

SCHOLARS, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND LIBRARIANS*

By HARRISON BRYAN

I HAVE never had the honour of delivering an inaugural lecture before, but I have listened to a number during the fourteen years that I have been associated with University teaching.

From my observation, inaugurals all too often fall into one of two groups. If the inauguree elects group one he devotes the full time at his disposal to a vehement defence of the place of his discipline within the University. In fifty minutes, or so, of intensive propaganda he sets out to establish beyond any reasonable doubt that his is the basic study on which all others depend. I have in my time been persuaded in this way of the completely central importance of a range of subjects from child health to marine biology. We might note at this point that there is hardly an authority on tertiary education who has not at one time paid at least lip service to the central importance of the library in the University. It is interesting, however, that it is always the library that is singled out for mention in this way and never the librarianship, which after all makes or breaks the library.

All things considered, then, perhaps I should not attempt tonight to establish librarianship as the one central discipline whence all else springs. There is an intriguing point of terminology here, of course. One suspects one might carry more conviction if one employed a more impressive sounding term such as library science or documentation, or even information retrieval rather than merely librarianship. Since I am not prepared to compromise about the title of my profession, however, it seems as if I am excluded effectively from group one.

But a new professor may classify himself instead into group two by deciding to impose on his audience an astonishingly learned discourse on as abstruse as possible an aspect of his mystery. Such an oration, in my experience, is likely to be punctuated by judiciously scattered references to authorities, by a carefully calculated employment of professional jargon and by a discreet use of literary, if not classical, allusions as a demonstration of cultural breadth. I do not propose to follow this pattern either.

If nevertheless I still commit errors in one, if not in both, of these general directions tonight, at least I have satisfied my conscience. I have shown that I am aware of the pitfalls, even if, despite my best endeavours, I stumble into one or other of them.

A further point about inaugural lectures which I have noted is that, even in those practitioners who elect what might be called the "blinding them with science"

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line, it is regarded as appropriate to preface one's remarks with some manifesto, however brief, on one's intentions with regard to the department or subject which one is to have the honour to direct.

Let me, then, with perhaps more seriousness than I have spoken so far, make clear my policy and my firm intention as far as the University of Sydney Library is concerned.

Within the limits of my personal ability, and this really means of course to the extent that I can exploit an able and willing staff, I intend to attempt to secure for the University of Sydney the kind of library that it deserves by reason of its quality, and its size ; the kind of library that it will need if it is to advance to that position of greatness to which its past record has pointed the way.

In justice to myself, I think I can claim that it is not mere pretention on my part to adduce to myself such an apparently elevated role. It may have taken me only about fifteen seconds to decide my reply to the invitation with which the Senate of this University honoured me, but my decision was based on very careful previous consideration, among other things, of what I could myself contribute to the University's library needs. My conclusion was that at this particular period of the library's development my personal deficiencies, of which I was only too well aware, might be countered by what I could offer. I bring to this University fairly extensive experience in this field of librarianship and a degree of professional knowledge ; a seeming ability to work with, as well as for, academic colleagues, and an enthusiasm for libraries and for University libraries in particular, that is still undimmed after nearly a decade and a half of work in and for them.

I know that I can help in getting this library operating with something like the degree of business efficiency it needs. On the other hand, I know that I myself have not the knowledge nor the skill to build that quality in its collections which a great University library will demand. But I think this second result can still be achieved by the proper cooperation of the four elements which I have included in the title of this address, scholars, teachers, students, and librarians.

It is about this cooperation (as it is) mirrored in the functioning and growth of a University library that I would speak tonight. Before I do so, however, it would be improper not to complete the introductory section of this address by making two separate acknowledgements, one on my own behalf and one on behalf of the Library it is now my honour to direct.

First, I would like to pay a personal tribute to John Wallace Metcalfe, my colleague at Kensington, who has done more than any one man and more than most other ten men put together for the development of libraries in Australia. I am proud to have received my first professional training in the Library School of the Public Library of New South Wales, and for this and for fifteen years of advice, assistance, friendship, and example I thank Mr. Metcalfe, and I hope that he feels that he can in a sense share with me the personal success this evening records.

