

CRIG Forum  
State Library of Victoria  
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## SERVICE DELIVERY FROM THE NEW HERITAGE COLLECTION SPACES

### What are the Heritage Collections?

The State Library of Victoria's Heritage Collections comprise three teams of staff with the following curatorial responsibilities:

- The Australian Manuscripts Collection, which collects unpublished material relating to the history and social life of Victoria. Currently, the collection is stored, both on and off-site, on some 8 kilometers of shelving.
- The Pictures Collection, which collects and houses photographs, and other illustrative material, relating to Victoria. The collection comprises some 600,000 items.
- The Rare Printed Collections, which includes the Rare Books Collection, Maps Collection, Children's Literature Research Collection, and the Anderson Chess Collection. These collections comprise over 100,000 maps, some 125,000 rare books, over 60,000 children's books, and 10,000 books and serials on Chess.

Staffing for each of the three collections is approximately 5-6 librarians and technicians.

### Where were the Heritage Collections before the Redevelopment?

Between the early 1990s, and December 2003, the Heritage Collections staff ran their services out of the Library's North East Wing. Some of you may even have visited us there.

The North East Wing was purpose built for the storage of material, rather than for people. It was designed as a high security and conservationally approved stack, and the majority of the Library's manuscripts, pictures and rare books continue to be stored there today.

It was less successful as a space from which to deliver a service to the public. Difficult to find, and somewhat inhospitable, with its low ceiling and hostile fluorescent lighting, it was anything but a public space or pleasant work environment for staff.

Perhaps its worst feature was the fact that the building was not connected internally to the rest of the State Library site. Staff and visitors requiring access were forced to use La Trobe Street as a thoroughfare between it and the main Swanston Street entrance. I am amazed, in hindsight, to look back to the day that I and a colleague wheeled Audubon's massive *Birds of America*, valued at some 12 million dollars, down La Trobe Street on a trolley – thankfully it wasn't raining at the time.

### What are the new Heritage Collection Spaces?

As part of your tour earlier today, you will have passed by, or looked into, the new spaces designed for the Heritage Collections. The spaces include:

- La Trobe Gallery, service point for the Australian Manuscripts Collection
- McArthur Gallery, service point for Maps, Rare Books and Children's Literature
- Swinburne Gallery, service point for the Pictures Collection

All of these spaces are accessed directly off the Redmond Barry Reading Room. The other linked Heritage Collection spaces are:

- The Cowen Painting Gallery
- The Heritage Collections Reading Room, located at the end of the Cowen Painting Gallery
- The Anderson Chess area, located at the entrance to the Domed Reading Room

### **What are the Advantages of the new Spaces?**

- The public can find us – the new spaces are high profile in relation to the Library's major reading rooms.
- The spaces are stunning from an architectural point of view and emphasize the importance and uniqueness of the collection material relating to them
- They have allowed us to co-locate teams of curatorial staff who previously operated on different floors of the North East Wing (eg. Maps and Rare Books)
- Most importantly, they allow the services from these collections to be integrated into a wider service plan that was central to our thinking during the redevelopment process.

### **And what are the Disadvantages?**

- The public can find us...

### **The Tiered Service Model**

The Information Services Division held extensive discussions during the redevelopment about the concept of a tiered service model. The redevelopment allowed us to physically work toward a design and layout of service desks that moved clients from the general to the specific.

The Information Centre on the ground floor serves as a central point for introductory service. From there, clients are directed toward more specialized services in the courtyards –Arts, Genealogy, Newspapers. Moving upstairs and through the building clients are directed toward either the Australiana services in the Domed Reading Room, or the non-Australian browsing collection in the Redmond Barry Reading Room.

The Heritage Collections, off the Redmond Barry Reading Room, have been designed to act as a service layer behind these other services. In other words, by the time they arrive at the Heritage Collections, introductory clients will have already worked their way through the building, both in a literal sense and an informational sense.

The move to the new spaces has allowed us to create a standard service model for the Heritage Collections. Central to this is the standardization of a 'by-appointment' service for each of the collections. Clients are expected to address their initial informational queries to the relevant general information desks; if it is determined that their research needs require an

interview with curatorial staff from the Heritage Collections, then an appointment is made. Regular users can ring up ahead of their visits to make appointments themselves.

The 'By appointment' service is important in allowing us flexibility, and a capacity to provide specialized service at the time of need, rather than to have specialist staff 'on tap' all day every day. For example, if a complex query on the map collection arises, we can ensure that the relevant expert is on hand at the appointment time.

In conjunction with this service model is the use of the Heritage Collections Reading Room. It is here that, once ordered, the majority of Heritage Collection material is consulted. The Reading Room, which has been designed with both security and careful handling of rare and original material in mind, is where the following categories of material are consulted: rare books, manuscripts, archival newspapers, identified 'at risk' items from the stack, and some map and pictorial material.

