

## Overseas members

## From the Other Shore of the Indian Ocean

I was away in Britain when Jenny Adams wrote to me at the Universities' Central Library, Rangoon, asking me as one of the few Burmese corresponding members of the Library Association of Australia, to write about what I have been doing in recent years. By coincidence, her letter came at a time when I had just completed 25 years' service at the University Library (15 years of which as its head) and I was reflecting on my work over the last quarter of a century. In spite of many difficulties, it had on the whole been a most rewarding experience, a challenging job of building up a university and college library system in a developing country with limited resources.

My colleagues in Australia will know the problems of distance. Our library system comprises 25 libraries stretching from Myitkyina, capital of the Kachin State in the far north, to Moulmein, capital of the Mon State in the south, a distance of about a thousand miles.

On my first visit to Australia in 1976 I spent two months in Perth. Very few of my Australian friends there know about Burmese libraries, and I used to tell them that we are really not so far apart; our countries both have long seacoasts on the Indian Ocean, and if you fly south-east from the southernmost point of Burma, it is only just over two thousand miles to the NW coast of Australia. Burma is only on the other shore of the Indian Ocean.

Unlike Australia, all the universities and colleges in Burma are run directly by the government. The Universities' Central Library is one of the main integral divisions of the Dept of Higher Education and we have to plan for the organization of the library system, recruit and train professional librarians, procure periodicals and books from abroad, run international book exchange programs, co-ordinate technical processing procedures and so on. Our library is mainly a reference and research library with a collection of about 350,000 items. We try to collect all books published in Burma and books published abroad on Burma; we also have over ten thousand palm-leaf and paper Burmese and Pali manuscripts.

One of our main problems has been the shortage of professionally trained staff. During our student days we all had to go abroad for professional library training. In 1971 I was able to establish the first and so far the only permanent course in library studies for our country, at the University of Rangoon and have been serving concurrently as Head of the Dept. of Library Studies, as well as lecturing in cataloguing and supervising the compilation of bibliographies by our students. During my two tours of Australia, in 1976 and 1983, I visited many library schools from Perth to Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra and university libraries in Brisbane and Townsville. Ed Parr and John Dean were some of my mentors at WAIT, where I attended a course on methods of teaching librarianship. I later met Margaret Trask at Kuring-gai and had useful discussions about running courses in librarianship, and also met the great D.H. Borchardt before he retired. With Harrison Bryan at the National Library of Australia I was able to develop a very useful exchange programme and also with George Miller of the ANU Library. Each month we select and buy for our exchange partners the best books published in our country.

Our library works closely with the Dept of Higher Education in planning scholarship programmes and every year staff from our libraries who have already obtained the Library Studies Diploma in Rangoon are sent abroad for further studies to Australia, UK, USA, Singapore, etc.

Burma has had a long tradition of libraries, located mainly in the Buddhist monasteries or centred around the former Royal Court. In the old capital of Pagan, a library building of the 11th century still stands. But it was only after the British annexed the country in three stages, in 1826, 1852 and 1886 that modern libraries were established. With Australia we share a common heritage as a one-time British colony. Copies of every book and periodical published in Burma were sent to London, to the British Library (the former British Museum Library) and the India Office Library and Records (now part of the British Library).

Recently I spent about three and a half months in London as a short-term consultant to the British Library for Burmese materials. I found many rare and interesting Burmese manuscripts and printed books. We are now microfilming many items which are no longer available in our country, but preserved in

Britain.

For me it was a good chance to renew the acquaintance of librarians I had met during my two previous stays in London. I met former lecturers who had taught me while I was attending the course leading to the Post-graduate Diploma in Librarianship at London University in 1960 to 1961.

As in Australia we also use AACR, Dewey, Sears and LC Subject Headings, though we have to formulate more detailed rules for the cataloguing of Burmese names, make our own expansions of DDC for Burma numbers, and also draw up Subject Headings in Burmese.

Librarianship has now gained an international character with just local modifications. For me I always feel at home whenever I visit libraries in other countries. It is good to meet and talk with colleagues who share a common goal as keepers of the collective human knowledge and wisdom.

*Thaw Kaung*

Chief Librarian

Universities' Central Library, Rangoon

## IBBY Japan

The 20th IBBY Congress to be held in Tokyo from 18-23 August 1986 will expose the following theme: Why do you write for children? Children, why do you read?

The theme will be explored in plenary sessions in which eminent experts will speak on different aspects of the theme, followed by three discussion sessions with about 30 subsidiary presentations.

Main speakers of the plenary sessions will include Mitumasa Anno (Japan), Michael Ende (FRG), Ana Maria Machado (Brazil), Miyoko Matsutani (Japan), Philippa Pearce (U.K.), Maurice Sendak (USA), Vilasini Perumbulavil (Singapore), Patricia Wrightson (Australia) and an expert from the U.S.S.R.

Themes of the discussion sessions will be:

The Future of Children's Books.

The Creation of Children's Books — Intention and Methods.

What Is a Child, After All?

The Hans Christian Andersen Awards will be presented at the closing ceremony.

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