

A 'behind the scenes' look at some Melbourne libraries

Techs on Tour: Saturday 24th June 2006

This popular annual event has been organised by the Victorian ALIA Library Technicians for the past nine years. I was a first time 'tech on tour', and on a wintery morning in Melbourne found the warmth and fine food aromas of Zalety's Café as welcoming as the smiles from fellow attendees! Registration went smoothly, with color-coded name-tags issued to help sort us into groups for various afternoon library tours.

After a short stroll to the State Library of Victoria, Gail Schmidt gave us an overview of 'slv21' strategies, including storage facilities at Ballarat. We were taken on a general tour of the library by Sandra Axford, which included the stacks area downstairs where we spied the locked roller door hiding the magic collection. Books awaiting preservation, binding or transport to offsite storage are shrink-wrapped and labelled to keep them from deteriorating further.

We moved on to the Genealogy Centre where Anne Burrows gave us a detailed view of the materials ('Genieguides' among them) and databases available to the general public. *Access to Ancestry* Library Edition is provided for clients searching at the Genealogy Centre (not available for remote access).

Des Cowley provided fascinating examples of rare and valuable books. Renewed interest in visiting second-hand book sales at the local church!

The 'Mirror of the World: books and ideas' exhibition is fascinating. This is a permanent, free exhibition and well worth seeing. Our visit was timed well as the pages of some of the display items were due to be turned.

Mike Shuttleworth, Centre for Youth Literature, gave an insightful view of teen and young adult literature, with plenty of examples of books for young people that they would find hard to put down. Check out <http://www.insideadog.com.au>.

Lunch back at Zalety's was delicious, very well organised and the hot chocolate is highly recommended as it comes with Flake and hard rock candy!

The afternoon visit to the RACV Club library was an unexpectedly fabulous highlight; the amenities of the club are impressive. We were welcomed by Lisa Sukkel with afternoon tea and a very

interesting talk that covered how the library was set up, where items are sourced, the challenges of setting opening hours, shelving and space constraints, and meeting member expectations. The library is non-lending, in effect a reading room for club members. It is traditionally appointed with high timber shelving, individual chairs, desks and reading lights. The collection consists primarily of materials on travel, cars and motoring, sport, cooking and gardening. They have a small collection of rare and old books too.

Staff organise tours and special interest sessions for members to attend. Recent examples include an information session on travel to the Greek Islands, author visit on making a seachange in retirement, 'visiting the ancestors' at the public record office, and a chance to discover great gardens of the world. For a relatively small library holding less than 10 000 items, they produce a large range of information pamphlets and reader guides. The library is geared to provide education, leisure activities, and enable the pursuit of areas of interest to members. This is done in a very traditional setting, with a CyberLibrary available at the rear of the main library.

There were many murmurs of interest in working here – or becoming members of the RACV Club!

Overall, the tour provided a variety of opportunities to learn about different areas of work and experience of library technicians, and was a thoroughly enjoyable and beneficial experience. 'Thank you' to all the people who gave their time and made it possible.

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