



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.<sup>3</sup>

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'.<sup>4</sup> 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 Mamtara, 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**