

Another contribution from an overseas LAA member

LETTER FROM VIENNA

It was a pleasant reminder of home to receive an invitation from Jenny Adams to write a little about my experiences in Vienna over the past two years. The LAA journals are the only source of information on Australian librarianship for those of us who have left the sunny shores behind.

Since January 1983 I have been on leave from the Australian Atomic Energy Commission and have been working for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as Head of the Vienna International Centre (VIC) Library.

The VIC opened late in 1979 to accommodate the IAEA and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) which were housed separately in the city of Vienna. The complex is a most impressive one

with the buildings being a landmark in Vienna, situated near the banks of the Danube in the Donaupark. There are just under 4000 people working in the VIC which has a post office, two banks, three travel agents, a commissary and a number of other services.

The VIC Library was formed by the merger of the old IAEA and UNIDO libraries in 1979. With the arrival of the UN units the subject coverage has expanded to encompass nuclear science, industrial development, narcotic drugs control, social and humanitarian affairs and a number of minor interests. The VIC Library is unique in this part of the world in that its working language is English and the majority of its enquiries are in English although it is situated in the midst of a German language country. The Library has a staff of 30 which includes 11 graduate staff and has an annual budget of \$US 1 600 000. It is a medium sized special library with some 58 000 monographs, 4000 periodical titles, 500 000 microfiche reports and specialised collections such as the UN documents collection. Approved external users such as graduate

students are permitted to use the Library though they may not be entitled to all services.

The technical services operations such as acquisitions and cataloguing are computerised with most functions being carried out online. An IBM personal computer is used to interrogate overseas data bases.

One of the main challenges in running such a library lies in the personnel area with the need to amalgamate the many different cultural outlooks of the staff into efficient teamwork. There are at least 15 different nationalities represented by the library staff.

A frequent question from visitors is 'What is it like to live in Vienna?' The answer must of course be subjective and invites comparison with life where I come from on the outskirts of Sydney. Vienna is the capital of Austria with a population of about one and a half million. It is much smaller than the equivalent part of Sydney since most of the inhabitants are apartment dwellers. It is a peaceful place to drive around with none of the traffic jams that characterise the Australian capitals. I must admit that it took a while to overcome the basic urge to drive on the left side of the road. The lack of fluent German is not a great hindrance since English is a reasonably common language around this international city. Most newcomers quickly learn to commence a conversation with a rather hopeful "Sprechen sie Englisch?"

Life in Vienna can only be what you make of it yourself. You soon find out that apartment rents are more expensive than Sydney by a factor of 2 to 3. The apartment dwelling and the cold winters force a change in life style compared with the average Australian experience of a suburban house and garden. Garages are scarce so your car has to be good to survive outdoors without rusting. For example, my car is guaranteed against chassis rust for six years providing salt is not used on the roads in the winter. Food prices are much the same as in Sydney with a noticeable reduction in the variety of fresh vegetables. To compensate, sausages come in an abundance of types and sizes together with the famous Sacher torte.

Vienna is a city of music and cultural activities ranging from the Opera Ball to the music of the many buskers in the Kartnerstrasse. Music is a theme which runs through life here. Of similar importance is the coffee house where you can buy a great variety of brews and blends and then sit all day reading a newspaper and watch the world go by.

Lest all the tourist brochures fool you, there is another side to all that winter cold and snow. It takes on the average 30 minutes to clear the snow off your car before you can go to work after an all night snowfall. Thank goodness for flexitime. As you work away with a scraper you have the fervent wish that, Camelot style, the snow would be banished to the night hours only. But, suddenly in April Vienna turns green, the sky turns blue and a wandering Australian feels a little more at home.

The experience has been rewarding professionally and personally. I have learnt much about the operations of a multi-subject special library and have gained a lot more insight into my fellow man through the many nations represented at the VIC. Time passes quickly; I will soon be making my way back to the green, green grass of home.

Wilson Neale
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Centre Library

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