

# OVERSEAS MEMBERS

The invitation by Jenny Adams to write about my experiences as an Australian librarian overseas came at an interesting time for me. After eight years in England we are facing up to all the disruption of returning to Australia — selling the house, new jobs, new schools . . . We've been having such a pleasant time here that we shelved our original plans for a two-year stay, but now we have this feeling that if we don't go back soon our children won't be Australians, and somehow that still seems important. So the invitation to consider and describe my life and work here came at a time when I was already thinking about the relative merits of life and libraries in each country.

We live in inner-city Manchester which is not like living in Carlton or Paddington. It's a bit run down, unemployment is high, and the '81 riots went through on the next main road. However, it's historically interesting, we have a beautiful house which we got very cheaply, and more importantly, the local library offered me my first English job — as a part-time library assistant.

Well, there are 4 million out of work, and I did arrive at a time of cuts in library budgets, so I was grateful for any job. And things did improve. I moved to a full-time position, was given responsibility for building up a local studies collection, and was then asked to give a paper on my work at the national conference of the Library Association. (I love the way the Australians have the Library Association of Australia, the Americans have the American Library Association, but for the British it's simply the Library Association, I mean, is there any other, old chap?) A qualified position eventually surfaced and I got accepted as a sort of honorary Chartered Librarian.

Local studies proved a good field to enter, although apart from having studied British History at Matriculation, I knew little about Manchester history. It soon spilled out into my non-working life and I found many evenings taken up with talks to local groups, guided tours around the area, and research for three area history books. In fact I'm well on the way to being a subject bore, unable to pass a particular street or building without telling anyone who will listen about its origins or previous inhabitants. Most people seem puzzled, even piqued, that an Australian is doing all this, but I always politely explain that when you're new to a country you often see things with a fresher eye and are more likely to ask questions.

After a couple of years of public library work — schools liaison, Urdu books, Mills & Boon, cultural events and occasional aggro and vandalism — all good community librarian stuff, I moved to a position at the North Western Regional Library System. I now organize regional inter-lending with a clear memory of the public demanding a book tomorrow if not sooner, liaise with splendid English institutions such as the British Library Lending Division and LASER, worry about computers and our union catalogues and paperless inter-lending systems, write publicity pamphlets, give talks to librarianship students . . . This job also continues my local studies connection. The NWRLS administers the Lancashire Bibliography — a sort of north-west England WESDOC, and the North West Sound Archive which is a collection of over 20,000 oral and

aural history sound recordings of regional interest.

Our offices are in Manchester's Central Library which looks something like the domed State Library of Victoria where I did my librarianship course, and where I learnt about Edward Edwards whose name appears at the top of the Honour roll of Manchester librarians in the sombre wood-panelled Committee Room.

What can I say about British libraries in a paragraph? Services vary, and a lot are under attack. Manchester has a reputation as a generous authority and although it faces further cuts, its public librarians function well, often innovatively. The school libraries are lamentable. My daughter's comprehensive has no qualified librarian, instead an English teacher gets a small salary enhancement to preside over a collection of moribund books — I know it's moribund because it contains a book on computers, published in 1966! Even worse, the 'librarian' defended its inclusion when I complained. 'We do not choose our books by their covers,' she said. Nor by their content I thought. It was ironic that on a visit to Australia last year I toured a school library in my home town Colac, and saw the facilities there. Librarian Stephen Due has four staff, including two teacher-librarians, a constantly staffed loans desk, a service that seemed fully integrated with the teaching programme, a computerized catalogue, and he discards computer books when they're more than a year or two old. To think I thought I was moving on to better things when I left Colac at 17.

However, I generally tread carefully when espousing Australian libraries, it doesn't do to risk social ostracism and I have learnt a lot in this country. There are some wonderful collections, smoothly functioning networks and bright and dedicated librarians, even with the cuts, unemployment and occasional neglected area.

I must confess to another library experience. My husband and I have joined a private subscription library. It's very posh, you have to be proposed and seconded to become a member, and I do feel a bit guilty, it's rather like an NHS surgeon joining BUPA. However, it was established in 1806, frequented by Mrs Gaskell, and the housekeeper will bring you lunch on a tray as you flip through Punch or peruse a book still grimy from the Industrial Revolution. You can even buy wine at the loans desk. The Home Country can still outdo the colonials on some things.

Finally, I would like to say that I have never regretted keeping up my Australian subscription at the same time that I was shelling out for my English one. As I contemplate returning home I can see how it has helped me to keep in touch with library development and the job situation in Australia. How else would I have known about WESDOC, information brokers and all those computers? Also, there's been a certain amount of pride in flashing the odd article at my hosts — services to the blind, conservation of old films, and school libraries.

Gay Sussex

## AUDIOVISUAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Audiovisual Services Committee met on 24 April 1985 and considered a number of issues. Information has been received from some libraries concerning restrictive practices in the supply of video cassettes to libraries which wish to purchase them. It appears that some suppliers of video cassettes will not sell them to libraries. The cases brought to the attention of the committee appear to relate to video cassette editions of feature films. The Audiovisual Services Committee would be interested to hear from librarians of any cases they know of where suppliers have refused to sell video cassettes to libraries.

Further planning was done on the development of a *Researcher's Guide to Audiovisual Resources in Australian Libraries*. There is a very clear need for such a guide to provide information to persons engaged in research about the nature and extent of audiovisual resources and the conditions for their use. The preparation of such a guide is a major task and the Audiovisual Services Committee hopes that it can be accomplished as a joint project with other organisations interested in developing audiovisual collections for research purposes.

The committee is undertaking a review of the Inter-library Loan Code for Audiovisual Materials published as Part B of the AACOBs Inter-library Loan Code. The committee seeks comments from members of the Library Association of Australia on the adequacy of the existing Inter-library Loan Code for Audiovisual Materials and on desirable modifications to it. Comments should be addressed to the Convener of the Audiovisual Services Committee.

Members of the Audiovisual Services Committee are —

*Bert Cornelius*: Special Collections Librarian, Macquarie University Library, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2113.

*Pam Dunlop*: National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT 2600.

*Martha Heeren*: Petersham Girls' High School, Gordon Street, Petersham NSW 2049.

*Bill Linklater*: Swinburne Librarian, Swinburne Institute of Technology, John Street, Hawthorne, Vic. 3122.

*Paul McNally (Convener)*: Deputy Director, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Post Office Darling Heights, Toowoomba, Qld. 4350.

*Marjorie Roe*: University Library, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Qld. 4067.

*Bill Stinson*: Audiovisual Librarian, Blacktown Municipal Library, Westfield Plaza, Blacktown, NSW 2148.

P.T. McNally

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