Spy vs Spy* collector's edition, 1996

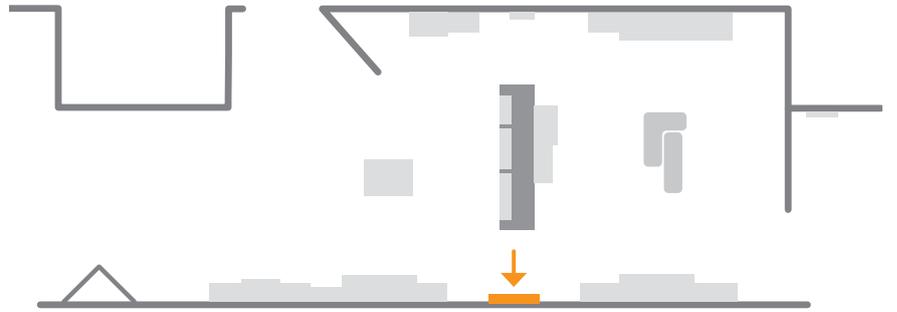


Reproduction revealed

Reproductive experiences like conception, fertility, infertility and menopause can be shrouded in secrecy and sometimes shame, perhaps stemming from our lack of control over the unconscious biology of our bodies.

Representing these processes demystifies the reproductive body for all genders, empowering women to advocate for their health and seek appropriate care.

Objects like the ones displayed here invite us to see the reality of women's daily lives and how their bodies can challenge social and political positions.

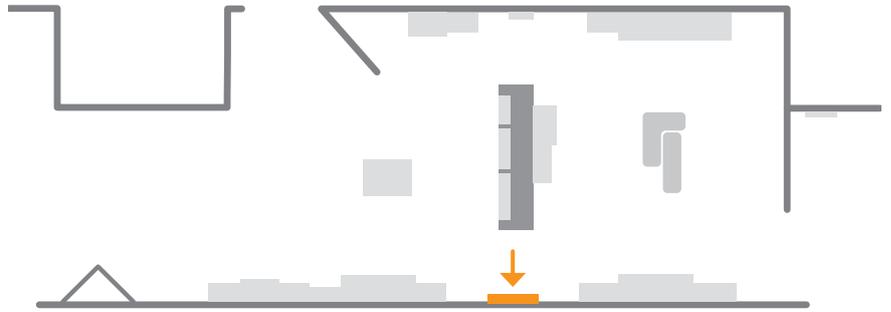


Patented in 1954, the conception day indicator (CDI) allowed the user to track when they could conceive. It was popular before the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1961 and continued to be used by women who chose not to take the pill for religious or personal reasons.

The CDI was a significant step in the development of contraception, allowing women to understand and control their fertility for the first time.

CDI used by a Toowoomba woman in the 1960s.

540266

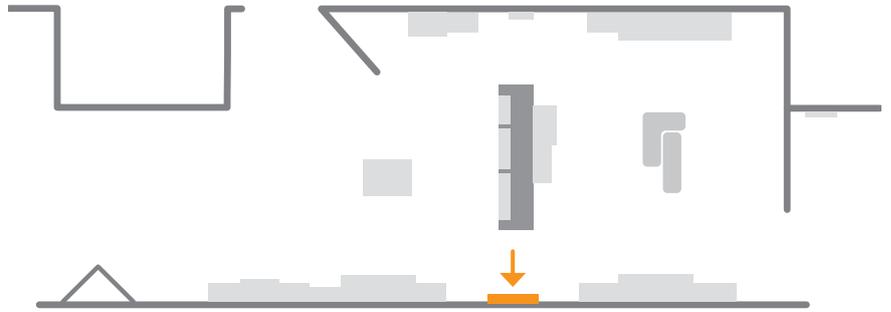


There is still great secrecy around the use of assisted reproductive technologies like in-vitro fertilisation (IVF). This persists, even though one in 16 babies born in Australia in 2023 were conceived via IVF.

Secrecy can be connected to feelings of shame around infertility, especially in relation to social and gender expectations, self-judgement, bodily autonomy and control.

Various IVF medications used by a Toowoomba woman with a history of infertility due to polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). She conceived her daughter in 2023.

