

## THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

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The National Library of Australia is an imposing building on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra. Modelled on the peristyle temples of ancient Greece it offers an austere exterior which contrasts with the well appointed and comfortable interior which welcomes the visitor.

Opened in 1968, the Library's main function is to act as a reserve for and to develop a national collection of material centered on Australia and Australian concerns, but it also contains important resources of non-Australian material. Like all libraries of such category it offers the bibliophile and researcher gems such as Captain Cook's *Journal* (1768-1770) and the *Diary* of William John Wills (1834-1861) of the famous but tragically ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition, or take, for example, the interesting and rare collection of eighteenth century French plays, or the first and early editions of famous works of the Restoration. The Library also holds Australia's major collection of Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and Thai publications. It goes without saying that the list becomes endless though, often, the reader's time is insufficient in order to take in the depth, breadth and variety of the collections at his disposal.

Material available includes maps, manuscripts, music, books, newspapers and journals, photographs, paintings, prints and audio archives, constituting some 3.5 million items. Various guides to the holdings are available and useful for the overseas visitor planning a tight work schedule, for example, Janice Kenny's *National Library of Australia: History and Collections*,<sup>1</sup>; or C. A. Burmester's *National Library of Australia: Guide to the Collections*,<sup>2</sup>.

Access to the material is made easy by computerised catalogue systems and the Library is the centre point for the Australian Bibliographic Network which links up library catalogues around the country thus facilitating the localisation of material in other holdings, an important point for the visitor on a short research trip to such a vast country!. The service furthermore is remarkably fast in all the reading rooms and, almost as important, cheerful and friendly. In the two months I spent researching at

1.- Kenny, Janice; *National Library of Australia: History and Collections*, National Library of Australia, 1984. This may be purchased from the Sales and Subscription Unit, National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2600, at \$9.50.

2.- Burmester, C. A.; *National Library of Australia*, National Library of Australia, 1974 - 1982, 4 Vols. Copies may be purchased from the Sales and Subscriptions Unit, National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2600 at \$20.00. Enquiries should be sent to the above address for information regarding other guides available for purchase.

the Library all my requests were met and often new and important leads were afforded by the librarians who took an active interest in the work I was engaged in.

In 1983 the Council of the National Library of Australia instituted the National Library Fellowships, now known as the Harold White Fellowships which enables established scholars and writers to work at the Library for periods of three to six months. Fellows are awarded financial and administrative assistance and are expected to give at least one public lecture and one seminar for staff during their time as Fellows.<sup>3</sup>

However hard one's schedule might be it is worth exploring the Library during a break to visit the exhibition rooms or to admire the coloured glass panel windows by Leonard French<sup>4</sup>, the wool tapestry hangings by the French-Hungarian artist Mathieu Mategot<sup>5</sup> or to admire the view across the lake while enjoying a well earned cappuccino in the top-floor cafeteria.

3.- For more information contact Mr. Graeme Powell, Manuscript Librarian, The National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT, 2600, Australia.

4.- These windows are the work of Australian artist Leonard French and consist of 16 panels of stained glass set in concrete frames. The windows were set in place in 1967.

5.- These tapestries date from 1968 and were woven in Aubusson, France.