

COLIN McCALLUM

Looking back – the PLV, 1919–1960: recollections and reflections

Edited with an introduction by Shona Dewar

Introduction

Colin Alexander McCallum was born on 15 September 1895 in Geelong, Victoria, the second son of Rev. Dr Alexander McCallum, a prominent Methodist minister, and his wife Alice Martha (Booth). His Scottish and English grandparents were early immigrants to Victoria.

McCallum was educated at Wesley College and embarked on a law degree at the University of Melbourne. He enlisted on 16 July 1915, served as a private with the 7th Field Ambulance in Egypt and France, and was repatriated to Australia on 9 March 1919. In July 1919, he joined the staff of the Public Library of Victoria as an Assistant. He graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1923. His father officiated at his marriage to Doris Eleanor East at the Methodist Church, Spring Road, Malvern, on 27 March 1924. He was promoted to Senior Assistant in 1933, Assistant Librarian about December 1944, Acting Chief Librarian in October 1945 and confirmed as Chief Librarian in May 1946. He retired in 1960 and was awarded the OBE in 1961. He died on 3 July 1981, and was cremated at Springvale.¹

Apart from Library publications, he wrote memoirs and histories of Methodism in Victoria, and prepared indexes to periodicals.²

As McCallum's retirement drew near, Sir Irving Benson, Chairman of Trustees, noted that 'the Trustees and the staff will lose a firm friend, an understanding Chief Librarian, a skilled officer of wide experience in all fields of Library work,

Leone Mills, Library photographer, Colin McCallum at the opening of the La Trobe Library, 29 March 1965, Pictures Collection, H27971



who saw this great Library grow from a quiet backwater to the hive of industry which it is today'.³

His colleague Ursula O'Connor wrote that 'CA McCallum's period as Chief was one of the most difficult but he remained calm throughout, always helpful to staff and public. He had the faculty of commanding loyalty and affection from everyone who worked with him and could bring out the best in even the most difficult person'.⁴

Colin McCallum's memoir was written in two stages: the first section shortly after he retired; the second some 18 months later. In a foreword written in November 1962 after he had completed the memoir, he wrote:

The following jottings are of the same nature. They are entirely egotistical. They concern what I did, what I learned, whom I knew, what I thought about people and things. They can really be of little significance to anyone other than my contemporaries.

And yet, for such is the conceit of the individual, I have made bold to write them down. There is always the possibility that they may be of some small interest in the long story of the PLV; perhaps, after all, they may add something to its 'secret' history ...

Anyway, it has been pleasant to recall some of those forty happy years and to put down these random remembrances.⁵

Shona Dewar

Looking back: part one

I never knew the 'old' Library in the Queen's Hall along Swanston Street, at all.

My first recollection is, therefore, that of a visit to the 'new' Library, as a young University student, in 1914. I suppose that I read and studied in the Great Reading Room, but my remaining impression of those days is of using the Enquiry Room. I was tremendously awed by the quietness and size of the Library, with its secret and mysterious 'index'. The staff who attended to me were, of course, men and must have been helpful but a bit distant, as one would expect them to be to a raw and gauche young student. At any rate, I was neither repulsed by offhandedness or discourtesy, nor attracted by cordiality and friendliness – nor did the idea of librarianship as a career even remotely come into the picture.

I gave up University studies in Law to enlist in June, 1915 and finished the War at Charleroi, in Belgium, at the time of the Armistice. In February, 1919 four of our unit were selected for immediate return to Australia and discharge, so that we might resume our interrupted University courses as early in the year as

practicable. We four had a most interesting ‘civilian’ (or at any rate, un-military) trip across France, travelling for the first time not in trucks labelled ‘40 hommes, 8 chevaux’ [40 men, 8 horses], but with French civilians in public trains.

I can still remember the sense of freedom from military control on that journey. On arrival at Le Havre, all four felt unwell and at Southampton were put into hospital. I, alone, came out. My three companions died of influenza, then at its epidemic height. Back at home, I was not enthusiastic about Law. Seeing an advertisement for an assistant at the Public Library, I applied. The only other applicant was Neville Williams who had been a temporary officer in the Library for four years. Since I was a returned soldier, I secured the appointment and Williams had to go. I felt some embarrassment about this as we had been companions, if not friends, at school. I need not have worried, for he soon joined the firm of JB Were and had a meteoric career in share broking ...

To go back a step, however; before appointment I had an interview with Mr La Touche Armstrong in his office – the same room which I was later to occupy. I think I answered a few factual questions. I know I found him pleasant and not overpowering, but I was surprised (with my lack of library experience) to get the job. The salary of £156 *per annum* seemed reasonable enough.

A week or so later, July 8th, 1919 I reported for duty. Without any very clear idea of what I was doing, I commenced ‘accessioning’ in the big, calf-bound volumes used then as now. The first item I entered was a volume of *The Casket*, an American journal devoted to undertaking and embalming.

My desk was a very large cedar cabinet just inside what is now (and was then) the Fine Art Room. I think my tasks were shared within a few days by a still newer member of the staff who had a particularly casual approach to his duties. Upon his return from lunch each day, he would draw up two or three chairs, stretch out on them and have a short nap. He left within a few weeks.

A few months after I joined the staff, a general reclassification of the Public Service took place. My salary rose overnight to £240, an unheard of increase! Mr Armstrong took occasion to congratulate me while admitting that he could not understand such a large increase at all.

After some months of accessioning, I was placed ‘in charge’ of the Periodical Room. This department occupied the area housing now the two carrels and the southern end of the present Australian Room. The magazines were stored in pigeonholes reaching to the ceiling. About 150 pigeonholes were in the lobby and while these included *Blackwood’s*, *The Nineteenth Century*, *Punch* and other sought after journals, they also contained quite specialised periodicals in French and German – and these were in constant demand also. The lobby in effect contained all the [Dewey] 050s.⁶ Inside the room, a rough classification was followed, but

with changing and added titles there was really no proper grouping at all, and engineering journals, for instance, were in pigeonholes all over the place.

Whilst I did the usual clerical work of recording arrivals, writing for missing issues, preparing accounts, etc., the actual processing of and issue was done by the two attendants 'Davey' Edwards and Jim Shannon alternating each other. Both were pleasant enough, except that Edwards was always coming along to read out some joke which he had just found, until I got somewhat weary of the interruptions. My desk this time was between the windows on the outer wall. Behind me, on the wall itself were housed the dozens of press-copy letter books into which Edwards and Shannon copied out outward correspondence by means of a wet cloth and a rotary press.

Just to my right, safely behind a barricade of ledgers, was 'Ducky' James Shield, a personality indeed. A cocky-looking little man (but not by nature) he was the special messenger of the Assistant Librarian, Mr Boys, and probably his source of information on a host of personnel affairs. 'Ducky's' own personal life was openly told by him in full detail. I think now of his home as having been a quite extraordinary *menage*, with wonderful parties, pretty casual marital relationships and a high spirited enjoyment of life beyond regard of the usual conventions. However, Ducky also tried the religions in turn and eventually settled into a very moral way of life. He was great fun.

Beyond Shield's desk was the Map Room with large wooden cabinets and shelves, labelled A-F (These numbers still appear in the Main Catalogue as the location of many old plans and maps). In those days the Library's maps were well catalogued and easily found. Shield's actual work was the listing and stamping of Patent Specifications as they reached the Library and he kept them well.

The methods used in the Periodical Room did not completely satisfy me and I prepared a typewritten subject index, by title, of the periodicals received. Mr Boys was good enough to bring this to the notice of the Trustees since I did most of it in my private time. At their direction, he sent me a pleasant letter of appreciation. I also worked on a visible record of subscriptions, so that quick reference could be made to the dates of renewal. This was at a time when some hundreds of subscriptions were paid direct to the publishers, becoming due at all sorts of different times throughout the year.