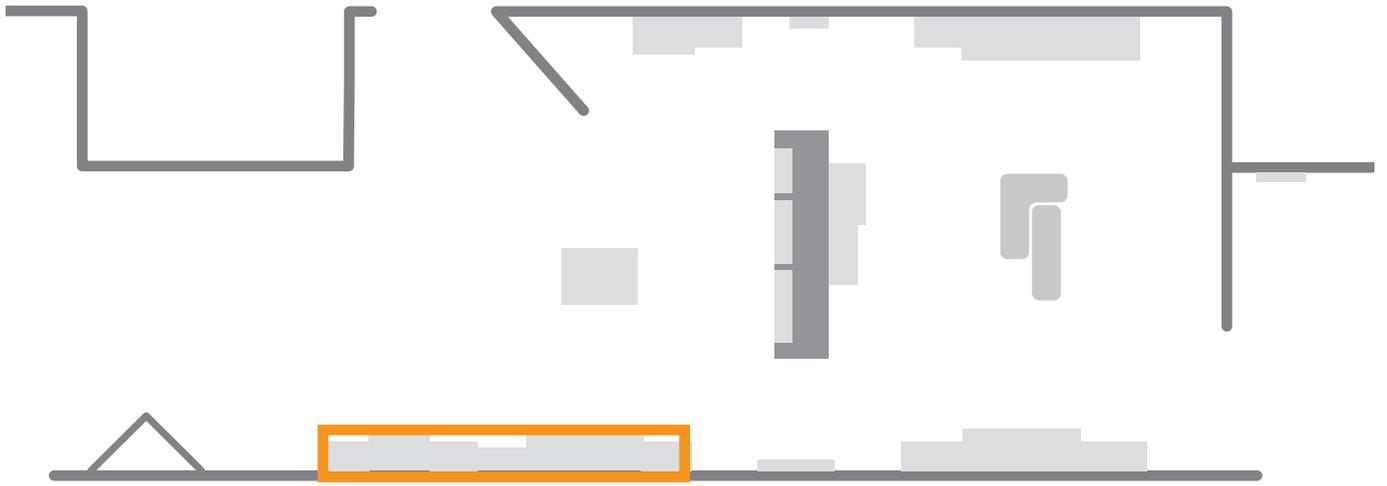
559541, 559542, 559543, 559544, 559545



Despite it being a natural process and shared social experience for half the population, menopause is often surrounded by stigma and secrecy. This can be due to its associated symptoms, cultural beliefs, general taboos around menstruation and social attitudes towards aging and fertility.

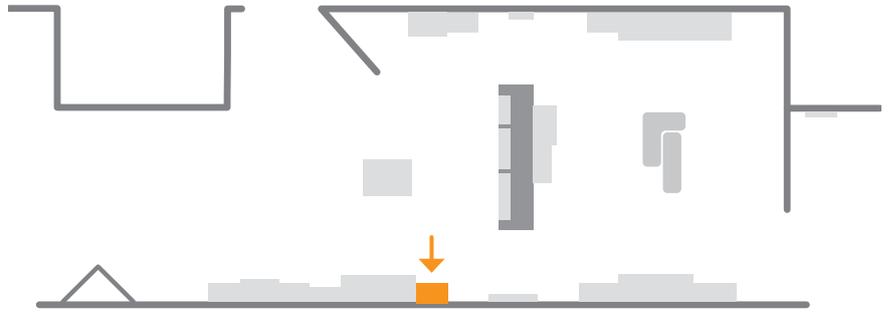
Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) medications used by a Brisbane woman in her 50s. She learnt about them herself because menopause and treatment options were not discussed in the family home.

559536



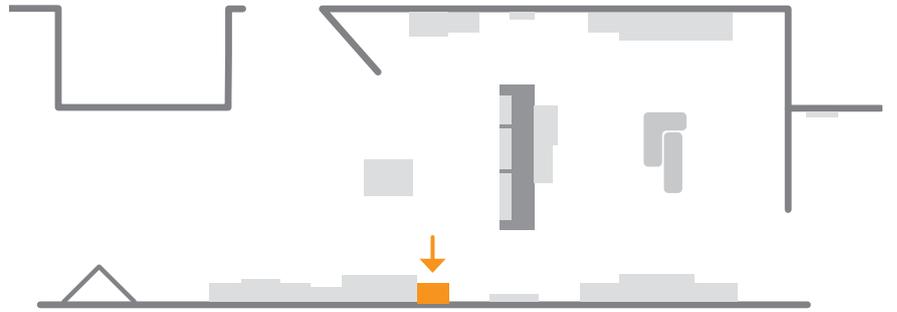
Secrets and society

Secrets are woven into our social rituals and relationships. They may identify us as a member of a particular group or organisation, be enshrined in law, or be part of social etiquette. Secrets are also part of magic and folklore, handed down through generations.



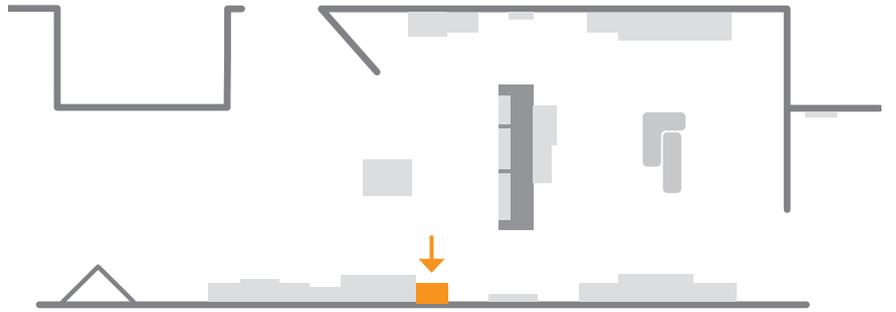
Open secrets

Secrets are by nature elusive. An open secret, however, is one that reveals to insiders what it simultaneously hides from outsiders, or those who wish not to know. Ancient history – so full of gaps and silences – has a lot to teach us about unofficial truths and not-so-secret secrets.



The Emperor Hadrian and his lover Antinous were one of the most famous couples in Roman history. They had a passionate and public love affair, despite Hadrian being married to his wife, Sabina. In 130 CE, Antinous died in mysterious circumstances. Hadrian was distraught and deified Antinous all over the empire, commissioning sculptures, plaques and medallions in his image and founding a city named Antinoöpolis.

Portrait of Antinous, after 130 CE,
Uffizi Galleries (3D printed)



Antinous' death was shrouded in secrecy. It has been speculated that he drowned in the Nile, was the victim of Hadrian's temper, or was even a human sacrifice. The truth of his untimely death may never be known, but the story of Hadrian's love for Antinous captured the public imagination, inspired art, poetry, religion and still endures today.

