

R.D. ('Pansy') Wright and WWII

Professor Roy Douglas 'Pansy' Wright (1907–1990) was a long-serving professor of physiology at the University of Melbourne, was instrumental in founding the Howard Florey Institute, and was Chancellor of the University from 1980 to 1989. Less well known is his service as a colonel in the Australian Army during World War II.

A brilliant scholar, R.D. Wright worked at Oxford University in the 1930s with Howard Florey, who later developed penicillin. In 1939, at the age of 31, Wright was appointed professor at the University of Melbourne. One night in 1942 a colleague suggested that Wright join a party in South Yarra — it turned out to be uproarious — in a house rented by one Alfred Conlon. The landlord was a foreign traveller and hunter and he had festooned the hall with deer horns, a rhinoceros penis and other trophies, a cause of some hilarity for host and guests. The night's conversation 'traversed the whole field from the reactions of various types of human individuals to the sort of effect the war would have on the economy of the country, to the problems of the psychology of Australian soldiers fighting from Australia, instead of from the back streets of Paris ... stuff about herd psychology, problems of tropical medicine, the lot'.

Wright and Conlon became firm friends. They were about the same age and later Wright said 'he was a brilliant fellow, and a companionable fellow, and a joy — often joyful fellow'. Conlon was a clever man and a brilliant talker. He had been a long-term student at Sydney University where he was influenced by the philosopher John Anderson. Conlon was later a (student) member of the University's Senate. He became friendly

with the head of personnel for the Army, General Victor Stantke. In April 1942, through Stantke, Conlon became Major Conlon and head of the research section at the Australian Army's headquarters, then at Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

By that time the Japanese Army had conquered the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea and its Australian administrators and officials had either escaped or been interned by the Japanese. Many were dead. In mid-1942 the Japanese invaded the Australian Territory of Papua. In 1942–1943 Australian towns such as Wyndham, Broome, Darwin and Townsville were bombed by the Japanese, with the greatest loss of life in Darwin. Australia became a nation under arms and all parts of Australian life and industry were put on a war footing. Conlon's view was that Australia's generals faced a new and unfamiliar form of warfare, quite different to the 1914–1918 experience of sending army contingents to 'slot into' the British Army in France or Palestine. There were now a range of politico-military, manpower and scientific complexities. The Army needed Major Conlon and his research section to solve them.

Conlon operated in two personae — the research section and as (civilian) chairman of the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale. Pansy Wright joined the morale committee with



R.D. Wright, c. 1930s.

other distinguished academics, such as Melbourne University's professor of history, R.M. Crawford. The record of the morale committee was equivocal but the research section became important. Conlon formed a strong bond with General Thomas Blamey, the Army's Commander-in-Chief. The section grew and eventually became the Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs. As the Army reconquered Papua and New Guinea, Conlon identified serious gaps in Australia's policy and worked with Blamey on transitional policy and longer-term policy advice for Government.

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By April 1944 large parts of New Guinea had been liberated. Conlon persuaded the relevant Minister, E.J. ('Eddie') Ward, to make a long study tour through the territories. Conlon was alive to the post-war possibilities of New Guinea including its forestry and agricultural possibilities. He also envisaged self-government. Conlon wanted Wright in the official party with him and Ward. In April 1944 Pansy Wright was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Australian Army and on the same day, promoted to honorary colonel. A few days later he left on the New Guinea visit with Minister Ward, in the primitive flying conditions of the day, flying into remote airstrips in a RAAF Lockheed Hudson aircraft.

Much has been claimed for the directorate of research. However the records and evidence do exist, and show that in 1944 Wright and Conlon developed the proposal with General Blamey and Howard Florey for founding the John Curtin School of Medical Research. This led in large part to the founding of the Australian National University (ANU). Of course others were involved in founding the ANU but Wright and Conlon were instrumental in the initial concept, and in obtaining the services of Florey and Mark Oliphant as 'academic advisers' to the new institution.

A number of other Melbourne University graduates served with Conlon and the Directorate of Research and later had distinguished careers in academia and literary pursuits. They included, as Army lieutenants, John Legge, Barbara Hockey, Peter Ryan and Laurie Baragwanath. Some Melbourne graduates who worked as civilians with the Directorate or its associated committees included Helen Wright (later Helen Ferber) and Pat Gray (later Ailsa Fabian).