After being 'on' periodicals for four years or so, I was given two tasks which linger in memory:

1. The restoration of the supply of 'continuations' [standing orders] broken by the 1914 War. It was a pretty difficult and specialised task and I got very tangled up in some of the great German sets with their confusing *livraisons*,

lieferungs, vols, bands, Abtheilungs, serie, nummer, Seite and so on. On one occasion at least, I had to admit to Mr Boys that, in error, certain of these involved parts had been re-ordered in duplicate. Mr Boys was then Chief Librarian and regarded as a difficult man, but he was certainly surprisingly understanding in this case and offered nothing in the shape of a reprimand at all. The whole result of my work was, however, that the supply of most continuations was brought satisfactorily up to date, only to be interrupted again by the War of 1939–45 ...

2. The second task was a commencement in cataloguing, again under Mr Boys. He had decided to make full entries for the *Bulletins* of the United States Geological Survey and the *Water Supply Papers* of the appropriate US department. I sat with him for weeks in the Map Room, laboriously writing out cards for both sets – hundreds of them, indeed thousands – under his direction. Occasionally, in the early morning, a few unofficial remarks would be made but he had great powers of application, and for the rest of the day we plugged along in almost complete silence for hours on end. And this went on, day after day. In recent years, a change in cataloguing practices has made it desirable to withdraw and destroy all the cards so painstakingly prepared.

Cataloguing and relief from the Periodical Room soon brought me into service in the Enquiry Room and contact with AB Foxcroft. As far as I can recollect I had about 11 or 12 years of alternating duty on ‘Enquiries’. At first I was a junior under Scott, Kirby, Baud or Cooke, but in later times I was in charge of a shift, alternating with Frazer, Feely, Ryan and Dwyer. Others with whom I was associated were McDonald, Mair, Astley, Perry, Miss O’Connor and many more. Looking back, I really think this was the aspect of library work which I enjoyed most in all my years at the Library. I have many happy recollections of dozens of the public with whom I became acquainted over the years. Their interests and enquiries were always fascinating to me; as to others in the Enquiry Room also. In later years, Miss Mary Marsden and Miss Dreiheller kept a register of their day by day enquiries over a long period. This makes most interesting and very amusing reading as the two girls were themselves interested in the calls made upon their knowledge and bibliographic skill and maintained a full and high-spirited record.

To go back: the Cataloguing Room, if there was such a thing, was in what is now in 1960 Mr Kealy’s room. In the small room next door, nearer to the Enquiry Room, was the Senior Cataloguer. This was occupied in my time for a short period by Mr Vogler (whom I never got to know) and then by Mr Foxcroft. After a while Foxcroft moved into the larger room and shared it with Mr John Howard.

Apart from these two, I think most of the cataloguing was done by members of the Enquiry Room staff. We were all required to keep little books showing the numbers of volumes catalogued each week. These records, I am afraid, were not always true to facts and I remember on one occasion suggesting to Foxcroft that they should themselves be classified as in the [Dewey] 823s.⁷ There was also a general complaint of one particular senior officer gobbling all the easy books and sets, thus 'padding' his weekly figures.

Cataloguing was largely based upon British Museum practices and great emphasis was placed on securing the personal names of authors in full. There were few of today's aids, although the *Cumulative Book Index* was known. I remember that I found the *Book Review Index* more useful. However, it was standard practice to spend much time going through the monthly issues of the *BM Accessions* – awkward as they were to handle, with their double uncut pages – and it was something of a triumph to eventually trace down a new author's name in full.

About 1933, I was seconded to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for a couple of months full-time and a longer period part-time to help edit a Supplement to 'Pitt's' *Catalogue of Scientific and Technical Periodicals*.⁸ Incidentally, it was the fine work of proofreading this publication which led to my first use of spectacles. Later, DWI Cannam and I produced a second supplement which was issued in mimeographed form.⁹

In 1928 I began to take charge of the Historical Collection. This material had been accumulating for years and Leigh Scott had had a hand in it. But his time was very limited and no serious effort of cataloguing it or showing it had ever been possible. Under Foxcroft's direction I prepared a fairly extensive exhibition in the Barry Gallery in 1928, opened by the President of the Trustees. Then in 1933, to celebrate the approaching centenary of the State, working with Bert Street, a senior Attendant, I prepared a much larger exhibition in the new McAllan Gallery.¹⁰ This really was a big affair, occupying both the Main Floor and the very extensive Basement. A tremendous number of items were put on display, many hundreds being lent to the Library for this purpose. I looked after the book side – accessioning and cataloguing – and in this I was assisted by various people in turn. The name of Una Douglas comes to mind here. Street was invaluable. He was very interested in local history and gradually acquired a very considerable knowledge indeed. He in turn interested others and led to the loan of many items of historical significance. Street was always on the job and was permanently detached from his previous duties in the Reading Room. I, on the other hand, made many hundreds of trips back and forth to the McAllan Galleries – the most remote part of the whole block of buildings. After several years, the exhibition was restricted to the Basement and finally, at the transfer of the three floors to



Herald and Weekly Times, photographer, Domed Reading Room showing the supervisor in the dais, Public Library of Victoria c.1940, Pictures Collection, H94.5

the National Museum and Art Gallery, was regrettably withdrawn from regular public display. In recent years, periodical displays of various subjects and sections have been made in the Palmer Hall, while the bulk of the Collection has been stored in the Main Basement below the Reading Room ...

In [1936] the Periodical Room was moved to the lower floor of the Reference Library, the area previously occupied only by the Newspaper Section (NPR).¹¹ This move was Foxcroft's idea and a very sound one, although it brought some difficulties. In my earlier days, the NPR was conducted by Charles Shellew and Arthur Hosken. I think of them both as elderly, and Shellew had very restricted vision. I don't think they got on very well together and I wonder today how they divided the duties between them. Shellew was retired after a while and Hosken died on a railway platform on his way to work one morning. I remember taking the telephone message of his death and referring it to the Chief Librarian of the time. These two were followed in charge by an Attendant – 'Bill' Mossop – a rather curious alteration from the previous administration by two fairly senior professional or clerical officers. However, Mossop was excellent. He was systematic, tidy and hard working. He kept the whole Room and its contents in beautiful order and was immensely popular with his public. His specialty was in

knowing from memory every placed horse and rider in the Melbourne Cup from its beginning. It may be added that, previously, as an Attendant in the Reading Room, Mossop's section of books to look after was [Dewey] 650–820 and he kept it in meticulous order. It was his practice as 10am approached each day to step back and look at his rows of books. Every shelf was straightened up, no volumes were hidden behind others; if there was any vacant shelf space it was always at the right end of the shelf with the last two or three volumes inclined consistently to the left at an angle of 30 degrees or so.

The 'invasion' of the NPR by the Periodicals Section was something of a trial to Mossop and he made sure – politely but firmly – that the new arrivals kept strictly to the north side of 'his' floor. He was, however, in every way, a first rate officer and most jealous for the smooth running of his particular section.

In 1921 the Library was shaken to its depths by the arrival of the first female member of staff, as far as its professional side was concerned. Miss Isabel Fraser somehow found her way on to the staff. She was viewed with shy horror by Mr Boys, who made life rather difficult for her. The gaucherie and awkwardness of some of us younger ones who did not know how you worked alongside a woman, did not ease things for her, I am afraid. The ice once broken, she was 'accepted' after a while, and of course was followed by many others of her sex until in fullness of time they outnumbered the males. I should think the first to follow her were Miss O'Connor, Miss McGlade and Miss Whitelaw, now Mrs FJ Perry.