Tessera (tile) from pavement, Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli, Rome, c. 100s CE

H330

Coin featuring Emperor Hadrian driving a quadriga (chariot), 117–118 CE

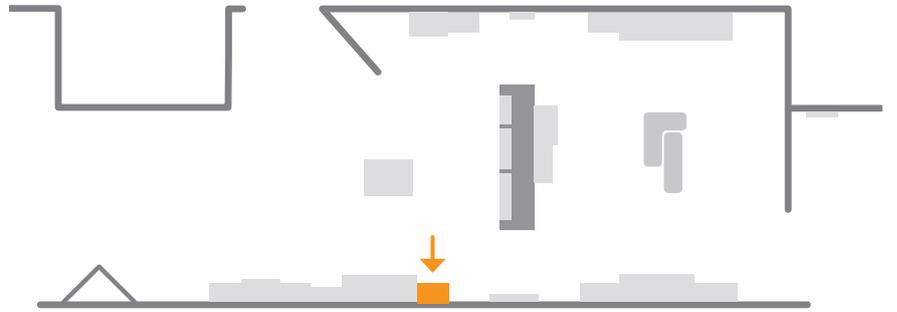
N7512

Roman coin featuring a bust of Emperor Hadrian, 117–138 CE

N2434

Roman coin featuring a bust of Emperor Hadrian, 136 CE

N7525

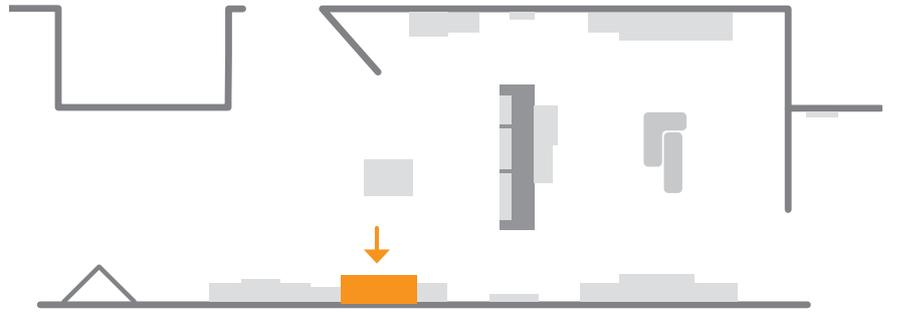


Emperor Caligula of Rome was renowned for his tyrannical excess. He built two opulent ships where he hosted exclusive parties on Lake Nemi. Locals, and later historians, repeated scandalous rumours about the wild and licentious behaviours that took place on these 'pleasure barges'. Both ships were sunk at the end of his reign in 41 CE.

For hundreds of years, locals knew about the ancient rotting shipwrecks beneath Lake Nemi. It was not until the Italian dictator Mussolini drained the lake in 1929 that their remains were revealed. The wrecks were destroyed by fire in the Second World War, taking their secrets with them for good.

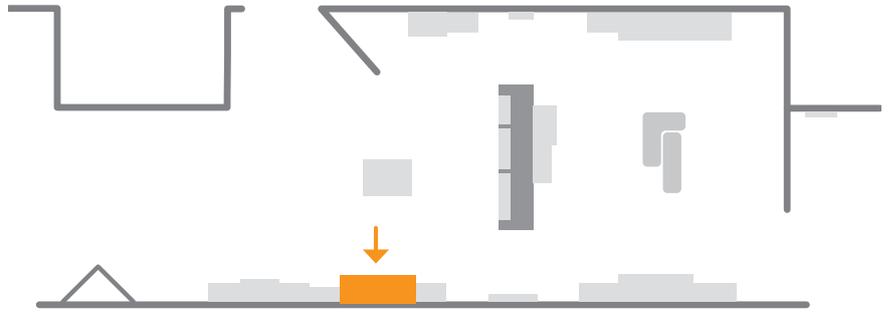
Spike from Caligula's ship, c. 37–41 CE

H41.1



Secrets of Parliament

The rise of transparency as a political and cultural ideal has led to secrecy attracting negative connotations, despite it always being a feature of politics. We vote in private booths and submit secret ballots. There can also be public mistrust around politicians themselves, with some assuming they falsify or withhold information, or conceal their true motivations.



This portable ballot box was used to collect votes from regional and remote areas via horseback. It was later used to collect votes from places where people were unable to get to the polling booth, such as hospitals and nursing homes.

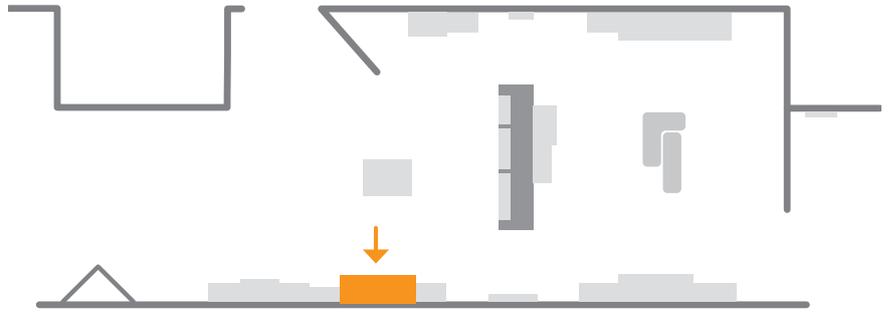
Portable ballot box, early 1900s

H42636

The wax seals ensured secrecy was maintained throughout the voting process.

