

Whitlam wit slams 'artless' governments

In the inaugural Kenneth Myer Lecture delivered at the National Library of Australia on Thursday, 5 April 1990, Gough Whitlam criticised both Liberal and Labor governments from the Menzies administration to the current Hawke regime, for delays in the process of creating 'collecting institutions'.

The Kenneth Myer Lecture was given by Gough Whitlam as one of the activities to launch the Friends of the National Library of Australia. Some 350 people attended including Mr and Mrs Kenneth Myer and the Chairman of the Council of the National Library of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen and Lady Stephen.

Mr Whitlam, citing the speed at which the functions and administrations of the Australian Institute of Sport and the Australian Sports Commission were merged compared to the progress of the National Museum of Australia, said that, 'Apparently the Prime Minister believes that there are more votes in sports than in arts.'

Topics included in the lecture were:

- the significant contribution to Australia made by Kenneth Myer

Mr Whitlam said, 'In a society morbidly contemplating the inherited navels of successive waves of immigrants over the last 200 years, Ken Myer is a reassuring figure. He is the eldest child of a Russian immigrant and a Melbourne matriarch. Theirs was like the marriage 110 years earlier between Napoleon and Marie Louise, whose ages they replicated. In our country where, until 30 years ago, all collecting institutions — libraries, galleries and museums — seemed overwhelmingly English in their provenance, it is appropriate to recall that English library

systems were virtually created by immigrants.'

- the hidden agenda of the Department of Finance in regard to arts funding

'On the the other hand, the affairs of the Gallery, the Library and the Museum did not feature in the 1987 elections. Subsequently there have been the Agenda for the Environment but not the Agenda for the Arts. The collecting institutions have been vulnerable to the hidden agenda of the Department of Finance. Since the unsurpassed galleries, libraries and museums of Florence were established by the Medici, who were financiers, Finance seems to assume that it can determine the operations of the Australian National Gallery, the National Library of Australia and the Museum of Australia.'

- the leadership role taken by the National Library in encouraging cooperation and coordination among other library services
- the electorate should show the Government that there are many votes in the arts.



Ken Myer (left), Margaret and Gough Whitlam at the launch of the Friends of the National Library of Australia. Photo: Barry Brown

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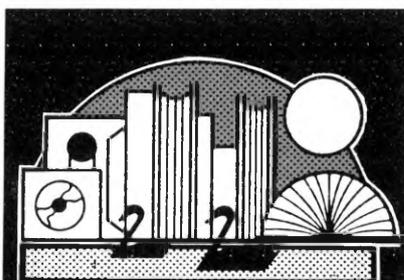
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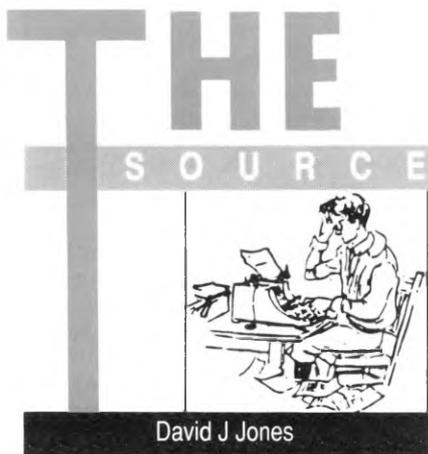
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Local studies: A practical approach

Local studies collections have come a long way over the past 10 years or so. A 'coming of age' is how Ian Jack describes it in his paper in an excellent recent publication from the NSW brigade of the ALIA Local Studies and Public Libraries Sections. The first part of *Managing local studies collections*, edited by Patricia Ward and Judy Washington, consists of four substantial papers which set the scene. Margaret Wyatt concentrates on the management aspects of local studies resources, sharing her wealth of wisdom and experience in this area.

As well as contributing a useful bibliography, Judy Washington tackles the very necessary topic of promoting public awareness of resources, stressing the need to win support, through the media, publications, presentations, workshops, 'friends', and last, but not least, 'efficient, positive service'. Two long-term local studies users also contribute: Terry Kass, a professional consulting historian, describes the value of local government records for the historian, and Ian Jack, an academic historian, provides an effective and entertaining overview.