Wright performed other war work with the Royal Australian Air Force and the Army Inventions Directorate. His Army service in the Directorate of Research was mainly part-time but important. He valued his friendship with Conlon. Wright retired from the Army in December 1945. It has been a delight to read and study the R.D. Wright Papers, splendidly presented and preserved in the University of Melbourne Archives.

Graeme Sligo

Graeme Sligo is completing a book on Alfred Conlon and the Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs. He is a graduate of the University of Melbourne.

Attentive readers of the *UMA Bulletin* over recent years will recall our plans to implement a new information system. 2010 marks 20 years since the first computer-based collection management tools were implemented at UMA and 14 years since some collection information became available to researchers online. For several years staff have struggled with these clunky, first generation tools and have longed for an information system which supports our work processes and keeps all our collection data in one place. Our researchers' needs have changed over the years too: they want more information to be available to them online — both collection information and digitised collection items themselves. Our old systems did not allow us to respond to this rapidly growing expectation.

Finally, late last year, UMAs aged, fragmented databases breathed their last, and were replaced by a shiny new beast known as EMu.

EMu (short for Electronic Museum) is proprietary software designed by Knowledge Engineering Pty Ltd. It is widely used and highly regarded by museums throughout Australia, North America and Europe, but largely unknown within Australian archival programs. As a comprehensive collection management product it has much to offer: integrated modules for repository management and the movement of collection items, donor and rights management, acquisition and conservation work, amongst others. It gives us the technical capacity to provide researchers with richer and more detailed descriptive information about collections and their contexts, including, eventually, detailed online listings of collection contents. With the right web interface it will enable digitised archival records to be published online.

The migration to EMu was surprisingly quick, but, less surprisingly, far from smooth. In July 2009 we learned that technical issues with our old database and server environment made an upgrade urgent, and this significantly shaped the project. EMu was not what we planned for and is not all we hoped for. The need to act quickly, along with financial considerations, gave us no opportunity to select products custom-designed for archival programs. EMu is primarily



Archivist Fiona Ross

designed to work in museum environments and we have found that it does not always align with our archival processes and information needs, nor does it enable us to meet national standards for archival description. The loss of the database web interface for about three months at the start of 2010 was the most visible and undesirable consequence of the hasty changeover. We have restored interim web access to the database and are now working on a fully-fledged web interface which will provide better searching and browsing options for our clients. We hope to make this available later this year.

Six months on, with most of the upheaval behind us, we are starting to see the possibilities EMu offers us and our clients. We have already made about 90 detailed collection listings available via the web database, and adding to this number is a priority for the coming year. We have implemented new accessioning and description procedures and have started planning for the integration of our two most important datasets — our collection data, which is already in EMu, and our repository management data, which is in spreadsheet format. We have started to explore EMu's potential to store and make available more detailed collection information along with digitised collection items. As our knowledge of our new system grows we are recognising many more ways in which it can help us manage our ever-growing collection.

Fiona Ross

Balletomaniacs Day Out

The Ballets Russes at the University of Melbourne

Between 1938 and 1940 a mutually beneficial relationship developed between the University of Melbourne and the world of ballet as several significant events took place on campus featuring members of visiting Ballets Russes companies. Various parts of the University were involved including the Conservatorium of Music, the Students' Representative Council, and the Old Students' Association. However it was the Union Theatre and the University Fine Arts Society which featured most prominently in the exchange between academia and show business.

The relationship came to light as a result of research undertaken recently by the Ballets Russes in Australia Project, an Australia Research Council funded project comprising a partnership between the Australian Ballet, the University of Adelaide and the National Library of Australia. The Project (2005–2009) studied the impact of three large ballet companies formed by Colonel Wassily de Basil in Europe which toured to Australia and New Zealand between 1936 and 1940 under the banner of J.C. Williamson Ltd. The companies are collectively known as the Ballets Russes companies, although each had a distinct name. Three lengthy tours took place — Monte Carlo Russian Ballet, October 1936–July 1937; Covent Garden Russian Ballet, September 1938–April 1939; and Colonel de Basil's Ballet Company (also known as the Original Ballet Russe), December 1939–August 1940. Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne were all included in the tours but it was in Sydney and Melbourne where the peripatetic companies stayed longest and became part of the local social, artistic and theatrical scenes. Longer stays in cities also meant increased publicity and newspaper coverage.