Sealing wax, late 1900s

H47489



During the Fitzgerald Inquiry, which ran for 238 sitting days from 1987–1989, artist Norma Dickason documented the colourful characters giving testimony, as well as some of the sordid scenes they described.

Above:

Former North Queensland police superintendent Cal Farrah meets casino operator Vic Conte in a Cairns restroom, Norma Dickason, 1988–1989.

H51253

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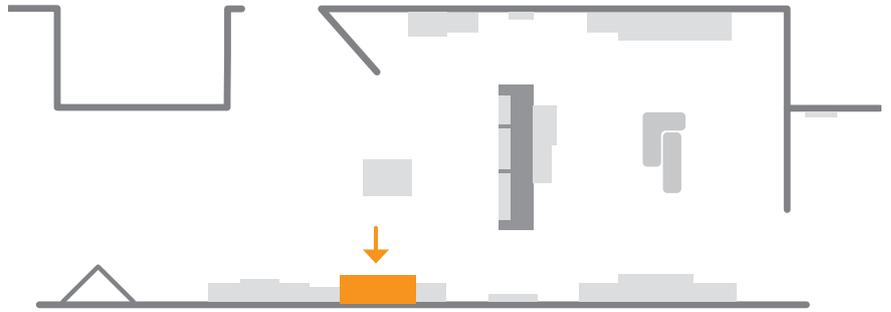
Above:
Former North Queensland police superintendent Cal Farrah meets casino operator Vic Conte in a Cairns restroom, Norma Dickason, 1988–1989.

Back wall:
Allen Bulger, former Head of the Licensing Branch of the Queensland Police, pleaded guilty to 12 charges of corruption and lying to the inquiry.

Norma Dickason, c. 1987–1989

After a short time on the run, Ann Marie Tilley testified to paying for police protection for the escort agencies and unlicensed nightclubs she owned and ran with her partner.

Norma Dickason, c. 1987–1989



Back wall:

Allen Bulger, former Head of the Licensing Branch of the Queensland Police, pleaded guilty to 12 charges of corruption and lying to the inquiry.

Norma Dickason, c. 1987–1989

H51255

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Norma Dickason, c. 1987–1989

H51254

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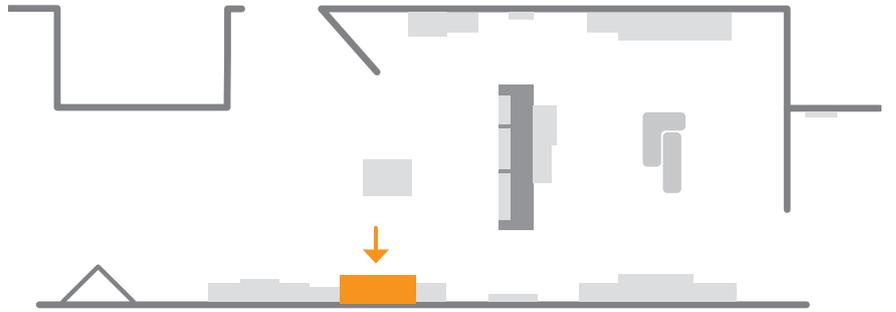
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Sir Johannes (Joh) Bjelke-Petersen remains the longest-serving premier of Queensland, holding office from 1968 to 1987.

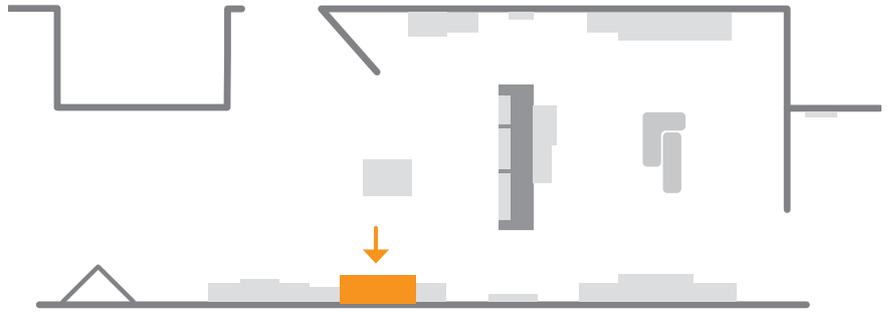
Signed poster “JOH”, 1991

H22570

Imagine the secrets this briefcase contained! It was owned and used by Joh Bjelke-Petersen whose reign as Queensland’s premier came to a dramatic end after 19 years with the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police corruption.

Briefcase, undated

Loan, courtesy: State Library of Queensland

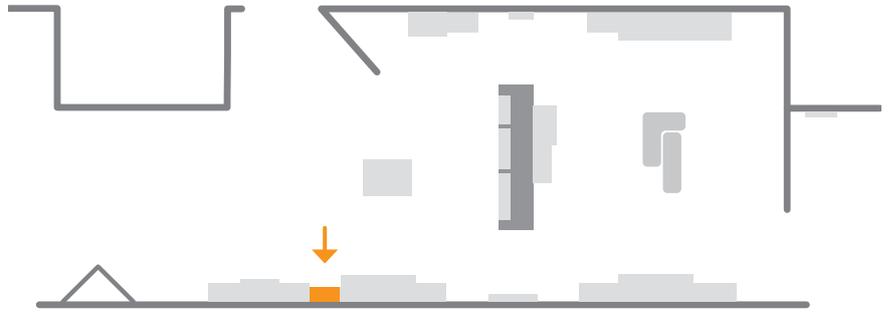


In 1864, Queen Victoria printed diary extracts from her visits to Scotland for family and friends. In 1867, a version was made available to the public that gave the impression of letting subjects glimpse her private life. In reality, 'All references to political questions, or to the affairs of Government, have, for obvious reasons, been studiously omitted.'