The 1939–45 War brought many changes, naturally. The younger Attendants either volunteered or if fit were called up, and some promising and pleasant lads disappeared from the staff. Similarly with the Professional staff, some of whom were absent with the Forces for many years. At first the calls upon the Library's services declined, but with the extension of the war into the Pacific and the arrival of the Americans, a great many calls were made upon the resources of the Reference Library. Books – ALL books – on the islands of the Pacific became invaluable and teams from the Army's Geographical Units found them to be sources of essential information. Even travel books and missionary records of 70 or 80 years before, were scanned and their references to beaches, shoals, streams, bush paths, etc., were all noted with eagerness. I remember one volume reporting a voyage into the Arafura Sea by a ship's captain in 1711 establishing the whereabouts of a downed aircrew, and suggesting a means of rescue.

The Reference Library windows and ceiling lights were completely blacked out with thick paint – indeed in the first flurry of excitement, the Reading Room was closed after dusk to prevent the possibility of any light from its windows and roof assisting Japanese fliers to identify their whereabouts over the City. It is interesting to note just how much light is still admitted to the Reading Room



Photographer unknown, Aerial view of the Library, showing the intersection of La Trobe and Swanston streets, c. 1939, Pictures Collection, H18206

after the closure of all the roof windows in 1959, consequent upon the ‘coppering’ of the Dome ...

In common with the general practice of the time, air raid precautions were undertaken. The Public Works Department built a ‘shelter’ in the basement of the then Lending Library (now the Murdoch Basement) in Russell Street. Heavy timbers coated with flaking white paint supported the main floor above, and guide notices around the buildings everywhere directed the public in case of emergency.

An Air Raid Precaution team was organised under the direction of John Feely and the Building Supervisor, Bill Morphett. For months this group practised and clambered over the building, gaining a thorough knowledge by night and day of every roof top, every access ladder, the entry to every ceiling. It was dangerous and uncomfortable work but in Feely and Morphett the team had two unusually inspiring leaders. My recollection is that an *esprit de corps* was developed in a remarkably short time; so much so that shinning over the roofs in the cold and wet of a winter blackout became great even if miserable fun for those who took part.

Mention of Bill Morphett prompts another recollection. It was the custom in the early 1940s to hold periodic inspection and instruction in the use of firefighting equipment. On such occasions all the staff of the four institutions would assemble in the north courtyard of the Library, while firemen lectured

on and demonstrated hoses, extinguishers, and so on. In one instance, the staff formed a wide semicircle facing the fireman, while Morphett as the Supervisor and Caretaker for the whole building stood close to them, alone, by virtue of his responsibility. His back was to the semicircle and behind him again was a length of canvas hose. When the fireman ordered the turning on of a tap, the hose filled and a tiny jet of water shot through a hole in the canvas. As the water gathered strength, this jet approached and then directly played upon the seat of Morphett's pants. It took him quite a few seconds to realise what was happening, by which time he was thoroughly soaked. The staff were hysterical. Dear old Bill and his shadow – his dog – which accompanied his every step.

The Trustees of the National Gallery, particularly Sir Russell Grimwade, Sir Keith Murdoch, together with the Director Daryl Lindsay¹², had a wonderful opinion of Morphett both as a man and as an artist by instinct. According to them, he could handle and appraise pottery, chinaware, glass and paintings with the taste and unfaltering judgment of any acknowledged expert. Otherwise, Morphett was healthily earthy, his favourite adjective being 'flaming'.

One of the failures which I remember associated with the Library was the copying project for the main catalogue. The cards for this were originally 6½" by 3½" [16.5 x 8.9 cm], handwritten by a multitude of various cataloguers over the period of [nearing] a hundred years. With the rise of standard library practices in the 1930s, the world-wide acceptance of 5" by 3" [12.7 x 7.6 cm] cards made it difficult to incorporate such printed cards into the Library's existing catalogue. It was manifestly desirable to conform if practicable, and one of the projects which Mr Pitt had to examine in a visit to America in [1935] was the most satisfactory means of bringing the Library's catalogue cards to the universal size.¹³ Upon his recommendation, a reducing camera was acquired, with some 100,000 or more cards of standard size. Under Kodak supervision, a commencement was made to photograph the original cards, 6½" in width, at first on to paper negatives and then on to card positives. The fixed reduction of the camera brought the photographed area down to 5" by 2¾" [12.7 x 6.9 cm] on cards measuring 5" by 3". A couple of girls were engaged and for some years the project went on. We were never happy about the finished product: the cards were very grey, they curled, they reproduced the varied and not always good hand-writing of the originals, they did not lend themselves to alteration and they made no copy of the often important bibliographical notes on the backs of the originals. But the expenditure was considerable and the Library was committed to the scheme, and it is not pleasant to admit to a mistake. Its inertia (if that is the word) carried the project for some years. After the retirement of Mr Pitt and Mr Cooke, I discussed the matter fully with Baud and we decided to

drop any further work of this type. Fortunately, by this time, the Photographic Assistant was being employed largely to make microfilms. By simply dropping the reduction process, the matter came to a silent end. In recent years the enlarged cataloguing and typing staff available has been able to check the old catalogue entries and type new standard cards up to the letter C, and including a number of subject groups scattered throughout the Main Catalogue. The recent preparation of current cards by Fordigraph has speeded up the supply of modern entries tremendously. This in turn has left more time for bringing the older entries into form. I was interested in designing new 72 drawer catalogue units or cabinets, a number of which were made for us by Rojo and Sons¹⁴ in Queensland maple, in the late 1950s.

While referring to the Photographic Section, and since these notes are to record the insignificant and the personal as well as the officially important, I would mention a case of firm and direct action taken on one occasion by WC Baud. He had been Chief Librarian a few weeks only. A girl who was very attractive indeed in dress and person, became employed in the Photographic Room. She had either been a sales girl in a cosmetics department or a model. One lunchtime she returned to the Library with a new purchase - a smart swim suit. She was so pleased with her acquisition that after a few minutes she donned this somewhat scanty garment and invited one or two of the male staff to view it (and her). Baud heard of this and the girl left that same afternoon.

Part two: Notes resumed 18 months later, mid-1962

The lapse of time has unfortunately dimmed many early memories, and now (June, 1962) the absence of two years from old associations has further obliterated the recollection of many persons and events ... What follows, therefore, will be just 'odd' things as they come to mind, with no proper sequence or relationship.

Long before the Free Library Service Board (FLSB) came into existence, it was the practice on occasion to send a Library officer to inspect and report on provincial and country libraries, usually Mechanics' Institutes ... My most interesting trip was to Warracknabeal, where I looked over, advised and then 'thinned out' the local Institute. The Librarian, Evans,¹⁵ was most cooperative. Mr ECW Kelly,¹⁶ a local solicitor (whose son was later on the staff of the PLV and the FLSB) was very kind, and it was a pleasant four days of acting as 'the expert from Melbourne'!

An outstanding member of the staff for many years was Bill Crawford. A returned soldier from the War of 1914–18, Bill had a bad wound in his knee which never completely healed. He was frequently in great pain and looked desperately white and sick on many occasions. He walked with a stiff leg and

always used a stick. He was in and out of the Repatriation Hospital many times. For years, Bill worked a noon–7pm shift, sitting high up in the central Dais in the Reading Room. He was vigilant, polite and popular with all. He had frequent skirmishes with the young law students, who loved to tease him by talking too much and too loudly ... It was all good clean fun and Bill eventually came out winner – with their regard and respect!