Six Ballets Russes related events took place on the University of Melbourne campus. Newspaper reports of these events were first found in press clippings scrapbooks which were meticulously compiled at the time by staff in the offices of J.C. Williamson Ltd in Sydney and Melbourne. These scrapbooks are now part of J.C. Williamson archives located variously in the Performing Arts Collection in Melbourne's Arts Centre and in the Mitchell Library in Sydney.



A scene from Graduation Ball. The ballet was choreographed by David Lichine in Australia during the 1939–1940 tour by the Original Ballet Russe. The photograph was first published in The Home on 1 March 1940.

Further research at the University of Melbourne Archives examining the records of the University Fine Arts Society filled in more details and provided context to these visits.

On 24 September 1938 Irina Baronova, the star ballerina of the second Ballets Russes company, attended a dance recital by local ballet dancers Corrie Lodders and George Carden in the Union Theatre. She was accompanied by her husband German Sevastianov, who was the manager of the ballet company, and by Arnold Haskell the English balletomane and writer. Their presence at the dance recital was reported in both the *Sun* and *Herald* newspapers, which further revealed that the Baronova party went on to the Melbourne Town Hall for the second part of a concert by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent.

On 13 October 1938 leading dancers Sono Osato, Tamara Grigorieva and Anna Volkova attended a lunchtime reception in the Union Theatre which attracted an audience of between 700 and 800 people. It was hosted by the University Fine Arts Society and the Students' Representative

Council. Arnold Haskell was again present and delivered an address on ballet history. Luncheon was served to the guests in Union House where they mingled with people from the host bodies as well as the Students' Representative Council and the Committee of University Women. Tamara Grigorieva planted a tree on the northern side of the Union building. (This was a preamble to another much larger tree planting ceremony held later on the same day when dignitaries from the Melbourne City Council and the University planted 'about 30 trees').

Just over a week later, on 22 October 1938, Irina Baronova returned to the Union Theatre, this time to dance at a charity concert arranged by the University Conservatorium of Music in aid of a Red Cross appeal for sick and disabled soldiers. Baronova danced a *Divertissement* to Chopin's waltz in D flat, choreographed by Yurek Shabalevksy, a member of the de Basil company. It was highly unusual for members of the de Basil ballet companies to give public performances outside the scheduled seasons, particularly so for a star of Baronova's status. This is the only such



Top: The cover of *Farrago*, 14 May 1940.

Above: Members of the *Ballets Russes* at the University of Melbourne. This photo appeared in *The Sun* on 14 October 1938.

extra-mural performance so far discovered. Staff and students of the Conservatorium provided the musical program for the concert, participants including pianists Margaret Schofield and Edward Goll, and singer Sylvia Fisher. As reported in the *Herald* newspaper, Baronova's performance at the Union Theatre was scheduled late in the program as she danced in *Les Presages* earlier that evening in the ballet season at Her Majesty's Theatre.

This second company, the Covent Garden Russian Ballet, finished its tour of Australia in April 1939. Several dancers opted to leave the company and stay in Australia instead of returning to Europe where the political situation was deteriorating. Two dancers who stayed, Tamara Tchinorova and Valentin Zeglovsky, formed a ballet company to tour to smaller, regional venues. One of their earliest performances was on 23 June 1939 at the Union Theatre. It was a lunchtime performance arranged by Desmond Connor and staged under the auspices of the University Fine Arts Society. As reported in the Society's minutes 'about 1000 students were present' to watch Tchinorova and

Zeglovsky perform a pas de deux from *Don Quixote*. Tchinorova also performed a Spanish dance arranged by Dolores Moreno to music by Valverde, and music from *Coq D'or* and *Prince Igor* was played. The minutes also record that 'At the end of the performance flowers were presented to Mlle Tchinorova and cigarettes to M. Zeglovsky ... The President wished them good luck on their tour of Australian towns and capitals.'

As the situation in Europe worsened in 1939, Colonel de Basil organised another ballet company for a third tour to the Antipodes, a destination which was considered safe and where a reliable touring infrastructure and loyal audiences existed. Dancers came from all directions in Europe to meet in Paris and then London where they set sail for Australia two weeks after the declaration of war. A smaller number crossed the Atlantic to join dancers in America and travelled to Australia via the West Coast of the USA and the Pacific Ocean. With timing worthy of a perfect pas de deux the two contingents sailed into Sydney harbour on Christmas Eve 1939 to become the third and final *Ballets Russes* company. This tour became fraught with problems as the result of growing wartime restrictions. A scheduled tour to New Zealand was cancelled and seasons in Australian cities had to be lengthened. The company stayed in Melbourne for nearly two and a half months from March to June 1940 which left plenty of time to refresh local publicity contacts, including two more visits to the University of Melbourne.

