

Dr Allan Horton FLAA 1928–2003

'Onward Christian soldier...'

In a valedictory on Allan's retirement as university librarian, University of New South Wales, [AARL, December 1988], I expressed the hope that he — free at last of the pressures of his working life — would be able to do more writing, confident as I was that he would still have a lot to say. Sadly, this workload had taken much heavier toll than we realised and his last years were shadowed by debilitating illness.

Those of his contemporaries still extant, engrossed for so many years as we were with either supporting Allan in his worthy endeavours or in undermining his machinations, will cherish their own memories of him and be thankful for his being there. Younger colleagues may not be fully aware of his contributions to librarianship as it now is and to Australian society.

Look no further for a role model.

Allan the academic librarian was one of the outcomes of the Robert Gordon Menzies revamp of the Australian university system, via the Murray Committee, in the 1950s. More and bigger universities needed more and bigger university libraries, all of which needed staff. Many of these, perforce, came from outside the Australian university system, from state libraries, the National Library, and, even, the public library system, some from overseas universities.

Compared with Allan, most of us (his professional colleagues) had silver spoon entrée to our professional careers.

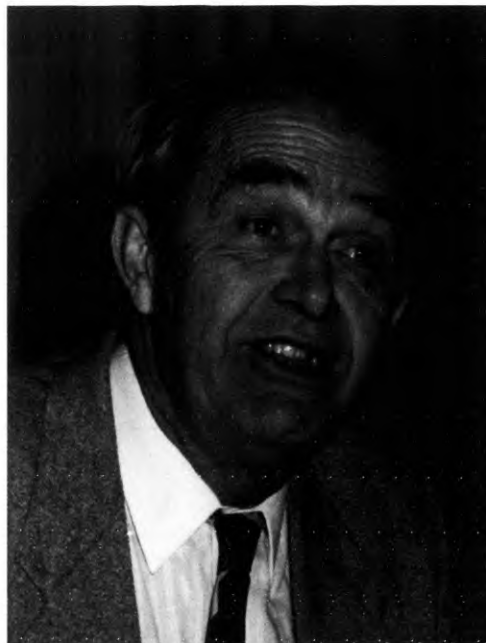
Much of Allan's breadth of vision and many of his strengths can be attributed to lessons learnt and people learnt from, especially, in his arduous novitiate, John Metcalfe. From school to the Public Library of New South Wales (PLNSW) in 1944, with his still-to-be-completed high school studies, university studies, and librarianship qualifications.

His capacity for work and his whole-hearted dedication to achievement clearly impressed the hierarchy at PLNSW and Allan was deservedly marked as a future leader of his profession. After some years as a library clerk within the walls of the Public Library, Allan was let loose on the outside world to garner the experience that so enriched his subsequent contributions to librarianship and society. A brief stint

was enjoyed in the Supreme Court Library, then three years establishing the Criminal Investigations Branch Library for the NSW Police Department. Allan then did time in Film Council and Adult Education, and then, in his first major contribution, set the foundations for the growth and development of the State Archives Office. His archives expertise has been recognised by his long membership of the Archives Authority of New South Wales. Finally, to polish and harden the product, Allan spent three months prior to joining Metcalfe at the University of New South Wales at the NSW Public Service Board Library.

As associate university librarian at the University of New South Wales, from April 1960 (at a time when Metcalfe was establishing its School of Librarianship) and from 1965 as university librarian, Allan was largely responsible for the establishment and growth of what is now a magnificent multi-disciplinary university library. While developing the collections inherited from the Sydney Technical College to meet the needs of what was predominantly a science and technology institution was difficult enough, the Library's development during Allan's tenure — in quantity and quality of staff, in collections, in services, in style, to its present eminence — is a much more remarkable achievement. Typically, Allan, ever the politician, thoroughly enjoyed his contacts with students and welcomed his identification as 'Big Al.'

For all that, Allan was best known in the broad library community for his widespread extra-mural activities. He was always an active and caring member of LAA-ALIA and achieved much in every role possible from student to examiner to universal pundit. Hyperactive at all times on Association matters, he served at exciting times as general secretary, treasurer, and general councillor. Allan in the late-1970s provided the decisive management that saved the Association from financial ruin and, through the Association's cut from steadily-escalating interlibrary loan charges ensured its survival. Allan's huge contribution to the Association was recognised by the award of the Fellowship in 1969 and the



Allan Horton, at the 50th anniversary of the LAA

HCL Anderson Award in 1979.

Allan was just as dominant on the Australian Advisory Council for Bibliographical Services [AACOBS], which, in its heyday consisted of the national librarian, the state librarians, the university librarians, CSIRO librarian, representatives of the other library sectors, and sundry state bureaucrats — a gathering of institutional heavies as compared to the disinterested professionalism of the LAA. Allan was, almost always, a member of AACOBS standing committees and its chairman for two years, and chairman, almost in perpetuity, of the Working Party on Information Resources.

Allan was heavily involved in the creation and development of the Office of Library Co-operation in NSW, and the Australian Information Management Association (AIMA).

Typically, on behalf of his UNSW community and us all, Allan took up the cudgels to ensure sensible photocopying provisions in libraries, and was somewhat bloodied in that encounter. His worth was quickly recognised by continuing membership, from 1982, of the Australian Copyright Tribunal to which he steadfastly presented the views of the Australian library community.

Allan was always available to assist any library sector in need of his talents. Inevitably, public libraries were dear to

his heart and he made a dedicated chairman of the Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries which reported to the Commonwealth Parliament in 1976. Unfortunately, the quality of this Committee was not matched by the quality of the Government that appointed it and a great opportunity was squandered. He did much for school libraries in NSW, both in his librarian persona and from his participation as a citizen in Parents and Citizens Association affairs. One of his lay activities was his heavy involvement, spurred by what was happening to government schools in NSW, in Defence of Government Schools [DOGS], to which he hoped to devote more time to in his retirement.

On assuming responsibility, from the end of 1981, for Australian aid programs to South-east Asia university libraries as International Development Program (IDP) Library Consultant, Allan decided that single-handed he could not achieve the library progress that he saw as essential. With expedition he involved interested colleagues in the activity and established the widespread institutional support system that achieved so much for the under-funded tertiary libraries of the region. Allan retained the most difficult country, Indonesia, as his own special concern. Big Al will be well-remembered throughout Indonesia.

Those who worked for Allan and those who worked with him owe him considerable loyalty and had great affection for him. He was a man of strong Christian faith who was indeed a good Christian soldier. For all his high seriousness of purpose he was usually a joy to be with. He could be trying in meetings with his mastery of the frequent interjection which did tend to upset slower thinkers and speakers. How the high councils of Heaven will cope with the rising tide of 'With all due respect...', 'With the utmost respect...' et al, I do not know.

Allan has made a magnificent contribution to librarianship and libraries in Australia. He had outstanding colleagues to work with, such as Harrison Bryan in the university library sector and AACOBs and Margaret Trask in just about everything, and the staff he developed at UNSW. He deserved the best as he sought much and achieved much for his fellow man.

Through all the years of struggle and effort and achievement, Allan was sustained and enriched by Elma, his devoted wife, and his children and grandchildren. He was very proud of them all. We are heavily in their debt. Our thoughts are with them.

Edward Flowers

The University of New South Wales memorial service to celebrate the life of Allan Horton will be held at 4:30pm on 23 April in the Tyree Room, Scientia Building, University of New South Wales. For more information or to RSVP contact Pat Bush, ph 02 9385 2615, or p.bush@unsw.edu.au

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