

The Archives library, which is open to the public, had been renovated to reflect the original features of the technical college library and contained Art Nouveau inspired furniture and an impressive spiral staircase. It came as no surprise to find out that their most heavy users were family historians. As Quebec celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2008, there had been a resurgence of interest in personal and local histories.

The other part of the tour was to the Grande Bibliothèque which was experiencing record-breaking visitation. It has the functions of a national library, a large metropolitan public library, and a developed virtual cultural space (<http://www.banq.qc.ca>). And it was very busy. Arrive by bus, car, or via its own stop on the Metro and enter from one of three glass elevators. Informal seating and study desks stretch along the outside corridors, banks of PCs are available for the virtual collections, and a rather strange tiered area provides powered spaces for visitors to use their own laptops. The important collection of state significance has its own secure space. The general reference collection is housed behind a wooden slatted wall which looks beautiful but rather intimidating.



Bibliothèque nationale de France

Left to my own devices, I did frequently step into a “librairie” after forgetting that it was a bookshop. By trip number two, I had that right!

In Paris, on foot, on holiday, but still ready to check out a couple of bibliothèques, but first a side excursion to the Bibliothèque Municipale de Sartene, Corsica. It is in what looks like a very ordinary, modern residential block and filled with a recognisably public library collection. Full marks go to the librarian on duty for her friendliness. We exchanged library merchandise and I particularly liked the slogan on the bookmark: “On trouve toujours un livre à croquer” (Google translates this as “you can always find a book to munch”).

The Bibliothèque nationale de France site Francois-Mitterand is located quite a long stroll from the tourist areas along the Seine and in an unattractive part of Paris. The first challenge was finding the entrance. The next was the security check going in. The third was negotiating the rooms thematically arranged around a corridor which overlooked a forest in the centre of the building. This was another foreign space as I was used to large open areas in our national libraries. I had the impression that there was some serious study being done in those rooms. The foyer was less intimidating and more familiar as it had a directory, online catalogues (more

keyboard and language challenges there!), and a crowded lounge with newspapers and current issue periodicals. I pretended that I knew what I was doing but I suspect that the act was unconvincing to a largely disinterested public.

My final sortie was into a public library, with another uninspiring entrance, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse. I found this inadvertently after a late lunch and thought I might check my email. This place was almost as packed as McDonald’s and felt much more like home. Like Quebec, the collection appears to have standardised processing and the fiction is arranged by genre. After a quick browse through the well-stocked discothèque (music on CD, no dancing) and a bit of help from a patron with the keyboard layout, I left following a mother and a couple of excited children chattering about their reading choices.

Despite my poor language skills, I could still recognise libraries and make some use of them. However, my experience did emphasise how disconcerting our libraries can be to visitors and new members whose English skills are basic. I certainly have a heightened appreciation of library staff who constantly deal with users from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It also made me think about looking at your own library as a visitor. Can you find the entrance and what do you see when you arrive inside?

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Serendipitous stories

I have been fortunate to have travelled overseas twice in the past two years and on each occasion I made time to visit libraries and colleagues. Travelling opened my eyes to many fascinating places, but I benefitted most when I conversed and compared our Australian experiences with colleagues.

After presenting at a conference in York (UK) I met a former Melbourne colleague who was keen to talk about life in Australia. This was mutually beneficial as she was able to give me local travel advice. I visited the public and Minster libraries and talked to the reference librarians. Then I travelled to the university and met a colleague from Brisbane who had been seconded to York. We talked as we toured through the campus and library.



York Minster Library

In Oxford I met the representative who handles Australian accounts. She toured me through Oxford University Press then to the library and museum. By chance, the archivist was there and he guided us through the exhibits. He spoke with such reverence I felt them come alive. There were wooden cradles with original letter blocks. The archivist demonstrated techniques using various tools which, in themselves, were works of art.

