

Conference Summary

by Philip Harvey



The President's Summary at Practicalities of the Twenty-Fifth ANZTLA Conference, held at St Catherine's College, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Perth, Western Australia from Thursday 15th to Sunday 18th of July, 2010.

This year's traditional pre-conference cataloguing session was led by Helen Greenwood (John Kinder Theological Library, Auckland). Electronic books are being added to the Kinder Library from the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre. Australia does not have an equivalent Centre. The provider-neutral record is our aim, with its emphasis on the content, not the provider. The language of Resource Description and Access (RDA) informs most discussion of new cataloguing practice, so familiarity with RDA is a prerequisite. Fortunately Helen had a PowerPoint class on practical RDA that she ran for the benefit of delegates. Forests of square brackets, 'Core if' statements, and notes fields that correct the direct description with information like "Actually published in 2010." Actually? The drift in standards of English style are just one symptom of the changing practice. By dispensing with abbreviations in Latin and English, RDA cataloguers are asked to type out all of these



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AACR shortenings in full. As Lavinia Gent (Australian Lutheran College, North Adelaide) observed, “Not RDA, but RSI.”

Kim Robinson (Moore Theological College Library, Sydney) delivered a keynote address on the 25 year history of ANZTLA. Discussion about a theological library association in Australia and New Zealand started as early as 1977. After convoluted consultations over many years, librarians of institute libraries of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools first met as ANZTLA, quite separate from ANZATS affiliation, in Canberra in 1985. Kim was one of only three or four here at Perth who were at that original conference. Patriarchs and matriarchs of those times were named, but it was plain that the person who first asserted and acted on the need for an association independent of other organizations was ANZTLA's first President, Trevor Zweck. A happy and healthy association will always be telling stories about itself and its people, and Kim gave some detailed narrative. Wendy Davis (Adelaide Theological Library), the shortest lived President of ANZTLA, read out a timeline while Rosemary Watts (Trinity Theological College Library, Leederville) and Jean Coleman (Murdoch University Library) literally held a timeline under which passed successive decades of members. The party then took off with blowing of candles, cutting of cake, and clinking of champagne glasses.

Next day we took a serious bus and a naughty bus for the regular pilgrimage to New Norcia. Air-conditioned comfort and a rich commentary from the driver was a change from the memorable trip in 2003, when cost-saving supplied a bus with no spring in the seat springs. Once at the monastery town, Ruth Millard spoke about her work of consorting. Consortiums are about cooperation and common purpose. After 1990 consortial interests moved to systems and technologies. The electronic environment has pushed libraries into cooperative behaviour. Hence, in 2002, ANZTLA's move to establish a consortium for the ATLA Database. Incentive: the shared cost. In negotiations, one representative at the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) called their operation “elephantine.” Negotiations were difficult. Silver Platter was the preferred aggregator and, once established, the service has run smoothly. 110 databases and 46 libraries in 2010 was contrasted with the initial twenty databases and twenty libraries in 2003. Face-to-face meeting solves years of problems that cannot be solved remotely. Outside medical libraries, ANZTLA is a rare bird amongst special libraries in running a consortia in this way. Ruth relaxed later with a panadol sandwich.

Lynn Pryor has retired from libraries and has since worked in libraries in the Northern Territory and Tanzania. This time it was three months in the capital of Dodoma. The university holidays continue for weeks until after the elections in order to avoid student uprisings. Books in the library are shelved according to the first



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number in Dewey order. There is no catalogue. Tanzania is different. Lynn introduced an automated system. She got all the books in shelf order, almost. She caused a student revolution. She came home. And what next for Lynn? Africa, Burma ... is this retirement by the alphabet? Once more the monastic community showed its great spirit of hospitality. We were shown nearly all the libraries in New Norcia and the librarian, Sue Johnson, was keen to raise our collective awareness of the riches available on the shelves and via the online catalogue. They are only a key stroke away.