The first occasion involved Colonel de Basil himself who had come to Australia for the first time with this third company. On 10 May 1940 he and his wife, the dancer Olga Morosova, were guests of honour at a function organised by the Old Students Association. It was held in the reception room of the Conservatorium and as reported in the *Herald* newspaper included a student music recital and a 'short recital of

creative dancing by Daisy Pirnitzer and Hanny Kolm'. Olga Phillipoff, a secretary with the company whose command of English was excellent, presented an address on ballet history on behalf of the colonel whose public speaking English was not good.

Four days later on the 14 May 1940 Colonel de Basil returned to the campus this time with the largest group to visit the University. Again they were there under the auspices of the University Fine Arts Society with the able assistance of Desmond Connor. It was a stellar group of dancers and senior management which according to a list in the minutes of the Society included Tamara Toumanova, Sono Osato, Marina Svetlova, Anna Leontieva, Paul Petroff, Ivan Schwezoff, Roman Jasinsky, Yura Lazofsky, Michel Panieff, Alex Phillipoff and Olga Phillipoff. The group attracted a large audience with newspapers reporting between 600 and 800 attendees. The Society claimed that 'nearly 1000 managed to squeeze uncomfortably into the Union Theatre ... The largest meeting of the year, in fact the largest in the history of the Society.' Olga Phillipoff again delivered an address on the history of ballet and Colonel de Basil's contribution. But de Basil himself introduced members of the company 'in rather broken English' and Tamara Toumanova, the prima ballerina of the company 'gave thanks on behalf of the company'. A luncheon was hosted by the Union Board in the University Union, and the guests were shown around Union House and viewed the tree planted in 1938 by Tamara Grigorieva. The student newspaper *Farrago* of 14 May 1940 labelled it 'Balletomanics Day Out'. As well as reporting on each of these visits, Melbourne's newspapers provide the only known photographic record of any of the visits. The *Sun* newspaper of 14 October 1938 published a photo of the ballet guests walking across the campus. In June 1939 the recital by Tchinorova and Zeglovsky resulted in action photographs of them dancing which appeared in both *The Age* and *Argus* newspapers.

However, it is the records of the University Fine Arts Society which provide more valuable information about the visits. Whilst these records relate particularly to the two group visits and the recital by Tchinorova and Zeglovsky, they also provide context and background to the University's relationship with the world of commercial theatre, a relationship which flourished as a result of several parallel events at the University in 1938. (It also explains why there were no visits during the tour of the first

Ballets Russes company, the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet in 1936/1937 — quite simply, none of the key factors were in place at the University.)

On 6 April 1938 the 'new' Union Theatre opened with a performance by the Melbourne University Dramatic Club of the play *Storm Song* by Denis Johnston directed by Keith Macartney. The Union Theatre, within the splendid gothic Union House, had been remodelled during the years 1935 to 1938 with an eye to increasing its use and profile. The Theatre reopened with seating for 500, the seats having come from the old Garrick Theatre in Melbourne where the Manager was Desmond Connor. He had been stage manager for the popular university revues, and had good connections with Melbourne's theatrical world. In September 1938 he was appointed the first manager of the revamped Union Theatre.

During the same year, 1938, the University Fine Arts Society was established. The records of this Society contain both minutes of meetings and annual reports which provide thorough coverage of events staged by the Society. The records also document the arrangements which were made for concession priced tickets for students and staff to attend the ballet performances, a feature of the relationship which was not reported anywhere else.

The University Fine Arts Society grew out of a student musical group which was given a collection of recordings and a gramophone player by the Carnegie Corporation in 1937. The organising group involved students and staff including Zelman Cowen, George Legge, Marjorie McCredie, H.A.K. Hunt, R.M. Crawford, A. Boyce Gibson, John Samuel, Edna Bennett, and Ken Williams.

