

FRONTLINE

International responsibilities by Averill Edwards



Now that all the 'hoopla' and 'razzamatazz' of the LAA Biennial Conference and the IFLA Annual Conference is over and we are coping with the boredom of being back at the grindstone or having not been away to enjoy the delights of Sydney in the Bicentennial year - let us take time to sit back and think about the implications of the conference for us as an association.

The IFLA Annual Conference was held this year for the first time in Australia and only for the second time in the southern hemisphere. It was an honour that IFLA accepted the LAA's invitation and a tribute to the foresight of Australian librarians who early in the 1980s had a dream that an IFLA conference could be held in Australia. We have every reason to be proud of the conference that has just been held, an exciting and challenging meeting, a triumph of organisation in a wonderful city during an historic year. As a showcase for Australian talent and an example of our stimulating and sophisticated country, we could not have done better. All of those involved, the speakers, the organisers, the par-

ticipants, the sponsors are all to be congratulated on a highly successful event.

But what now? Now that all the shouting and the laughter have died down, what did the conference mean? Was it worth all the effort? What are we going to do now? The international visitors have departed and we return to routine. Has the stimulation of overseas visitors and the mingling of librarians from all over Australia meant anything more than one exciting week to be forgotten as soon as it is over? I hope not, rather let it serve to focus attention on Australia's overseas relations and to emphasise the fact that Australia does not live in a vacuum. It is part of a large and heavily populated region - South-East Asia, and lies on the edge of another large, but less populated region - the Pacific.

I hope that the stimulus achieved by the influx of overseas visitors to IFLA/LAA will provoke members to consider the role of the Association, not just in Australia but beyond its shores. The LAA (soon to be ALIA) has, for very good reasons, been largely inward looking but after 51 years it is now an established professional association and it is timely to develop wider professional emphasis and become more outward looking. As a strong Australian professional organisation we should be looking to see how we can meet our international responsibilities.

Australia is one of the most technologically sophisticated countries in this region and is looked to as a source of advice and assistance. As well, Australia is one of the richest countries in the region and many countries see us

as a nation that can provide help, not hand-outs.

However, the Association is not doing all that it could and should. Many of the countries in our region fall into the United Nations category of less developed nations, poor in resources or in capacity to exploit technological advances. Delia Torrijos, the Regional Adviser for ASTINFO, one of UNESCO's regional information networks, and who works from the UNESCO regional office in Bangkok commented bluntly in a recent discussion at the National Library of Australia - that Australia is not doing enough within the region - the need is great and we have the resources to help.

LAA members who have been fortunate enough to visit the Pacific and South-East Asia are well aware of the paucity of resources in some of these countries, the lack of training, the lack of funding and the inadequate access to information. Many Australian libraries and librarians have done much to help libraries in our immediate area. The International Development Program (IDP) sponsored by Australian universities has, for many years, sent librarians into the area and funded worthwhile programs. The National Library has since 1981 been funding a modest program of aid to national libraries in the region.

An experienced foreign affairs officer said to me recently that the South Pacific reminds him of South-East Asia 20 years ago when the Colombo Plan was just becoming effective. The South-East Asian countries are in a much better position now in terms of training and resources and it is countries in the Pacific which are poor in resources, funding and trained personnel.

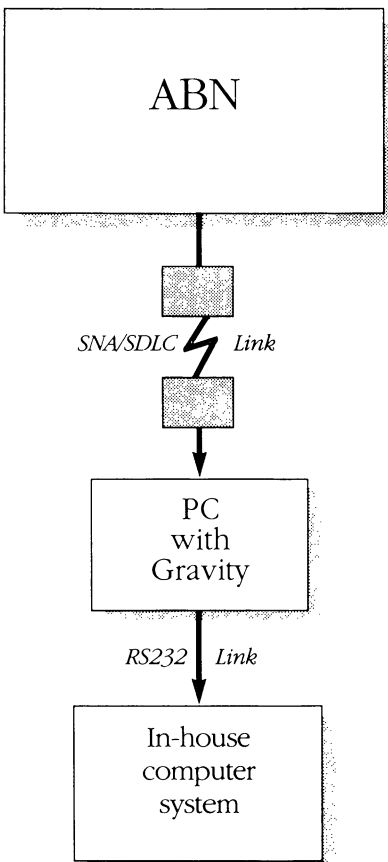
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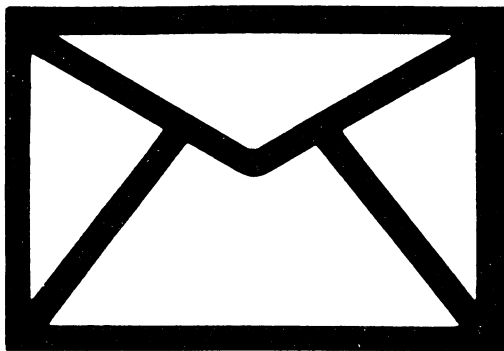
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Further to 'Friends'

Indeed as librarians we all need friends and 'Friends' groups do a memorable job in helping out in certain libraries. However, it seems to me, we are short of a very particular type of friend. Let me cite four whom we have lost.