*More Leaves from the Journal
of a Life in the Highlands, 1884*

L22862

Photographs appearing to show
Queen Victoria's 'private life'.

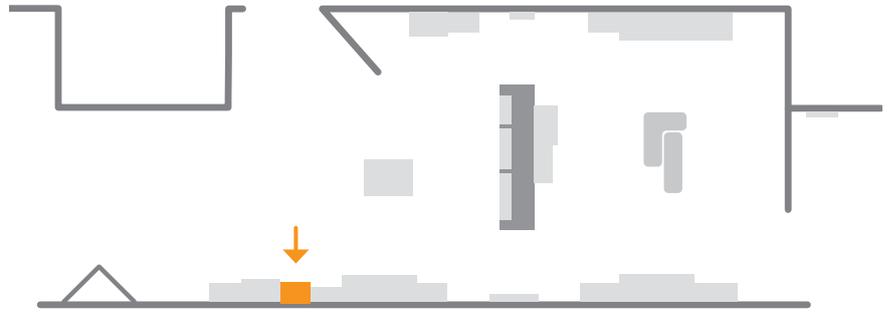


Hiding a shoe within a house or building has been a folklore practice for centuries. Well-worn shoes were thought to ward off evil spirits.

This convict shoe was found when renovating the Government Stores (now Commissariat) in 1913 and is thought to have been placed inside the building when it was built in 1829.

Partial convict shoe, c. 1829

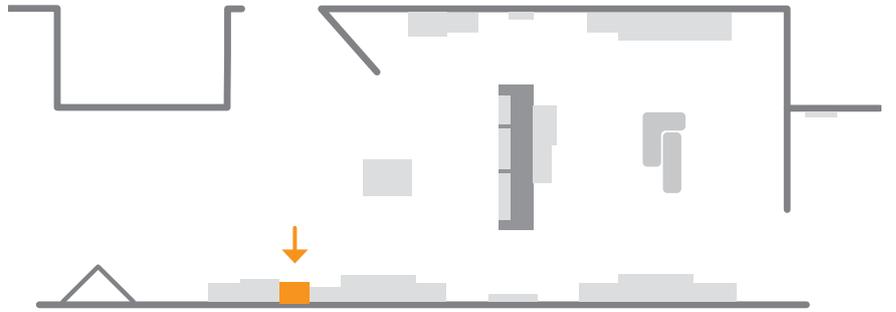
H4819



Sinful secrets

In Catholicism, the Sacrament of Penance is a ritual where individuals confess sins to a priest and have them absolved. Usually conducted in a confessional box in church, this rite is based on the idea that secrets can have negative effects on their keepers.

Catholics living on remote properties in the 19th century did not often have a church nearby. Instead, they kept portable altar sets so a travelling priest could conduct Penance within their homes.

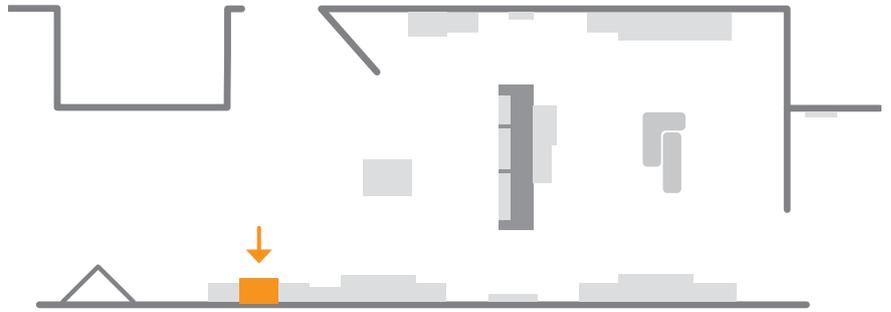


Portable altar set from a homestead
in Dalby, c. late 19th century

H27692

Back panel:

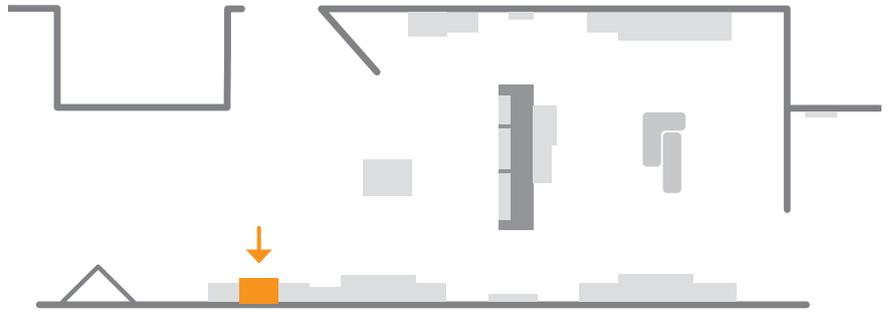
Illustration, The Death of the
Righteous Man, 1870



Rituals of secrecy

Rituals of secrecy – practices that identify us as part of a group or organisation – can reinforce social unity, serve as means of social control and contribute to wellbeing.