Unquestionably the person who left the longest impact on his contemporaries was Albert Foxcroft. In my time, he was Senior Cataloguer and then Assistant Librarian. He had done a very good course in Philosophy and was a remarkably clear and profound thinker. He (with Robert Boys) bridged the gap between 19th century library practices and the modern. He and Boys together established the Accessions Register. After a count of books in the Library, the Register began with the next new arrival at number 135,000. Foxcroft with Boys reclassified the collections to Dewey.¹⁷ Foxcroft was an immense influence on all who worked with him and he never refused his help to any of us. I must have taken scores of letters to him and his touch transformed them from windy, illogical affairs to clear, precise and purposeful screeds. Looking back, my impression is that his greatest gift was in being able to eliminate the unnecessary and to pinpoint the essential.

It was Foxcroft who thought out and instituted the use of Dewey 819 for English colonial literatures.¹⁸ This was, and still is to my mind, a very ingenious and practical application of a number which would otherwise be always vacant. It was used for Asian, African and Canadian literatures, in English, from the Dominions and Colonies, as well as Australia. The scheme had the merit of keeping together these increasingly considerable writings in proper relationship.

Foxcroft was a shy and, I suppose, a very diffident man. He had a quick, darting glance behind his spectacles when he was thinking, without ever looking at one. Curiously enough, for all his clear thinking, he preferred the circuitous and evasive route in his actions rather than the direct and open one. I still remember his two or three favourite anecdotes, slightly Rabelaisian and often repeated. He enjoyed them every time and they did no harm. His end was tragic. He was awarded a travel grant overseas and went off alone ... [he] died while coming home across the Pacific, and had been buried at sea. His trouble was apparently a brain tumour. He was essentially a brilliant and very likeable man, known to us all without disrespect as 'Foxy'.

WC Baud's end too was sudden. Bill Baud was immediately above me in the line of succession. When he became Chief Librarian, I was very pleased to be Assistant Librarian. No one could be nicer to serve under and he was capable and considerate. I thought that as our ages were not very different, we should just



Lyle Fowler, photographer, Newspaper Reading Room, Dome ground floor, Public Library of Victoria, c. 1951, Harold Paynting Collection, H92.20/4079 (top), H92.20/4080 (above)

about see our time out together – and that suited me. When he became Chief Librarian in 1944 he, too, was looking forward to an overseas trip and I remember his purchase of a camera and other things to take with him. Some little time before he was to go away, he went down to the City to give a lunchtime address. He spoke for a few minutes and then sank back in his chair, dead. With Morphett I had the melancholy duty of breaking the news to Mrs Baud ...

Robert Douglass Boys was Assistant Librarian and Chief Librarian in my time. When I joined the staff his office was the angle room opening off the northern passageway from the Reading Room – now the outer office of the Research Section. It was always a bit exciting to guess whether ‘Bobby’ was in his room or whether it was possible to use it as a short cut from the then Periodicals Room and Map Room towards the Enquiry Room. Naturally enough Boys disliked frequent passages through his room and it was one of those things which emphasised the faulty building design. The trick, if caught entering while he was there was to be prepared with a question to ask him; thus justifying one’s presence in his room. Later, a partition made a corridor possible and shielded the Assistant Librarian of the day from interruption.

Mr Boys was a first class cataloguer with a clear and quick mind. He was, however, apparently extremely shy and reserved; his speech was quick and low, and the movement of his slight and compact body was nervy and silent. Yet he was also a very good cricketer and before my time was a star performer at the annual cricket match (with Freddie Bryant, the bookbinder); the occasions were seemingly ones in which interest was divided between bat and ball and the ‘niner’ on the boundary. But this was before the peace of things was broken in 1914.

Even when Chief Librarian, Mr Boys avoided above all else, the making of a speech; on the occasions when he had to say a few words for a staff member retiring from the Library, it was as big an ordeal to the assembled staff as it was to Mr Boys himself. With all this, he was a ‘natural’ librarian of the older tradition in his knowledge of books and literature generally, and his quick and accurate decisions in the processes of cataloguing and classification. For this was in the days before the existence of so many modern aids, which lighten the task of the modern librarian.

A real personality of my time was ‘Cookie’, Thomas Fleming Cooke. I knew him in the Enquiry Room, Officer in charge of the Lending Library, and as Assistant and Chief Librarian. He had great vigour and drive, and usually did things on a loping run. For years he worked on a history of the Melbourne Cricket Club, mostly by long poring over early newspaper files. When in the Enquiry Room, his tea hour was usually an extended one, but his junior at least knew where to find him – in the NPR below. Cooke was noted for his economic use of cataloguing

cards; he made them serve half a dozen times at least, for orders etc., and the puzzle was to know which of his scribbled entries on back and front was the relevant one. His pencils never seemed to exceed a couple of inches in length; just sufficient for lodging behind an ear. He took great pride in ‘training’ his juniors at high pressure, by precept and by example; the ‘training’ included instruction and exhortation in being able to ‘think on one’s feet’ in public speaking. His best period was as officer in charge of the Lending Library in Russell Street, where he built up a considerable reputation and a goodly number of Country borrowers. Perhaps his circulation figures in this section were open to question at a later date; they were not dishonest but very ingenious ...

The Chief Librarian as yet unmentioned was Ernest Pitt. Of all whom I served under, Pitt was the best known ‘outside’ – at least as a Public Servant. He took a very prominent part in drawing up the Public Service Superannuation Scheme, he partnered Ralph Munn¹⁹ in the survey of Australian libraries in 1934–35, and he was President of more associations than I can put down. He was also a keen Henry George-ite, a classy bridge player, and a man of easy social grace. He was never ruffled; indeed, he kept cool, perhaps cold, under all conditions; he never hurried, rather the opposite. He established something of a reputation in higher Public Service circles for the time which files lingered in his possession; he was cautious, meticulous and painstaking. But to my mind he was a pretty big man.

Away from official duties, he was a most amusing person and at his best with young people at library functions and assemblies. I have not forgotten his kindness in inviting half a dozen of his senior assistants to a night at the Tivoli towards Christmas time on a couple of occasions. To me, he was always considerate, friendly and wise.

DWI Cannam (Duggie) was an unusual character all right, but always a bit of a mystery to me. He spoke quietly and not very much; his movements were silent, he was slightly hard of hearing; he seemed imperturbable. But he had a reputation for being ‘one of the boys’ away from work. He ... was a quick thinker and hard worker ... My impression of him was that he was restless and dissatisfied with life. When the War had been in progress for some little time, the Commandos were formed. Doug Cannam, somehow, despite his age and his hearing defect, was accepted with the [Seventh] Company. I remember being on duty in the Enquiry Room one evening when he came in, in uniform. Diffident as ever, he asked for a map of New Caledonia or mentioned the place. I had just previously found in the basement a long detailed map of the island, perhaps 30 feet [9 m] long. I produced this for him and rolled it out on the top of the Main Catalogue. Cannam for once showed obvious and keen interest. He almost crawled the length of the cabinet,

examining every detail of the map ... He disappeared from Melbourne soon after, in the mysterious ways of the War and in the still more hush hush movements of the hardly-to-be-mentioned commandos. The next we heard was that he was dead – killed, not by enemy action, but by being hit on the head by a supply-drop from an aeroplane, somewhere in New Guinea.

Another whose name deserves remembrance was TL (Leslie) Dober. Short, rotund, cherubic, he was a male typist when I first knew him. We always said that he was born in the Library. His father ‘Old Tom’ Dober – a very impressive character – was Caretaker of the institution and lived in rooms later taken for a staff room and still later for the Carbon Dating Laboratory. So Leslie was in the Library literally from babyhood. He rose to Senior Attendant, responsible for the books in the Reading Room and all the other attendants, but kept his job as a typist throughout. His passion was flower growing and he regularly presented the ladies of the staff with enormous dahlias, gladioli and other magnificent blooms. Leslie was popular with all. He retired at 65 in reasonable health, but died within three or four years.