On Saturday morning we were woken once again by the cackle of kookaburras. After an excellent breakfast (meals were magnificent throughout) we climbed onto the serious bus. Travelling past river scenery that will never change and real estate worth billions and billions of dollars, we arrived at Kings Park for a photo opportunity. Then it was on to Trinity Theological College where we heard from an Aspro, Associate Professor Kerry Smith (Dept. of Information Studies, Curtin University). Succession planning is about preparing for staff turnover, even your own. It is about leadership continuity, ensuring the continuity of the service itself. Age is an issue. In Canada the average age of library students is 37, so it is a later career choice. We need to have knowledge about the knowledge we are dealing with. We need to have succession plans. The person you need is Nanny McPhee. Sorry, I'll read that again. The person you need is a risk-taker, a jack-of-all-trades, a networker. Special librarians communicate with their profession. It's about trust.

Anne Hocking (ex-Veech Librarian, Catholic Institute of Sydney) thinks we should not be afraid of emerging technologies, that we take what we need and not worry about what we don't need. Don't panic! There is time to do all of these things. It doesn't have to cost a lot either. Anne talked about the hype cycle. Her paper went from a Peak of Inflated Expectations to a Trough of Disillusionment, before reaching a Slope of Enlightenment and eventually a Plateau of Productivity. It was an emotional rollercoaster. Either that or some modern version of The Pilgrim's Progress. We heard about the Horizon Report. In 2010 emerging technologies included mobile computing and open content (adoption in one year), electronic books and simple augmented reality (two years), and gesture-based computing and visual data analysis (three year adoption). It's about being aware, at least, even if much of this may be at present inappropriate and costly. I liked the story from Rachael Bahl (Australian Catholic University, Canberra) who recently visited the same Veech Library and overheard this exchange. Library User: "Hey, you don't have a lot of technology in this library." Reference desk: "No, we have it all in print."

Kerrie Stevens (Harvest Bible College, Melbourne) spoke on metrics. Statistics are numbers with context. Kerrie delivered a superb summary of her ANZTLA-sponsored Statistics Workshop of late last year. ANZTLA statistics measure up well against



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comparable organizations, as the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries (ABTAPL) doesn't keep statistics, the European Theological Libraries organization (BETH) is just starting an online statistics form, and ATLA cannot say that their statistical methods meet the international standards. The Australian Federal Election was announced and we all went to lunch on the sundeck.

On Sunday morning we heard from Philip Harvey (Carmelite Library, Melbourne) and Judith Bright (John Kinder Theological Library, Auckland) about renovations of libraries. Provide adequate space for the next thirty years, at least. Librarians must not work in a construction site. Know the limitations and heritage expectations of your building. I liked the idea of initially taking your planners on a library crawl, a good way to get them to see a library the way we see them. We need to be aware of trends when putting together our strategic plan. Find out how to read building plans. Make sure you, the librarian, are on the planning committee, so you are aware of any new decisions that could affect the ultimate result. The transformation of library buildings should involve us. Remember too the rule of thumb: architects design libraries to work effectively and, once they are out of the building, the librarians move in and redesign everything so the library can work effectively.

Vicky Tkacz (Catholic Library of Western Australia) stepped in for Steve McVey at the last moment, for which we were very grateful. Service, success, survival - these are the three premier considerations in running a small special library. She had other alliterative alerts. Emphasis should be on the following: plan, perform, promote, people. Do it well and do it properly. We heard a great deal about Vicky's amazing work at the Catholic Library. She even revealed one of the secrets of her success: keeping one page lists.

St Catherine's College was an excellent choice of venue for this year's conference. Bright skies, the Swan River nearby, and the soft colours of Perth. The Conference Committee did a wonderful job of making us at home and keeping everything on track. They did us proud. The Committee was quite sizable: Carol Rysdyk, Diane Harper, Kerriann Lock, Nathan Hobby, Pam Richardson, Robin Dunn, Rex Waddell, Sue Johnson, and Vicki Tkacz. But they made it quite clear that nothing would have happened the way it did without the monumental effort, devotion, patience and skill of Jean Coleman and Rosemary Watts, the two leaders of the Conference. We thank them one and all! Transcripts and files of the Conference papers will appear soon on the ANZTLA EJournal and will be much more reliable and accurate representations of what was said than anything you see here.