

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter Cochrane (ed.), *Remarkable Occurrences: The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years 1901-2001*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2001, pp 283, hardback, ISBN 0 642 10730 0, illustrations, notes, index, \$59.95.

The National Library of Australia is one of the finest libraries in the world. I say this unequivocally, for I have done research in many national libraries. It is democratic and open in its ethos. It serves the people of Australia (past, present and future) with pride and efficiency. Although its collections may not be as large or as old as those of some other national libraries, in many respects it is without rivals. It unquestionably has the finest collection of Australiana in the world. While such an assertion might seem banal, it should be remembered that not every nation can boast such a degree of sovereignty over its own documentary heritage. The National Library of Australia also has extraordinarily rich holdings on the Pacific and Asia and a wealth of British and European scholarship. It is far from introverted in its gaze.

As one of our core institutions, the National Library celebrates its centenary this year along with the nation. This impressive anthology of essays, edited by Peter Cochrane, has been published to coincide with the anniversary. Well-written, beautifully illustrated and elegantly produced (even with a burgundy ribbon!) this book is a fitting tribute. In his thoughtful introduction, Cochrane reminds us that, as libraries develop,

Whatever the acquisition, the process in one sense is always the same — de-privatization — the transformation of privately held records into an enduring public resource. In addition to their newspaper collections and deposit holdings of published works, research libraries make public and accessible a host of private or previously inaccessible pasts. They are a hedge against forgetting: they are guarantors defying oblivion: they are the storehouses of our cultural heritage.

Peter Cochrane has also contributed an essay on the evolution of the library as a national institution and an essay on the rescue of the Australian silent film classic 'The Sentimental Bloke'. Both essays capture a sense of excitement and national purpose in the process of collection development. Greg Dening has written a masterly essay on the provenance, acquisition and significance of James Cook's holograph Endeavour journal — one of the library's iconic

treasures. Dening's luminous prose is steeped in wisdom born of deep scholarship on Pacific exploration. With unique immediacy he conveys the joy and wonder of research amid original sources. I also relished manuscript librarian Graeme Powell's account of E. A. Petherick and J. A. Ferguson and their extraordinary collections of Australiana — now cherished core elements of the national collection. Equally engaging is Tim Bonyhady's essay on the creation and acquisition of William Hardy Wilson's collection of drawings of early colonial architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania, and Nicholas Thomas' chapter on Rex Nan Kivell and his collection 'for more than fifty years a stimulus to research in many topics in the field of Australasian and Pacific history'. Nevertheless, I would like to have learned more about Nan Kivell and the persona he created for himself. How did the illegitimate New Zealander Reginald Nankivell become Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell? Thomas explains his knighthood (a condition of the acquisition of the collection by the library), but not his adoption of a French aristocratic name as a prefix to his Cornish patronym.

It would be wrong to assume that this anthology simply focusses on the bequests of great private collectors — although there are several other great collectors mentioned in other essays in the anthology. It is very much about librarians as cultural heroes: advocates and executors in the great quest to preserve the printed, painted, handwritten and otherwise recorded heritage of our nation and region. It is also about the remarkable breadth of the National Library's functions. Joan Kerr, for example, adroitly discusses historic 'three-dimensional' objects not normally considered core holdings for a library, but precious for a multiplicity of associations. In another fine essay, Stuart Macintyre discusses the library and the political life of Australia. David Walker reviews the fascinating evolution of the library's Asian collection in the years following World War II. Barry York surveys the library's priceless oral history collection — stirring voices which reach back into the nineteenth century. Helen Ennis looks at the heritage of Australia through the lens of the camera. Robyn Holmes gives an account of the music section, formally constituted in August 1973. Suzanne Rickard explains the origins of the library's important map holdings: from the cartographic treasures of the Petherick, Ferguson, Tooley, Nan Kivell, Bates, Scott and White collections onwards. Lastly Paul Turnbull offers very important insights to the development of Australia's national bibliographic resources. Many scholars and librarians will remember acronyms such as APAIS (Australian Public Affairs Information Service), NUCOM (National Union Catalogue of Monographs), NUCOS (National Union Catalogue of Serials) and ABN (Australian Bibliographic Network) as milestones of national endeavour in the management of Australia's bibliographic resources. In 1999 ABN was replaced by a new national resource-sharing

database named 'Kinetica'. In the process a web-based bibliographic network came into being and signposted the digital future on-line. It is hard to imagine that the National Library of Australia will not continue to pioneer the introduction of new technology in the bibliographic field.

Although the index to Remarkable Occurrences does not contain entries for France, Paris or several notable French historical figures, the book does yield a number of interesting Franco-Australian associations. On page 82 we learn that a Frenchman filmed the 1896 Melbourne Cup and that the film survived in Paris. On page 96 Joan Kerr tells us that 'The one item in the National Library directly traceable to the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte is an enormous white damask tablecloth with an imperial crown and the letters N B woven into the design'. Kerr dates the tablecloth '(c.1800)' but this is clearly too early, for Bonaparte did not crown himself Emperor until December 1804. On page 230 we read of the collection of the American musicologist Dr Everett Helm, which Robyn Holmes tells us contains 'many rare scores and libretti of French opera, as well as voluminous unpublished works'. Suzanne Rickard makes passing reference to the explorers Labillardière (p. 149) and Kerguelen (p. 240). And among the 250 illustrations in the book are Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg's and John Webber's 'Apotheosis of Captain Cook' (p. 160); a photograph of General John Monash in Glisy, France, in May 1918 (p. 120); and Charles Bayliss' (1859-1897) eerie photograph of the La Pérouse monument on Botany Bay (p. 200).

The story of the National Library of Australia, chronicled in Remarkable Occurrences, is a grand adventure. Peter Cochrane and his fellow contributors deserve our sincere congratulations.

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