

# Information, Dissemination and Conservation of Library Collections

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Moving into the second half of the seventies it is evident that our society grows increasingly dependent on information. As the ever-increasing number of books and journals come off our presses to flood us with information, and as microfilm, fiche, films and other audio-visual materials pour into our information centres we need an increasingly efficient system for the control and channelling of this information. It is only through an efficient network of information services that information about the new developments in science, technology and the arts can be made available to its potential users in the community.

During the last decade, however, there has been a growing recognition in Australia, within libraries (which are the major storehouses of information and centres for dissemination of knowledge), that existing information resources have been progressively less able to meet the demands made upon them by the community. In response to this the National Library established in February 1971 the Scientific and Technological Information Service Enquiry Committee (STISEC) which enquired into Australia's scientific and technological information needs. The work done by STISEC and submissions received by the National Library on the feasibility of an Australian Library Based Information System (ALBIS), and published in the report *Development of Resource Sharing Networks*, showed overwhelming demand for improved library and information services.

Furthermore it was shown that services are required not only in science and technology but also in the social sciences, the humanities and the arts. These new services, which would encompass all branches of human knowledge, require a sound basis. This basis depends on the creation of structures to facilitate both economic and effective distribution of information. The structures need both staff and materials in order to function

efficiently. The organization of staff and materials should be planned in order to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of human and technological resources. Therefore the National Library created the following subject libraries as structures necessary for the development of its information services:

ANSTEL	Australian National Scientific and Technological Library.
ANSOL	Australian National Social Sciences Library.
ANHUL	Australian National Humanities Library.

It is envisioned that these National subject libraries will identify the needs for library-based information services and be able to fulfill these needs in the future.

The National Library also envisages that other areas of the library will continue to act as sources of information dissemination for Australia in their special subject areas. The conservation laboratory at the National Library is in a unique situation within Australia in relation to information gathering and dissemination in the field of conservation and conservation related subject areas. The laboratory can draw upon the material resources of the National Library and upon the subject knowledge and expertise of the ANSTEL, ANHUL, and ANSOL staffs. Furthermore the conservation laboratory can channel the information it gathers through to other workers in the field of conservation; either private restorers/conservators or staff working in other public or private institutions.

At the present time the conservation laboratory staff provides conservation information to enquiries from all over Australia. The limitations of staff time have not enabled the Conservation Laboratory to enlarge upon this service, however it is hoped that the role of the laboratory in information dissemination will grow as there is an

increasing awareness within Australia of the importance of conserving and preserving our national heritage. When time permits, Library staff also will undertake limited literature searches and provide special subject bibliographies for those enquirers who request them.

It is in the major role of conserving our heritage that the Conservation Laboratory contributes the most to information dissemination and to the subject library system of the National Library. The information resources include material in various forms: fiche, microfilm, books, manuscripts, serials, film, sound and video tape and computer tape. The effectiveness of the dissemination system depends on the availability of the hard copy containing the required information.

The state or condition of this hard copy is fundamental to the dissemination process. When the material is unfit for use, the entire concept of information networks breaks down. Much material presently stored in libraries and other information centres is unfit for use. Many thousands of library books, particularly books printed in the last century, are currently unusable due to the acidity of their paper or damage due to improper storage. Microfilm, motion picture film and all other plastic based material run risks of disintegration due to improper manufacture and storage. All information contained in materials no longer fit for use is effectively lost to the general public and, in many cases, even to the special researcher. Therefore the conservation of collections must be viewed as an integral part of the overall information dissemination system.

The National Library sees the development of its Conservation Laboratory as having a vital role in the development of an integrated system of library net-

works and services. The Conservation Laboratory was formed in 1969 initially as a service section to the Pictorial Collection of the National Library. Facilities were established for the treatment of easel paintings and works of art on paper such as prints, drawings and watercolours. Because of the broad nature of the National Library's collections, the Conservation Laboratory was soon performing a wider range of activities within the Library including treatment work on manuscripts, maps, rare books and miscellaneous antiquities. The National Library houses important collections of non-paper material such as sound recordings, micro-media — microfilm and fiche — and motion picture film. The preservation requirements of many of these 'plastic' materials are quite complex and the Conservation Laboratory has begun to examine the conservation needs for these large collections.

At the present the National Library's conservation laboratory has an establishment of six and is housed within the library building at Parkes Place. In 1973 the Library assisted the chief conservator on a tour to examine world wide trends in conservation technology. Resulting from this tour the National Library Council approved a broad policy for the development of a conservation programme within the Library. The Council also agreed that the National Library should play a distinctive role in the development of Conservation Science in Australia. It is to be expected that the implementation of the Council's policies will lead to a strengthening of the conservation programme at the National Library, which will in turn affect the state of the National Library's information resources and enable the National Library to be more effective in its programme of meeting the information needs of the Australian people.

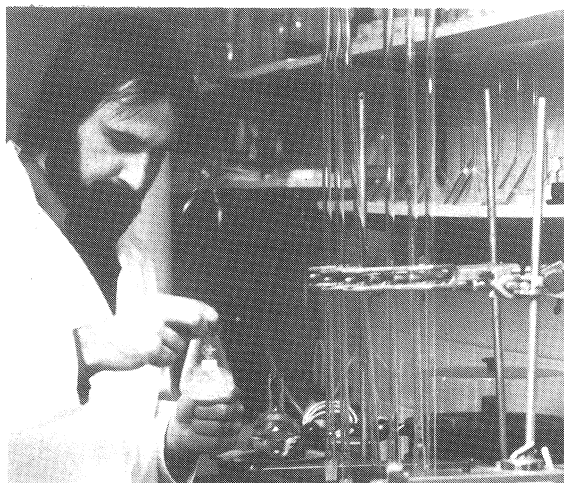


Figure 1. Conservator J.A. Chadwick testing paper samples through aqueous hot-extraction at the Conservation Laboratory, National Library of Australia.



Figure 2. Conservator G. Marsh doing PH surface testing at the Conservation Laboratory, National Library of Australia.