

About Portrait Detective

Do you have a treasured family photo whose date remains a mystery? Or perhaps a historic portrait depicting an ancestor – but you're not sure just which ancestor?

Portrait Detective is a unique image-dating tool developed by Inside History and the State Library of NSW to help you accurately interpret and decode historic images.

Drawing on the research of historian and portrait-dating expert Margot Riley, Portrait Detective brings together a selection of images of Australian people sourced from the Library's collections, dating from 1788.

These 100 images cover a wide range of media (such as oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, miniatures, silhouettes, engravings and photographs), but the one thing they have in common is that they depict Australians of the past – from a variety of eras, classes, social contexts and walks of life.

Each image in the timeline has been chosen because its date and provenance is known, so you can see at a glance the changing styles of portraiture, art, dress and personal grooming over time.

Arranged in a chronological timeline, these images form an authoritative and historically accurate record and reference resource of the changing appearance of men, women and children in New South Wales over time.

Using Margot's expertise in dress and photographic history to decode the visual evidence in every image, Portrait Detective will equip you with specialised visual analysis skills to accurately interpret and date historical images of your own.

Explore Portrait Detective – and become an expert image sleuth yourself!