

SA State Library goes local

Cheryl Dalling, local history and community liaison officer, Adelaide

The State Library of South Australia is committed to its role within the public library network, and the creation of a local history and community liaison officer position at the library reflects this. Created in 1994, the position co-ordinates liaison with donors of archival material to the Mortlock Library of South Australia, as well as liaising with public libraries containing local history collections. The two roles complement each other. The former often results in referral of material to a local history collection, while knowledge of the Mortlock's collections is used to assist local history collection personnel.

The advisory/consultancy service provided to public librarians concentrates on promoting archivally-sound procedures in new and existing local history collections, assisting with organisation of collections, indexing, automating, database, copyright and preservation advice.

Country visits are an integral part of the work and each year the local history and community liaison officer makes two country field trips. The cross fertilisation of ideas when visiting both country and metropolitan libraries enables the State Library to assess and understand the needs of these collections and curators. In the past couple of years visits to remote libraries have demonstrated a need for preservation awareness workshops, resource kits and a local history kit containing information on copyright and sample forms that could be used in a local history collection.

Preservation workshop

Country libraries work closely with their local history group, historical society, museum or National Trust. There is usually only one library member and a few volunteers involved in local history and then only for a few hours a week. This combined with the distance from the State Library has made it difficult for members to attend workshops held in Adelaide. It was suggested that a workshop could be organised in the region for either one or two days covering topics relating to conservation.

Following enquiries from country libraries on a recent tour, the manager of conservation services of the State Library of South Australia prepared a rough draft for one- and two-day workshops which was circulated to all libraries in South Australia.

The one-day workshop offers the following topics: handling of records (basic outline); environmental considerations when storing your records (basic outline); safe storage options for records; disaster planning (basic outline); and minor



repairs to records (practical). The two-day workshop offers additional practical sessions and instructions on disaster planning.

These outlines can also be changed to provide specific topics for individual libraries. It is envisaged that there will be follow-up workshops involving more in-depth practical sessions.

The response received was excellent and, surprisingly, many metropolitan and

near country areas have also requested workshops to be held in their locality. Many libraries have requested that volunteers in the local history area also be included in the workshops which will be run by a member of our conservation services.

Resource kits

Visits to public libraries revealed the lack of information regarding material held in the Mortlock Library. A questionnaire was sent to all libraries asking whether a kit containing information about Mortlock's collections would be useful and if there were any particular topics they would like researched.

Following an outstanding response the first kits were developed. Mortlock Library's archival, oral history and photographic collections were searched, as well as the published collection database. The result was a listing of sources specific to a particular area or region. Access to these lists, in the form of an information kit, gives country researchers insight into the State Library's collection, without requiring them to travel to Adelaide. A vast quantity of information held in the library is not fully-indexed and new material is added continually, which means the lists will never be complete but will require continual updating.

To date, kits for the Upper Eyre Peninsula have been completed with the Riverland and Upper South East scheduled for 1998. The kits were distributed in 1997 to each town in the Upper Eyre Peninsula and a complete set to the regional centre, Port Lincoln. Kits for metropolitan libraries are being compiled simultaneously. These kits are proving to be most popular — however the amount of time required to produce each area's kit slows distribution.

These initiatives have been developed in response to client requests and show that there is a genuine need for such services. They provide further examples of the immense value of liaison between the State Library and local history collections. ■