From First Nations cultures to the world's most famous secret societies to the mysterious world of folklore, membership relies on a set of customs and rituals known only to initiates.



Freemasonry is described as a fraternal association based on a shared set of secret rituals. Membership is open to all men and there are almost 300 lodges in Queensland.

Above:
Unknown Freemason man
in masonic regalia, c. 1900s

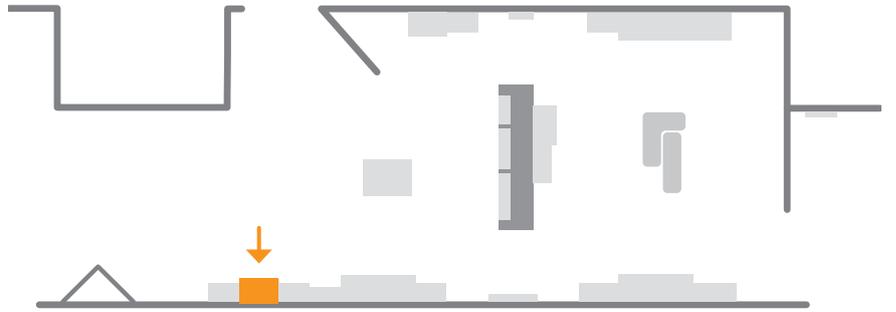
Courtesy: State Library of Queensland

Above right:
Matchbox with Masonic logo
and lodge quote, c. 1950s

H46622

Mason's wine glass, c. 1920s

H12172



Oddfellows is one of the oldest fraternal societies. The order's use of esoteric symbolism and highly secretive rituals centre around their motto 'Friendship, Love and Truth'.

Below:

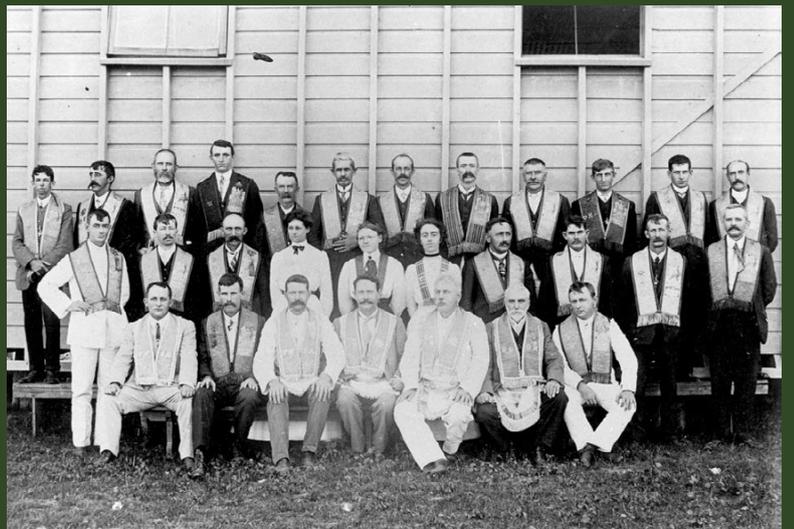
Oddfellows ceremonial apron, part of Grand Masters regalia, Brisbane, c. 1960–1980

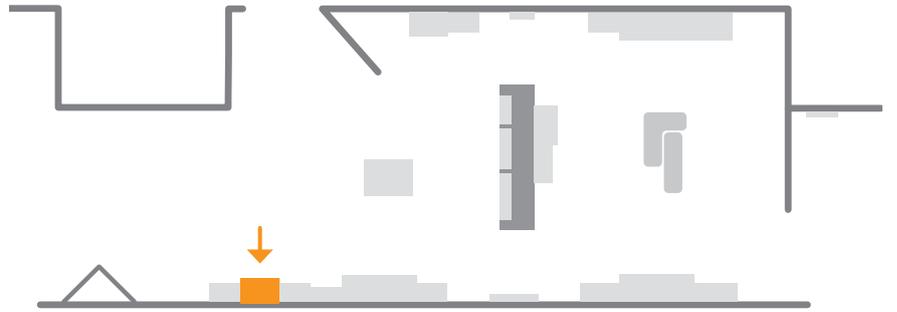
H23486

Right:

Members of Oddfellows, Mackay, c. 1900s

Courtesy: State Library of Queensland



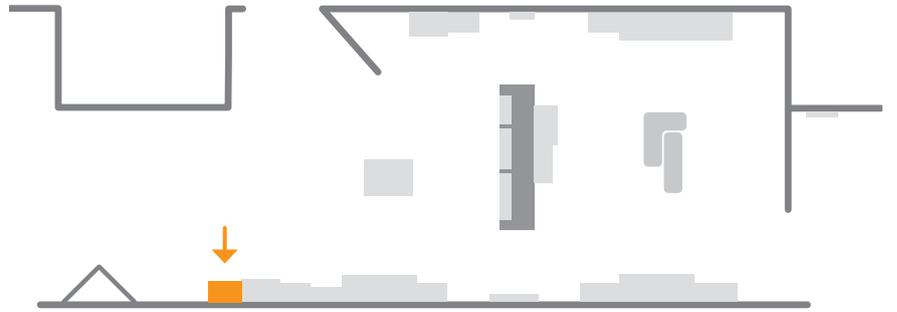


Fortune-telling has always been steeped in secrecy. But is it an innocent pastime or persuasive con?

