

# A Rich History

By Dr Mary Carroll with Anna Griffith

In considering what to write for this piece it seemed appropriate to share an experience that has led me to both reflect and take action on some research which I have been intending to pursue for some time. This experience occurred in December 2014 when I was fortunate enough to attend and present a paper at the Australian and New Zealand History of Education (ANZHES) conference. The conference was being held at the former Melbourne Teachers' College (MTC) in the beautiful and atmospheric Gryphon Gallery of the 1888 building, Grattan St, Carlton, now part of the University of Melbourne's Graduate Centre. I always enjoy the breadth of insight into education the ANZHES conference provides but this opportunity was filled with additional significance for me because of its location. I was excited (some would say perhaps a little overexcited!) about the venue as I had spent many memorable hours as an undergraduate student in the building under the guidance of names perhaps familiar to some including Allan Thomas, Doug Down, Wes Young, Bea Fincher, Fay Nicholson, Stella Lees, Kathleen O'Keefe, Graham Corr and others – all linked closely to teacher-librarianship education in Victoria. The venue and its memories spurred me, with the help of research assistant Anna Griffith, to take action and commence long delayed investigation into the history of the library of the Teachers' College and the work of one of former Principal Warwick Eunson, topics which have interested me for some time.

As a former teacher-librarian and as an education historian my interest in this history was not new, having its genesis in research into librarianship education in Australia as part of my doctoral thesis. Supplementary to the main focus of the thesis were snippets of information that became, to my mind at least, unfinished business. These snippets included a realisation of the oversight in histories of the Australian profession of the very early establishment of post-secondary education for librarianship at the MTC. Questions were also raised over the lack of information available about one of Victoria's first trained teacher-librarians, Warwick Eunson, initially librarian of the MTC and later principal of the Frankston and then Melbourne Teachers' College (MTC). Eunson is a significant figure in the development of librarianship and teacher-librarianship in this country yet he is almost invisible in the historical record. As well as his positions as College Librarian and Principal, Eunson's roles included lecturer in library practice at the University of Melbourne in the 1940s, writer of training materials for teacher-librarians and, in the 1960s, foundation president of the School Library Association of Victoria.

Importantly for this story, as with any history of librarianship in Australia, is the influence of Frank Tate and the outcome of his request for funding for a review of Australian libraries. Tate was another former MTC Principal, teacher, inspector and first president of the Carnegie-funded Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The resultant report from this request for funding *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for their Improvement* (1935), commonly known as the Munn-Pitt Report, continues today to cast a long shadow over Australian librarianship. In this seminal though somewhat controversial report, the library of the MTC was assessed in vastly unflattering terms. It was described as "the worst one . . . seen in any educational institution" stating there was "little excuse for calling this collection of books a library"! Historically, such an assessment poses the challenge to discover how (or maybe if in actuality) the library of the MTC came to be in such a state and if this report and its assessment of the library was to ultimately have a role in shaping the future of teacher-librarians in Victoria?

While there is no intention here of telling the complete tale of the outcomes of our research so far, it would appear that the Munn-Pitt Report was instrumental in spurring the Victorian Education Department, if somewhat belatedly, into action directed at the development of training of teacher-librarians in Victoria. In 1946 John Prictor and Warwick Eunson were selected to travel to NSW to undertake training in librarianship at the Public Library of NSW (now the State Library). Eunson was a Social Studies teacher who had developed an enthusiasm for 'new education' and libraries through his experiences in his training and his teaching in schools such as Brunswick and Warrnambool Technical Schools and Melbourne Boys High. He also had a deep interest in new educational theories and methods and an interest in new media. To complete his BEd at the University of Melbourne in 1936 he wrote a paper on 'The efficiency of the cinema as a classroom aid'. Upon

return from NSW John Prictor was appointed the first Library Services Officer in the State of Victoria while Eunson became lecturer in Social Studies with responsibility for the library at the MTC. This combination flags Eunson's approach to teaching and his interest in school libraries.

