

Literary heritage in the bush

Rachel Salmond

Every year since the early 1970s the former goldmining town of Chiltern (population ca. 1200) in northeast Victoria has thrown a party on 3 January to celebrate the birthday of Ethel Florence Richardson, better known as novelist Henry Handel Richardson. Richardson's father was the doctor in Chiltern for about 15 months in the 1870s. The house that the family lived in during those months, 'Lake View', a National Trust property, is well worth visiting. This year the party, usually an evening picnic in the grounds of 'Lake View', grew into something much grander — a Literary Heritage Day with a very full program of papers about writers and artists who have had a connection with the town.

Professor Ross Harvey from Charles Sturt University began the day by talking about the local newspaper of the 1870s, *The Federal Standard*, and its role in the lives of the townsfolk. Bronwen Hickman spoke about Mary Gaunt, a Chiltern native, whose novels about resourceful women in the bush abound with references to life on the Victorian goldfields. Having found out a lot more about Dr Walter Richardson than has been known before, Associate Professor Bruce Steele, a member of the Monash University Henry Handel Richardson Project Team, helped us disentangle him from Henry Handel Richardson's fictional character, Richard Mahony. Author and illustrator Vane Lindesay passed on the benefits of his research into Chiltern artist Alfred Eustace, whose delicate paintings on gum leaves are among the highlights of the Chiltern Athenaeum Museum collection. Chiltern novelist, historian and lawyer Wilfred Busse was the subject of local historian Christine Watson's paper. And after a picnic tea on the lawn, as the sun went down and the stars came out, Dr Meg Probyn showed



Dr Meg Probyn provided the evening's slide show

us slides of Walter Richardson and his wife and two daughters and told us more about the family's history.



Professors Bruce Steele, Clive Probyn and Ross Harvey. Note the photograph of HHR in the background

The day was the perfect opportunity to launch the recently completed listing of the collection of 5000 books housed in the Chiltern Athenaeum Museum. From the late 1860s until 1970 a library service operated from the Chiltern Athenaeum. Although no catalogues or records of this service survive, the collection upon which it was based has survived, almost in its entirety. Tired and weary though these books may be, having fed the reading habits of Chiltern for so many years, they remain together in the same building in which they were used. Collections such as this are invaluable to cultural historians, social historians, bibliographers — to anyone with an interest in the history of publishing, the history of the colonial book trade, the history of reading, the history of library services in country towns, the history of cultural and social influences on the bush. The earliest publications on the shelves date from the 1820s and 1830s. The three-volume novels supplied to libraries during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s by the London book distributor, Mudie's, are well-represented on the shelves, as are the single-volume, much cheaper editions made available by publishers in their 'colonial edition' series during the 1880s, 1890s and early twentieth century. From the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s there are plenty of Mills and Boon romances and Collins Wild West Club westerns. Many of the books were acquired second and third-hand from Melbourne's circulating libraries, and the evidence of a system of moving well-read stock from metropolitan subscription libraries to rural libraries is strong in this collection. The collection listing will be made available online by the Athenaeum Museum Committee later in 2006.

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Streaming live from libraries...

I undertook my VALA Travel Scholarship study trip in mid-2005 to investigate a range of webcasting, streaming and webconferencing solutions that have been implemented in North America and UK. The tour included visits to a range of libraries, museums and galleries using these services. The technologies present new service delivery opportunities for libraries in Australia and also provide options for professional staff development.

Streaming of content provides audio and video resources in libraries to be made accessible via the internet. It also provides a solution for broadening the reach of live events currently limited to the library buildings. The Library of Congress (USA), Tate Online (UK) and Natural History Museum (UK) are using webcasting technology to deliver to a global audience. Each institution webcasts their pub-

lic events on a regular basis and makes them accessible via their websites. Author talks, symposiums, public programs are recorded and streamed, widening the reach of the experience to participants who cannot attend the 'live event'. The Library of Congress has added over 700 webcasts to their website since 2001, access is provided to content via a search engine, and a browse option.

Webconferencing adds an extra interactive component to streaming. In use at the State Library of Illinois through the OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries) public events and training for librarians are delivered via this technology. Library staff are invited to a 'meeting' in an online meeting room — communication can take place via audio or text chat, PowerPoint and webpages can be viewed by all participants. The event can be ar-

chived for future reference, including the text/audio discussion.

The technologies provide an exciting opportunity to bring library events to a broader audience. The interactive components enable audiences to engage; sharing in the discussions. As a professional development tool in Australia library staff could listen to visiting guest speakers, participate in conferences and debates regardless of location.

Anna Raunik, State Library of Queensland

Anna was a speaker at the February VALA06 conference in Melbourne. Her paper 'An investigation of streaming, webcasting and webconferencing technologies in the US and the UK' can be found at http://vala.org.au/vala2006/2006pdfs/100_Raunik_Final.pdf.