

A LABOUR OF LOVE



Dr Alex Byrne, *FALIA, State Librarian and Chief Executive of the State Library of NSW*, is the recipient of ALIA's 2015 HCL Anderson Award. The award acknowledges Dr Byrne's outstanding contribution to the library and information profession as a university librarian, state librarian and in his former role as President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and IFLA Fellow. INCITE chatted with him about his passion for libraries.

WHAT DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD DO AS A CAREER WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD?

Like most children, I tried a lot of careers on for size, but the one that most appealed was to be an archaeologist, combining interests in science, history, geography and art. When I went to university I decided that I should study science because I felt that I could pursue my interests in the humanities and art independently.

WHAT ROLES DID YOU HAVE BEFORE TRAINING FOR A CAREER AS A LIBRARIAN?

I qualified as an electrical engineer and worked briefly as a trainee engineer and travelled around Australia, worked in a factory, drove taxis and so on until lured into librarianship.

WHO OR WHAT HAS INFLUENCED YOU MOST IN YOUR LIS CAREER?

Librarianship has been a wonderful career that has taken me around Australia and to many countries across every continent (with a slight cheat about Antarctica, which I visited as a tourist). I have had the sense of doing something very

worthwhile, something which changes peoples' lives, whether directly through a local public or educational library or on a broad scale through the work of IFLA. I have met many wonderful colleagues who are so committed to our important work. If I had to choose one influence, it would have to be the realisation twenty-odd years ago that we needed to engage more wholeheartedly as a profession with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and that to do so would challenge us to reconsider many of our professional predispositions and priorities. We have made considerable progress in that area but have a long way to go, as does our nation.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACED WHEN YOU FIRST TOOK UP YOUR POSITION AT THE STATE LIBRARY?

The State Library of NSW is Australia's oldest library with an unparalleled collection on Australia and the Pacific; its monetary valuation at \$3.15 billion reflects its inestimable cultural value. It is fortunate to have extraordinarily passionate and expert staff. Like all old institutions it needed, however, to renew and cast off its inhibitions and become more nimble and creative, while at the same time deal with the financial pressures that are the lot of the Australian public sector.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT IN YOUR ROLE SO FAR?

That is really for others to judge but I like to think that I, and my colleagues, have been able to foster a culture that is more open, enterprising and creative, both in our traditional roles and in today's digital spaces, and highly focused on evidence and the interests of the communities we serve. Our

Digital Excellence Program, vibrant and varied exhibitions, engagement with public libraries and regional areas, extensive schools activities, research and innovation, collaboration with other GLAMs, especially via National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), and many other initiatives show that we are well on our way.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT YOUR ROLE THAT DRIVES YOU TO GET OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING AND GET TO WORK?

Doing something inherently worthwhile for the people across New South Wales, Australia and beyond and working with such talented colleagues. We work closely with the wonderful public library network and with many other partners in academe, business and government – lots of smart people doing smart things to benefit everyone.

HOW IS THE RATE OF CHANGING TECHNOLOGY AFFECTING YOUR LIBRARY? HOW ARE YOU MANAGING THESE CHANGES?

Today's world is digital, mobile and engaged, and the State Library of NSW is very much part of that world. We have taken our traditional collections into the digital world, transformed them and are gathering digital heritage while continuing to value, preserve and explore the heritage of yesteryear. But we are also conscious that the digital divide still exists and are working to ensure that our services and those of public libraries are inclusive, bridging the barriers of technology and distance, culture and language, education and interest.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR YOUR LIBRARY IN 2020?

The State Library of NSW is a memory institution par excellence and one of the world's leading libraries. It is our job to collect the memory of the past, present and future to enable Australians to interrogate our past, seek to understand our present and imagine our future. Collecting is in our DNA but is not sufficient; we must also make available and connect with people, and we must work with the diverse communities of our state and nation. Collect, connect and community are at the core of our shared vision.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO BE A MEMBER OF ALIA AND BE THE RECIPIENT OF THE HCL ANDERSON AWARD?

Henry Charles Lennox Anderson was, of course, a predecessor of mine as the principal librarian of the then Public Library of NSW from 1893 to 1906. He was responsible for bringing the bequest of David Scott Mitchell and other significant acquisitions to the library, thereby setting it up for its current pre-eminence. He became internationally known for developing 101 rules of cataloguing with the use of subject headings and contributed significantly to the professionalisation of librarianship in Australia. It is thus a great honour to be recognised with an award in his name and an even greater honour to be in the company of the distinguished colleagues who have received the HCL Anderson previously. It caps a career through which membership of ALIA has flowed as a silver stream of collegiality, professional commitment and shared purpose. 🌟

ALIA RESEARCH GRANT



A research project in digital and traditional preservation management in Australian national and state libraries has won the 2015 ALIA Research Grant Award. This award is based on recommendations from the ALIA Research Advisory Committee, endorsed by the ALIA Board.

ALIA has awarded the \$5,000 grant to Heather Brown, AALIA, Assistant Director, Paper and Books at Artlab Australia. Heather also manages the State Library of South Australia's industry partnership with the University of South Australia in delivering the Library and Information Management/Archival and Records Management programs.

The research topic will investigate the various approaches to digital and physical preservation management, with special reference to Australian national, state and territory libraries, in order to identify similarities and differences. This is important because National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) have a mandate to preserve cultural heritage.

From the findings of the research, a new integrated conceptual framework will be developed. Such a framework can inform the prioritisation of all materials requiring preservation attention and enable sharing of strategies across all formats.

Work will also be done on an integrated conceptual framework on disaster preparedness that spans physical and digital collections.

This research could help the international preservation community by providing a better understanding of preservation practices and insights into how the two areas of preservation can learn from each other. 🌟