Manning Clark was also involved briefly at an early stage. Sir Zelman Cowen later wrote in his memoirs *A Public Life* (Miegunyah Press, 2006) that the foundation of the Society was 'A major event in my university life.' He and John Moline drew up a constitution which aimed to 'promote knowledge and appreciation of the following art forms: a. Pictorial and Plastic arts; b. Music; c. The film as an art form; d. General aesthetics'. There is no mention of theatre or dance, but these performing arts were soon to feature in the Society's activities. The Society had official status and was part of the Student Representative Council.

The first annual report of the Society, which was signed by the honorary secretary, Zelman Cowen, on 20 October 1938, commented that it had 'grown considerably' in membership and in its



A scene from Protée, also choreographed by David Lichine. The costumes were designed by Giorgio de Chirico. This photograph originally appeared in The Home on 1 March 1940. The Home published the only quality colour photos of any of the Ballets Russes tours.

activities. These were chiefly lunchtime 'musical recitals' of recorded music, as well as evening events of longer recitals and lectures. A sampling of events extracted from the Society's records for 1938–1940 include the reported attendance in brackets. Recording concerts: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (65); Beethoven's 9th Symphony (70); Bach's Mass in B (90). Lectures: Joshua McLelland on antique collecting (25); Vance Palmer on film as art (30); Gertrude Johnson on the National Theatre Movement (20); Bernard Heinze on modern music (40); H.W. Kent on Chinese art (30); R.M. Crawford on 'What Leonardo wrote about art' (45); A visit to Ola Cohn's sculpture studio (9).

These respectable attendance figures contrast with the large audiences of

between 600 and 1000 which flocked to the Union Theatre to see the glamorous ballet dancers. The two group visits of Ballets Russes personnel which were hosted by the Society became major events which attracted a much wider University audience, in spite of the fact that not one ballet step was performed. A headline in *Farrago* of 21 May 1940 accurately reflected the atmosphere of the group visits: 'Russian belly gets crowd. They sat and looked'. Sitting and looking at dancers and then buying seats for the ballet was what the organisers expected of these well-staged publicity events which benefitted both parties. The University enhanced its public profile, particularly in theatre circles, and the Union Theatre was promoted as a venue. The entrepreneurs J.C. Williamson Ltd

and Colonel de Basil gained another publicity platform to promote the ballet season in the constant quest to attract audiences. To ensure this, students and staff were offered concession priced tickets to the ballet. Starting in October 1938, there are regular references in the Society records to the availability of cheaper tickets through the University Fine Arts Society. The 1938 Annual Report recorded that 'At the present time the Society has been able to secure concessions for the Ballet itself, and it is hoped that members of the Society and the University will avail themselves of this opportunity ... It was decided ... to ask Miss Pat Colbrook, secretary of the arts faculty, to arrange for the distribution of concession tickets for performances at the Russian ballet each week.'

The pattern of weekly groups continued as recorded later at a meeting in March 1940: 'The first party to the ballet should be on Wednesday April 10 and ... arrangements would be made for seats in the stalls (5/8) and in the 'gods' (4/-). It was suggested that a circular should be sent to about 25 freshers who might be interested in the concessions, and the names and addresses were offered by the president from the Arts faculty cards.' (The full prices for tickets in the Stalls were 12/6, 10/-, and 7/6. It is probable the concession of 5/8 was for the 7/6 stall seats. A saving of 1/- was made on seats in the 'gods' which were 5/- full price). The success of the scheme was obvious as 'hundreds of students' took advantage of the cheaper seats and the Society extended its reach by negotiating concession tickets for productions of operas staged by the National Theatre Movement at the National Theatre in St Kilda.

No evidence has been found of other Australian universities developing a relationship with the Ballets Russes companies such as that which occurred with the University of Melbourne. The presence of the ballet companies in Melbourne between 1938 and 1940, combined with moves at the University to enhance its theatrical profile, presented opportunities that earned rewards in terms of publicity and ticket sales. At the same time the University Fine Arts Society was fulfilling its role of promoting the appreciation of the arts, a role which dramatically embraced some of the greatest ballet in the world at the time.

Richard Stone

Richard Stone was a researcher on the National Library of Australia's Ballets Russes Project. See www.nla.gov.au/balletsrusses.