Second, I must on this occasion remind you of Andrew Delbridge Osborn, whose few years as my predecessor will be long remembered, if only for two reasons. First,

by his energy and skill he demonstrated the way in which the greatest single deficiency of our libraries—simple lack of books—could be overcome. Argument there may be about the books that were collected and the books that were not and about what happened to them after they were collected, but 225,000 of them did come to Sydney in only two years—about as many as had been collected in the previous half century. In the second place, Dr. Osborn conceived the plan that has given us a library building that is not only easily the best in Australia but assumes world rank in its class. If you would see Andrew Osborn's proper monument in this University, look across the road as you leave this Hall.

I had thought originally to speak tonight only of librarians and scholars. On mature reflection, however, I felt this title to be doubly misleading. In the first place, it seemed to infer that the University could still be held to be a community of scholars. I propose to express honest doubts whether this particular description is really any longer applicable. In the second place, there seemed to be some room to wonder whether the apparent inference of synonymy between the terms "librarian" and "scholar" would be accepted without question. I would not myself attempt to sustain this point completely. Before arguing, however, whether librarians are or should be scholars, I owe it to my profession to dispose very promptly of the calm assumption made by many scholars, whether or not explicitly, that they are librarians—or that they could be if they set their minds to it for a minute or so.

Librarianship today comprises a mixture of disciplines and experiences, a blend of administrative and technical competences, such as can only satisfactorily be achieved by the superimposition of at least a degree of professional training on a sound basis of academic qualification. I hope I would be the last to attempt to claim a complete professional mystery for my livelihood, or to pretend that the exercise of the librarian's professional knowledge is not governed in the last resort by sound and easily understood principles of common sense administration. I am sure that any scholar seized with these principles, and there are some, could make an excellent librarian. Examples can be quoted from past, and indeed from present, practice in some universities of scholars who ultimately made distinguished contributions to my profession. History has a habit, however, of concealing from our gaze the inefficiencies and extravagances common to the early period of such bibliothecal administrations. I refer to the period during which the gifted amateur discovers by experiment the precepts which would have formed part of a professional's training or while he operates at the mercy of his professionally trained and all too often unbalanced though specialized subordinates.

As for librarians as scholars, there has been a great tendency here to over-generalize. It has often been said, for example, that a prime requisite in a University librarian is the possession of academic qualifications which would allow him to compete on equal terms, as it were, with his learned colleagues. This seems to be asking rather much and, indeed, including such requirements among conditions of appointment to librarianships is surely crying for the moon. One should bear in mind too that not only is the desired object out of reach, but also that even if it could be

staff, and to a somewhat lesser extent by the teachers who make up the balance. There is, second, the transmission of learning, with varying degrees of efficiency and efficacy, by this staff. There is, third, the acquisition of learning, with more or less avidity, by students, some of whom are, or are potentially, themselves scholars.

The University library impinges on this structure at every point. It exists to strengthen and encourage the scholar's own learning. It both facilitates and cooperates in his and his colleagues' transmission of it to students. It makes perhaps its greatest contribution to the University if, in the course of making possible the acquisition of learning, it helps to persuade a student to become a scholar.

To the carrying out of these tasks the modern university library brings not just a librarian and his staff but a staff of professional librarians, supported by technical and clerical grades. Every qualified librarian on the staff should make a positive individual contribution to all three functions of the library ; research, teaching and study.

If the academic community is no longer a community of scholars, it is just as certainly not a community of scholars and a librarian. It is an association, I submit, of scholars, teachers, students and librarians.

There is more to the library, obviously, than its staff. Indeed, like all Gaul, library provision can be divided into three parts ; which can be recorded alliteratively as books, buildings and bodies, or alternatively as stock, stacks and staff.

A magnificent building itself does not make a library, but any library will function better if satisfactorily housed. This University has shared the experience of others in Australia that the provision of a good library building increases library use at a rate that is related geometrically rather than arithmetically to the increased facilities provided.

The simple fact is that New Fisher was used about four times as intensively during first term 1963 than was Old Fisher in the corresponding period the preceding year, and yet the number of places for readers is less than three times those provided in the former building.

