

Liberating the Old and capturing the New at New Norcia

A report on the annual New Norcia Library Lecture, September 2001

Spring is a beautiful time of year in the monastic town of New Norcia, 132 kms north of Perth, and that is when the annual New Norcia Library Lecture is held. Viewing the wild-flower verges was an added pleasure for the hundred librarians who travelled to New Norcia on September 14. The principal pleasure was to hear Jan Fullerton, the Director-General of the National Library of Australia deliver the 2001 lecture.

Jan defied the airline crisis and a very busy schedule to present a very thought-provoking lecture entitled *Liberating the Old – Capturing the New* in which she explored the concept of a national library, then outlined the National Library's current directions and described some of its ongoing programmes.

Below is her lecture in summary:

A national public library, as stated in Federal Parliament in 1907, should be worthy of the Australian nation and be a centre for the collection of literature, manuscripts, documents and records from or about Australia. This collection should be available for all Australians. The National Library Act enshrined these aims.

The National Library has to compete with many other public cultural institutions for funding, and it has to resist attempts by the fund-providers to measure success on the basis of visitors through the doors. Rigorous public accountability is measured in financial outcomes, not values, and the challenge in this environment is to attract funding and still develop long-term strategies that uphold ideals.

The directions statement for 2000-2002 for the National Library expresses the values which "support the development of ideas, scholarship, research and creativity, and the enjoyment of these pursuits". Particular consideration is given to the use of technology, and a goal of the national library is to ensure that all Australians, at their place of choice, have direct, seamless access to print and electronic sources of information, with minimal intervention by librarians.

The decision of the National Library to concentrate on increasing collections of Australian literature was reinforced. It is and always has been an unattainable ideal to collect all books from all places and from all times. However, it is an important principle that all collections are available for people to access.

Obviously, the catalogue is important as point of entry to the National Library collections, so a major effort has been made to catalogue uncatalogued items, and to make sure that all catalogues are available online.

Online journals have become important, and Australian electronic publications have been captured and preserved, and will be accessible for posterity. The National Library has a lot of experience in ensuring viable and sustainable access to digital content, and is working with state libraries to develop the national electronic collection.

Cooperation with libraries of all kinds is important to the National Library in order to improve awareness and access to collections all over Australia. An example is the Interlibrary Benchmarking Study which examined interlibrary lending and document delivery, with the objective of allowing all Australians to get best service from the Australian library service.

Finally, Jan took us through some of the digital library initiatives as outlined on the National Library of Australia web-page. A careful look at the web-site is recommended.

After the delicious lunch, there was a panel discussion followed by questions from the audience. Before the discussion, panellists were asked to give their ideas on satisfying library user requirements.

Trevis Lawton, from the City of Joondalup, explained ways in which technology could provide personalised services away from the library building for the benefit of public library users. Bobbie Bruce, a corporate information manager for a multinational mining engineering firm, described how her librarian skills assist her company in strategic planning as well as records management. Finally, we were told by Paul Genoni, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media and Information at Curtin University, that the speed and variety of technological change had impacts that could not be anticipated. Planning, therefore, by libraries, and by those training future librarians had become more problematic. Jan Fullerton joined the panellists to field a wide variety of questions before Abbot Placid Spearritt closed the day.



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ANZTLA Newsletter

The April 2002 issue of the Newsletter will be the final production from the desk of the present Editor. Members of ANZTLA are encouraged to consider offering for this responsibility.

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