

# Is there a place for tradition?



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ALIA president

Our Association marks its 60th birthday this year and what a wonderful opportunity for us to celebrate: to remember our past as well as look forward to our future.

Having a past is something which has been haunting me of late. And not for the reasons you might be thinking! My time as chair of the Association's By Laws and Regulations Committee reminded me of a number of traditions which befell us in the way our Association is structured and one example of this is our Royal Charter. We may need to break with this tradition if Australia moves to become a republic.

Also, as many of you know, the Asia Pacific Special, Health and Law librarians will be holding their conference in Perth later this year and one issue which is dogged in its persistence is 'to hold or not to hold'? Why should we, in the name of tradition, hold the Lesle Syme Memorial Lecture this time?

I must declare more than a passing interest in this topic for, despite my role as today's information studies academic, special libraries, or more importantly one-person libraries, were my training ground in the information game. One might argue that in a special library there is no place for tradition as time moves with such rapidity that there is scarcely time to breathe, let alone contemplate the past. Or contemplate one's navel as one of my work colleagues used to so succinctly put it. But there is.

Why is it that our profession is able to make such a reasonable and valid contribution to the ways in which information is managed today? Some fundamental reasons which immediately come to mind are because our precepts are based on a long tradition of cataloguing and classification principles which have stood the test of time. And because many of the social principles which we hold so near and dear are also based on social justice ideals which predate both you and me.

Is it not because of tradition and the tests of time that we hold such principles so dearly? And they haunt us. Many of us catalogue, albeit sparingly, our reprint collections, we classify our personal collections at home, we file the contents of our pantry shelves or our CD collection less than ran-

domly. We argue in public forums, as I have done, for social justice in the treatment of, and provision of facilities to, all members of our community.

So when I browse ALIAS and read of how our Association started and about the names and faces of these times, I feel a sense of belonging or to quote a well know Western Australian author, George Seddon, 'a sense of place'. This is why I believe that traditions like the Lesle Syme Memorial Lecture belong at our Specials Conferences. This lecture ought to give those attending the opportunity to be challenged by an erudite and perhaps even controversial presentation on an issue of import to the special library community. In so doing the name of that wonderful special librarian Lesle Syme, on behalf of all the very special special librarians, is preserved.

Our Association continues its traditions in the presentation of Fellowships, Redmond Barry Awards, HCL Anderson Awards and the occasional Ellinor Archer Award. Branches and sections have their ways of celebrating and remembering tradition. Why? To honour those of our membership or those closely associated with us for their fine efforts and to continue the traditions we hold so dearly and emulate quite cleverly in the names of those we remember through our awards.

We are not alone in such celebrations. Our American colleagues, in my limited, though real, experiences of American librarianship, enjoy their traditions too. In a visit to Colorado a few more years ago than I care to remember, I was lucky to be taken under the wings of the, then, graduate school of librarianship at Denver University and invited to their wonderfully friendly and traditional Alumni evenings — complete with sparkling punch bowl (and punch) and other local delicacies. I am also aware of the long list of traditional awards and recognitions our associate bodies the ALA and SLA bestow on respected colleagues, to show they appreciate, remember and care.

I hope you enjoy this anniversary issue of *inCite* and its reminiscences, and remember that just as you are paving the way in the brave new world in which our profession belongs, so too did others before you. ■

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