



The World in Context

From antiquarian books to electronic journals, Angela Brown reveals the breadth of the Overseas Publications Collection

The National Library's Overseas Publications Collection contains a vast array of books, journals and newspapers published over many hundreds of years. The collection has been built up selectively over many years and now provides an invaluable world context for researchers in Australian studies while also supporting researchers working outside this field.

One of the most interesting aspects of building the Overseas Publications Collection is meeting people who wish to help with this work by donating items. They are often clearing out part of their own collection or that of a relative, and they are looking for a home for titles that are important to them and which they feel should be available for people to use.

Unfortunately we cannot always take what is offered as donations still have to comply with the collecting policy and often we already hold a copy of the book. However the Library is fortunate in receiving every year many valuable and important works, and it is always very pleasant to hear from the donors details of how they came to acquire the book. Sometimes the story is quite fascinating.

One such work in the *Future Memory: National Library Recent Acquisitions* exhibition is Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, printed in 1732 in London. This book, donated by Mrs Ruth Cramond, was retrieved undamaged after a World War II air raid on Bristol that damaged much of the historic centre of the city. It is in very good condition in spite of its age and history.

Henry Baker's *Employment for the Microscope*, printed in 1753 in London, is also on display. This work was donated by Dr Ruth Bright and originally belonged to her father, the late Francis Ockenden whose career was in research

Plate XII, 'Animalcules'
Reproduced from *Employment for the Microscope* by Henry Baker (1698–1774) (London: R. Dodsley, 1753)
RB MISC 3283

and electrical engineering. His hobby, however, was the microscope and he wrote and lectured extensively on matters associated with its construction and use. He was a past-president of the Quekett Microscopical Society in London and the book was presented to him by a descendant of Henry Baker when Francis left England for Australia. For a book of such age, it is in very good condition and the fold-out plates are magnificent.

Hans Holbein's *The Dances of Death through the Various Stages of Human Life*, printed in 1788 in Edinburgh, was donated by Mr Karl Heiniger in appreciation of assistance he received from staff in his work on early surveyors of Tasmania and their maps. What a splendid way to say 'thank you!' The work is renowned for the fine quality of its allegorical engravings of Death leading all walks of life in

'The Countess', Plate 22, reproduced from *The Dances of Death through the Various Stages of Human Life ...* by Hans Holbein (1497–1543) (Edinburgh: 1788) RB MISC 3283

a dance to the grave. The original woodcut engravings were made in the sixteenth century. This edition features 46 of Holbein's original woodcuts, reproduced as copper engravings set in a surround with additional detail by David Deuchar.

Miss Sheila Atkinson donated nine rare books of which two are on display: *The Booke of Common Prayer* (printed in 1559 in London); and *Novum Testamentum Graece, cum Vulgata Interpretatione Latina Graeci Contextus Lineis Inserta* (New Testament in Latin and Greek, printed in 1613 in Leiden). The books belonged to her father, the Reverend Henry Brune Atkinson (1874–1960), who was not only an Anglican clergyman but also an orchidologist who collected and classified Tasmanian orchids. He recorded 24 previously unknown species, one of which was named after him, and his orchid collection is housed at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston.

All these works are housed in the Library's Rare Books Collection. However, the Library also collects a wide range of overseas material published more recently. In addition to print publications, the Library acquires microform of many overseas publications, and increasingly provides electronic access to items, especially overseas journals. Many titles are received as part of depository arrangements with international government and



non-government organisations but the Library also purchases a large amount of overseas material including collections of important historical research materials. One such collection is *Early English Newspapers*, a major purchase in 2002. More than 5000 reels of microfilm were acquired to complete this collection that is not held in its entirety anywhere else in Australia. The collection includes more than 1300 seventeenth and eighteenth century newspaper titles, and is of great

significance to researchers in the areas of political, social and intellectual history.

Selecting and acquiring both rare and current books, journals and newspapers from many parts of the world is a major task. But together, the collection provides millions of resources for scholars and readers.

ANGELA BROWN is Manager, Overseas Collection Development in the National Library

AN INVITATION TO HELP BUILD A TREASURES GALLERY



Plans are now in progress to redevelop a prominent area of the National Library as a Treasures Gallery, where significant objects and records central to Australia's story will always be on display.

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For more information about the Treasures Gallery and becoming a Treasured Partner, please contact the Library's Development Office.

T 02 6262 1141 F 02 6273 5483 E development@nla.gov.au