The Dismissal Note

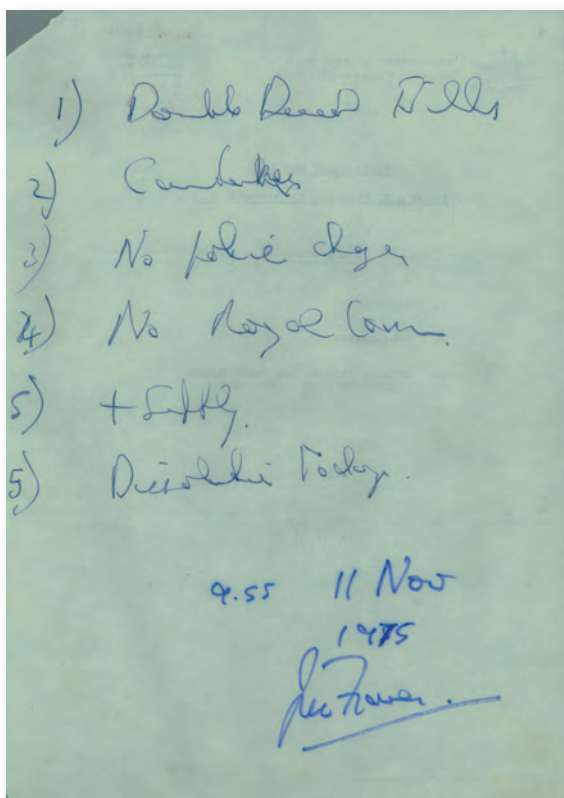
The dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 was one of the most significant events in the history of Australia. Like all good historical controversies, it can still arouse debate today. The UMA has recently received further documents from the office of Malcolm Fraser to augment its existing collection. Included in this most recent accession is the note written by Mr Fraser during his phone call with the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, on the morning of 11 November 1975.

The note, written on the back of an agenda for the joint party meeting that Mr Fraser was about to attend, observes the time as 9.55am. It lists the undertakings that the Governor-General required of Mr Fraser before he would dismiss Mr Whitlam. The note reads:

- 1) Double dissolution
- 2) Caretaker
- 3) No policy changes
- 4) No Royal Commission
- 5) + supply
- 5) [sic] Dissolution today

Essentially, what Sir John Kerr required was an agreement that if Mr Whitlam were to be replaced by Mr Fraser it would be as a caretaker Prime Minister until a double dissolution were promptly called. During the caretaker period there were to be no major policy changes, the coalition parties would pass supply in the Senate and they would drop the pursuit of charges against Labor ministers in relation to the 'Loans Affair'. The note confirms that Mr Fraser knew of the Governor-General's intention to raise the prospect of the dismissal of Mr Whitlam that day. As remarked in the recently published, *Malcolm Fraser: The political memoirs*, it certainly was 'one of the most momentous phone calls in the history of Australian politics'.

Katie Wood



Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's note of his conversation with the Governor-General on 11 November 1975.

The Sandringham Ladies Reading Club: The early days

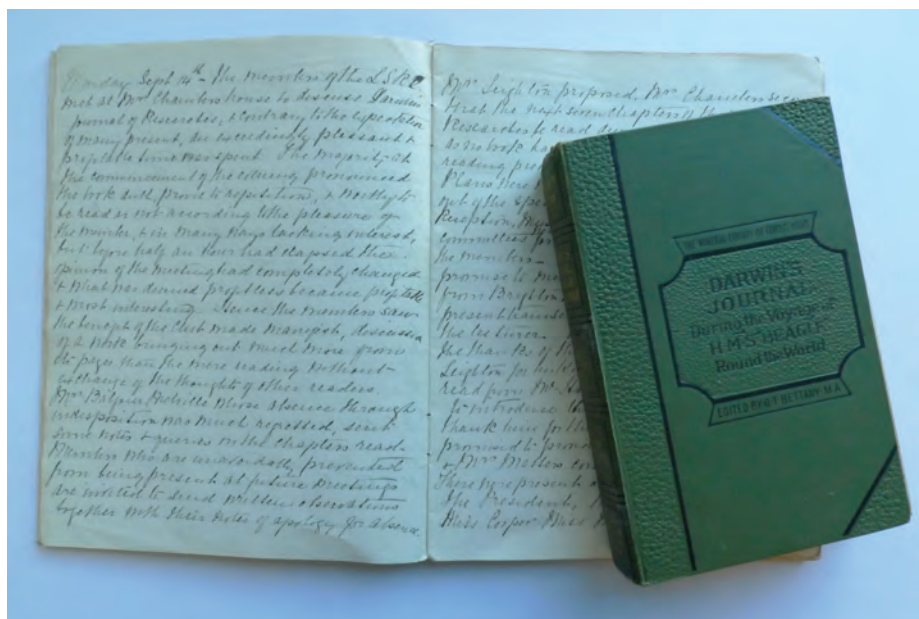
On 1 June 1903, a Monday, 'a meeting of ladies was held at Hadley Cottage, Bay Road, to consider the advisability of establishing a reading Club in Sandringham'. Thus began the 42 year existence of the Sandringham Ladies Reading Club, whose unique minute books are held at UMA. Five ladies attended the meeting and duly formed themselves into a club. Their purpose was to 'keep in touch with the literature of the day, by reading, at home, poetry, high class fiction and standard works, and discussing the books at monthly meetings'. The founding member was Mrs H.A. Matters¹ who resided in Abbott Street. Sandringham was then a sparsely populated suburb and still a holiday and weekend destination with many cafes, tea rooms, boarding houses and boats for hire along Beach Road.² There was a boarding school, 'Cliffcote'; its two principals, the Misses Bonney, were early members of the Club.

