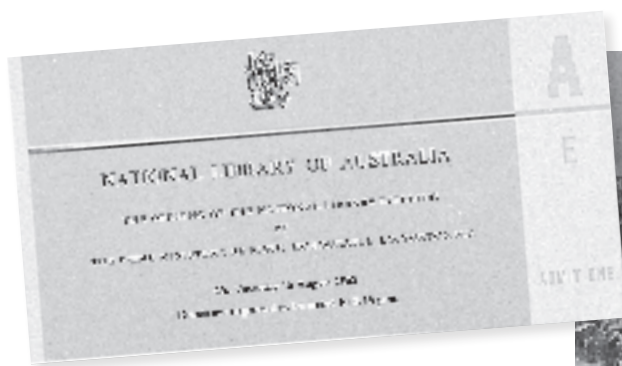


DEGREES of REFRESHMENT -



Colin Bannerman describes the fare served at events surrounding the Library's opening

To a society still worrying over its cultural credentials, construction of a suitably iconic building to house the National Library Collection was an important undertaking. It was right and proper for its official opening in 1968 to be accompanied by as much pomp and circumstance as the keepers of the public purse were prepared to pay for. The National Library Council initially had visions of a royal occasion. The keepers, however, were less ambitious. Completion of the neoclassic temple by the lake was a gratifying achievement, but, as far as they were concerned, its doors could be opened as well by a prime minister as by a royal person, and at rather less expense.

Since the program of events marking the opening of the new building was the result of nearly two years of planning, it seems fair to say that any residue of elitism was quite intentional. It was necessary to attract a goodly turnout of VIPs to dignify the occasion. It was appropriate on such an occasion to show off the new building to a leavening of opinion leaders in the Australian and international library communities. There were also many people, including politicians, bureaucrats, artists and staff, whose contributions to the enterprise deserved to be honoured. All events were by invitation only and the style of hospitality offered was carefully matched to the perceived obligation (and, of course, the rather modest catering budget of \$2500). Consequently,



hoi polloi hardly got a look in and were fed on media reports alone. (Had the opening occurred in 2008 it might have been a different story; I am sure there would have been a determined attempt to encourage popular participation.)

However meticulous the preparations may have been, documenting the process was not a high priority for any of those involved. At all levels, from the Council down to the clerks who arranged the details, the only product that really mattered was the event itself—and the proof of success was generally taken to be the number of favourable press reports and congratulatory messages that followed it. These were meticulously filed. Other surviving record sets—office files, ephemera folders and personal papers lodged in the Manuscripts Collection—are mere deposits of working papers, providing no more than glimpses of the nitty gritty of event planning and management. Nevertheless, there is enough to make a fair sketch of the celebrations, with some surprising details here and there.

The first planned event was a 'Viewing of Tapestries'. These magnificent works in merino wool, designed by Mathieu Matégot to grace the Foyer, attracted rather more

above left:
An entry ticket to the official opening ceremony, 15 August 1968
Ephemera Collection

above right:
Unknown photographer
Officials and Dignitaries Being Addressed at the Opening of the National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1968
b&w photograph; 15.2 x 21.2 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn4387854



above:
Unknown photographer
*Sir Archibald Grenfell Price
Addressing Officials and
Dignitaries at the Opening
of the National Library of
Australia, Canberra, 1968* [detail]
b&w photograph; 15.1 x 20.2 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn4387961
Gough Whitlam and Malcolm
Fraser are to the left of the
speaker, Sir A. Grenfell Price;
architect, Walter Bunning is in
the back row, third from the right

below:
Unknown photographer
*Sir John Gorton and Sir
Archibald Grenfell Price*
b&w photograph; 20.9 x 15.4 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn4387972



than their fair share of attention on opening day. But details of the preview on the afternoon of Saturday 3 August 1968 were discreetly kept from the public. To assist with this 'viewing', a case of French champagne was ordered (sale or return) from David Jones at \$5.75 per bottle, and a certain Mrs Royal was engaged to provide savouries for 20 persons at 70 cents per head. Fillings of 'Crab, Meat, Salmon, Chicken etc.' were specified. It is not clear who attended this exclusive event, though a file records that they drank half the champagne and broke one glass (which almost certainly was of the ridiculously unsuitable 'saucer' style in vogue at the time and therefore deserved to be broken). Perhaps not surprisingly, the cost of this viewing was buried in the budget for 'teas'.