Undergraduates of the University of Sydney are certainly a favoured nation as far as library accommodation is concerned ; nor are we librarians any less fortunate, at least those of us who work in New Fisher.

For the reader, the building provides an impression of spaciousness which is underlined by the fact that he has been carefully considered as an individual and has been provided, in effect, with a place to himself. Careful planning has achieved a simplicity of layout and a regularizing of traffic flow which reduces to a minimum the bewilderment inevitable in those using for the first time a building covering 130,000 square feet.

I have mentioned the very size of each reading area. To this can be added painstaking acoustic treatment, including the clever use of the open access book shelves as noise baffles. The combined effect of these factors is to remove the obligation on readers to creep quietly about. They need no longer punctiliously observe that deathless hush which alone keeps the general noise level low enough, in an older

building, to render study possible. More importantly to the librarian, such a building minimizes the need for staff time to be wasted on "shushing" patrols. The New Fisher will tolerate and absorb not only the very considerable traffic noise resulting from hundreds of people moving in and out of it every hour on the hour, but also an astonishing amount of movement and conversation in the reading rooms themselves.

All this strikes one as very sensible and proper: a maximum of liberty for the student, an insistence on respecting his individual dignity, and withal the provision of reading places where he can work undisturbed by his fellows or by the obtrusion of the building. To add to this one of the pleasantest views in metropolitan Sydney seems almost to gild the lily.

It may legitimately be enquired whether this kind of provision is appreciated by the undergraduate or whether he becomes surfeited with comfort and querulous of the minimal restraints that must yet be imposed.

So far the evidence of use of this building supports the view that beneath the inevitable shell of cynicism and beyond the evidence of irresponsibility inevitably found in a building used by up to 8,000 people a day, there is a real appreciation of these improved facilities. So far, most of the chairs that have collapsed would have done so all too soon if their sole use had been for a Sunday afternoon bridge party. So far the ban on stiletto heels, which our magnificent floors require, has been scrupulously and good-humouredly accepted. So far readers' complaints have been almost completely limited to the service, and not the surroundings.

For librarians, this building provides what so few of us have ever had in Australia, a chance to mould our library to changing conditions and to changing emphases. New Fisher does not tie us down. If, in its life, we need more room for readers and less for books; even, perish the thought, more for machines and less for the obsolescent written record that they may be going to replace, then this can be effected with the minimum of fuss. For a library, as it mirrors the ages through which it exists, must not only grow but also change if it is to function effectively. It must keep pace with the changing requirements of successive generations.

There are clearly, however, limits to the amount and the rate of change that an institution can tolerate, and the main limitation is set by the investment tied up in its plant. Too many great libraries have been strangled, or at least effectively restricted, by inflexible buildings imposed on them with all the complacent over-confidence of a self-satisfied age. It is our great advantage and our privilege in the University of Sydney to be free, to all practical purposes, of this problem. I wish I could convey to you the feeling of personal relief that this inspires in one who has escaped from the straitjacket of an ill-designed, inflexible library. After fifteen years of oppression by, and compression within, a marble-lined hexagonal mausoleum, New Fisher is pleasure, satisfaction, excitement and challenge all in one.

But a building, in the last resort, is no more than a shell to contain a library's collections. An increase in library use of the kind mentioned earlier will be rendered nugatory if supplies of the appropriate books are not maintained at the same increasing rate. It is all too easy to be labelled as the library without any books. For those

other than he, as the practising subject specialist, can possibly make the considered judgment involved in selecting books in his field. At the other extreme stands the more doctrinaire librarian who insists, with equal intransigence, that to entrust book selection to scholars is to ensure imbalance, doubtful continuity and a complete lack of integration in the collection. He insists that the very fact that scholars *are* subject experts means that a library in which book selection is in their hands will cease to be a library and become no more than a somewhat erratic accretion of special collections, each reflecting the increasingly narrow interests of individual selectors.

The solution to these apparent irreconcilables, each with its measure of truth, is to be found, of course, in cooperation; cooperation which goes beyond merely scholars and librarians to include all the elements in the academic community.

With all that subject knowledge to hand, it would be absurd of the Library to ignore the scholar as a book selector and to him must be assigned the responsibility of selecting material in his speciality. The task of the librarians is supplementary and moderating. They must attend in short to those fields of knowledge untouched, or unsatisfactorily covered, by the scholar, since theirs is the final responsibility for producing a balanced collection.