The second and larger part of the work consists of sample forms and model policy statements based mainly on materials from NSW sources. There are forms for recording information on local historic buildings, form letters in response to enquiries, letters of indemnity from legal action, preservation record forms and many more besides. All are very logically arranged, and very useful for setting up or reorganising a local studies collection, or for comparing with your own current practice. *Managing local studies collections: Selected seminar papers, sample forms and policy statements*,

edited by Patricia Ward and Judy Washington, was published by the ALIA Local Studies and Public Libraries Sections (NSW) in 1990 as the Local Studies Section occasional papers no. 2. Printed on long-life APM alkaline-based 'Bookprint' paper, this book will be around for a long time; but don't delay getting your copy — at \$20 (\$16 to ALIA members) plus \$2 postage, it will be snapped up enthusiastically. (ISBN 0 86804 272 2)

Taming parish registers

Nick Vine Hall had a youthful passion for recording car numberplates, he confesses in a recent publication. Not such a quantum leap, I guess, to recording information about people's ancestors. Certainly grim determination and stamina are required to perform either, although genealogy is of course much more of a minefield or quagmire. Nick Vine Hall has now provided one more well-conceived path across the genealogical Grimpen Mire with publication of his *Parish registers in Australia*, the fruit of many years research. This closely-printed 206-page work lists 'all known originals, transcripts, microforms and indexes of all Australian parish registers': no modest claim, and in the event, no mean feat. Until this work was published, there had been no national survey of parish registers in this country although some pioneering work had been performed in some States. It is marvellous that someone with Vine Hall's energy and experience has made the time to produce this.

In his helpful introduction Vine Hall stresses the importance of parish registers in the pre-civil registration period, helping to fill a 'record gap' of, in the case of New South Wales, 68 years. Entries are arranged by State, and then by the name of the parish or locality. Each entry shows the period of coverage, the type of record, the form of the record, the denomination of the church and the holding institution. Names and addresses of institutions are given in an extensive notes section. This is an essential purchase for all genealogy and local history collections, and is already selling well. Vine Hall's *Tracing your family history in Australia*, by the way, has been reprinted twice since 1985, and has sold over 20 000 copies. *Parish registers in Australia* is compiled and published by Nick Vine Hall, 25 Mills Street, Middle Park, Vic 3206, and costs \$16.50 posted (\$25 overseas). (ISBN 0 9597208 3 9)



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Mr Whitlam concluded: 'At the elections the Government did not seek a mandate on the national collecting institutions. The Government has to be persuaded to act. There is no excuse to have another election before April or May 1993; the Government could not be sure that it would get a larger majority in the House of Representatives at a premature election and could be sure that it would still not get a majority in the Senate at a double dissolution election before the 30 June 1992 or at a conjoint election with the House of Representatives after that date.'

Those interested in the National Library, the National Gallery and the Museum of Australia should therefore have three unbroken years to show the Government that there are as many votes in arts and letters as in sports and trees. There are two fresh and accomplished ministers in Ros Kelly and David Simmons, who should be allowed to keep their posts at least till the next House of Representatives election. If a government shows an undiminished and unflagging commitment, it will readily find public-spirited citizens like Ken Myer, who will back the Government's commitments with their own resources and talents.'

Powerhouse of cultural history

Ruth Cracknell officially launched the Friends of the National Library of Australia, in Canberra on 7 April.

The launch took place during a 'Friends Welcome Day' at the National Library when the doors were opened to the Library's spectacular collection of manuscripts, maps, exhibitions, works of art, newsreels and books.

She said she was delighted to be asked to launch the Friends: 'We tend to think that the National Library is just a huge information resource. It is of course, but you could also describe it as an art gallery, museum, cinema and tourist attraction — a powerhouse of our cultural history. All Australians can take pride in this extraordinary institution.'



Beatrice Brickhill (left) Executive Officer, Friends of the National Library with Ruth Cracknell and Ros Kelly, Minister for Arts, Sport, Environment and Territories.

Photo: Barry Brown

