



Virginia Walsh

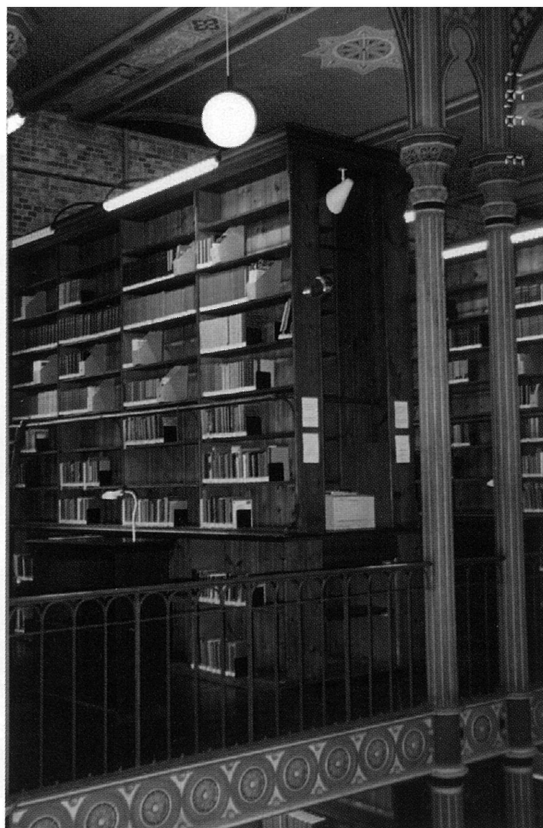
Executive director

IFLA '97 was held in the week 31 August to 5 September in Copenhagen and attracted a record attendance of nearly 3000 participants from over 140 countries. Nearly forty Australians participated.

While travelling home and reflecting on the conference highlights with a view to writing this brief account for *inCite* readers I concluded that many of us who had the opportunity to participate in the meetings, workshops, lectures, council sessions and social events would emphasise different aspects of the conference. The opportunity for me to meet with colleagues from library associations around the world is always one of the chief attractions. This year the Executive Board met with the Chief Executives and Presidents of Association members and there was discussion about some of the developments in IFLA's own administration — including the production of a much more user-friendly *IFLA journal*.

Inevitably comparisons will be made with previous IFLA events and it is difficult to match the splendid occasion when we dined at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing last year and those wonderful receptions held in Turkish palaces by the Bosphorous in 1995. Copenhagen is itself a beautiful city built around harbours and canals choked with water craft of all shapes and sizes reflecting the ancient seafaring legacy of the Danes as well as the modern realities of maritime trade and commerce. With a population of around 1.5 million, Copenhagen offers little in the way of those large venues found in the previous host cities. Receptions and cultural events were held in libraries and civic centres and offered participants the chance to glimpse some local colour. Crowds surging through these sites diminished opportunities for meeting new and old acquaintances but were nonetheless convivial.

What was striking about Denmark and the surrounding Scandinavian countries was the strong commitment to their libraries and particularly the commitment to free access to information in the public libraries. This theme was echoed in the many conference papers given by Scandinavians and in the ceremonial addresses made by local and national Danish politicians. Indeed, publicity material from Sweden was headlined 'Sweden — open minds — open libraries'. It was a theme that evolved into a council resolution unanimously passed on the final day which specifically focussed on cases of censorship in French public libraries but which emphasised the global commitment to freedom of access to informa-



The Royal Library in Copenhagen. The Royal Library is the National Library of Denmark, the University Library for the University of Copenhagen within the humanities, theology, social sciences and law, the Danish Museum of Books and Printing, and the National Museum of Photography.

tion and enshrined in the UNESCO public library manifesto.

One of the major outcomes of the conference was the adoption by Council of a report prepared by the committee on access to information and freedom of expression (CAIFE) and the subsequent announcement that Denmark is to fund the establishment of a secretariat for a trial period of two years to support the ongoing work of this committee. There were also Council resolutions supporting the establishment of a committee on copyright and other legal matters. I attended a pot-pourri of sessions covering marketing and management of libraries, the management of library associations, academic publishing, on-line communications and preservation of library resources. This year I gave a paper on our advocacy program, *Lobby for Libraries*, which generated a great deal of discussion and new ideas. IFLA sections held meetings dealing with areas of specific interest and nearly forty Australian librarians participated in those sessions. We hope to bring you news of these sessions at a later date.

Of particular interest was IFLA's initiative in sponsoring the attendance of the newly announced South African Woman of the Year, Ester Sibanyoni, who provided a fascinating account of her pioneering efforts in establishing libraries in Pretoria for those who had hitherto been denied access to information resources. She had not been into a library until she was twenty-seven years old and her recognition of the value of libraries instilled in her a drive and commitment which clearly earned her the honour of this prestigious award. Her

Warren Horton, director-general of the National Library of Australia, with Ross Shimmon of the Library Association (UK) during the conference



address was particularly relevant to the conference theme of libraries and information for human development.

This was an election year for IFLA and six candidates were elected to the executive board. Robert Wedgeworth reached the end of his six years as president and Frenchwoman Christine Deschamps was elected as his replacement. Bob has been a popular leader of the international library community and the delegates honoured him in the final session with a tribute appropriate to his magnificent achievements — which was skilfully conceived and organised by Secretary General Leo Voogt.

Bob, too, paid tribute in an imaginative fashion to those who has worked with him during his term of office. Singled out for Bob's praise was Warren Horton, Director General of the National Library of Australia and member of the Executive Board since 1991. Warren, who also served as IFLA treasurer since 1993, was commended for his work with the Council of Directors of

National Libraries and preservation and was described by Bob as 'a true internationalist' and noted for his 'diplomacy and enthusiasm'. Warren has certainly made his mark in the global library community and fittingly received a standing ovation (as well as a very large hand-written citation, the IFLA medal and an umbrella with a plastic tulip as its handle). We expect Warren to continue to stride the world stage for some time to come and I understand the

rather unusual umbrella is a special inducement for his involvement in next year's conference in Amsterdam. We hope too that many more Australian librarians will find a way to participate in IFLA events because of the special rewards and insights that abound.

The 64th IFLA conference will be held in Amsterdam from 16 to 21 August 1998 and the 65th will be held in Bangkok from 20 to 28 August 1999. ■



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