



David J Jones

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What did people really think about Norman Lindsay's *Red-heap* (W H Ifould called it 'Rubbish Heap')? How popular was *The Magnet* with Australian children? Why was *Beckett's budget* notorious? Where did people get reading matter in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Australia? There is a fair bit we know about how libraries developed, about what was written and by whom, and about the book trade—of course there is still a lot to be researched and revealed—but the literature on the consumer of print from whatever source is exceedingly slim.

### What Katy read

So Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taska's *Australian readers remember* is most welcome. As the basis of their study Lyons and Taska took 80 interviews with 61 volunteer interviewees in New South Wales, all aged 70 or over, who were skilfully led through their early lives to reveal what they were reading, how they obtained it, what they thought of it.

For the first time, even with a small sample, we can have some inkling of the role of reading, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. We read of the importance of the Bible in some households, of reading aloud as an entertainment, of reading as a pastime in remote areas, and in some instances

the reverence or sometimes insatiable craving for reading matter. Olga Masters was not the only young country person who awaited parcels with eagerness, not for their contents, but for the wrapping paper which supplemented her reading matter.

The period remembered most clearly was one which was poorly served by public libraries as we know them, and, as the Munn-Pitt Report colourfully outlined, as poorly served in most states by schools of arts and institutes.

Imperfect though the latter were, the present work suggests that there was life in some of these 'cemeteries of old and forgotten books'. Their circulation figures were not insignificant, and those of the Newcastle School of Arts, for example, continued to rise between 1890 and 1930, despite secretaries who embezzled funds, fires, discontinuance of government subsidies during the Depression and competition with ever-increasing numbers of billiard tables.

Newcastle was one of the better examples—the still-operating Sydney School of Arts was another and there were many interstate successes, including some which figure in Michael Talbot's recent *A chance to read* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1992)—but Lyons' and Taska's point is well made. Many schools of arts did fulfil a need, especially for fiction, for a

considerable period.

The term 'library' encompassed a range of services. Included were libraries in schools of arts, the private circulating libraries (some calling themselves 'public libraries', like the 2GB Public Library in the 1930s), lending collections or book exchanges attached to bookshops and other retail outlets, as well as the few public libraries proper during the period.

In the 1930 *Sands' Sydney and New South Wales Directory*, for example, there were 35 'libraries' listed in the centre of the city alone. Of these only the Public Library of New South Wales and the Sydney Municipal Library (which the authors incorrectly lump together in a 'see' reference in the index) were free to all comers. The position would not be reversed for another two decades. Meanwhile readers read on, and the light cast on their sources of reading matter is fascinating, not the least because this was the background against which the Free Library Movement was operating.

In attitudes to the books which the interviewees remembered there are some surprises too. The dominance of the English and some American 'classics' was only to be expected, but there was a leavening of local authors. It is fascinating to see, with this sample at least, that Henry Lawson could pip Shakespeare to the post as a remembered encounter, ►

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► and Paterson was remembered ahead of Longfellow, and in turn Dennis ahead of Wordsworth and Tennyson.

The interviews and their analysis, together with the fluid commentary and instances of remembered reading from published sources, make this a highly readable excursion into a vital but hitherto neglected area. It will be of interest to all librarians who wish to know more about the environment in which their profession developed in Australia. Today's librarians serving elderly readers may also find the work useful in providing insights into what their clients may have been reading in their youth—and might like to rediscover, if only they could remember.

Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa's *Australian readers remember* is highly recommended. It was published in Melbourne by Oxford University Press in 1992, and costs \$24.95. (ISBN 0 19 553304 6)

### No fixed abode

A new International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) publication provides a wealth of sound advice for librarians in all parts of the world involved, or about to be involved, in mobile library services. The first project of the IFLA Round Table on Mobile Libraries, Robert Pestell's *Mobile library guidelines* covers lucidly the practicalities of using a van, bus or semi-trailer to make library resources accessible. How do you stop books falling off shelves when you go round a corner? What safety equipment do you need? How much light do you need? Why is a 'Jacobs' engine brake desirable? How much will it all cost? How do you publicise the service? How do you staff it? This is a valuable contribution which Robert Pestell and IFLA have made to an important mode of library provision. Robert Pestell's *Mobile library guidelines* was published as IFLA Professional Reports no. 28 in 1991. Spanish and French editions are in the pipeline. Meanwhile Anglophones can obtain copies of the guidelines for \$13.00 from Robert Pestell, Public Libraries Division, 24 Macquarie Street, Teneriffe, Qld 4005. (ISBN 90 70916 33 9; ISSN 0168-1931)

