

New directions

Over a number of years, staff at the State Library of Victoria have watched with envy as other States either built spectacular new State Libraries or imaginatively extended their existing buildings. Now it is Victoria's turn.

Starting in July 1990, an 8-year \$115 million redevelopment project will see the State Library of Victoria totally occupy the magnificent central city site it currently shares with the Museum of Victoria.

'It really is the realisation of a dream which both the library staff and the Victorian public have shared for over two decades. There have been other plans and proposals in the past, but this is the first time we have had such a strong and positive commitment from the Victorian Government', said Leah Mann, Director of the State Library.

The Museum will progressively move out to two new locations. The Science and Technology section of the Museum is to go to the historic Pumping Station site in Spotswood and an even larger complex will be constructed on the south bank of the Yarra River to house the Museum's Natural History and Human Studies collections. The Science and Technology section's move is due to be completed by the end of 1991.

Recently, the State Government gave its approval for the start of the first stage of the redevelopment. Costing \$29.2 million, this first stage includes the construction of two new 6-storey 'in-fill' buildings on the Russell Street frontage, finally completing a facade that had remained unfinished for nearly 100 years. A huge services plant room and a new electrical substation are also planned.

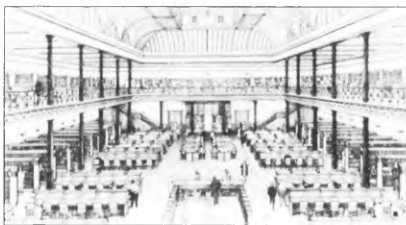
'The whole project will be carried out under the Historic Buildings Council guidelines and the plans of the new buildings, designed to blend harmoniously with the existing historic buildings, have been approved by the Council', said Leah Mann.

When completed the State Library Redevelopment Project will expand the functional space of the library from 16 500m² to 29 000m². 'This library has a wonderful history of service to the public and a superb collection of approximately 12 million items, worth an estimated \$200 million.

A collection which constantly increases. Like many of the older libraries throughout the world we are facing conservation problems brought about by past ignorance and neglect, and the inherent perishable nature of modern papers and newsprint. These problems are made worse by overcrowding. The additional space will allow us to adequately store and, more importantly to display, our wealth of treasures.'

At present only two small sections in the La Trobe Library are air-conditioned. However, with the redevelopment, the whole of the complex will be fully air-conditioned with special attention being paid to conservation requirements. Books require dry, cool conditions for storage and, after considerable consultation with the library's conservation unit, the temperature level for the air-conditioning in the complex was set at 20°C (plus or minus 2°C), with relative humidity at 50 per cent plus or minus 5 per cent. Specialised areas such as the photographic collections and the closed storage areas will have more stringent controls.

The redevelopment also allows the library to offer the public, superior new facilities and services in attractive, refurbished surroundings. By glazing over the four existing courtyards around the octagonal domed building all the external buildings can be linked to provide easy access throughout the complex. The public will still enter the library through the Swanston Street entrance and from the foyer will have unrestricted access to the bookshop, theatre, restaurant, minor exhibition areas and educational facilities which are all located on the ground floor. There will also be controlled entrances into the library proper and to a major exhibition area in Monash Hall.



McCoy Hall— an artist's impression of the new general reading room

The great Domed Reading Room remains as a public reading room, however it will probably house the La Trobe Library's Australiana collections allowing a far greater number of books to be available to the public on open access. A new general reading room will be created in the restored McCoy

Hall, currently the Museum's major exhibition space, providing seating for 367 people. The Queen's Hall, which has been described as Melbourne's most beautiful Victorian room, will be able to extend the reading and study facilities for its Art, Music and Performing Arts collection when bookshelves blocking one wing of the Hall are removed. Combined, the Domed Reading Room, the McCoy Hall and the Queen's Hall will have seating for over 600 people and an estimated 300 000 volumes on open access. Waiting times for the delivery of books not available on the public shelves will be kept to a minimum with the installation of the most up-to-date storage, retrieval and book delivery systems.

'Our State Library was founded in 1854



Swanston Street frontage



Leah Mann,
Director State
Library of Victoria

during the gold rush and in the late 19th Century was acknowledged as one of the great libraries of the world. It is now our intention to see the complete renaissance of the library combining the grace and charm of the 19th Century with a functional library for the information needs of the 21st Century.'

Gail Evans
Publicity Officer
State Library of Victoria



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