

The Centre for the Book, Monash University

Monash University's Centre for the Book was reshaped in 1998 within what has become the School of English, Communications and Performance Studies. Before that, from 1981 to 1997, it was an autonomous unit called the Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies functioning in the Faculty of Arts. The new name makes clear the Centre's aim to cover all aspects of the history of manuscript and printed books: authorship, production, publishing, distribution and reading. Apart from editors of texts from antiquity to the present day and compilers of descriptive bibliographies, the Centre caters for all students of the material heritage of our means of communication through the written and printed word.

At present the Centre does not offer any programs leading to formal academic degrees, but people associated with it do supervise MAs and PhDs on appropriate topics registered with the School of English. A wider audience is sought through occasional seminars – some of them in the framework of the Melbourne Bibliographical Circle, co-sponsored by the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand and run at the State Library of Victoria. Otherwise the Centre reaches out via conferences (normally organized in conjunction with other bodies), extramural courses and various publications.

In addition to involvement in Melbourne conferences of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, the Centre took the leading role in an international colloquium on "Centre and Periphery in the World of the Book, 1500–2000" held in 2001 at Monash University's study centre at Prato near Florence in Italy. The proceedings (published by Olschki) are due out in a few months' time. In 2009 the Centre is joining with Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Inc. to hold the next seminar on Australian library history at the Prahran campus of Swinburne University.

The main vehicle for the Centre's extramural teaching is the Australia and New Zealand Rare Book Summer School. The series began at Dunedin in 2005, then came to Melbourne in 2006 and again in 2008. The next Melbourne session will be held in February 2010. Arranged in close collaboration with the State Library of Victoria, the Rare Book School proposes an intensive week of tuition on one aspect (chosen from a menu of four) of bibliography or book history. The subjects treated in Melbourne by local or overseas specialists have included binding, lithography, medieval manuscripts, physical bibliography, Australian and Canadian nineteenth-century book history, and book collecting. This indicates clearly that the Centre, while putting a certain emphasis on Australian matters, has an international scope. It is possible that courses for locals spread over a longer time will be put on in future. The week-long formula is obviously more practical for people coming from other parts of Australia and from New Zealand.

Publishing pamphlets and monographs is a very important part of the Centre's activities, but it is limited by modest resources (a day and a half of paid assistance supported by the

Chaskett Fund of the Melbourne Community Foundation). A major recent effort was *The Commonwealth of Books: Essays and Studies in Honour of Ian Willison* (2007), but more usually the Centre issues pamphlets and smaller volumes like the "Naturae" series devoted to "the history, literature, biography, bibliophily, and fine art of natural history", the annual Foxcroft lectures on bibliography and book history of the State Library of Victoria, and a collection on "immigrant communities of writers and readers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries". Overall the purpose is to work in tandem with other bodies with related concerns.

The Centre is conscious that, with a serious national diminution of teaching efforts in the book-history, bibliography and rare-book areas, it must offer possibilities of instruction and interchange to Australia as a whole.

Further information can be found <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/cftb>

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The La Trobe Rare Book Collection

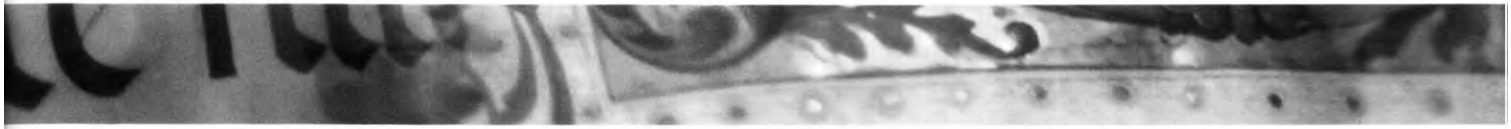
Australia was luckier than most national literatures in having much of the pioneering work done on its bibliography by John Ferguson. His seven-volume *Bibliography of Australia*, published by Angus and Robertson, remains the single most important reference tool for the study of Australian rare books.¹ Equally important in raising the standards of bibliographic description have been the activities of antiquarian bookdealers, both Australian and overseas; their many published catalogues serve both as a significant reference source for the study of Australian rare books as well as an indicator of current and future market trends.

So what is an Australian rare book, or any rare book for that matter?

From the point of view of the La Trobe collection, a number of criteria come into play: date of publication, edition statement, fine production or binding, market value, notable illustrations or plates, variant copies, association copies, significant first editions, to name a few. In many cases, one or more of these criteria may be present, and The State Library of Victoria's *Selection Policy* for Australiana rounds off this definition in stating that the La Trobe Rare Books collection includes titles whose content relates to Australia, or titles published in Australia, regardless of content.²

The La Trobe Rare Books collection consists of four separate but interrelated collections: the Currie collection, the Buesst collection, the Moir collection and the main collection.