### May you live in challenging times

1992 saw the publication of three thought-provoking collections of papers by Auslib Press. In the 'Library Challenges Series' contributors have been

briefed to tackle issues confronting particular sectors of the library and information industry in this decade: special, tertiary and public libraries. The trio are *Information service in changing times*, edited by Raymond Price, tackling the specials, *Australian tertiary libraries*, edited by Colin Steele, and *Access and equity*, edited by Anne Hazell, dealing with public libraries.

The topics covered are naturally diverse—from the sometimes nightmarish logistics of multicampus libraries to the value of Friends' groups—but there are many common threads, which make the series valuable reading across all library sectors. The issue of education for librarianship, for example, is treated in four papers in *Information service in changing times*, and is given thoughtful attention in Levett's paper in *Access and equity*. Levett identifies the critical importance of the performance of library managers, and shares some ideas on a new curriculum which would develop needed skills as well as attune students to the environment within which they would be working.

Collection development, library automation, management, networks, collaboration or cooperation, and of course in one way or another, money, are recurring themes in this series. The varied viewpoints and perspectives make the papers valuable reading as a sectoral overview and for the many original insights into library problems and prospects over the next few years.

*Australian tertiary libraries: issues for the 1990s*, edited by Colin Steele, costs \$34.00 plus \$4.00 postage (ISBN 1 875145 13 3). *Access and equity: challenges in public librarianship*, edited by Anne Hazell, costs \$38.00 plus \$6.00 postage (ISBN 1 875145 15 X). *Information service in changing times: challenges in special librarianship*, edited by Raymond Price, costs \$38.00 plus \$6.00 postage (ISBN 1 875145 17 6). All were published in 1992 by Auslib Press, PO Box 622, Blackwood, SA 5051.

### 'How did we manage without?' Department

Life's been a little easier for people needing a handy subject approach to Australian publications in print since Thorpe put out its *Subject guide to Australian business, commerce and law books* and its *Subject guide to Australian children's books*. The third member of this useful team covers scientific, technical and medical books identified in the

Thorpe database as being in print in October 1992, as well as out of print titles notified since 1989. It's therefore a good guide to what is, or has recently been available in these subject areas. Like its companion works, it is no mere rehash of the *Australian books in print* entries: many details have been cross-checked in *ANB* and on *ABN* to tidy up inconsistencies, fill out subtitles or simply correct mistakes which will creep into even the best kept databases. Where appropriate, intended readership and reading age is indicated. Edited by John E Simkin, *Subject guide to Australian scientific, technical and medical books* was published by Thorpe in 1993. It costs \$55.00. (ISBN 0 909532 94 X)

### Hare-Clark—a lesson Tasmania has tortoise

Demystifying the Hare-Clark system may sound a tall order. Anything less simple than first past the post baffles many (most?) voters, and it's London to a brick that the Hare-Clark system adopted in Tasmania will lose the ordinary punter before the runners get under starter's orders. Terry Newman, the Tasmanian Parliamentary Librarian, has accepted the challenge, with a comprehensive 319-page account, from its earliest to its most recent manifestations in Tasmania. Thomas Hare was an English solicitor who wrote on proportional representation. Andrew Inglis Clark was the Tasmanian Attorney-General who first introduced proportional representation into his State's law. That's the easy bit to remember.

Newman describes in detail the mechanics and subtleties—including anti-donkey vote measures—of the electoral system which the *Age* has described as the best in Australia. Liberal use is made of illustrations, tables and diagrams—including the image of wine cascading into a tower of glasses to illustrate the concept of quota filling in a vaguely comprehensible manner.

Terry Newman's *Hare-Clark in Tasmania: representation of all opinions* was published by the Joint Library Committee of the Parliament of Tasmania in 1992 and costs \$39.95. (ISBN 0 7246 3876 8)

### Items for review in The Source should be sent to:

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