Good afternoon, my friends.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the magnificent land on which we gather, and the present custodians of this place of learning and scholarship.

I want you to know how delighted I am to be at the University of Melbourne, as part of the jubilee celebrations of the marvellous Baillieu humanities library, for the relaunch of the Australian Women’s Register. It warms my heart to join you, and I thank you for welcoming me.

With a refurbishment funded by the ARC, this Register is a fantastic initiative of the National Foundation for Australian Women, indeed the centrepiece of the Australian Women’s Archives Project.

As it nears the end of its first decade, we reflect on how it enhances Australia’s cultural, social, intellectual, political, and historical understanding.

Its relaunch today affords a fresh opportunity:

• to celebrate women’s offerings and achievements in our nation,

• and to acknowledge how these records enrich and inform us,

• how vital they are to our labours in reconstructing and construing our collective past.

American poet and feminist Adrienne Rich said: “Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.”

One of the main scholarly tasks of the last half century has been to retrieve women’s history from its ‘unspokenness’, from the shrouds of silence and obscurity.

Marvellous restorative work has been done to fill in the blank half of a huge canvas.

I can’t help but think of Professor Dale Spender’s prolific and energetic contributions to this endeavour.

One reviewer noted that her animating question was: “If women’s sphere is separate, why is there not a continuous public record of women’s perception of the world from that difference place?”

Professor Spender and many others have been impelled by that question. The loss or lack of a ‘continuous public record’ is...
being redressed, not only in the academy, but in the community:

- local and family historians,
- women’s groups,
- libraries, galleries and museums,
- and communal online databases.

The reconstructive process is necessarily a collaborative one, bringing to bear our intimate records, letters, images, precisely those precious, difficult-to-come-by things that make the past eloquent.

The Australian Women’s Register is a vast, fascinating, and inspiring resource, not only for researchers but for everyone who seeks to understand our story and our standing.

It is now my very great pleasure to re-launch it.