Here in Sydney, we have embarked this year on a modest programme of librarian participation in book selection, under which each member of the professional library staff has accepted responsibility for a particular subject area. So far, we have restricted our efforts to what might be called virgin fields, but I see no reason why, with experience, we cannot extend our scope. I can envisage a situation where we can relieve our academic colleagues increasingly of the routine aspects of selection even in their own fields. A library aiming at the coverage of this one, and even in terms of its limited financial resources, must expect to purchase automatically quite an amount of the new material that is published. The works of certain authors, the output of certain publishers, these will have to be acquired *in toto*, and we should not need to waste academic time on selecting them. Moreover, in practically any field, a trained librarian with access to the appropriate aids can safely select up to a certain content level, or to a certain degree of specialization. We can relieve the scholar and the teacher of this labour and free them to concentrate on evaluating for purchase publications in their specialities, on which they can decide with more authority, and certainly with more speed, than we can.

Again, of course, a library inevitably acquires strengths in its collections after more than a century of continuous existence; strengths which may not necessarily reflect in every generation the emphases of the University's teaching. To build to these strengths is a very real responsibility which clearly will be left to librarians and which indeed properly falls on them. It is a responsibility to the nation as well as to the University.

You will have noted, I am sure, my insistence that *all* librarians on the staff participate in this cooperation with academics in book selection.

There are two reasons for this. First, book selection is an important part of the librarian's expertise and too few librarians in subordinate positions are encouraged to practise it. This seems to me both to constitute a waste and to infer an unwarranted degree of superiority on the part of chief librarians, who tend to reserve this sphere jealously to themselves. Secondly, continual practice in book selection in assigned subject fields helps to develop subject knowledge among librarians. There is no doubt that the University would be very well served if it could have only librarians with appropriate subject competence; but for the same economic reasons that it cannot expect to have first-class scholars as librarians, neither can it hope, for instance, to have medical graduates as medical librarians. Failing this subject *competence*, the more subject *acquaintance* that working librarians develop the better.

Those members of the academic staff whose strength lies in, or whose pre-occupation is with, teaching, have a particularly important role in book selection. To understand this it is necessary for us to examine in detail the application of library resources to University purposes. One of the most important developments in this field in recent years has been the emergence of an open appreciation of the multiple role and responsibilities of the University library. A clear distinction has been made, both architecturally and administratively, in some leading libraries between the provision of library services for undergraduate students on the one hand and for research workers on the other.

Such an expression of multiple function is clearly carried out in the New Fisher library, where the whole building has been planned, in effect, as two libraries linked by a common services block.

There is still much to be done, however, to work out the detailed application of this differentiation of function. A separate library for undergraduates is motivated by two distinct forces. First, there is the pressing need to attend to the large class problem by providing multiple copies of much-used books; second, there is the growing realization that to expose an undergraduate to too many books at once may be to bewilder and discourage him.

Clearly, the closest cooperation with the teaching staff is needed to secure the first result. For instance, the Fisher library has to work out now what multiple copies should be on the shelves for students in first term 1964, so that they can be purchased and processed in time. This can only be done, obviously, if the teaching staff can give the library details, so far in advance, of their assignment programme for next year.

But the second aspect of the undergraduate library, its protection of the student from the overwhelming size of the research library, must have a positive as well as a negative side. It is all too easy for an undergraduate collection to be restricted to no more than multiple copies of books in demand, whereas it seems, beyond this, to offer a real challenge as an educative tool of high potential value.

Such a library could present very persuasively the essential interconnectedness of human activities and the mutual dependence of subjects treated quite separately in the University curriculum. In a University where specialization is increasing and

where it takes place ever at an earlier stage in the student's life, such a demonstration could be of high importance.

Such a library could be indeed the last bastion of the traditional liberal education in the University, a last but by no means least opportunity and encouragement to the mere learner to become a true student, and to the genuine student to develop that intellectual curiosity which marks the future scholar.

