

STATE LIBRARY QUEENSLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

9 March 2026

What is a good death? New exhibition explores death in life

The often-taboo subjects of death and dying feature in a new exhibition at State Library of Queensland opening 14 March.

Dearly Departed: death in life examines how Queenslanders talk about and experience death, in both public and private realms, asking the question ‘what is a good death?’.

Through historical records, contemporary stories and immersive artistic experiences, the exhibition explores Queensland’s religious and spiritual diversity, funerary traditions, palliative care and capital punishment from the mid-1800s to today. It reveals the deeply personal impacts of collective events such as pandemics, epidemics, wars and tragedies.

The traditions and practices of Queensland’s culturally diverse communities are explored, offering insights into how communities around the world honour and mourn their loved ones, shaping vastly different understandings of life’s last chapter.

As a memory institution and one of the state’s leading cultural organisations, State Library will draw on its immense collections of objects and stories to examine the social, cultural, spiritual and historical forces that have shaped Queensland’s experiences of death and dying through *Dearly Departed: death in life*.

Highlights include:

- **Rare historical collection items:** sympathy cards and letters, mourning garments and jewellery and undertakers’ ledgers and diaries
- **Death records:** pathways into people’s lives – death records reveal much about the lives of your ancestors; discover ways to resolve inconsistent or incomplete information.
- **Music beyond the grave:** Queensland's first band master, Professor Andrew Seal, communicated a piece of music to his daughter Pauline during a seance in 1911. The score has been brought to life by a Queensland jazz musician.
- **Sound art installation** *Untitled (Death Song)* by multidisciplinary Quandamooka artist Megan Cope
- **Death Cafe** (facilitated event): a welcoming, informal space for open conversation about death, dying and mortality - over a cup of tea or coffee. Following an internationally recognised model, this session brings people together in small groups to talk, listen and reflect.
- **Digital Legacy: what is your digital afterlife?:** panel discussion and practical workshops to help in managing social media, cloud accounts and digital assets after death.

Quotes from Minister for Education and the Arts John-Paul Langbroek:

“The *Dearly Departed* exhibition takes a sensitive and reflective approach to a universal human experience – delving deep into State Library’s collection to share art, artifacts, and historic records which deal with death, dying and the great unknown.

“This exhibition is an example of the important role State Library plays in sharing the perspectives, stories and histories of Queenslanders and our communities.

“The Crisafulli Government invests in State Library to support Queenslanders’ access to enriching arts and cultural experiences and collections, delivering on our 10-year strategy for arts and culture, Queensland’s Time to Shine.”

Quotes from State Librarian and CEO Vicki McDonald AM:

“*Dearly Departed* invites us to reflect on our mortality in a safe and sensitive environment.

“Through history, art and emotion, the exhibition challenges audiences to reflect on what it means to live well, die well and honour those who came before us.

“*Dearly Departed* reframes death not as an ending but as a profound and enduring part of Queensland’s living story.”

Dearly departed: death in life

14 March – 23 August 2026

Open daily 10am–5pm | Free entry

slq Gallery, level 2 | State Library of Queensland, Cultural Centre, South Bank

slq.qld.gov.au/dearlydeparted | [Media kit](#)

Media enquiries

media@slq.qld.gov.au

(07) 3840 7269

Interviews available on request.