The officially acknowledged events began with a reception at Government House on Wednesday 14 August, the list for which included nearly 100 guests and their respective spouses. That evening there was a chamber concert in the Library Theatre, given by members of the Faculty of the Canberra School of Music. The official opening by Prime Minister John Gorton took place on Thursday afternoon, 15 August, before about 900 invited guests, followed by tours of inspection and afternoon tea.

That evening's event was a lecture by Sir Frank Francis, also in the Library Theatre. It was described in a staff circular as 'pretty much a professional exercise'. The following evening, about 200 dignitaries and their partners were feted to an official dinner at Burton Hall at the Australian National University. The final event was a party on Saturday 17 to acknowledge the contributions of Library staff.

The official program was not too full to preclude private celebrations. While many guests were enjoying the chamber concert, another, more exclusive, group was being entertained to dinner at University House by Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, Chairman of the National Library's Council, and Lady Grenfell Price. The *Sydney Sun Herald* reported that 'Walter Bunning, one of the architects of the National Library ... and his wife, Gillian, gave a small dinner party for those closely associated with the project, at the Commonwealth Club'.

However, the most interesting private event occurred just a couple of hours before the official opening. The French Cultural Attaché had organised a small champagne party in the Foyer to introduce Mathieu Matégot to the press, but communications between the Embassy and the Library had not been perfect and Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, despite having already conceded the relevance of champagne to French tapestries, had no intention of being upstaged on his opening day. According to a press report, when guests arrived in the rain to meet the artist, 'they were

firmly turned away by a guard on the main door'. The resourceful French (doubtless after making the necessary ritual protest) quickly relocated the party to the nearby Lobby restaurant. It turned out to be a good move as far as Matégot was concerned. In apparent contradiction of the fine discernment shown in his tapestry designs, he was reported in the press as having fallen in love with Australian food (1960s style!) and its apple pies in particular. He was keen to complete his education by trying one of our famous meat pies. The Lobby obliged and M. Matégot has the distinction of having washed down an Australian meat pie with *real* champagne. I can't rule out the possibility that the Frenchman was having a joke at the expense of his Australian clients.

The official opening was followed by afternoon tea, supplied by Mrs Caulfield of Kingston at 50 cents per head (plus extras), on the recommendation of someone at the National Capital Development Commission. Little is now known of Kathleen Bridget Caulfield's career. She first listed herself as a caterer in the Canberra telephone directory in 1959 and probably retired around 1971; she died in 1988. The food was necessarily simple for a crowd of 900, but plentiful: chicken and ham sandwiches ('to be brown and white bread and generously filled'), asparagus rolls, celery curls, olives

green and black. The allowance was three sandwiches and one asparagus roll per person. Unremarkable fare, but suitable to the occasion. Spears of tinned asparagus rolled in crustless white bread were very fashionable just then. One still finds them occasionally, though now they are more likely to feature fresh asparagus than tinned.

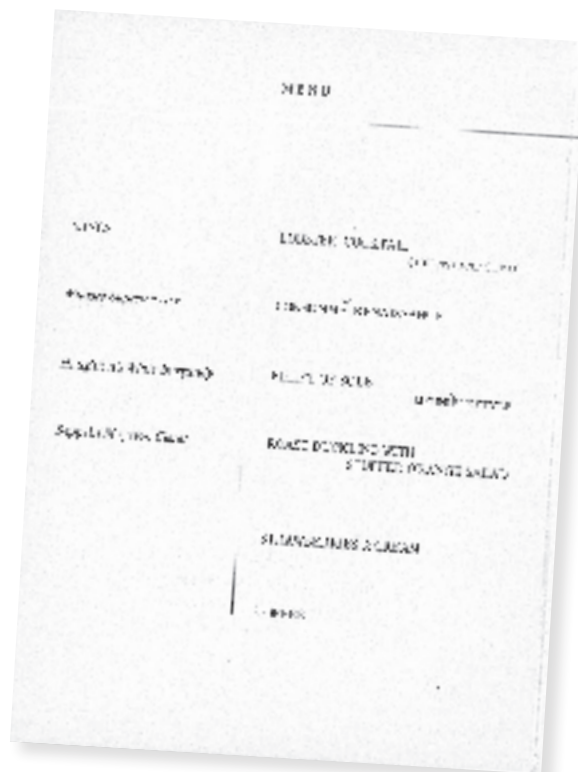
The menu for the official dinner was unexceptional for a catered event in the 1960s. The 'lobster cocktail Queensland style', 'consommé renaissance' and 'fillet of sole meunière style' were probably more ordinary than they sounded. The 'roast duckling with stuffed orange salad' was probably roast *duck* garnished with some kind of salad featuring orange segments arranged in hollowed-out orange halves. The wines were familiar standbys for middle-class dining.

