

Some thoughts on the future

THE LITERATURE OF librarianship abounds with the cliché, 'we are living in changing times'. Although this is a laboured phrase it nevertheless is an issue which we must face. All professions are experiencing the effects of technological change and librarianship is no exception. We cannot predict the future but we can shape it so that librarianship is well served by and serves well changing technologies. The LAA has a major commitment to guide libraries and librarianship through changing society, and equipping the Association itself for changes.

Recognising the importance of this task, in 1979 General Council established a Futures Committee. This was largely in response to the highly successful 1979 Biennial Conference on 'Alternative Futures'.

The terms of reference for the Futures Committee were to prepare a report which:

- examines the documentation associated with LAA20 and the issues raised at the Conference and assess likely changes which will affect the profession and the Association over the next 20 years;
- proposes objectives, an organisational structure and mode of operation for the Association which will allow it to evolve and respond in a positive manner to the changes in its environment; and
- initiates immediate action in relation to planning, policy creation and decision-making so that the Association may begin to shape its future.

Following a meeting of the Committee on 20 April 1980, it was resolved that the primary consideration was to determine the future environment in which libraries and librarians will be operating. Only then could the appropriate Association structure be determined. A statement was circulated to all Sections (23 April 1980) which included the following statement:

The Futures Committee is to examine current forecasts of the future of society. It will then examine where librarianship, broadly defined to meet the needs of the latter part of this century, fits into that future. It will then seek a definition of what librarianship is, what a librarian is, and what the Association is. From this should flow the objectives of that Association, and a consideration of whether those objectives can be achieved within the existing structure or whether that structure needs to be changed.

On 24 July 1980 the Committee met with representatives of each Section. This did not result in much progress and the Committee felt at this stage that it should concentrate on its first Term of Reference.

At its next meeting on 7 September 1980 responses from divisions and from external related bodies were reviewed. The Committee decided that the task set by the terms of reference was too broad and too ill-defined. It would be possible for the Committee to continue discussing possible sociological and

technological elements of the future for some time, but with little practical result.

Responses received from a wide range of divisions and from other associations indicated that existing material was of limited use to the Committee. The Committee therefore decided to work towards commissioning a number of papers on specific topics, to provide the basis for a better-informed discussion in the Committee and in the profession generally.

A list of topics was identified on which the Committee wished to commission papers; an invitation to interested parties was printed in *InCite* and the present program of activity embarked on, with mixed results in 1981.

A number of papers were commissioned in 1981 with the hope that when completed they would be circulated to the membership to generate discussion and debate. Due to the constant problem of overcommitment, to date only one paper has been received.

The Futures Committee met in March 1982, well aware of the lack of tangible results of its endeavours. The Committee reaffirmed the need for its existence, recognising that, as the professional association, the LAA must guide the profession through periods of change and stimulate debate on areas most likely to affect the profession. At the moment the Futures Committee is the only body of the LAA with a specific brief to consider the future and our place in it.

Topics for which papers are still being commissioned include:

1. Technological change – as it relates to information management.
2. Educational change and its impact on the individual and therefore on libraries.

3. Economic structure of information in public access services.

4. Emergence of a commercial information industry.

5. Politics of information, including censorship, privacy, freedom of information.

Library schools have already been invited to prepare papers on any of these topics. If other members of the Association are interested, more information is available.

The Futures Committee is hoping to appoint rapporteurs at LAA22 to take particular note of papers covering any of the topics of interest to the Committee. As well as this other avenues are being considered to involve the membership in this very important and difficult task.

Members of the Futures Committee are Denis Richardson (Convener), Judith Baskin (President), Barrie Mitcheson (Vice-President), Peter Judge, Brenda Gerrie, Diana Killen, Jeanette Knox, Susan Acutt (Executive Director). To facilitate ongoing action between meetings, sub-committees have been established in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. The Melbourne Group has been very active in publicising the work of the Futures Committee to the Victoria Branch, with the other groups hoping to follow this practice.

The task set before the Futures Committee is a very difficult one but this is no reason to give up, lose faith or disband. The LAA must consider the future, the Futures Committee is the mechanism. Results or definitive proposals will not happen overnight. There will be a time when input from the membership is of the essence.

Further information about the Futures Committee is available from Susan Acutt, Executive Director, LAA.



Memorial chair at Blackwoods

AS A TRIBUTE to the late Richard Blackwell, who inaugurated the James Cook Bicentenary Scholarship, the five scholars who had benefited from this award up until Mr Blackwell's death decided to commission a memorial to him.

These scholars were John Horacek (La Trobe University), Philip Kidd (Otago University), George Miller (Australian National University), Carol Mills (Canberra College of Advanced Education) and Sir John Yocklunn (National Library of PNG).

The tribute has taken the form of a chair, specially commissioned from furniture designer Tom Clarke, a former librarian. It is made of cherrywood, and a small brass plaque on the back rail gives its history and purpose. It now sits in the Broad Street, Oxford, office of Blackwells.

Two scholars have been chosen since; John Barclay and Max Borchardt.

Two pages of book reviews