

the last word

THE WAY WE WERE

Gordon Bower has been an active member of ALIA for many years. He's now taking a look back and updating our history in honour of our 75th anniversary in 2012.

When I started work as an unqualified junior library assistant (Aka the lowest rank available) I never dreamed that almost fifty years on I would be writing for *INCITE*. Between then and now I have been lucky enough to have worked in or around libraries of one sort or another here in Australia and in England. It included an exhilarating but too short a term as Executive Director of the then Library Association of Australia (LAA) and ten wonderful years as Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) for the whole period of its existence. The LAA has been an important part of my life, particularly in the 70s, when I was heavily involved in the NSW Branch and the Public Libraries Section.

So against this background I was pleased to respond to a suggestion from Sue Hutley to 'volunteer' for some work with ALIA. The Association will in 2012 be celebrating 75 years since the establishment of its predecessor in the form of the Australian Institute of Librarians. There will be a range of activities to mark this occasion but it was thought that one activity should be an overview of ALIA's history.

There is already the major work by Jean Whyte and David Jones, which covers in extraordinary and fascinating detail the life of the Australian Institute of Librarians 1937 – 1949. So it was decided that some coverage of the following years, from 1950 to 2000 should be written. It is this work that is now occupying a reasonable chunk of my life in retirement and what an interesting exercise it is turning out to be.

This period roughly parallels my life in libraries so it has been a wonderful exercise in looking into the records, writings and photographs from this time. It has stirred some memories (some accurately remembered and some, shall we say, rather less than perfectly remembered!)

It was agreed at the outset that the new work would not try to emulate Jean's and David's work in terms of the level of detail and extensive references. Rather, it was decided that we try to take something of a helicopter view of the Association and seek out some of the major highlights of those years. One approach will be the preparation of an annotated timeline. This will, for example, take into account such key issues as the extensive work of the Board of Education, the lengthy and often acrimonious debate about the physical location of the Association and the eventual move to Canberra, as well as many other topics. This work is proceeding well and it is expected that it forms part of next year's celebrations.

There is a great opportunity for you to participate in this ongoing work. If you have a memory of some activity which particularly interested you, why not tell us about it? Perhaps your professional life was heavily influenced by 'one of the greats' in the teaching or mentoring you enjoyed. Just email me at the address below and give me a brief note, preferably with the time of the activity and a few words about why you think it is important.

In the meantime, I am enjoying reliving some of my life and remembering 'the way we were'.

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