

# Regional, tropical and remote

John McKinlay, university librarian, James Cook University library

James Cook University of North Queensland in Townsville, in Queensland's dry tropics, was Australia's first tropical university. From its origins as the Townsville University College of the University of Queensland in 1961, it achieved autonomy in 1970 as Australia's fifteenth university and, for much of its history, Australia's smallest and most remote university.

The facts of its origins have shaped the nature of the university and, inevitably, of its library. The University's Act extols it to 'encourage and provide facilities for study and research both generally and in relation to subjects of special importance to the tropics' and to provide courses of study 'to meet the special needs of the community'.

The university has a significant emphasis on tropical studies, with teaching and research strengths in areas such as tropical marine studies, the Great Barrier Reef, tropical rainforests, and earth sciences and economic geology. As a traditional, pre-Dawkins university, it has always championed professional disciplines and world-class basic research. Most of its students are drawn from North Queensland, a very large area with traditionally a low participation rate in higher education. The university has always craved and needed growth which, by and large, it has achieved, beginning with the amalgamation with the Townsville College of Advanced Education in 1982.

The library building was the third building on the Douglas campus and is symbolically central to the campus (even if the academic buildings soon acquired a geography of their own) and symbolically faces Magnetic Island and the Pacific Ocean (even if the greening of Townsville now totally obscures the fact). The building is one of the most unique if not the most eccentric library building in Australia, which was improbably but

successfully extended in 1990 through the exceptional skill of its architect.

The library, historically, did the things which one might expect in the circumstances. It developed strong research collections and research support, within a limited disciplinary range. It created a tradition of one-to-one support for its often disadvantaged student population, which it has almost managed to sustain. It developed a strong regional studies collection, with the support of the local community and researchers. And it became the training ground for many of the steadily growing number of librarians in north Queensland. Above all, it was a very traditional and conservative library.

The university now has a second and rapidly growing campus and library in wet and lush tropical Cairns, Townsville's economic and political rival to the north. Both libraries are, or try to be, the very model of the modern university library, doing everything that everyone else does. Being regional, tropical and remote defined the original character of the university and its library. Now, the new political and pedagogic pressures have produced a bigger, brighter and more modern university. What the university now needs to do is to define a new role in the new education market place. ■



Exterior of the James Cook University library, Douglas campus

## Electronic text service

John Arfield, university librarian, University of Western Australia

The University of Western Australia's Electronic Text Service was officially launched on 14 November 1996 by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson. Funded in part by a grant from the Faculty of Arts, and modelled to a considerable extent on the University of Virginia's Electronic Text Center, this innovative service has the initial aim of providing a group of large full-text scholarly databases to staff and students in the humanities. It is coordinated from the Scholars' Centre in the university library.

The five initial databases, all published by Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, are: *The Bible in English, Editions and Adaptations of Shakespeare, English Verse Drama, Goethes Werke, and Patrologia Latina*. They contain thousands of texts in English, German, and Latin, as well as many accompanying images, mostly of the title-pages of the original editions. A locally-

created version of *Dante's Divine Comedy* is also available.

The software used as the basis of the service is the DynaWeb and DynaText package, produced by Electronic Book Technologies, Inc. The library is the first Australian participant in this company's Higher Education Grant Program. DynaWeb, which can be accessed over the campus network with any Web browser, allows both browsing and searching of the electronic texts. Searches can be customised to take advantage of the detailed SGML-based markup embedded in the texts.

The result is a powerful tool which can be employed in various sophisticated ways. The entire two-hundred and twenty-one printed volumes of the *Patrologia Latina*, for example, can be searched almost instantaneously for a single word. The occurrence of specific

words, phrases and concepts can be tracked across hundreds of years and dozens of authors. The extent to which different authors quote from each other's works can be investigated. The service will be extended in the future with the addition of more texts drawn from commercial and public-domain sources. Attention will also be given to encouraging staff and students to construct and publish their own materials, either as part of a course or as an outcome of research. The library is also keen to promote the use of electronic texts in courses, especially at honours and postgraduate level.

It would be naive to claim that these electronic texts will supersede the printed book. Nevertheless, they add a completely new dimension to literary and historical scholarship and research, and have produced an enthusiastic initial response from researchers in a range of humanities departments. ■