At their inaugural meeting the members set out their rules, which included monthly meetings except during summer months, total membership limited to 18 (soon extended to 25), membership by recommendation, an annual 'lecturette', a prohibition on religious discussion and the establishment of a Syllabus Committee. Soon there were also committees for management, refreshments and for floral decoration. The December meeting of each year was held as a picnic, usually around the bayside, with minutes always carefully taken.

By their third meeting in August they had 15 members and were ready to discuss their first work. This was Tennyson's poem 'Enoch Arden', an odyssean tale of a fisherman, presumed dead, who returns to his family after ten years to find his wife happily remarried to his best friend. The discussion involved a 'spirited defence of her'.

The second book was Israel Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto*. This 1892 publication, sensational in its day, was an epic tale of Jewish life in London, describing both the poverty of the East End and the wealthy lives of the established Jews in the West End. The Jewish customs and practices described in the book were remarked on by the ladies and compared to similar ones amongst the Scots and the Chinese.

The Sandringham ladies were nothing if not thorough in their approach. One or two members would undertake to read at least one critical work on the selected reading, another would prepare a biographical sketch of the author, excerpts were read out loud, and in the case of *Children of the Ghetto*, 'some prints of the ghetto of today were passed around'. All in all they embraced a serious and ambitious reading program. They read Shakespeare, Dante, Dickens and George Eliot; they subscribed to *The Bookman* and compiled a small reference library containing works like *The Classical Dictionary*. Their purpose was clearly towards education and the formality and structure of their meetings resembled a university tutorial more than a ladies' social occasion.



A page from the minute book of the Sandringham Ladies Reading Club and the 1900 edition of Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*.

In the minutes recorded for the third work they read, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*,³ their agenda is spelt out. 'Contrary to the expectations of many present, an exceedingly pleasant and profitable time was spent. The majority at the commencement of the evening pronounced the book dull, prone to repetition ... and in many ways lacking interest, but before half an hour had departed the opinion of the meeting had completely changed and what was deemed profitless became profitable and most interesting. Hence the members saw the benefit of the Club made manifest, discussion of a work bringing out much more from the pages than the mere reading without exchange of the thoughts of other readers'.⁴

In further evidence of their commitment, when the ladies failed to understand or appreciate *Midsummer Night's Dream*, feeling that 'their failure to see the beauties of the dream lay in their [lack] of instruction in the works of the great dramatist ... it was arranged that [in] the next lecturette one of Shakespeare's plays should be the subject, and that a Shakespearian lecturer be invited to take the evening. It was suggested also that if possible, an extra meeting in the same month be arranged for, so that the same play to be lectured upon should be studied & discussed'.⁵

The Management Committee set high standards and the rules were regularly re-examined and refined. Half-hearted participation was discouraged; for example, members unable to attend a meeting were still required to send in their notes on the book in question, with a 'three strikes and you're out' policy in effect.