Increasingly our research has begun to reveal the significance of the MTC in the development of both librarianship and teacher-librarianship nationally, clues to the often uneasy relationship between the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in its various guises (previously the Australian Institute of Librarians (AIL) and the Library Association of Australia (LAA)) and teacher-librarian associations, the influence of the MTC college library and Eunson on international education movements and the formation of Australian teacher-librarianship. New questions have inevitably arisen as we dig deeper. These include what was the role of an education museum in teacher education at the College? How did the library collection at the Teachers' College reflect the aspirations for teacher education in Victoria over time? Are the constructs that helped shape teacher-librarian education reflected in MTC history and why did teacher-librarianship emerge as a discipline when it did? The answers to these questions may be of significance to the profession and present insights into the way in which the past has informed and continues to shape the practice of teacher-librarianship. One word – reform – dominates our findings thus far and the link between school libraries; the training of professional librarians and reforming pedagogy is a constant presence. One of the most telling aspects of our research into the history of teacher-librarianship in Australia has been its dearth. With some few exceptions little has been written, leading us to also ask why there appears to be a gap in the professional literature around the history of teacher-librarianship in Australia? The evidence so far suggested that rather than the history of teacher-librarianship being one supplementary to the history of librarianship in this country it is in fact a parallel and unique story with its own twists and turns deeply entrenched in the development of 'new' education. What, then, are the implications of not knowing this history? If knowing one's tradition and history is one of the hallmarks of a profession, the practical implication of this gap in the literature and perhaps our education is that teacher-librarians are not fully armed with all the weapons necessary to sustain and promote their profession.

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One issue that stands out in the research into the history of the MTC and goes some way to explaining the gap is the state of the historic records of the MTC. This situation had practical implications for our research, as Anna was to find, and presents questions about how we preserve our history and the impact institutional amalgamations has had on the preservation of the records of such a significant institution. In delving into the archives, Anna was to discover a long tradition of collecting objects, records, photographs and papers from former students, teachers and Principals of the MTC. Amalgamated in 1989 with the Education Faculty of the University of Melbourne, the records of the MTC now are held by this institution.

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In total, the University of Melbourne Archives holds sixty-eight boxes of material in the Melbourne College of Advanced Education (which succeeded the MTC) series, occupying twenty-four metres of largely unorganised shelf space: with pencil, notes are scrawled

on the sides of boxes, and materials grouped together by object type, such as photographs or student records or (relevant to our project) library ledger books. In trying to uncover the history of the Melbourne Teachers' College Library, a very wide-net strategy had to be used, where secondary sources often informed a specific hunt for an early photograph or building plan, making the research very non-linear and revealing changing attitudes towards the concept of educational libraries.

From grand visions in the 1880s, to depression in the 1890s and the impact of the world wars on the transport of books, the evolution of the MTC library has been marked by the availability of funds, and changing ideas about what teachers should be reading. The library has occupied multiple spaces over time, also reflecting changing ideas about the way a library should be used. Over time, the library occupied a part of the central portion of the main 1888 building, the old 'Music Hall' (now Gryphon Gallery), as well as a 'Western Reading Room', before ultimately being housed in the Education Resource Centre (ERC) in 1970. This building, now mostly lost, came to reflect not just teacher education but the aspirations and vision of the MTC's founders. The role of librarian at MTC follows a parallel path to the housing of the main library collection, from the early days when the College Principal acted as director of the library, to the expansion of the 1940s which saw a Librarian and Assistant Librarian, through to the growth of the library into the ERC under the direction of

Warwick Eunson. Through the archives and the availability of resources it is clear the concept of an educational library at MTC has been dynamic and evolving, as attitudes towards educational materials for teachers have followed a non-linear path towards recognition. In the fate of its records and the evolution of the MTC library the story of a profession and the pedagogical imperatives that drove its development can be seen.

Attendance at the conference also enabled me to hear another speaker, Bronwyn Lowe, a University of Melbourne PhD candidate, present on a topic that has the potential to inform both our understanding of the past and build a case for the future relevance and importance of school libraries. Hearing Bronwyn speak reminded me of the practical value of research and the exchange of ideas. Bronwyn's paper presented her findings on the experience of women of their school library between 1930 and 1950 and the changes that occurred during this period. These changes in the user experience parallel the growth and interest in school libraries in Victoria and the professionalisation of school library staff. Such research is exciting as it adds a previously unexplored dimension and depth to the contemporary discussion of the impact of librarians and school libraries on quality of life and educational success. To further develop this research would provide a longitudinal view of the effect of school libraries and librarians on young people and their lives.

In the coming months, Anna, Bronwyn and I hope to build on our initial research, but I would also like to throw out a challenge to teacher-librarians everywhere. Ask yourself what do you know about your history, the history of your library and the long view of the history of teacher-librarianship? If the answer is very little maybe it's time to explore further so that, in your advocacy for your profession, you can draw on a rich history with foundations firmly embedded in improving the quality of education, innovative practice and the ability to change lives.

## References

Munn, R. and Pitt, E. R., (1935) *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for their Improvement*, Melbourne: ACER.

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