The Heritage Collections spaces thereby largely operate as consultation spaces for discussing projects with staff and the placing of orders for material that will be delivered to the Heritage Collections Reading Room at advertised times. The latter, it should be noted, is open for the full Library hours, including nights and weekends; whereas the Heritage Collections appointment times operate only between 10am-5pm weekdays.

Central also to the service is our capacity to provide an electronic catalogue of all Heritage Collection material that will allow clients to find their own material, and order it by phone or in person at any of the Library's general information desks. This is what, in effect, happens with rare books and manuscripts. Such a service effectively functions without the direct input of Heritage Collections staff, allowing them to get on with other professional tasks, such as acquiring, organizing, and further cataloguing collection material.

The ultimate, ideal, of course, is to deliver such a service by way of digital facsimiles, which bypasses entirely the need for clients to visit the Library to view the original. This is largely how the Library's Pictures service operates. With over 200,000 images available on-line, clients regularly consult the catalogue and order photographic copies without any need to consult with staff from the collection, or, for that matter, to even visit the Library.

### **So what are our challenges for the future?**

The Library's digital strategy plan seeks to address some of these issues. Currently, we have several digital projects in train or at the planning stage, aside from the on-going digitizing of Pictures material. These include:

- A project to digitise the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works 40ft to the inch series of maps, produced between the 1890s and the 1920s. These are the most detailed series of maps depicting the development of Melbourne that we hold and are amongst the most highly used items in the collection. The project hopes to address both access and conservation issues – the frequency of use has led to deterioration of the rare originals.
- A project to digitise rare 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian pamphlets. This is an on-going project and delivers full text, in PDF format, via the Library's catalogue.
- A project to digitise the foundation documents of early European settlement of Port Phillip, including John Batman's 1835 diary of his visit to Port Phillip, John Pascoe Fawkner's first handwritten Melbourne newspaper, and Sir Richard Bourke's 1837 diary of his visit to Melbourne.

But we have a long way to go. Currently, only 50% of the Manuscripts card catalogue is available online; about 40% of the map collection is online; and several hundred thousand photographs can only be retrieved via card catalogues and old accession registers. And, while all of the rare books collection is available online, many of the earliest and rarest material were electronically input from the old card records – without subject headings, proper authority, or, in many cases, even imprint details. In all of these cases, expert staff are required to intervene between the user's needs and the identification of relevant material.

One factor that needs to be taken into account, however, is the rise in user demand for Heritage Collection material that comes with online availability of the catalogue. Basically, as we know from experience, users find things very easily via keyword searches. Often people ask me: "who gets to look at all of this rare material". The short answer is thousands and thousands of Library visitors each year. In the past 12 months, for instance, we have responded to over 4,000 requests for rare books, nearly 5,000 requests for maps, some 7,000 requests for manuscripts, and nearly 2,000 requests for pictorial items.

Demand for this material seems to grow exponentially with electronic access to the collection. It is clear that, if we are to meet this demand, we have to greatly increase our capacity to deliver facsimiles online. It is indicative that the lowest demand occurs in the area of pictorial requests – the collection that has the greatest number of digital images available on our catalogue.

#### **How else do we deliver service?**

- The Heritage Collections deliver large numbers of seminars as part of the Library's overall Lifelong Learning program. For example, the Rare Printed Collections have run up to 100 sessions in any year. With regard to Rare Books, up to 25% of the use of the collection over the past 5 years has occurred in formal learning situations. Seminars range from general introductions to the collections, through to more specific subjects, such as Medieval Manuscripts, or the history of botanical art.
- The Heritage Collections also provide on-going support for the Library's exhibitions program. In late 2004, the first of the Library's two proposed permanent exhibitions – on the History of Victoria – will open in the fourth floor of the annulus of the Domed Reading Room. In 2005, the History of the Book exhibition will open. These large scale exhibitions will allow the Library, for the first time, to display many of the major treasures from the Heritage Collections – such as Ned Kelly's armor, the Jerilderie Letter, or early medieval manuscripts - on a permanent basis.

#### **What has been gratifying about the redevelopment process?**

The Library's redevelopment took a long time. For those of us who have probably been here too long, we can look back with fondness to Masterplan E of 1989. For many of us, the subsequent years were spent moving from temporary location to temporary location, all-the-while assaulted by drilling through neighboring walls, and acting one minute as librarians, and the other as designers/architects. When I first did my Library training, it was not with the expectation that I would spend my time matching wood grains, selecting carpet designs, or

looking at light fittings. I think I can speak for all staff in saying that it feels good to finally look at the finished product.

It's also been a gratifying experience to see the reactions of visitors to the new spaces. And to provide such increased access to material – such as the Library's collection of paintings or its chess collection – which had been long locked away from view.

## **Conclusion**

Now that we are in our new spaces, our next task will be to review how well they operate. We won't have got everything right, and even if we did, the imperatives of change will soon be upon us. Within 12 months, we'll probably be questioning some of the very assumptions I've imparted here today.

**Des Cowley**  
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