Some of the original etched plates for the OUP annual calendars were there as well as one made as a special gift for Her Most

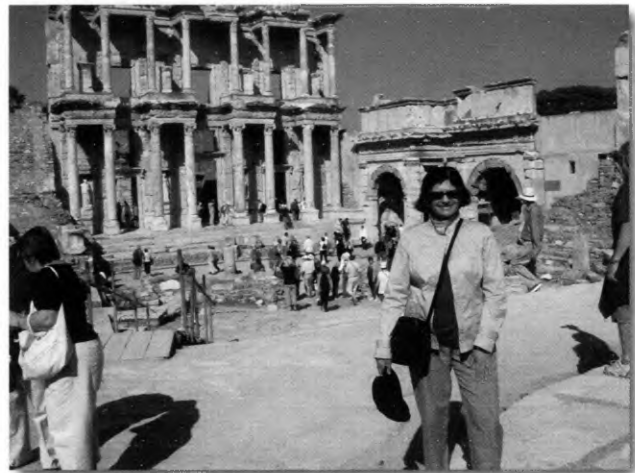
INTERNATIONAL LIBRARIANSHIP

Gracious Queen. I have read the story of the William C. Miner (a surgeon in an asylum in the USA who was one of the main editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*) – and here I was beside a box of his original OED slips.

C.S. Lewis personally oversaw productions of early editions of his *Alice in Wonderland*. This was unusual for an author but he insisted on being involved. We saw the original printing blocks for his mouse script. This would have been extremely difficult and painstaking to produce. There are many other versions in different editions but this one has the best symmetry.

In London I visited the British Library (special exhibition of illuminated manuscripts), British Medical Association Library, and House. A doctor showed me through the editorial areas for the BMJ and Clinical Evidence. An unexpected highlight was the medicinal garden. I am a great fan of the author Charles Dickens and he used to live next door and strolled through this garden. This is not visible from the road, nor is it open to the public – so this was another special unexpected treat.

I met several colleagues in Bangalore (India) to encourage them to attend ICML in Brisbane. I toured the library of the vast National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences and saw many familiar books and journals. The librarian also manages the IT department, electronic resources, and library university courses. This is the national centre for rehabilitation medicine so I was especially interested to engage in discussion. I also met the Indian agent for many of our suppliers. He showed great foresight to establish his business 20 years earlier when IT was only just developing.



Library of Celsus, Ephesus

Apart from the modern National Library in, the other libraries I visited were all in ruins but fascinating all the same. The Library of Celsus in ancient Ephesus (Turkey) held 12 000 scrolls in galleries designed to prevent damage from damp (a precaution that did not stop the Goths burning them all when they sacked the area in 242 AD). Celsus Polemaenus is entombed there.

The acropolis once housed Pergamon's famous library which, at its peak of 200 000 books, rivaled Alexandria. The Egyptian kings, alarmed at the growth of the library which they saw as a threat to their own, banned the export of papyrus – of which they were the sole producers – thereby attempting to stem the library's expansion.

Eumenes II offered a reward to anyone who could come up with a replacement and writing on parchment was revived. This led to the invention of the codex (paged book) since you could not roll up parchment like papyrus. The library was ransacked by Mark Antony who gave the best items to Cleopatra as a gift, but enough remained for the library to be used until 4th Century AD.

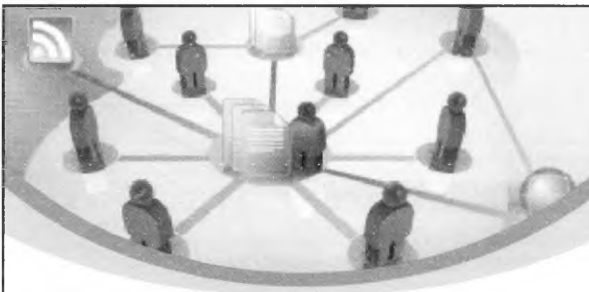
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Libraries in the Digital Age (LIDA)

May 25–30, 2009. Dubrovnik and Zadar, Croatia

The annual conference, now in its tenth year, provides a good mix of papers presented in a beautiful environment. It is co-hosted by the University of Zadar and Rutgers University, New Jersey. This approach enables a wide range of speakers and topics, including big names from the US – this year the invited speakers were Marcia Bates and Michael Buckland, together with Peter Ingwersen from Denmark. The conference attracts around 200 participants and runs for a week, starting and ending with workshops covering a range of topics including working with Dublin core tools and an introduction to the Digital Library Reference Model. The first two days were held in Dubrovnik, a jewel of a city and, this year, extremely warm. The organisers then moved everyone to the University itself in Zadar – another Croatian town set on the water's edge. Again, a beautiful setting with the university in a prime location and chandeliers in the lecture theatres!

Presentations were wide ranging and international, including Marcia Bates thought-provoking paper entitled "On heritage




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