



Who's Your Mob – First Nations Family History

Margaret Lawrie collection

Margaret Lawrie Collection

The Margaret Lawrie Collection of Torres Strait Islands materials is the life's work of Margaret Lawrie, a teacher with an interest in child health. She travelled to the Torres Strait Islands with Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) at the request of the Queensland Government. Margaret Lawrie was interested in the history, languages and cultures of the Torres Strait Islander peoples. She spent time in communities during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.

Warnings and sensitivities

Torres Strait Islander people are advised that the Margaret Lawrie Collection contains the names and images of deceased people and elements of secret, sacred tradition. Users should also be aware that some of the records include personal information that may contradict what is known about their ancestry. The records in the collection are from anthropologists' field notes and were produced from a non-Indigenous perspective. Before viewing the collection, please be advised that offensive words, terms and descriptions may be used throughout the records.

About the collection

Margaret Lawrie travelled to the Torres Strait many times between 1964 and 1973, often staying for months at a time. Becoming friends with many Torres Strait Islanders, she was approached by some to record and write down their stories as well as family histories. This resulted in her conducting research into the cultural history of the Torres Strait and collecting transcripts, audio recordings, photographs, slides, art works and stories. Together they formed the basis for the publication of [Myths and Legends of Torres Strait](#) (1970) and [Tales from Torres Strait](#) (1972).

The [Margaret Lawrie Collection of Torres Strait Islands material](#) was donated to State Library of Queensland in 1996.

Genealogies

Between 1964 and 1973, Margaret Lawrie recorded many Torres Strait Islander genealogies (family trees). The Margaret Lawrie Collection includes genealogies of 17 Torres Strait Islander communities:

- Badu
- Mabuig
- Thursday Island
- Bamaga (located on the mainland)
- Muraleg (Prince of Wales Island)
- Ugar
- Boigu Island
- Murray Island
- Warraber
- Dauan Island
- Naghir (Mount Ernest Island)
- Yam Island
- Erub (Darnley Island)
- Poruma (Coconut Island)
- Yorke Island
- Horn Island
- Saibai
- Kubin Village / St Pauls (Moa Island)
- Seisia (located on the mainland)

Accessing the collection

What is available online?

State Library has digitised the Margaret Lawrie genealogical charts. The index is available for anyone to search on our [One Search](#) catalogue.

Who can view the collection?

Genealogical charts are available on request for individuals or families who are researching their own family history.

Requests can be made through the [Margaret Lawrie Enquiry Form](#). Please allow up to 10 days processing time.

How can Land Councils access records?

Copies of genealogies are provided to Land Councils for the purpose of Native Title claims. Please submit the request through the [Margaret Lawrie Enquiry Form](#) on official letterhead with names of families researching the claim and claim number.

Why are there access conditions?

Although anyone can search the Margaret Lawrie Collection index records, there are restrictions on those allowed access to the digitised genealogical charts because much of the information is private or sensitive.

In accordance with State Library of Queensland's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections Commitments](#), the access conditions enable staff to provide context and appropriate cultural care messages for potentially offensive material.

Any use of the information other than for private and study use is the sole responsibility of the person making the request.

How to locate and request Margaret Lawrie genealogy records


- Search for your relative's name in our [One Search](#) catalogue. Select 'State Library Family History Indexes'
- When you find a relevant catalogue record, the information you need is in the 'Notes' section. This will tell you the box number, item-sheet number and island if known.
- You can then use those details to complete a [Margaret Lawrie Enquiry Form](#) online.
- For more detailed instructions, see our [step-by-step guide](#) on how to locate and request Margaret Lawrie genealogy records.

Further reading

- [Jorn Harbeck's paper about the Margaret Lawrie Collection](#). Delivered at the Access to Indigenous Records National Forum in 2003.
- Blog: [Margaret Lawrie Collection of Torres Strait Islands 1964-1998: treasure collection of the John Oxley Library](#)

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/services/ask-librarian>

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