

Foreword

In 1973 the First National Conservation Seminar was held with the aim of assessing the problems affecting cultural material in Australia and the resources available for combating these problems. The information gathered was depressing; a story of massive collections jammed into disreputable storage structures, of buildings, monuments and archaeological sites totally neglected and of conservation laboratories that could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In 1975 The Committee of Inquiry into Museums and National Collections published its report, *Museums in Australia 1975*, which further detailed the state of cultural material and made strong recommendations for the development of conservation resources at state and national levels. The magnitude of the problems facing Australia's cultural heritage was thus broadly defined; this was the logical first step towards doing something about it.

The purpose of the 1976 Canberra Conference was to follow up this information by concentrating on three main topics. Firstly on the development of conservation in terms of staffing, laboratory facilities and training. But although it was important for the ICCM to promote this development, it was equally or perhaps more important to get down to the more practical aspects of conservation.

Accordingly, the second purpose of the conference was to examine in some detail the nature of deterioration of the different collections housed in museums, libraries, art galleries and archives. And thirdly, to suggest ways in which this deterioration could be slowed down or eliminated, particularly by improving the physical and environmental conditions for stored collections. In short, by promoting the adoption of "preventive conservation" measures.

Papers were presented under the following three headings:

- Development of Conservation
- Deterioration of Collections
- Standards for Environmental Control and Storage Design

A large number of speakers were invited to present papers to enable as comprehensive a coverage as possible of the three topics. Specialists from overseas and individuals from outside the conservation field contributed greatly to the scope of coverage.

As a result of the groundwork of these last two conferences, together with the anticipated growth of the profession, it is expected that any following conferences will be more concerned with the processes of conservation.

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Sydney, March 1977