The menu for the Chairman's Dinner at University House was also typical of the times, except for two curiosities. First, it began with kangaroo tail soup. By the 1960s, kangaroo meat had virtually disappeared from Australian tables (helped by bans on its sale for human consumption) and had yet to begin its comeback. Kangaroo tail soup appeared occasionally as an iconic Australian dish (I encountered it on a paddle-steamer restaurant in 1975), though there was always a suspicion that it was actually made



above:
Unknown photographer
Mathieu Matégot Enjoys an Australian Pie and French Champagne
reproduced from the *Herald*,
17 August 1968
(Melbourne: F.B. Franklyn & Co., 1968)

below:
Invitation and menu to the opening dinner at Burton Hall
Ephemera Collection



with oxtail. The second curiosity was the dessert, 'Bombe Biblique'. Generally, a *bombe* is taken to be a pudding of ice cream set in a spherical mould; one can only guess what made it *biblical*. One dish fashionable at the time was Baked Alaska, a block of ice cream set on sponge cake, covered in meringue and baked just long enough to brown the meringue without melting the ice cream. When made in a suitably round shape, it became Bombe Alaska. Perhaps Sir Archibald Grenfell Price's dessert was not a *bombe* at all, but Baked Alaska decorated as a large open book. For a dinner party of 52, this is plausible.

Catering for the concert and lecture was somewhat perfunctory. Guests were offered a choice of flagon wines (described merely as 'claret', 'burgundy', 'hock', 'sauterne', 'riesling' and 'pale dry sherry') or tinned fruit juice. The fruit juice on offer was Golden Circle pineapple or pineapple-and-orange, bought in gallon tins. Biscuits were the only food provided: Arnott's Sesame Thins and Brockhoff Savoury Shapes. Even by 1968 standards this was minimalist fare, but it is a

nostalgic reminder of where we came from. Brockhoff was long ago absorbed into the Arnott empire; Arnott, in turn, was bought by an overseas company. The particular biscuit varieties are no longer made. Others like them are, though no caterer would dare to feature them at a chamber concert. (I'm less sure about a 'professional' lecture.) Tinned pineapple juice was—amazingly—the refectory drink of preference in my undergraduate days. To persuade people to drink it by the gallon was a marketing feat even McDonald's would envy. As for the wine list, it is more a cause for celebration than denigration, since it highlights just how far the Australian wine industry has come since 1968—from pale imitator to confident innovator.

Also in stark contrast with the tapestry viewing, the staff party—which lasted about five hours—was a proletarian affair. Refreshments included Resch's Pilsener, a smaller selection of flagon wines and, again, tinned fruit juice. Food was 'as supplied by caterer' (again Mrs Caulfield) at \$69 for 150 people: 'Sandwiches, chicken, ham, round bread spread with cheese, smoked oysters etc.' Wise event-planners match degrees of status with degrees of refreshment.

COLIN BANNERMAN is an independent scholar whose research interests include food history, culture and communication. His previous books for the National Library are *Acquired Tastes: Celebrating Australia's Culinary History* (1998), *The Upside-Down Pudding* (1999), and *Seed Cake and Honey Prawns: Fashion and Fad in Australian Food* (2008)

Unknown photographer
The Famous Brockhoff Products
 [including Savoury Shapes]
 reproduced from *Biscuits and Beyond: Jack Brockhoff and His Foundation* by Robert Murray
 (South Yarra, Vic.: Haddington Press, 2006)
 Courtesy Arnott's Australia