The Currie collection consists of approximately eight hundred books, primarily nineteenth-century material, and includes many important accounts of voyages and travels. The majority of items in the collection are to be found in their original state of issue, being in original boards, cloth or wrappers, with uncut pages, as distinct from so many State Library of Victoria books which were recased in standard Library binding at the time of purchase.



The Buesst collection of foreign language Australiana was presented to the State Library of Victoria in 1974. It consists of some three hundred volumes, primarily nineteenth-century material; although a sizable proportion of late eighteenth-century material is included.

The main La Trobe Rare Book collection consists of some 10,000 volumes, the oldest of which is Bishop Joseph Hall's *Mundus Alter et Idem*, printed in London in 1605 with a fictitious Frankfurt imprint, which purports to describe an imaginary Utopia set in Terra Australis Incognita.

The earliest factual account relating to Australia held in the collection is *Descriptio ac Delineatio Geographica Detectionis*, printed in Amsterdam in 1612. It includes a Latin edition of De Quiros's eighth memorial to the King of Spain announcing his discovery of what he believed to be the fifth continent, but which was later shown by James Cook to be the New Hebrides.

Early accounts of voyages and exploration are a particular strength of the La Trobe Rare Books collection. Included are the major compendiums of voyages to Australia and the South Seas issued by De Brosses, Callander and Dalrymple. These books were responsible for creating renewed interest both in Australia and the concept of a South Land. A comprehensive range of publications, both official and unofficial, emanating from James Cook's three voyages to the Pacific are held, as are all first edition accounts of the First Fleet.

Without doubt what must be considered one of the most important and certainly one of the rarest items in the collection is the 1831 printing of William Bland's account of Hume and Hovell's overland expedition *Journey of Discovery to Port Phillip*. Jonathan Wantrup has described it as one of the fabled rarities of Australian book collecting.³

Acquired in bizarre circumstances was the Library's copy of John William Lewin's *Birds of New South Wales*. In 1918 a copy was submitted to the Chief Librarian by a man whose children had been using it as a picture book. As recorded in *The Book of the Public Library 1906–1931*, 'none of the Library staff had ever seen a copy, and a valuation was more or less guess-work. The would-be seller was so informed and, as the book was incomplete, was offered five pounds, which he gladly accepted'.⁴ It turned out that it was one of only thirteen surviving copies of the 1813 Sydney edition, which was the first natural history book published in the colony, and one of the most sought-after plate books amongst collectors; in June 1989, a copy at a Sotheby's auction in New York sold for \$525,550.

A further criterion for inclusion within the collection is items whose the importance rests in their association with individuals of significance to Australian and, in particular, Victorian history. Included in the collection are books originally belonging to John Pascoe Fawcner, John Batman (a copy of Volume I of *Homer's Odyssey* in an 1802 edition translated by Pope), Robert Hoddle, the Henty family, and Charles Joseph La Trobe.

The collection contains many first edition works of literature; the original parts of the pirated Tasmanian edition of *The*

Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, published by Henry Dowling in Launceston in 1838, must be considered one of the rarest.

Use of the La Trobe Rare Book collection could be said to be as varied as the many books which go to make up its number. It is used by scholars and bibliographers; illustrated material from the collection is used extensively by publishers; items are featured in State Library of Victoria exhibitions and are equally loaned to other institutions for their exhibitions; items are used as the basis for facsimile reproductions; the Moir collection has been extensively consulted for research on early Australian crime fiction. Put simply, the La Trobe Rare Book collection comprises one of the most complete holdings of early Australiana in the country and, as such, is used in the broadest sense for any research in the subject field.

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1. Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia* was republished in a seven-volume facsimile edition by the National Library of Australia between 1975–1977; a supplementary eighth volume entitled *Bibliography of Australia: addenda 1784–1850* (Volumes I to IV) was first published by the National Library in 1986.
2. State Library of Victoria. *Selection Policy*. Library Council of Victoria Melbourne, 1986, p.44.
3. Jonathan Wantrup, *Australian Rare Books* 1987, p. 187.
4. Armstrong, Edmund La Touche and Boys, Robert Douglas, *The Book of the Public Library... 1906–1931*, The Trustees, Melbourne, 1932, p.37.

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Did you know...

...that in Australia the biggest market in rare books is for local history including diaries of early voyages of discovery and natural history books with coloured plates.

or...

...that modern first editions are the hottest section of the collecting trade. But the collectors are readers first; collecting the books that they love with an eye to investment.

In last month's issue of *inCite*, the feature entitled *A 'both-ways' Library and Information Service in the Top End* was wrongly attributed to Jayshree Mamtora, ALIA NT Local Liaison Officer. This article was supplied by Ann Williams, Head of Library and Information Services, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory. We apologise for any inconvenience that this oversight may have caused.

The Editor