

# The Mathew's Collection at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

**A set of important magic lantern slides has recently been catalogued and digitally preserved by AIATSIS. It was fascinating for Elisa deCourcy and Martyn Jolly to discuss where the slides came from with the donor, Mrs Diana Williams, who lives in Canberra, and with David Jeffery, AIATSIS's Collection Manager (Photographic).**



Men wrangling a calf in a stockyard Central Australia, 1930s AIATSIS Ref. MATHEWS.W01.DF-D00027792A

Between 1932 and 1939, Wallace H Mathews and his son Arthur G Mathews, a Western Australian missionary at the United Aborigines Missions at Ooldea, Mt Margaret, Warburton and Gnowangerup, made a collection of lantern-slides illustrating mission life. In the decades that followed other missionaries, Mr Tom Street from Western Australia and Mr White from Tasmania, used a magic lantern to show the slides to church groups and other missionary supporters in the cities. In the mid 1960s Street gave the magic lantern and the slide collection, now battered and worn after long use, to the notable Aboriginal pastor Reverend Ron Williams who was living in Kalgoorlie. Reverend Williams was very keen for Aboriginal people to collect and preserve their past. He himself was a keen collector and photographer of Aboriginal life, and his 35mm colour slides, prints and video, as well as the work of his wife Diana, are now preserved



Boxes containing Mathews' lantern slides slung with leather handles. Photo credit AIATSIS

in the Battye Library, Perth. After the Reverend Williams passed away Mrs Williams gave the collection of 209 slides to AIATSIS, where they have now been [conserved, copied and catalogued](#). The extensively annotated slides show mission scenes and activities, housing, timber milling, religious instruction, education, individual portraits, group portraits and traditional activities.

David Jeffery described the collection as “an

outstanding set of images. Moreover, many of the slides have location and subject descriptions written on the mount and quite a few identify the people photographed. This sort of detail is priceless especially for our Indigenous clients researching their family history”.

The Mathews Collection joins other collections of lantern-slides preserved by AIATSIS. These include a collection of 83 slides taken at the UAM Colebrook Home taken between 1924 and 1944; the Herbert Read Collection, taken of Methodist missionary activity at Raukkan, South Australia between 1917 and 1925 and South Goulburn Island between 1925 and 1928; and the Ernest Brainwood Collection taken in Aborigines Inland Missions and United Aboriginal Missions across Queensland between 1928

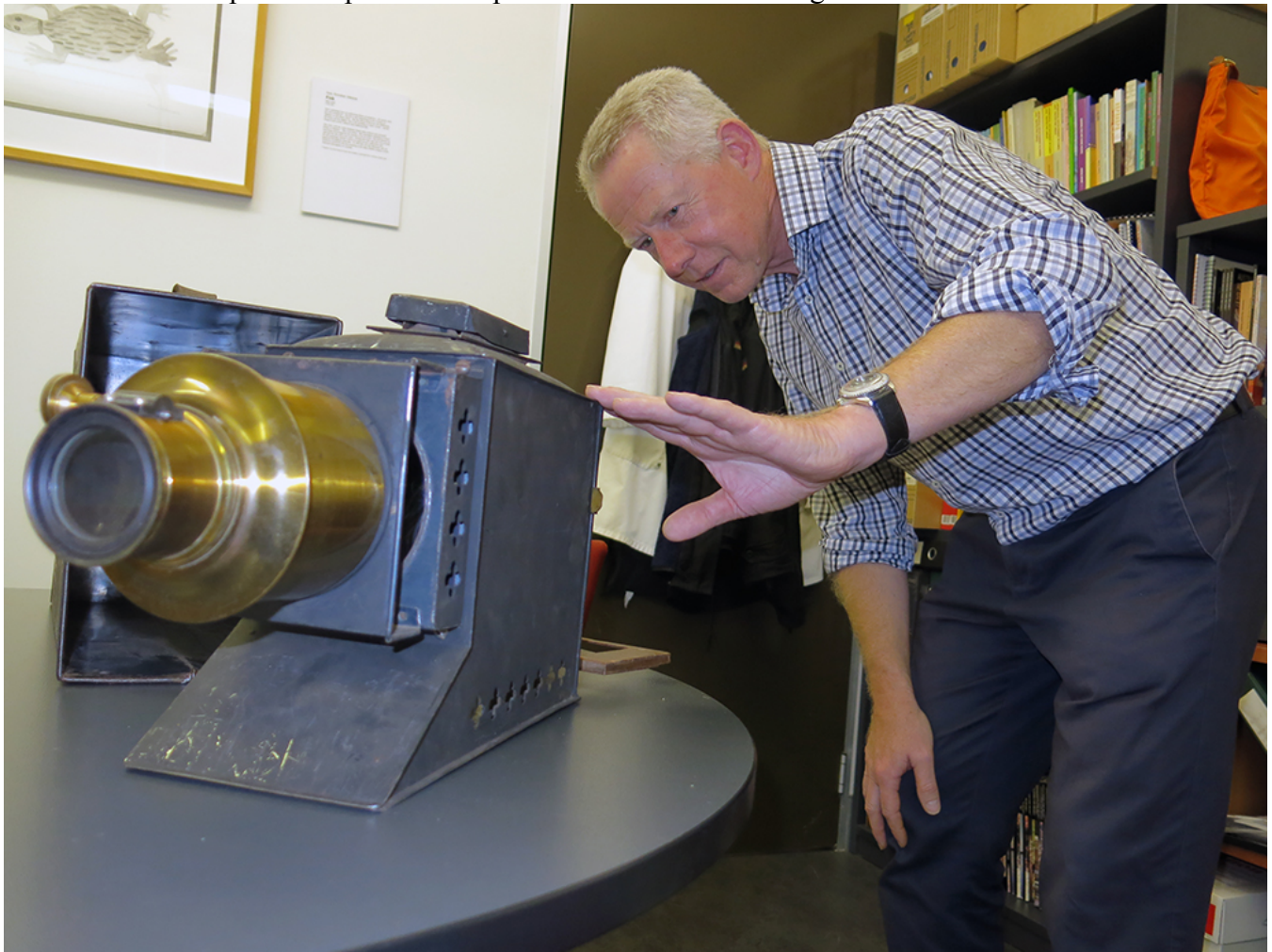


A.G. Mathews sending an S.O.S. from stranded Warburton truck, Warburton, WA, 1938 AIATSIS Ref. MATHEWS.W01.DF-D00027841

and 1932. The Brainwood collection includes a magic lantern dating from the early twentieth century, and the evidence of its many decades of hard service across Queensland was clear to see when David Jeffery



and Senior Engineer, Doug Smith examined it at AIATSIS. Evidently, with tools such as tinsnips and pliers it had been modified to take flexible film-strips as well as glass slides, and the chimney and rear door had been modified to replace the paraffin lamp with a modern electric light bulb.



David Jeffrey with the Brainwood collection magic lantern, AIATSIS, November 2016, photo credit: Martyn Jolly