Only in a few places in the world has a conscious effort been made to build an undergraduate collection with these ideals in mind. We propose here in Sydney to attempt the same result, but it will only be possible with the cooperation of both the academic staff and the student body. We must know what our customers need, but we must also be informed of what they want. We have no overwhelming ambition that they should feel the library doing them good, but rather that it should do them good in as pleasant a way as possible.

In order to secure the kind of cooperative approach we need for building this new and rather exciting kind of library, I want to arrange for a special committee to help and advise us. I hope I can manage to get representatives on it not only of the student body but also of the sub-professorial staff, who are often, and quite inevitably, closer to students than are Heads of Departments.

So far, then, for cooperation in book selection. Acquisition of material, by contrast, is by and large a routine process which is fairly the responsibility of librarians. They should not be too superior in their professionalism, however, to accept advice on such matters as direction of purchasing; while making due allowance of course for a strange coincidence between bookshop preferences and *almae matres*. It would be strange indeed to find a D.Phil. (Oxon.) recommending the services of Messrs. Heffers, or a Ph.D. (Cantab.) extolling the virtues of Blackwell's of Broad Street. Proper cooperation with local scholars, too, may often lead to the acquisition of private collections, the existence of which becomes known first in the scholarly rather than the commercial sphere.

Having thus admitted strangers to many of the cherished preserves of my profession, it may come as a little of a surprise to find that I do not even regard the librarian decision as to a book's ultimate use and usability to be completely sacrosanct.

Let us be clear, however, that in all this I am advocating cooperation and not subjection. Librarians have a considerable responsibility to the future to look beyond what may well be the scholar's or the teacher's needs of the moment. The librarian should seek the scholar's advice, understand clearly his intention, and then make up his own mind. In no area of librarianship is such intelligent cooperation and mutual understanding more important than in this matter of processing books for use. Decisions made as to the classification or shelf location of a particular book and as to its cataloguing or entry in the finding records of the library, affect its use not only for today, for this year, or for the lifetime of the scholar who selected it for acquisition for the library, but for the lifetime of the book—which could mean for the duration of our civilization. This is a sobering thought.

Librarians, then, must not be too modest about their contribution to the efficacy of the University as a teaching tool or as an essential part of our heritage. By the same token they must not fail to seek all the assistance they can usefully employ in making this contribution.

And now let us note that if we take classification in particular, which is what the academic usually means when he talks about cataloguing, there never was an area of the librarian's work in which his colleagues the scholar and the teacher felt more disposed to interfere, to criticize, to scoff, to condemn—and even occasionally to offer constructive advice.

One of course can see their point. We annoy them by apparently concealing in some arbitrary way, the books they want for a particular teaching purpose and by divorcing such books on the shelves from others procured with the same end in view. We obstinately refuse to accept the fact that any particular University subject is one and indivisible and clearly to be distinguished from all other disciplines. We crown our stupidity, in their view, and point their complaints at the same time, by insisting on arranging our books according to a system devised in 1876 by an inexperienced amateur for the use of a school for American young ladies.

Of course neither the library's cataloguing operations, nor the criticisms of its customers, are restricted to the process of classification, and part at least of the problem we have been discussing turns out to be a simple lack of communication between librarian and scholar. Many of our patrons are quite unaware of, or at least unaware in detail of, the complementary roles played by the classification of material on the one hand and the provision of subject entries in the catalogue and of published bibliographies on the other.

The whole question of the subject organization of material is more difficult in practice for University librarians than for their colleagues in other branches of the profession. The reason is of course the specialized subject knowledge possessed by a major group of the University librarian's public.

There is the perpetual embarrassment that no system of classification and no list of subject headings can ever be either specific enough, or up to date enough, for the genuine specialist.

It is not infrequently asserted, in consequence, that the University library should restrict itself to descriptive cataloguing and author/title identification, leaving the subject material approach to material to the personal acquaintance of the scholar with his literature and to the cover, however tardy and incomplete, afforded by the published bibliographies.

Nevertheless, there seems point in continuing to provide what subject approaches we can, both in the interests of the non-specialist and as some first step, if no more, toward a more specific subject analysis, should the need for this become more apparent or should technological and other advances bring such a considerably enlarged project within the realms of possibility.

