

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

People who travelled to Canberra on 2 September for LAA:50 may have thought they were in for a time of pure nostalgia — slaps on the back for all concerned, a time of complacency and self congratulation. Not so!



*Professor Jean Whyte — beginning at the beginning.*

Participants were taken back in time to the 30s where the pace and complexity of life was slower and simpler by the reminiscences of Jean Arnot, Wilma Radford and Harold White and by the dinner concert at Albert Hall where tunes from 'Desert Song' and 'Porgy and Bess' rang out. But the focus of the conference was firmly on the future and learning from the past.

As well as papers where each speaker included a good joke and lively chairpeople such as Harrison Bryan, Joan Brewer, Jim Dwyer and Russell Doust to keep positions on the move, the agenda allowed for topics to be tackled from differing personal viewpoints and for a measure of debate. Bouquets and brick bats were duly handed out.

Areas requiring special attention emerged — formalising ties with ASLA and renewed efforts for greater co-operation; gearing up for a comprehensive lobbying campaign for funding of public libraries; the general sprucing up of our ideas on lobbying; balancing the social responsibility of libraries against economic accountability.

## Let's do the time warp again

Day One, 3 September, looked back. Professor Jean Whyte gave a detailed look at the formation of the Australian Institute of Librarians (AIL) with fascinating vignettes of the personalities involved. Boyd Rayward made an assessment of John Metcalfe's contribution and the audience listened to Metcalfe speak again via an oral history recording.

The personal reminiscences of Jean Arnot, Sir Harold White and Wilma Radford gave delight. The war years were relived by some and sprang to life for others. The excitement of being there at the start and the congenial fellowship of foundation and early members were vividly communicated by these three.

## Achievements

The major achievements of the AIL and the LAA were discussed. Margaret Trask spoke on the development of a framework of professional education for librarianship. Jean Conochie gave the 'specials perspective' by detailing the achievements of Eleanor Archer, Betty Doubleday and Lesle Symes. Jane La Scala covered our survival in a changing era and the contribution to public librarianship. Fay Pattinson spoke on the recognition of technicians and the impact this had on their work life. Ted Flowers focused on the contribution made to industrial areas and the importance of library standards and policy statements. Lastly, Harrison Bryan spoke on the role of the Association in the emergence of librarianship as a profession.

**If I were to sum up the history of the Australian Institute of Librarians, or the Library Association itself I would say it was the length and shadow of one man — John Metcalfe.**

*Sir Harold White*

## Looking Ahead

Day Two, 4 September, looked at the future. In 'Learning from the Past' Judith Baskin discussed status, Alan Horton compared the successful Federal funding campaign for school libraries to the 1976 campaign for public libraries. Robert Sharman analysed areas where energy has been wasted in pursuing issues peripheral to major objectives and areas where it has been expended to good effect.

Gordon Bower, Anne Hazell, Ian McCallum and Warren Horton joined together to discuss 'Objectives for the Future'. Gordon Bower looked at the need for objectives while Anne Hazell discussed the need for NIP and bringing teacher-librarians back to the fold. Ian McCallum took a lateral approach to the location of LAA offices and services. Warren Horton warned about the consequences of being non-players in the political process, suggesting targeting fewer priorities in order to concentrate effort, the need for a political newsletter and the eventual development of one umbrella organisation to lobby on political matters.

The 'Individual Member and the Future' was covered by Jenny Adams, Jenny Gleeson, Peter Judge and Carmen Hannaker. Jenny Adams hypothesised on unbundling services and the introduction of new services in line with the needs of the broader base of membership. Jenny Gleeson discussed librarians and trade unionism. Peter Judge reported on how the future had been discussed in earlier conferences and the implications of new technology.

Meg Cameron and John Levett shared the unenviable task of concluding the conference by summing up what had gone on before and drawing the threads together. Both accomplished the task with wit and emotion.

*Meg Cameron — Libraries change people's lives and they give people opportunities for the future. They help students and people studying by themselves. They enrich their understanding; enliven their imagination; give endless aesthetic pleasure and intellectual satisfaction and stimulation. They change the way people look at the world. So we are fortunate to be in a profession which has those responsibilities and we are fortunate to be able to pass on that responsibility to other people. We are responsible, also, for others doing it well in the future.*

*John Levett — One of the principal issues for our Association over the next 50 years will be the provision of adequate library service to the other half: the submerged 60 percent of our society that libraries and their manifest benefits don't reach. This is not a matter of our vision, or search for power, prestige, our lust for lobbying, or our hunt for influence — it is an issue for our social conscience as professionals . . .*



*Lively 'chairing' by Harrison Bryan*



*Patricia Ward . . . the roving microphone allowed the audience to contribute.*

**It is as well to remember that in 1937 there were very few libraries. Each capital city had one university with a library, one parliament with a library, and the general reference library . . . there were very few libraries in between**

. . .

*Jean Arnot*