

OLDIES BUT GOODIES: NEW WAYS OF MAKING VALUABLE OLDER INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

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ABSTRACT: From its establishment in 1950 the Australian Antarctic Division Library has built up a significant collection of internal reports and records, most of which are unpublished. This includes valuable primary source material such as station reports, voyage reports and ship log books, all of which need to be made more accessible. The Library has recently enlisted the help of modern technology to achieve the desired result.

The Australian Antarctic Division Library was established in 1950 to provide a library and information service for the Antarctic Division and to support the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE). Its role was also to store and conserve important records such as station reports, voyage reports and ship log books, and in earlier days the Library was also the repository for the Division's map collection, the photographic collection and for much of the scientific data collected in the field.

Over the years these latter materials have been separated out and have become the responsibility of other areas, namely Mapping, Multimedia and the Australian Antarctic Data Centre. Nevertheless, the Library has retained, and continues to receive, a significant volume of Antarctic Division reports and records, most of which are unpublished. The challenge we face is how to make this valuable primary source material accessible, and the good news is that modern technology can play an important role in helping us achieve this result.

The Australian Antarctic Program operates three permanent stations on the Antarctic continent at Mawson, Davis and Casey, and a fourth at subantarctic Macquarie Island. The station at Macquarie Island was established in 1948, at Mawson in 1954, at Davis in 1957, and at Wilkes (later Casey) after it was taken over from the Americans in 1956.

Station reports, including Station logs, Station Leaders' annual reports, field trip reports, biology and other scientific reports, radio logs, and a variety of trade reports, have been received annually for all stations since the year of establishment. Australian Antarctic voyage reports have been received annually since 1947, as well as reports on various expeditions to subantarctic Heard Island, which is also under Australian jurisdiction. All in all, these unpublished reports contain a mine of valuable information, which over the years has remained relatively untapped.

As part of the sentencing regime established with the National Archives of Australia, Australian Antarctic Division is required to archive its unpublished reports as they approach the 30 years old mark and, as a result, most of the station and voyage reports that predate the early 1970s have been consigned to the Archives. However, by special arrangement with the National Archives, access to this consigned material was not lost at the Antarctic Division, because microfiche copies were created between 1988 and 1994 and retained on site in the Library. These can be read or printed out on the Library's microfiche reader printer, and since the acquisition of a new digital machine last year, they can now be scanned electronically and uploaded to computer as digital files. As a result digital copies of this material can now be created on demand.

Early in 2004 the National Archives approached the Library to see if we would be 'guinea pigs' in testing their prototype electronic sentencing module. This involved entering item and container level details and their associated barcodes into a customised Microsoft Access database, which on completion could be uploaded into the Archives' collection management system, RecordSearch. The material chosen for this project was the Australian Antarctic voyage reports from 1980/81 to 1999/2000, as this was a discrete set of material that would complement previous consignments and give the Archives the full set of our voyage reports from 1947 to 2000. Over a period of several months the data were entered on to the new database and individual items received barcoded folders, which in turn were stored in barcoded archival containers. At the end of the project the data were saved to disk and delivered with the boxed originals to the National Archives. This project was a complete success and will no doubt streamline our future sentencing of voyage and station reports to the Archives.

However, the question remained of how the Library could retain full access to the material so consigned. This was solved by commissioning an outside agency to scan and digitise the more than 7,000 pages of voyage reports and make them available electronically (in both TIF and PDF formats) on a single CD-ROM. This convenient format has already proved to be popular with researchers and has the advantage of saving us valuable library space, while allowing us to consign the original documents to the Archives, as is the requirement.

In recent years the Library has arranged for other 'oldies but goodies' to be made available electronically. The Australian Antarctic Division has two main series of publications, ANARE reports and ANARE research notes. 147 ANARE reports have been published from 1950 to the present and 103 ANARE research notes from 1982 to the present. Many of these publications are still of considerable interest to researchers, and we are regularly asked about the availability of individual numbers.

Over the years our stocks of some titles have dwindled down to a handful, so it seemed sensible to have a selection of the scarcer and more popular titles digitised. As a result the Library now has over 30 of these titles available in PDF format on a single CD ROM, and there are plans to make them available online via the Antarctic Division's web site (<http://www.aad.gov.au>).

Another area of Library responsibility is for historical and other artefacts relating to Macquarie Island and Australian Antarctic Territory. Items of significance which are returned to Australia are stored and conserved by the Library and are put on display selectively to publicise Australia's Antarctic Program. An important unpublished report in this area entitled *Artifacts of Macquarie Island* was compiled for the Antarctic Division by Ted Mitchener in 1975 and early 1976 (Mitchener 1975). This consists of two volumes of high-quality black and white photographs and an accompanying handwritten inventory with notes on the 179 items covered. (Item 4, *Two try pots*, is illustrated here).



In recent times these Macquarie Island artefacts have attracted some interest, including that of a researcher who happened to be a wintering expeditioner at Macquarie Island last year. As a result we had the photographs and accompanying inventory digitised and made available electronically (in TIF, JPG and PDF formats, for flexibility) on two CD ROMs. We were then able to satisfy the immediate request by loading the material on a server that could be accessed from Macquarie Island, as well as retaining it in the Library in a variety of formats for future use.

Last but not least, the Australian Antarctic Division was able to take advantage of a large-format scanning project undertaken by National Archives earlier this year, in order to

successfully transfer a number of historical maps and charts into their custody. Maps and charts that were personally used by Captain J.K. Davis on his Antarctic voyages were purchased by the Library from his estate in 1984, and a roughly drawn chart used by Sir Douglas Mawson was also held in the Library's 'Special Collection.' Examination of these items in conjunction with our Records Management staff late last year resulted in a decision that they required more appropriate conditions for preservation and storage, and it was therefore recommended that they be transferred to National Archives custody.

On transfer they were successfully scanned using a state-of-the-art large-format scanner and the resulting digital images are waiting to be uploaded to RecordSearch, the Archives' collection management system. Once that is done, the images will be accessible via the National Archives' website. In return, the Antarctic Division has received copies of the high resolution quality images on CD ROM and will now be able to load them on to the Division's website and link them with catalogue entries in the *SCAR map catalogue*. The originals, of course, will still remain accessible at the Archives, on request.

This is the progress so far in our quest to make valuable older information accessible by selective scanning and digitising. And there are still many more gems, many more 'oldies but goodies,' in the Library's collection just waiting to be discovered and shown to the world.

REFERENCES

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