Some visitors to the Library

Back in the mid-thirties, the Library had a ‘regular’ in ‘Yorkie’. I don’t think that I ever knew his name; Baud christened him after the county in England from which he came. He was in the Library nearly every evening, and it was obviously a home and a refuge to him. His particular study was English ecclesiastical architecture. He was a favourite of Bill Baud’s whose friendly approach was undoubtedly of help to him. ‘Yorkie’ was probably of good family; he was, however, always hard up although he never begged. Perhaps he was in the nature of a respectable ‘remittance man’. He suffered, unfortunately, from a speech defect, with a cleft palate and a stammer, but he was an extremely nice person. He had a deep knowledge of church vestments, architecture and ritual. In spite of his defect, I believe he secured an appointment in the country as a curate or paid lay-reader, if there is such a thing. Just before the 1939 War, he secured passage money and returned to England ...

A still more unusual visitor was Dr Annie Yoffa.²⁰ She came in frequently, and I remember her producing for Foxcroft a great pile of albums containing her ‘Upspeech’. She claimed to be able to describe a person and his character in a series of squiggles and whorls, done with white ink on black paper. These would, in time, be universally understood and accepted, and would eventually replace the laboured use of words and letters. She put down her depiction of Foxcroft in this manner. She declared that anyone could then ‘see it was Foxcroft to the life’. Her substantial collection in Upspeech was presented to the Library.

Dr Yoffa was, many years later, murdered by a maniacal youth, at her lone camp in the Dandenongs.

‘Pencils’ was a reader for perhaps 15 or 20 years. His name was never known to us, but daily at 10am he would enter the Reading Room, set out 10 or 12 sharpened pencils at his elbow, and scribble busily all day. His usual books were architectural journals. When he collapsed one day, the Police took him to his lodgings, where he died. In his room were trunks and cases filled with the completely useless scribblings of years.

On one occasion, I was directed to accompany a policeman to a house in Kew. A woman had had a quarrel with her husband and had reported to the police that he was cutting parts from Library books and stealing others. I found a big collection of illustrations of warships cut from our *Jane’s Fighting Ships*, and a number of our books on the Navy. The man was charged with theft and turned out to be an ex-member of the NSW police force. At the City Court, while I was waiting in the courtyard with the prosecuting constable, the wife came up and roundly abused us for laying a charge against her dear husband.

The Lending Library

The portion of the Library with which I had the least to do in my earlier days, was the Lending Library. It was then in the large hall facing Russell Street, now the Murdoch Gallery, and partly in the basement below. However, I did at least know something of it in Brazier’s time and in Cooke’s. The hall was lined on all four sides with books to a height of 12 or 14 feet [3.6–4.3 m]. Running around the room at this height was a steel rail from which hung a number of moveable ladders. Visitors could slide these along to the spot needed, and climb them to the upper shelves. Entry to the Lending Library was along a race of lightly-stained woodwork, past the Attendant on duty – and ‘out’ through a similar race on the other side of the counter. George Hutchinson held the fort there for many years and was well liked by the public and the staff. When he retired at 65 years, he looked little more than 40, a good advertisement for the gentle and leisurely occupation of librarianship as it was.

The Country Section was ‘housed’ – if that is the appropriate word – on the floor beneath. This was a frightful hole, dark, rat-ridden and difficult of approach. How anyone ever found a book there was always quite beyond me. Under TF Cooke, very good work was done here, however, by Phillip Garrett who acquired over the years an extraordinary knowledge – which he has retained, of the book collection. Incidentally, it may be stated here that this same collection contained many works of considerable reference importance and many items of Australiana which deserved far better accommodation.

Binding

A continuing unhappy circumstance which used to worry me was the steady deterioration in the Library's binding. In the [Dewey] 053s, for instance, are sets of German high-grade literary periodicals. The early volumes are bound in full or half calf, beautifully tooled, marbled edges and endpapers, gilt extra, with raised bands and coloured slips on the second and fourth spaces. First the elaborate gilding disappeared, then the coloured pieces. Marbled edges were superseded by sprinkled ones; the raised bands went. Then the volumes descended into buckram, with a minimum of lettering, no sprinkling. Then into half cloth and finally (and horribly) into quarter bound, flush, paper boards. Undoubtedly the original style of binding was extravagant for anything but a gentleman's private library or a ducal collection. But the end result of these, and a host of other periodicals, was too utilitarian and penurious to contemplate with any satisfaction.

Reference should also be made to the tens of thousands of leather bound volumes in the Library whose material has dried out, and whose hinges have given way, so that the sides have broken off and become separated or lost. The remedy is not just a matter of money. There is justification for the establishment of a fairly large scale binding shop, not merely to bind current material, books, periodicals and newspapers, in strong and lasting covers, but to gradually overhaul over 20 years or so the mass of woefully neglected volumes gradually falling to pieces in the stacks.

Further to the Lending Library

Up to 1945 the Lending Library was rather the Cinderella of the place. By a series of unfortunate circumstances, the officers in charge had usually been *non persona grata* with the Chief Librarian of the day. The Trustees were not very sure of the purposes of this section of the Library, its book purchases were limited, its staff few in number. It was almost Siberia. TF Cooke brought great energy and drive to its activities, but without approval from his Head could not go very far. Rightly or wrongly, I permitted expansion of its services under Mr Feely and Mr Ryan. Soon it was buying as many books a year as the Reference Library (but not such valuable ones), and its staff was built up to 30 officers. The Country Section was particularly developed until it was making genuine loans of 50,000 volumes a year. But the purpose of the Lending Library is still in 1962 not clearly defined, and the rise of the municipal libraries has clouded the issue still further.

From my experience in traipsing around to the McAllan Gallery for the Historical Collection on many hundreds of occasions, and also from a conviction that the Russell Street site was a remote and poor one as far as the public was concerned, there came the idea of a swap-over ... The outcome was that the



Photographer unknown, Lending Library, corner La Trobe and Swanston streets at the Public Library of Victoria, c. 1950–55, Pictures Collection, H40292 (top), H27338/3 (middle), H27338/5 (above)

Lending Library moved to the new northwest corner (formerly in use as a lecture hall) and into the Drawing School at the rear. The School, in return, moved to the upper floor and basement of the present Murdoch Gallery, and the National Gallery took over the main Murdoch Gallery for the show of furniture, tapestries, etc. The Historical Collection moved to the Palmer Hall, occupied until then by the Children's Room of the National Museum. The Gallery and the Museum took over the McAllan Wing between them.

All this meant a better grouping of the various institutions' activities, and for us meant the bringing of the Lending Library into closer relationship with other library services. The entrance in La Trobe Street was gradually improved. The real sufferer was the Historical Collection which had thus moved into a restricted area. The later use of the Palmer Hall for various exhibitions and general displays curtailed still further the public exhibition of historical items.

In its new location, the Lending Library had smaller changes made in its furnishings from time to time. The old Charging Desk was rebuilt and re-sited to speed up lending processes and to reduce queues. This, however, required extra fixed staff positions, and some difficulty was experienced in providing suitable work for these at slack periods, tied as they were to their definite locations.

New and successful lighting down the centre of the main hall was installed. The Country Room was completely done over. A ceiling was fitted, new shelving provided, excellent lighting installed, and an attractive painting scheme transformed the whole room into a pleasant and serviceable working area. And it *was* a transformation from the old chamber of horrors below the Russell Street site.

