Early days in Australian librarianship

From UNSW comes a significant contribution to our understanding of our professional roots

The School of Information, Library and Archive Studies at the University of NSW recently published the papers from the fifth *Library History Forum*, 6–7 November, 1992 (earlier forums were held at Monash in 1984, Canberra CAE in 1985, UNSW in 1987 and Monash again in 1989). Dr W Boyd Rayward, Professor of Librarianship at the School, and Dean of UNSW's Faculty of Professional Studies, edited this volume, called *Libraries and Life in a Changing World: The Metcalfe Years, 1920–1970.* (1993: UNSW. ISBN 0 7334 0014 0).

'John Wallace Metcalfe (1901–1982) is generally considered to be the most important librarian of his generation,' writes Boyd. (In *ALIAS* Boyd called Metcalfe 'the Father of Australian Librarianship'.) This forum aimed to examine how and why he is so important for us. Certainly, Metcalfe initiated or helped to establish many of the key elements of our profession in Australia: library schools, the Library Association which brought librarians into a professional community, the system of examinations and certification which gave the 'advantages of uniform and portable qualifications,' and the legislation concerning public libraries in NSW. Any one of these would have been a grand achievement; together they add up to a giant stride for the profession of librarianship in Australia.

As a man he was variable, says Wilma Radford in her foreword: rude and abrasive in confrontations, he could be kind and compassionate at other times. He appeared frank and open, while maintaining an inner core of reserve. But there was underlying constancy in the main thrust—for improved library services.

In this book, Boyd writes of Metcalfe's travels and their far-reaching effects. Jean Whyte studies Metcalfe's contribution to establishing professional librarianship in Australia, and concludes that although the School at UNSW, of which Metcalfe was the first Director, gave professional respectability, there were also wrong decisions that may have held back some developments. David J Jones looks at the relationship

John Metcalfe

between Metcalfe and W H Ifould at the Public Library of NSW.

Other writers examine Metcalfe's contributions to subject access, his relations with Parliamentary libraries, and at various library phenomena of the time, such as the 1935 Munn-Pitt Report on conditions in Australian Libraries. There are also papers on publishing 'From depression to War', Carnegie Grants 1923–1961, and others—fifteen in all, counting the excellent Foreword and Preface, totalling over 230 pages of text. The sources of most of the papers are given in copious footnotes, but there is no index.

The measure of the importance of this Forum is given by John Levett in an Introduction delivered as an after-dinner speech. History, he says, is now almost dropped from the librarianship curriculum, although it is the key to understanding our present culture: 'Those who do not know their history are indeed doomed to repeat it. The study of history is the light with which we may illuminate our present and fathom it.'

The book is available from Mrs C McBrearty at the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies, UNSW, PO Box 1, Kensington NSW, price $28.50.   ◾

George Holman 1901-1994

A great teacher librarian, loved by his students

George Clavering Holman died of a stroke on 8 February. He was a pioneer in school libraries, having established one back in the 40s, thirty years before hey became seen as normal school resources.

In Holman's obituary in *The Australian* of 22 March, Walter McVitty paid 'tribute to the man he had first known in 1951 as the librarian of the Toorak Teachers College—a time when Holman was setting up the College library, starting with one bookcase and *Cassell's Encyclopedia.* Walter met Holman again during his time as a lecturer at the Melbourne Teachers College and found him an inspiring if unconventional teacher.

From humble beginnings (his father was a tally-man in the Victorian coal mines), Holman obtained an arts degree and a Diploma of Education at Melbourne University. He taught French and maths in various Victorian schools, but began his interest in school libraries at Coburg, where he was given the job of looking after 'the room full of books'. From schools he moved to Toorak Teachers College, and from there in 1959 to the Melbourne Teachers College; he retired in 1966.

He was passionately interested in all the arts and threw himself into passing on his passions to his students. In retirement these interests were unabated: he set himself to master all the Beethoven piano sonatas, while continuing to study Shakespeare, painting and Latin.

Those who were his students, says McVitty, would describe him simply as 'the greatest teacher it has been their good fortune to have known.'   ◾