This is a situation that calls for careful understanding and mutual tolerance. The academic must accept our *bona fides* and concede that our responsibility in this

matter effectively transcends his. The librarian, for his part, while admitting the inadequacy of his tools, must at least convince the academic that he employs them with skill, consistency and intelligence so that the system, and for all its faults it is a system, does work to the maximum limits of its efficiency. He must stand firm on the point that any system is better than no system, and far far better than the enthusiastic muddling of well-intentioned but narrow-sighted amateurs.

The opposition of interests is not nearly as extreme of course as I have represented it; few academics are as intellectually snobbish and few librarians are as childishly obstinate as I may have inferred—I hope. Scholars and teachers alike are generally more than willing to accept the fact that the librarian's life is beset with the need for intelligent compromise. The librarian should be always willing to make every possible concession to today's needs. Nor is he necessarily wedded indissolubly to Mr. Dewey's classification or to any of the other limping apparatus of his craft. He looks forward with considerable interest, and indeed excitement, for example, to harnessing to his problem the electronic devices of the modern world. We are investigating, indeed, the possibility of installing data processing equipment in Fisher in the coming year. This equipment would be limited in operation initially to the mechanical control of the circulation of books from the library, but it will provide immediately the possibility of experiment along lines already developed overseas. We could begin, for instance, to transfer the Library's shelf list to punched cards, thereby making possible the printing of class lists of the Library's holdings, and the re-introduction of the regular accession list, for which many academics seem nostalgically to yearn.

Beyond this relatively primitive automation, one member of staff is already engaged personally in a study project involving the Basser computing centre, and we hope to start a joint investigation soon with the centre on the possible applications of the computer to our problems. The Librarian alone, however, is fully aware of the work consequences of altering the records of more than a century. After all, it amounts to changing in mid-stream from what was the best horse available at the time to a completely untried animal, and only an imitation animal at that. Can he be blamed if he practises so much caution as to risk condemnation by the unthinking as a conservative and even a reactionary?

But I have slipped into the singular again. As University Librarian, I must take the responsibility for the policy decisions that might brand my library as intransigent, or impractical, or improvident, but the day-to-day decisions that determine usability of stock are made by the University's librarians. For my part, the more I can arrange for the development of subject interests, subject competence and hence subject specialization, among the cataloguing staff, the more pleased I will be. My pleasure will be substantially further increased if individual scholars and teachers form the habit of discussing usability and use problems not just with me but with my colleagues.

Usability decisions are the province of the cataloguing department, but day-to-day use is controlled and directed by the librarians of the Reader Services Department

and by library officers who staff the Branch and Departmental libraries as a very necessary and very valuable extension of the library's services. The same kind of cooperation that is needed for book selection is essential and is widely current with regard to the actual use and conditions of availability of books to the various classes of University library patron.

Here again I would like to see a positive development in the direction of more reader assistance, particularly to undergraduates. The delinquent minority that mutilates and steals tends inevitably to weigh heavily with any librarian. Such a preoccupation can become all too unhealthy, and I for one would hope that we can move from dour defence against crime to a real attempt to add something to undergraduate education and pleasure.

I am sure that the traditional University library conservatism in regard to reader help should be consigned to the same limbo that accommodates chained books and indicators. In the new Fisher we will hope to provide more assistance to our customers, particularly at that point of maximum reader bewilderment, the catalogue.

Even here, however, we must not fail to take advice from our academic colleagues as to the degree to which we can proceed without detracting too much from the real need for students to do their own work.

Thus, then, across the whole field of the University library's operations spreads the need to regard it as a largely cooperative venture. The provision and design of a library's buildings ; the size and quality of its staff ; the selection, acquisition, processing and use of its stock ; all these *can* be undertaken independently by a Librarian ; providing he has delusions and omniscience. All of them will be much more sensibly and much more satisfactorily realized if they are carried out in a spirit of active cooperation with the Librarian's colleagues both within and outside his library.

In proper fellowship with scholars, teachers and students, we librarians can make something meaningful of the use of an undergraduate library. With the help of scholars we librarians can build a research library which will contribute actively to higher learning in this country.

The new Fisher Library is a very real indication that the University will give us the tools—we will do our best to finish the job.