First, Thomas Fisher, the memorable book maker; next Reverend Irving Benson, a doughty preacher and champion of the free library movement; Sir John Ferguson, a bibliographer for all seasons; and Sir William Dixon a generous benefactor. Fisher was the only non-public figure. All realised the importance of literacy and, above all, access to learning. We badly need the friendship of distinguished people, such as these, outside our profession — people of conviction who can bring our most serious and urgent issues into the public arena.

G. F. R. Cowdery

Professional identity

Katie Blake writes (*Incite* no. 10, p. 7) with passion, authority, and I believe, a touch of indignation about the 'old order' (librarian) changing, yielding place to new (information manager). Words have an uncontrollable habit of altering their meanings.

At the heart of the dilemma is the rapid and irrevocable intrusion of technologies into our professional lives. Librarians did not invent computers and we are forced to master their potential. Katie demonstrates woolly thinking when she tries to distinguish between 'facts', the librarian's raw material, and 'information', the commodity of the 'information manager'. There is little to be gained in this line of argument: people who work with both facts and information in our world do it best when they add value to both by unique training and skills.

As an educator of librarians, information managers, information professionals, information specialists, call them what you will, it is difficult to explain to teenagers and very young students what it's all about. I have recently finished writing a book for teenagers describing, hopefully enticing them to, our line of work. What required the most cogitation was delimiting the boundaries of the profession. Having reached a reasonable comprehensive description, I was amazed when the publisher (a large one) suggested that I include compilers of the Telecom Yellow Pages as part of it!

Anyone who has ever tried to see logic in the Telecom filing system will be aware of its inadequacies. La Trobe University, for instance, established 21 years ago, does not appear in the Melbourne Yellow Pages under 'universities', if at all. The reaction of the publisher quoted is typical of the confusion in the public at large over what our role in society, business and politics involves. 'Librarian' was concise and nice, but carried overtones of a negative image.

At the moment I know of no new word to neatly explain our virtues and strengths, and our desire to maintain a professional identity.

Graeme Johanson

Friends of library

At Ryde-Hunters Hill, a 'Friends' group flourished during the period 1968-75, with 10 active members. The 'Ryde-Hunters Hill Library Association' constituted of Sheila Swain, Mick Lardelli, John Birch, June Peek, Ian Savins, Gavin Cashman, John and Carol Casey, Shirley Berg and Oelwyn Mackenzie. In this period, the library service doubled its staff and raised the number of qualified personnel from, if I recall correctly, three to twelve. In swift order, after the group's formation, came the new central library, a permanent twofold increase in resources votes, the opening of the central library every Saturday and Sunday afternoons, a new branch library at West Ryde, computerisation, a year-long cultural program and a major boost to the commencement of the Children's Film Circuit.

I am sure that the 'Friends' group was the major factor underlying all these advances. Public meetings were held, with Alan Horton, Peter Coleman, Barry Scott and other speakers to support and publicise each specific library requirement. Letters were sent to local papers and councils. There was never any interference with the library's functioning.

It is significant that three of the ten members were aldermen and three were active members of political parties. The group con-

sisted also of a leading figure in the NSW P & C Association, a school librarian and the president of the local history society. I believe that a public librarian can only favour the establishment of a Friends group. Looking back I can see how fortunate Ryde-Hunters Hill Library was at the time as the coming together of such talents is no doubt uncommon.

It is proverbial in local government that 'one letter from a ratepayer is worth a hundred reports from a senior officer'. How much more effective a Friends group acting on the library's behalf.

Julian Woods

Goulburn City Librarian

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These are the areas surrounding Australia — what can we as an association do? Are we going to sit back and say that the government and IDP are doing what they can? Don't we as a professional association have the responsibility to do what we can to help fellow professionals in adjacent countries?

At present the Association has an International Relations Committee which has as a term of reference 'supporting the LAA's involvement in international activities, encouraging exchange and internship programs, and charged with development of a program of assistance to external library associations with particular emphasis on the Pacific Asian region'. We also have an LAA Policy Statement on the South-West Pacific. More significantly no funds have been set aside for overseas programs in the budget. The infrastructure is there but we do not have a program.

The Association needs to establish a small working committee to develop an appropriate policy on international relations for the LAA and to propose a suitable program. Such a program must be discussed and developed co-operatively with library associations in the region.

The LAA has relations with the American, Canadian, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Papua New Guinea library associations but there are many more associations in other countries in the region. We need to reach out and develop links with them, to determine mutually how we can help. We must develop a well-planned and integrated program of international relations rather than the ad hoc intervention of the present.

All this is of course not a one-way street — this Association would benefit by contact with overseas associations. We can learn much by the way in which other associations conduct their business and use particular activities to successfully promote their associations.

Let's make sure that the impetus of the IFLA conference and its overseas associations does not dissipate. Let's use it to build on the success of IFLA to develop closer relations with overseas associations particularly those in our region and let us develop an association program which will be effective both for those countries and for us.

Averill Edwards
Vice-President

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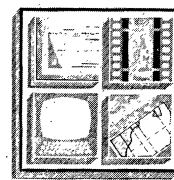
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