

# EEI... ENERGISE, ENTHUSE, INSPIRE

EEI gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Lesa Maclean at [maclea.lesa@gmail.com](mailto:maclea.lesa@gmail.com)

## MY DOCTOR DROVE A YELLOW FORD

*When Anne Reddacliff began work in the Family History team at the State Library of New South Wales, the grand Mitchell library felt all but impenetrable to her. Then a chance conversation unlocked the collection's secrets and now this library is one of Anne's personal treasures.*

When I started work in the Family History team at the State Library of NSW my Team Leader told me everyone has their own Mitchell. By this she meant everyone has their own appreciation of the Mitchell Library, home to the State Library's legal deposit collection and original materials.

The Mitchell Library's original materials collection ranges from the First Fleet journals to photographs of Sydney shopping arcades, from the Holroyd Oral History Project recording the memories of Holroyd residents in Sydney's west to rare items such as Macquarie Collector's Chest, recently rediscovered and now an important part of our collection.

Being a new librarian who graduated from high school in 1999, I found the Mitchell Library at first confusing, often esoteric and old-school to the point of anachronistic. I grew up using computer screens, not card catalogues. I couldn't load microfilm. I dared not spell the word 'realia', let alone decode its meaning. It took me over an hour just to locate an item in the Mitchell Library stacks. I felt like I was sinking in a sea of microfilm reels and card catalogues, weighed down by the complexity of the Mitchell Library's finding aids.

The State Library's eRecords project is in part a response to this complexity, driven by the desire to open the Mitchell Library's collections to the world. This project began in 2008 and by June 2013 will provide full electronic access to the library's card catalogues. The eRecords project began in my first year at the State Library; back then I didn't think I would ever find my Mitchell.

Because of its historic value, the original materials collection is perhaps the Mitchell Library's most prominent collection. But the legal deposit collection was a mystery to me until I met my doctor with her lacklustre family history. She told me of her quest to uncover "something interesting" in her family history. (Admitting you work in family history often elicits requests for research help).

I told my doctor I would investigate, and one afternoon I found myself in the fading winter light of the Mitchell Library looking for call number Q610.7/S. This is the call number for the Faculty of Medicine's Senior Year Book, published by the Sydney University Medical Society.

Under legal deposit legislation, each state library receives a copy of all printed items published in the state. In New South Wales these items come to the Mitchell Library so that we may preserve a record of life in this state. Legal deposit publications include university year books, school magazines and local histories. They are magnificent, often serendipitous, treasures cherished by librarians and family historians alike.

Flicking through the pages of student photographs I soon found my doctor's student profile in the *Senior Year Book* for 1983. It gave me her maiden name, which I needed to begin the family history search. It also gave me a reason to value the Mitchell Library as more than just a source of perplexity and confusion. When that bound volume opened on my lap, my doctor's *Senior Year Book* became the Mitchell Library discovery that was unique to me.

In 1983, my doctor looked like Jennifer Grey from *Dirty Dancing*. She travelled to India, drove a yellow Ford and is quoted as saying "I didn't go to a private school". Her name has changed since then but she still has the same broad smile she had in that Senior Year Book photograph.

I call that year book a treasure because it is a snapshot of the past alive in the present. It made me think the Mitchell Library's legal deposit collection is like formaldehyde. It will preserve my doctor's profile as she was in 1983, a

medical student with a broad smile driving a yellow Ford to Sydney University. Her year book is now my Mitchell.

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*Anne Reddacliff has been a librarian for three years. She began her career at the State Library of NSW. Working in Family History she spends a lot of time researching other people's family history and absolutely no time researching her own, being busy volunteering with the Black Dog Institute and St Vincent de Paul's Compeer program.*



*Anne Reddacliff has fallen under the spell of the Mitchell Library*