The system of charging books on loan was changed; 'pockets' were kept at the end of every book rather than in massive and far-spreading trays as formerly; the slips bearing the words 'date due' were substituted for the puzzling ones which gave the 'date of issue' and left it to the borrower to work out when the volumes were due for return.

The Australian Room

In anticipation of the eventual building of a La Trobe Library, an Australian Room was opened in [November 1953] in part of the annulus between Research and the Art Room.²¹ The idea was good despite the limited area; it required extra staffing but was an undoubted boon to students and authors working on Australian material. About 9,000 volumes were placed there; the [Dewey] 819, 919 and 920 for Australians, 940.3, 940.4 and 994 sections as far as they were of Australian origin or of Australian interest.

The La Trobe Library

Whilst it is nice to think that this project was launched in my time, it is only too true that little visible progress was made. Approval was given by the Premier in 1951 and an imposing foundation or memorial stone was set up in La Trobe Street. The Trustees and the Historical Society brought some occasional pressure to bear on succeeding Governments, but actual authority to have plans drawn and the money provided did not come until just before I left the Library. The Public Works Department still had to find staff to draw the plans but at this date, late in 1962, the steel skeleton is there to see and the concrete is being poured. This is 12 years after Premier McDonald's first acceptance of the idea ... But when completed, it will be a notable advance, a blessing to students, a big prestige-factor and a fine addition to the architecture of what is becoming one of Melbourne's busiest streets.

Research Section

As the Enquiry Room grew busier, it became clear that a special staff should be assigned to answering the more difficult enquiries involving special knowledge of reference materials or prolonged search. A staff of eight or nine, under Phillip Garrett was set aside – ideally all graduates – and they have answered some 8,000 or 9,000 queries each year. When staff duties permitted, detailed indexing of old journals and newspapers was carried out and about 150,000 entries have been put onto cards. My personal contribution was an index of 3,500 entries relating to the origins and meaning of Victorian place-names.²²

Archives

For 60 to 70 years the Library has been the depository for a number of Government records. But nothing much could be done with these in the absence of sufficient staff. An Archives Section was set up, at first with only one officer but later expanded to four. The records in the Library were added to and put under some proper archival 'control'. Other Government departments have been instructed and advised in the care, preservation and destruction of their holdings. Indexing of the much-used Shipping Lists has continued as opportunity has arisen. Shelving has been provided on the top floor of the Reading Room, in the NPR basement and in the Verdon Basement.²³

Library Training School

In 1948 this section was begun under FJ Perry. Accommodation was built in the NPR. Lecture notes were prepared and issued, and instruction was given by the Principal and by lecturers from the Library staff and from 'outside'. This called for

much sacrifice, much preparation and much 'giving out' of themselves by Library officers, often without special reward, and deserves high commendation. In 12 years over 1,000 full-time students were instructed for the Library Association of Australia examinations, with generally very satisfactory results. A highlight of each year for me was the annual selection, with Frank Perry, of the most promising students from a large number of applicants. A sub-professional course was conducted at the request of the FLSB but found no occasion to be repeated.

Book orders and Accessions

This section was delayed in formation until near the end of my term. Individual officers did good work from time to time, but a properly set up section under a senior officer was really required and should have come into being years earlier. A practice for which I do feel directly responsible and which was carried through despite some opposition was the joint ordering and the joint cataloguing for both Reference and Lending Libraries. This was an obvious and natural economy which, but for personality problems, should have been in force for 50 years.

Photography Section

This began under Pitt as a means of reducing the size of the Reference Library catalogue cards and is referred to elsewhere. After it was realised that the photography method of doing this was unsatisfactory, I persuaded Bill Baud to abandon it. By this time a demand was growing for photocopies of text material, illustrations etc. for students, research workers, interlibrary and newspaper use. A succession of photographers carried on, always very good people, and the amount of work steadily increased. In 1958 I added a second assistant – or rather a helper to Miss Mills who had done very fine work by herself for some years past. By grace of Mr Darren Baillieu²⁴, the Library received over several years a large amount of expensive modern equipment as gifts from the Baker (Kodak) Benefactions.

I made some effort to have photocopies of the more valuable historical material in the Library made. Accordingly, such things as Batman's journal, the *Melbourne Advertiser*, some early directories, Saxton's *Place-names* and the invaluable Brodie Shipping Collection were put onto film. By special permission, the Parliamentary Library Committee granted authority for its jealously guarded Strutt²⁵ album to be put on to Kodachrome slides, and I also had many slides made from the Library's collection of medieval manuscripts. A series of slides of the Library 'in action', showing the building, its equipment and its staff at work were also made and used for lecture and record purposes.

Students' Room

To facilitate the use of, and to effect some control upon University students' essay material, an officer was assigned to look after the Students' Room, immediately off the north end of the Enquiry Room. Regrettably it must be reported that students' books still continued to disappear, but not nearly so frequently as formerly.

Interlibrary Loans

The Reference Library's traditional reluctance to allow its books to go outside the building was inherited from the British Museum. But it had to break down from 1945 onwards. With the increasing trend towards library cooperation for research purposes, more and more demands upon the Library's unique collection of source material began to be made by Government departments and interstate libraries. Gradually the Trustees had to accept the idea and go along with the scheme. The extension of lending had begun even earlier with wartime demands by the Service departments which could not in the public interest be refused. By the time I left the Library, this had become quite a busy service, taking the full time attention of at least one officer and costing the Library a considerable sum for which it got little return, except perhaps in kudos.

British Patent Specifications

To help the searches of patent attorneys, the Trustees agreed in [1936] to lend the beautifully bound and long-run series of British Patent Specifications to the Commonwealth Patent Sub-office in Melbourne.²⁶ [In 1954 and 1957] these came back to the Library, and space and shelving had to be found for them in the NPR Basement. This was quite a task as the thousands of volumes are continuous from the time of Charles I (1616 onwards).

In my earlier days, these specifications occupied the galleries around the Reading Room; or rather the balconies, on the top floor. Their uniformity and rich binding often prompted visitors to suggest that they were dummies placed there to 'look nice'.

The Bindery

Although the Library has no bindery as such, it has for many years had a succession of binders.

I first remember Fred Bryant; his office was in the northern annexe, just outside the 'back lift'. His job was something in the nature of a sinecure by today's standards, since the amount of binding to be done was comparatively small. Bryant's job was to prepare lists to go to Detmold's²⁷ and later the Government Printing Office, and to mark off the books on return. He also mounted the Dais

early each morning and kept an eye on the General Division staff arranging their shelves while he went through his morning paper. Bryant was a councillor of a northern suburb, chairman of his local Gas Authority, and highly regarded in his locality. He was also a gardener of note.

Sometime in the 1930s, I suppose, there grew up the practice of having a binder seconded from the Government Printing Office. I don't remember all of them, but the names of Bill Howell and Bill Russell come to mind. Then down came Harold Newman, a personality in his own right. He was versatile in his trade; he could bind a book fully, mount a document, no matter how frail, make a slip-case, clean and mount maps, print on a small machine which we acquired with several fonts of type; he was the confidant of all, the friend of everyone; a joker and raconteur. In 1960, when I left, he was very sick and died soon after. Those who knew him feel there will never be his like there again.

Central Administration

In my earliest days, this consisted of the Accountant, Mr Phillipps. Leigh Scott relieved him at intervals and followed him for a short while. Then I think came Evans, Weir, Dewar and finally the present occupant of the office Mr McCall. Through the years, various typistes were added beginning (and continuing) with Miss Ethel Ingram. These people were housed in an office along the corridor leading to the Chief Librarian's room. Miss Ingram was the Chief Librarian's secretary until the Administration moved to the NPR in [1952].²⁸ Through the years, too, the office added the services of several male assistants. The duties of the section were, of course, related to the whole four institutions, and not restricted to the services of the Library only.

