

NEW NORCIA LIBRARY

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New Norcia Library was the venue for the Spring meeting of the ANZTLA, WA Chapter. Since commencing in September, 1990 the meetings of the Chapter have been held quarterly on a Monday evening and have rotated around the seven metropolitan libraries. However as New Norcia is 132 km north of Perth it was decided to hold the meeting there on a Saturday afternoon.

New Norcia, Australia's only monastic town, with its towered buildings, olive trees and richly-decorated interiors, is like a piece of old Spain in the heart of the Australian bush. Founded in 1845 by Spanish Benedictine monks, the settlement has been a mission to the Aborigines, the centre of the monks' extensive farming activities and a place of education and culture.

We met at the Abbey at noon and immediately joined the monks for prayer in the new chapel and then adjourned to the park in front of the Abbey for a picnic lunch. At 1 pm we assembled in the monastery library. Since the library is within the monastic enclosure, special permission had to be obtained for our lady members to enter. After a formal welcome by the Prior-Administrator (Father Placid Spearitt) we were given a guided tour of the library by Brother David and the recently appointed qualified lay librarian, Travis Lawton.

The New Norcia Library houses the largest theological collection in W.A. with some 60,000 items. The areas of strength (as laid out in the collection development policy) are Scripture, Philosophy, Theology, Liturgy, Spirituality, Church History and Monastic Studies. The Library is also the oldest Theological Library in the State and, in fact, has the second largest collection of rare books in any Australian library. They have over 2000 books (representing 1008 titles) published between 1508 and 1801.

As well as the Sacred collection, the Library also has about 20,000 books in its Secular collection. At present the Library is in a transitional state. The collection is in the process of being transported to another building. The new library building (of concrete/brick construction) was originally a

classroom facility and as such has many interesting areas which will provide for a well laid-out library. The new building is situated opposite the Abbey between St. Gertrude's (the former Girls' College, built in 1908) and the cemetery (the resting place of some 130 monks and nuns, as well as many Aborigines and pioneers).

As books are being moved from the present library to the new building they are being computer catalogued using the Inmagic software package. Work has commenced on the Secular Collection and when this is completed a study area will be created. This will give plenty of space for both comfortable reading and serious work.

With the re-organization, the library will become a centre of excellence in the religious field and will offer a wider range of services than are currently available including access to the collections by other libraries and students.

The Community also has an extensive archive of both photographic and manuscript materials which documents a lot of early history of the district as well as missionary activities among Aboriginal people.

The library has commenced publishing a quarterly newsletter (*Amici Bibliothecae*) which is available from the Editor at New Norcia Library, Holy Trinity Abbey, New Norcia, W.A., 6509.

Any reader travelling to W.A., either for business or pleasure, should make New Norcia a must on their itinerary. Accommodation is available in both the Abbey and the Old Convent. Seminars, etc. can be run in adjoining buildings.

However it must be explained that New Norcia Library is NOT a public library. At present NO women are able to look through the main library room, and because of the valuable collections it is necessary to be certain that only bona fide visitors are able to access the collections. Prospective visitors, should, therefore, make contact with the Library prior to their arrival at New Norcia so that satisfactory arrangements can be made.

Dr Meers, Principal of Perth Bible College, is on the executive of the ANZTLA WA Chapter.