The minutes usually record both the consensus and dissident views of the book at hand and are impressive in their often nuanced expression. The minutes are too formal to allow individual personalities to stand out although some of the members have charming names: there are the Misses Balfour-Melville, Hollow, Meggs, Munday, Mallett, Lamb and

Wunderley. Most though have the standard Anglo and Scottish names of the time. First names are not recorded. While the minutes are formal and correct, mischief can sometimes be detected. When the annual 'lecturette' was given by the Reverend Williams, who 'presented the centipede to his audience in every possible manner', Mrs Chambers 'seconded the vote of thanks to the lecturer who replied with some further information on the centipede'.⁶

The minutes end without notice in December 1945. Was a subsequent volume lost or did the Club disband? By then minute-taking had become more perfunctory but a certain weariness is discernible; there were fewer attendees and more apologies, the books were less ambitious — popular fiction now reigned — and the end-of-year picnic had been abandoned due to lack of interest. The Club had partly evolved into a play and poetry-reading — and even a news-reading — circle. Had the long years of wartime dampened spirits? Had a faction taken control? The minutes of the final meeting are telling: 'Miss Mullett's piano-playing and Miss Ferguson's original verses were worthy of commendation, Miss Paton's account of the "soldier from the war returning" was of much interest while Miss Hooper's antiques were much admired.' The Ladies Reading Club had lost focus. In any event no further record of the Club has survived.

UMA holds the minute books from 1903 to 1945 of the Sandringham Ladies Reading Club.⁷ They include the yearly reading lists devised by the Syllabus Committee. The collection encompasses many more aspects than can be treated here and deserves a wider study. It will feature in the UMA's 50th anniversary exhibition in December.

Jane Ellen and Denise Driver

Notes

- 1 Searches of the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages have uncovered no information about this woman. Her husband was Charles Matters, a real estate agent with premises in Collins Street.
- 2 The Sands & McDougall Melbourne Suburban and Country Directory of 1905 lists dozens of such places.
- 3 The full title is *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle Round the World, under the Command of Capt. Fitz Roy, R.N.* The nearest contemporary edition was published by Thomas Nelson in 1900.
- 4 Minutes, 14 September 1903.
- 5 Minutes, 3 November 1903.
- 6 Minutes, 10 May 1909.
- 7 Accession no. 77/117.

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The University of Melbourne Archives
University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010,
Australia

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Principal Archivist's Report

This winter marks 50 years since the University of Melbourne Archives was founded. Created mainly for the benefit of researchers and students of the University but also with the wider community in mind, UMA remains a treasure trove of primary source material which continues to grow.



While the anniversary date can be pinpointed to the appointment of the founding Archivist, Frank Strahan, on the 29th of June 1960, proposals regarding the establishment of a formal University Archives had been in train for at least two years prior to this. Driven by a number of academics from both history and commerce, various proposals were initiated to discuss the feasibility of appointing an Archivist. The need to document the history of the University and its day-to-day administration was accompanied by the opportunity and desirability of collecting Victorian business archives that would enable research in the relatively new field of economic history, an initiative undertaken in co-operation with the Victorian Business Archives Council.

Our upcoming anniversary event will celebrate Frank's appointment. We will be holding an evening function, hosted by Dr Ian Renard, current Chair of the Archives Advisory Board. The Provost and current acting Vice-Chancellor, John Dewar, and Professor Emeritus Chris Wallace-Crabbe will launch the event at University House on 23 July.

Today at the UMA the past continues to inform the present and the acquisition and documentation of collections, both small and large, remains integral to our daily work. It's surprising to note that while such day-to-day operations may have slightly altered from a reactive to a more proactive approach to collecting records, and our methods of documentation are evolving in the light of social context and technological change, we are still working to the original ambit of 'co-operate with organisations outside — by giving advice as to the keeping of their records and even obtain possession of many of these for historical research purposes'.¹

Telling examples of this will be in the exhibition that celebrates our anniversary: *Primary Sources: 50 stories from 50 years in the Archives*. With all Archives' staff contributing to the content and narrative of the exhibition, it will be an intriguing expose of some of our well-known treasures and many that are not so well known. The exhibition will be launched on 8 December 2010 and will run until February 2011 in the Leigh Scott Gallery in the Baillieu Library. A publication will accompany the exhibition and a program of curators' talks is being organised, as well as a website to document the exhibition and to allow access to those who cannot attend.

As we reflect on our past, this is also an exciting moment for UMA's future as we anticipate the appointment of a new University Archivist, part of whose brief will be to plan for UMA to acquire and manage digital material and to ensure better exposure and access to our collections online.

Helen McLaughlin

¹ Vice Chancellors Correspondence Series, University of Melbourne Archives