When this palm reading was conducted in 1900, the practise was so divisive that professional fortune-telling was illegal in Queensland. This meant that, although services could be advertised, payment occurred separately and in secret.

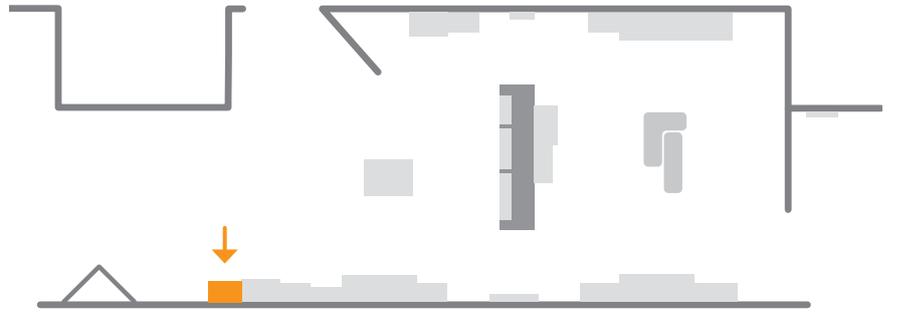
Palmistry reading, 1900

H5559



Secret knowledge

The stories and knowledge these First Nations objects embody, both in their form and iconography, are deeply resonant with culture and value. Dense with local meaning, their social biography begins in the communities where they were used or created. They convey territorial and spatial information, encode cultural and social meaning, and confer concepts of self. Testament to the survival of cultural traditions, these objects are as much of the present as they are of the past.

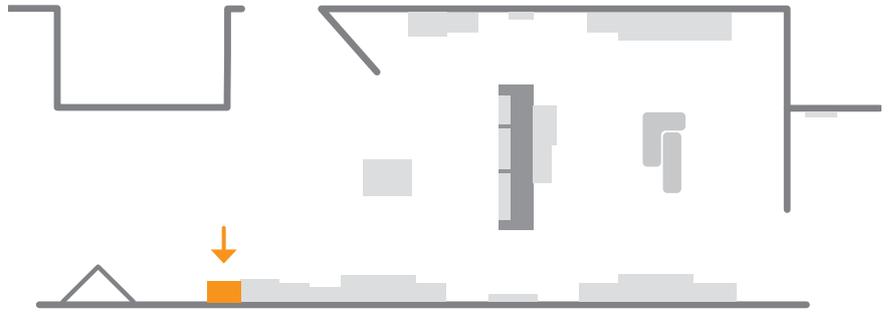


The symbols used in Aboriginal dot paintings are not just art; they are a secret language. These symbols, coded with meanings, are connected to Aboriginal Dreaming stories. The narratives in these artworks are foundational for teaching law and lore (kinship structures, spiritual beliefs) and lived experiences.

Back panel:

Bark painting, Roslyn Kemp,
Cherbourg, undated

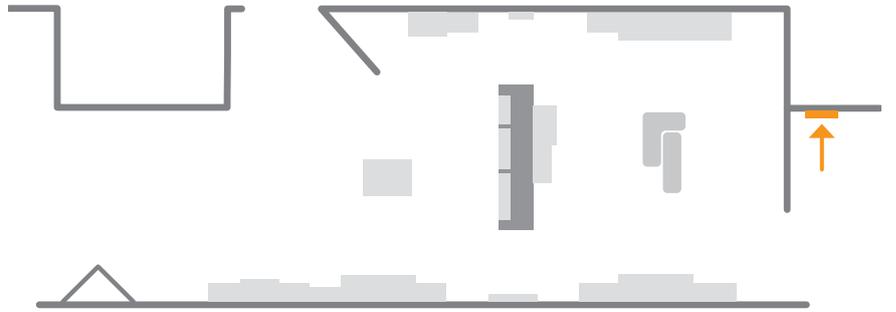
QE26828



These horns carved with hunting scenes may look decorative, but they contain secret messages. The depiction of plants in certain cycles of life indicate when to hunt different animals. This object demonstrates how First Nations knowledge – accumulated over long periods of observations and experiences – holds deep insight about nature.

Carving, made by Ancestors,
Barambah Station (Cherbourg),
c. 1894

QE3344

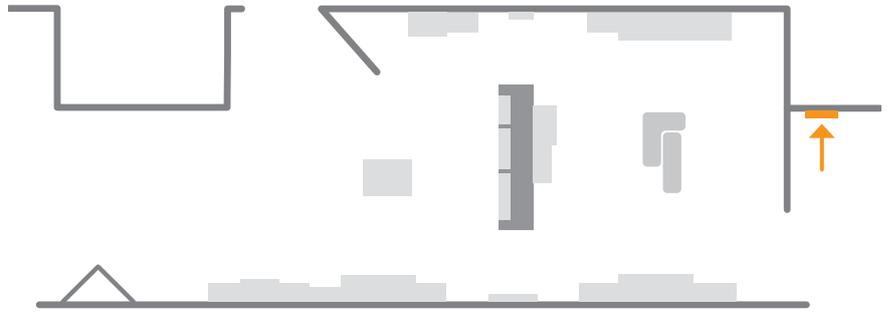


Hide and seek

For a bushranger like Captain Thunderbolt, secrets mean survival. On 24th August 1867 in the Borah Ranges, NSW, Constables Dalton and Cantrill stumbled upon the secret hideaway of the bushranger and his accomplice.

