Bringing the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century...

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The full content — text and images — of journals, newspapers, novels and short stories published in Australia from the period 1840–45 will be digitised and made accessible through the Internet by a collaborative project between the University of Sydney Library, the State Library of New South Wales, the National Library of Australia and Monash University Library.

The Australian Cooperative Digitisation Project, 1840–45, initiated by the University of Sydney Library, will provide the digital conversion of significant nineteenth century Australian material to enhance literary and historical research. The purpose of this collaborative project is to ensure both increased access to, and preservation of, this material through an integrated process of preservation microfilming, digital scanning, network access, and selected full-text enhancement.

The project will provide access to the published record of life and activity of the period 1840–45, regarded as seminal in the development of a colonial culture and the emerging sense of an Australian identity in the colonies.

This period, following the end of convict transportation to NSW and preceding the influx of the gold-rush migrations, heralded the introduction of representative government in 1842 and witnessed the early years of mass free migration to the Australian colonies. It was a period marked by an upsurge in local publication in both the older and newer centres of settlement to meet the demands of the increased population and the commercial opportunities emerging in the colonies.

Images of all material will be accessible via the Internet through the National Library of Australia in the later half of 1996, for browsing and down-loading if required. The fiction of the period will be further converted at Monash University Library to be fully-searchable in ASCII form as well as accessible as images. This will mean that individual words and phrases can be quickly located in the texts. Technical and user specifications are being developed and the production work of filming and digital conversion will be contracted to commercial vendors. Other products of the project to be investigated include CD-ROM on demand and print reproduction.

The project will address many of the major technical and management issues of large-scale digital conversion, and develop new partnerships in collaboration between major institutional libraries, librarians, researchers and industry. The project will assist in the development of technical specifications and skills based on international best practice, and will present a new level of resource-sharing between libraries.

The coordinator of the project is Ross Coleman (University of Sydney), the chair of the project is Professor Elizabeth Webby (University of Sydney), and other librarians on the steering committee of this project are Alan Ventress (State Library of New South Wales), Colin Webb (National Library of Australia), and Robert Stafford (Monash University Library). ■