Free Library Service Board

Accommodation had also to be found for this body and once again the Library had to forgo reading space in the NPR. As with the Central Administration, this Board took over a window area in the front of the NPR, much to the regret of many of our old regulars who had for years occupied sunny spots in these recesses so warm and comfortable in wintertime.

I do not propose to deal at any length with the FLSB. In its first ten years or so it did a good job and undoubtedly advanced the library services of the State. Gordon Stewart left the Library staff to become Secretary of the Board and brought decisiveness, energy and imagination to his task.

Personally, I was never extremely happy in my position as *ex-officio* member of the Board. Some of its members were aggressively difficult – all from country districts. That is not to say, of course, that *all* country members were difficult;

some were very helpful and friendly and fitted in well with their colleagues. But I often detected an undercurrent of resentment and antipathy towards the Public Library and the Trustees, and felt thrown on the defensive on many occasions. Whether this feeling of antipathy arose from personal grounds I do not know. The ‘difficult’ people probably brought vigour and a new outlook, but they were often wildly unrealistic and sometimes quarrelsome – and we were not used to that sort of thing. My relations with the staff of the Board were never anything but most harmonious.

Perhaps the above is ungracious. I made many friends of members of the Board, and all were courteous and kindly in the extreme. I hope that the remarks given above spring only from my jealous regard for the Library as an institution, and not from any personal feelings as far as I am concerned. To be more specific in my ‘complaint’, I would instance a member of the Board who stated that the Board should set up a dozen ‘Regional libraries’ within twelve months, (this back in 1946 or 1947 when the scheme was barely underway), and thought I was being obstructive when I said this was impossible. On another occasion – indeed, on several occasions, the Trustees were roundly criticised for not undertaking to train much larger numbers of students in librarianship than they could possibly accommodate or teach – quite regardless of the fact, also, that the Trustees were keeping a wise eye on the number that could find suitable employment on completion of their training.

The Historical Society

When the Society lost its accommodation in Queen Street, I urged the Trustees to provide rent-free space for it in the Palmer Hall. I argued that its collections and our own Victorian historical material complemented each other, and that a lot would be gained by having all this together under one roof. The Society jumped at the chance when the Trustees accepted the proposal, and soon occupied the northern end of the Hall. This action, all took place while the President, Dr Benson, was overseas. On his return, he stated that he was opposed to it and would not have agreed if he had been present at the time. However, the Society was there and the Trustees let it stay until changes in the Lending Library, in preparation for the La Trobe Library, made it necessary for the Library to resume use of the whole of the Palmer Hall. The Society then moved to rooms in Queen Street once again.

I still think it a good idea to have the Society’s material, both extensive and often unique, closely allied with that of the State Library. I should have been happy to see it given accommodation in the La Trobe. In fact, I should hope that some time the whole of the Society’s books, records and illustrations might pass into the possession of the Trustees.

Staff facilities

In my earlier days, the Professional staff luncheon room was the mezzanine floor in the north annexe, between the Reading Room and the NPR floors. Later it moved across the courtyard when the Photographic Room was established. The new staff room was the dark, cold and sometimes rat-ridden room now occupied by the Carbon Dating Laboratory, and this remained in use for many years. I remember that the girls on evening duty, sitting there in half gloom, habitually had their meals with their feet up on another chair to avoid possible invasion of their clothing by mice or other rodents. When the Museum of Allied Science took over the room, the staff were moved along southwards into the former kitchen of the Tea Rooms. With quite generous assistance from the Trustees' funds, and the support of Messrs McMicken and Ellwood, this new location was painted, lighted, furnished and generally made (for the first time ever) into a place in which the staff could really feel that they were beginning to be adequately provided for.

Through all the years I was at the Library, the General Division staff shared lunch room accommodation with similar officers of the Gallery and Museums. This was across the courtyard to the south, below the Verdon–Buvelot stairways. Of this, the less said the better, except that it is amazing what men left to themselves will put up with. Just before I left, a small mezzanine area was built below the Reference Library Enquiry Room to provide locker space and a changing area for the Reference Library attendants.

A few years earlier, a women's rest-room, attractively furnished, was formed on the north wing of the Reading Room floor, (TL Dober's old room), and toilet accommodation was built into the inner or northern side of this.

Increased staff

In 1945 the Professional staff was still feeling the effects of the War. Several senior officers were still with the Services, and there were too many untrained and temporary people, who perhaps by the nature of their appointments were something lacking in interest and enthusiasm. It was obvious, too, that to follow the pattern of other large Australian libraries, additional staff must be authorised.

In a bold and well-documented proposal, John Feely secured administrative permission in 1949 to add 22 new members to the staff at one go. This was carried out mostly while I was overseas in Britain and the USA, and great credit is due to him for the successful conclusion of this forward move ... It may be said that in the 15 years of 1945–60 the staff total was about doubled. In addition to general salary rises and adjustments, quite a number of more senior positions were reclassified from time to time, as their occupants gained in experience and seniority of service.

United States Information Service Library

During the 1939–45 War, the US Government established in Melbourne as elsewhere, an Information Library.²⁹ This at first occupied a site in Collins Street, south side, near *The Age* office, at basement level. The librarian was Mrs Helen Wessells, a vivid, dynamic personality, dark-eyed, curly-haired, an excellent mixer. She chose very competent local girls to assist her. I certainly don't remember most of them but the names of Moreen Wenzel, a tiny replica of Mrs Wessells herself, and Diana Medley, later the Chief Librarian's (my) secretary. Helen Wessells had extraordinary social poise; her level at functions was with the Premier, Cabinet Ministers and Lord Mayors and she sparkled in this company. On the other hand, both then and at later dates when my wife and I were in the USA, she was friendly and hospitable in the extreme – almost exhaustingly so – and evidently had formed a strong attachment to Melbourne and its people. I should add that in library circles in her own country, she quite obviously was in the innermost groups of library administrators and directors.

Mrs Wessells had several successors: Geraldine LeMay from the deep south of the US, who spoke of Savannah as being a fine 'po-at', and for several years presented the Library staff with a special Christmas cake sent to her from her home; Thelma Passo, a blonde of Finnish extraction, and very much liked by all of us. One or two of us (Miss O'Connor and I, at least) kept in touch with her for 15 years after she departed. For a long time she regularly sent me children's books for my own grandchildren, and I tried to reciprocate with gifts of current Australian.

As the War effort declined, the US authorities shut down the Collins Street library and it was transferred to our NPR, in the north-west alcoves later occupied by the Central Administration and the FLSB. When the US finally closed down the library, a wide distribution of its effects was made and we scored with the presentation of many fine reference works and general books, and a good deal of office and library furniture.

Sunday opening

Other happenings during my term as Chief Librarian included the question of Sunday opening of the Reference Library. A wartime experiment, it was found after some years that the opening from 2pm to 5pm each Sunday was not well patronised. The Trustees always insisted that the staff should not be forced to work on Sunday, and gradually the supply of volunteers for such duty shrank until the practice became unworkable as well as unappreciated. I always felt in two minds about it: sympathy with the staff, but also a strong feeling that in these days, a reading service should be available on Sundays in a city the size of Melbourne.

For many years before the Library opened on Sundays, I had taken my turn with each of the other three Heads of institutions in attending on Sundays in a supervisory capacity. This practice in itself gradually petered out, and the responsibility was left in the hands of the Supervisor and Caretaker, Bill Morphett and his successors.³⁰ But I did have many years of Sunday duty all the same ...