The constables crept up and surprised Captain Thunderbolt; shots were fired, and a pursuit ensued. After several kilometres, Thunderbolt escaped through dense bushland.

These handcuffs, riding crop and pistol belonged to Constable Dalton.



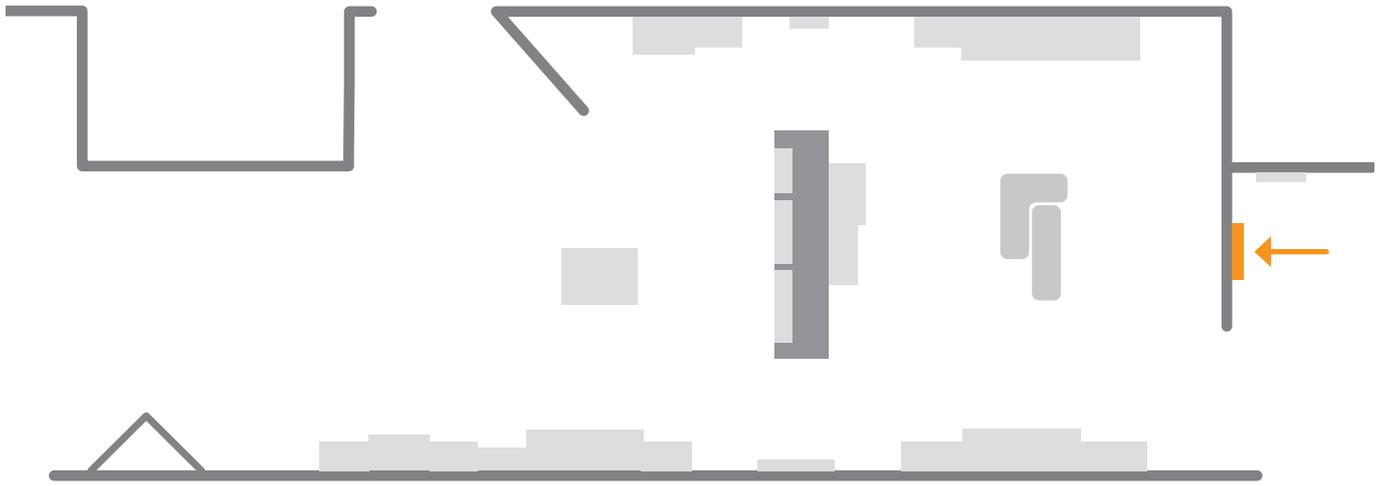
Left:
Handcuffs and riding crop, c. 1867

H41096
H41095

Right:
Centrefire revolver, 1867

H41097





Introduction

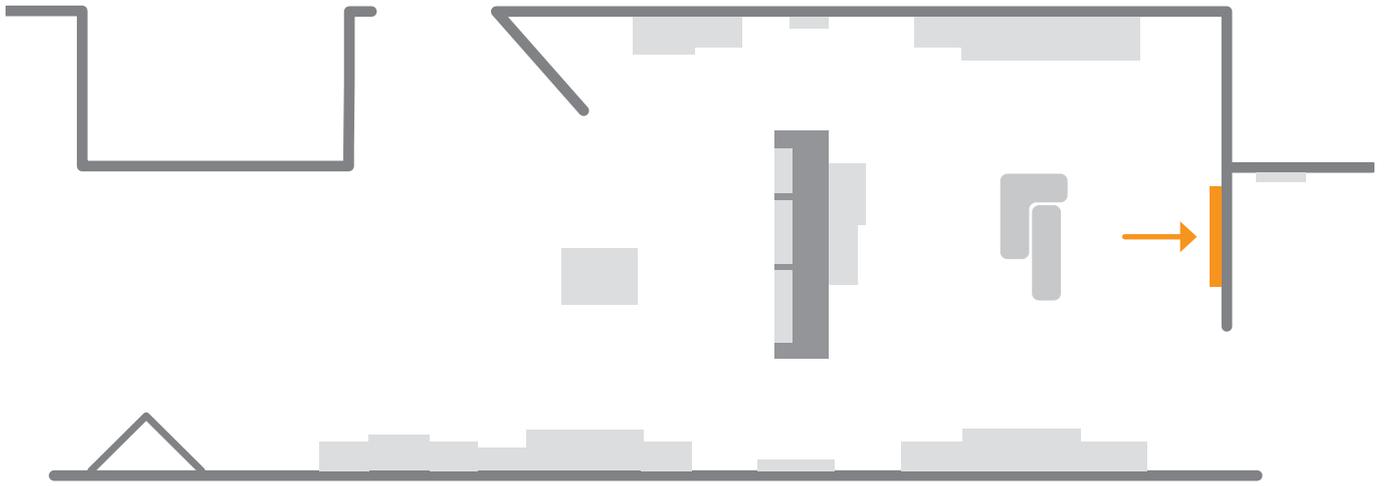
Secrets are at the heart of what it means to be human.

What we reveal, and conceal, from others shapes our identity.

Trading secrets has been part of human evolution and still contributes to social bonding as well as our cultural and political life.

Secrets are both deeply individual and a universal human phenomenon.

After all, we all have something to hide.



Secrets submitted by you..



Do you have a secret to share?

**Tell us your secret in one or
two sentences for a chance
to be featured.**