



the front line

It was Alan Kay, 'grandfather' of the Macintosh Computer who said '... the best way to predict the future is to invent it. As long as we don't violate too many of Newton's laws, it is something that can be shaped the way we want.'

We are constantly reminded that we are living in a world of change as dynamic as that which saw the transformation of society from an agrarian to an industrial base.

The Industrial Revolution did not take place overnight but lasted more than 50 years; the changes we are witness to are transforming our society before our very eyes to one in which information and service are the dynamos of our economy. Confirmation of this phenomenon is the number of people employed in what Barry Jones refers to as the quaternary, or information industry sector of our economy. Furthermore, an increasing number of studies are demonstrating that the information sector is expanding more rapidly than other sectors of the economy. (See, for example, Nancy Lane's paper — LAA 1983.)

I do not believe that we can be passive observers of this change; we must be participants. Australia produces about two percent of the world's published scientific and technical information; it must, perforce,

import the balance. Given this situation, it does not reflect well on us as a profession, that, to the best of my knowledge, we have no current figures on the size of our national collections as a percentage of the global output. At the time of the STISEC investigations 17 years ago, it was found that we were up to 85 percent self-sufficient in some key scientific areas. With the declining economic situation in recent years, the collapse of the Australian dollar, and the consequent and widespread cancellation of hundreds of serials, I suspect our coverage has deteriorated.

It is true, nevertheless, that the remaining literature constitutes an enormous mine of information waiting to be tapped. The prices of our traditional bulk commodities — coal, iron ore, wheat — have collapsed contributing markedly to our present economic situation.

We say we are living in the information age, but no-one speaks of this most valuable commodity of all — information. For years the Japanese have been paying top scientists and technologists top-of-the-range salaries, not to do research, but to exploit this world mine of information. The results speak for themselves. We could, and I believe we must, do the same.

I don't believe I am overstating the case when I say that those who control and facilitate access to this information, the librarians and information specialists, are set to play a crucial and pivotal role in Australia's economic recovery. But in the first instance it will be up to us, to make our leaders and masters aware of this national resource, and to show how it can be exploited in the national interest.

Peter Dawe
President

A new doctor for the profession

John Barclay has been awarded a Doctorate in Philosophy from Loughborough University of Technology. John's dissertation is on 'Research and the library school in the United States to 1965' and was completed in Loughborough's Department of Library and Information Studies.

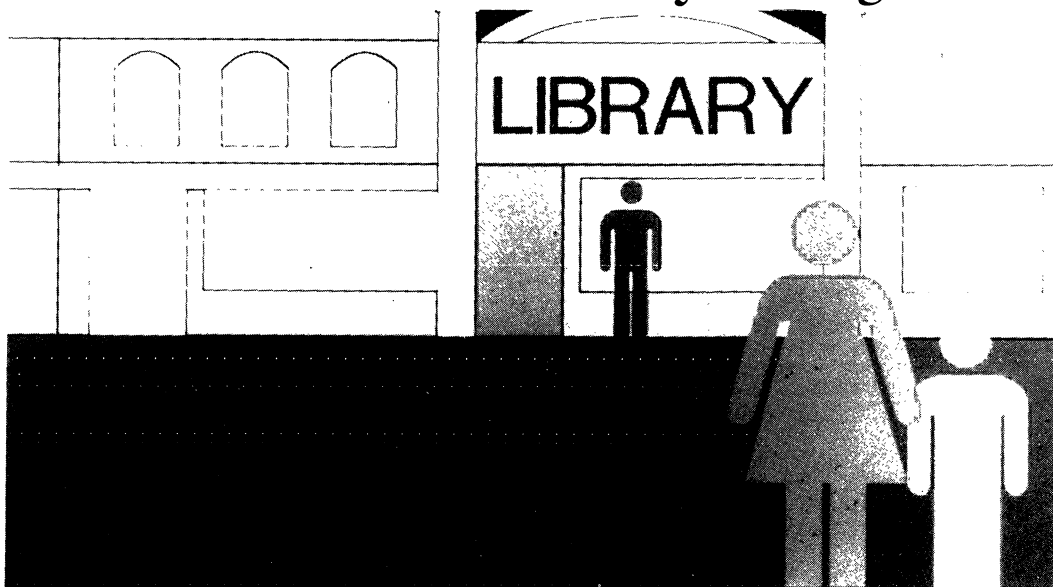
John was a member of the teaching staff of the School of Librarianship at the University of NSW before he went to the United Kingdom in 1980 on a James Cook Bicentennial Scholarship. He returned to Australia in 1983 and submitted his dissertation to Loughborough in 1986. He has recently taken up a position as Training and Staff Development Librarian in TAFE Library Services in NSW. Prior to this he taught in the Division of Library Practice at Sydney Technical College.

John describes his doctoral study as 'a long haul like most people's' but he is grateful to have gained from it a conviction of the importance of research in the field, and of the strength of the US contribution. 'The US,' he says, 'is the major library tradition and we need to analyse it and make sure we incorporate their strengths'.

John is preparing a book on libraries and information services in China and he intends to combine his interests in international librarianship with his now stronger-than-ever conviction of the importance to librarianship of high quality research and writing.

Carmel Maguire
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