Lighting of Reading Room

Whilst it was not found possible to lower the height of the shelves around the perimeter of the Reading Room, steps were taken in [1951] to improve the lighting. The old original goose-neck brackets and incandescent lamps were taken away and a new system of continuous strip lighting by neon tubes, behind a cream fascia, was installed – a vast improvement. Not only were the book numbers and titles on the upper shelves easier to read, but the brilliant but hidden light brought out all the various colours of the books *en masse*, a most decorative sight.³¹

Care of rare books

The Library has always been pretty casual with its use of rare books – perhaps too free on occasion. However, the presence of skilled binders ... on the premises made it possible to gradually have special slip-cases, or felt-lined boxes, made to house our choicest items. By the time I retired, a couple of hundred volumes were so protected on the shelves in the Chief Librarian's room or in the stacks. About 1959, also, I had a handsome glass-fronted, lockup, cabinet made to house the four volumes of Audubon's *Birds of America*. These were, and are, the most valuable books in the Library from a monetary point of view, but had lain for 40 years on the sloping top of a book case in the Art Room, too easily accessible to casual handling altogether.

The stacks

The Reference Library has always been over-crowded as far as its book collections are concerned. Originally designed to hold two million volumes, there have never been enough shelves at any one time for more than a third of this number. The erection of steel mezzanine floors and shelving in [1940] had helped a lot, and the gradual extension along the top floor galleries eased things from time to time.³²

But before I left, continual requests for money for more mezzanine flooring were unsuccessful and I tried the practice of placing books on the lower shelves in the stacks on their fore-edges, spines upwards. This had a double advantage of saving some space between shelves and also of preventing the settling of dust on the tops of leaves as when the books stood upright. However, not much progress was made with the idea, and a windfall of a substantial sum of money in 1959 for

further mezzanine flooring improved the situation for the next few years. The opening of the La Trobe Library will also, of course, be of material assistance in providing additional book space. Because of habitual overcrowding over the years, the regular sequence of Dewey order in the stacks had been badly broken for many sections of books. Whole groups had been taken away from their normal positions and housed just wherever room could be found for them. This I always considered deplorable, but unfortunately necessary as things were. I hope that the present increase in shelving and accommodation will permit the return of all books to their proper sequence.

Uniforms

As I knew them earlier, the Library Attendants wore specially made uniforms and caps – a practice which continued on in the Gallery and Museums after it was abandoned in the Library. There, for economy's sake, the Library uniform gradually gave way to serviceable but somewhat utilitarian-looking grey dust coats, merely adorned with a crown on the lapel. These coats were, of course, washable and were usually kept fairly fresh and well-pressed. But they lacked the dignity and prestige of the older serge uniform. Perhaps this decline into severe practicality was just another evidence of the general fall from elegance – as with the Library's bindings – typical of this 20th century.

With the increasing numbers of female members of staff, uniforms – or overalls as they were officially designated – came into their own. No general uniformity throughout the whole Library was attempted, but the girls worked out their own departmental colours of brown, green and maroon. Seniors who had not so much contact with masses of dusty books and documents retained their individuality and normal modes of neat and attractive dressing. As far as possible, I liked the girls to wear their uniforms out of sight and only while engaged in actual dusty jobs of work. I always considered the PLV too big and too notable an institution to bring the staff to the level of a factory or restaurant, as far as the public view of them was concerned at any rate.

The Centenary [of the Library]

The Library was opened in 1856 and the Trustees decided to celebrate the centenary in 1956. I do not propose [to discuss?] this in detail here, but will merely say that it was marked with a really fine exhibition of the Library's book treasures displayed for personal handling and inspection along the tables in the Reading Room, by a reception in the Reading Room and supper (very lavish) in the NPR at which the Governor and Lord Mayor were present, and thirdly by the publication of a centenary volume which I wrote. The text told briefly of the history of the

Library and of its activities, and this was followed by reproductions of fifty of the Library's finest books, with short descriptive notes ...³³

If all the foregoing activities and projects were put into train in my time, giving me at least some sense of achievement, there were plenty of other things for which I must admit complete or partial failure. Mention has been made of the slow progress with the La Trobe Library, the delay in establishing a proper Accessions Department, the indecision in defining a clear purpose and programme for the Lending Library in the new scheme of State-wide library services.

But there were failures also; delay in bringing the Map collection under proper control, in making any real attack upon the Library's binding problems and in establishing any proper system of public relations on the Library's behalf. I feel now that I should have engaged myself far more actively in external social, literary, and cultural projects; joined societies, opened exhibitions, appeared on TV and spoken on radio, written scholarly articles for the Press and in suitable journals, and altogether brought the Library and its official Head into much more public prominence.

I tried to establish on two or more occasions some little news sheet, both for staff and public distribution, but they were short lived efforts; no beginning was ever made with a printed bulletin or periodical of merit. I thought often of a staff social club, but got nowhere with this; perhaps the variety of educational levels, and social backgrounds, precluded any possibility of success with this in a largely mixed staff. However, I still think we should have been able to find some means of adding to the *esprit de corps* and giving staff members a greater interest and pride in the great institution which they were serving ...

The Depression years

Stepping back in time for two or three years, puts my mind into the Depression era. The general state of unemployment meant that the Library was crowded with readers day after day. People stood up reading, they squatted on the ends of tables reading, people everywhere studying to improve their prospects. In its efforts to avoid too much widespread distress, the Government provided work for the unemployed and paid a small wage, known as 'sustenance'. Those who benefitted from this became known as 'Sussos'. For many months, the Library had teams of these about the place. They were not supposed to do work which would normally be done by the regular staff, and it became difficult at times to think up suitable, permissible employment for them. The men were varied in type; some were former clerical and even professional men, some labourers, some (I'm afraid) numbered among the normally unemployables. I had some supervision of these teams under Foxcroft. On one occasion, the Sussos generally went on strike. Our

men gathered in the southern courtyard and refused to work. There were no hard feelings about it at all and I remember the shy and devious-minded Foxcroft, to my surprise, handling them very directly and getting on very well with them while they made their protest. Later, Axel Lodewyckx was in charge of Susso men and was quiet, firm and quite excellent with them.

The Trustees

I have deliberately left the Trustees right out of this story. First of all, in my younger days, I knew nothing of them. They were Olympians and I was a mere earthling. In my later days, as Chief Librarian, their group remained almost unchanged until I retired and it would not be fitting to comment here upon them. Several of them became my good friends and I was liked and was on good terms with all. But I would like to mention just a few:

Dr Joske for his *completely* illegible signature and for the fact that one day he returned a Reference Library book which he had borrowed 31 years earlier!

Mr McMicken for his extraordinary vitality and enterprise into his late eighties ...

To Rev Dr Benson I can only express my utmost gratitude for his never-failing support in a host of ways. From 1945 onwards, in particular, he was a guide, philosopher and friend. He was generous in allowing me an almost entirely free hand in Library matters, and as Chief Librarian I was given a freedom of action which I am sure my predecessors never had. He offered constant encouragement and helpfulness; he backed my every effort, and in the end was instrumental in securing Royal recognition of the position which I had occupied for the last 15 years.

One thing remains to be said. In all my forty years at the Library, as far as I know I never experienced any feeling of enmity from any single member of staff. Lots of them did not agree with me from time to time, and were doubtless very critical of my actions or inaction. This was natural and inevitable; they would not have been human, otherwise. But at all times, through all those long years, I was shown continual courtesy, understanding and friendliness by everyone with whom I worked ...

For the period 1945–60, I have the greatest possible appreciation of the loyalty, friendliness and support of everyone who served the Library with me. Let it go at that. Words are but poor and inadequate things with which to express such gratitude as I feel.