

## The Parliamentary Library

The New South Wales Parliamentary Library was established in 1840, which makes it one of the oldest libraries in Australia with a continuous history.

On 16 October 1840 a library committee was appointed by the Legislative Council to purchase books and establish a legislative library. Three years later steps were taken to better house the collection and a room was set aside for this purpose, while the Clerk Assistant of the Legislative Council was given the responsibility of running the library.

In February 1850, the Legislative Council Library was re-located into the Council's original meeting room, adjacent to the 1843 Legislative Council chamber (now the chamber of the Legislative Assembly). Visitors to the Legislative Assembly can still see the library association with the word "Library" stencilled on the two doors which lead from the Assembly chamber into this room.

Following the granting of responsible government in 1856 two houses of parliament were created: a new upper house called the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly.

The first Parliamentary Librarian, Walter McEvelly, was appointed in May 1856 and became responsible for both the Legislative Assembly Library (which took over the collections of the original Council Library), and the new library for the Legislative Council, which had a separate library collection and reading room for its needs.

It was found that this arrangement duplicated resources and in 1862 both libraries were combined into a Parliamentary Library. However each house had its own separate reading room until the new Jubilee Library was opened in 1906.

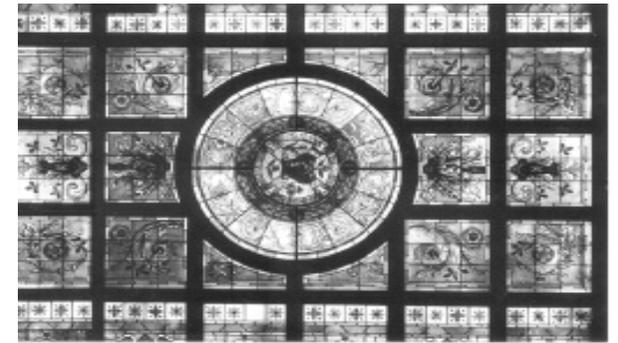
Before 1906 the Parliamentary Library's collections were located in a number of rooms within Parliament House and in the adjoining Richmond House (now known as Richmond Villa and relocated to Kent Street). Richmond House was also at one time the residence of the Parliamentary Librarian.

The year after the two libraries were combined, the famous colonial artist, Conrad Martens, accepted the position of assistant parliamentary librarian. When Walter McEvelly died in 1867, Martens continued as acting librarian but was never formally appointed and, despite his concerns about his own health, remained in the post until his death in 1878. Robert Rogers was appointed as Parliamentary Librarian the following year.

What is now the **Jubilee Room** was originally built in 1905 to accommodate the Parliamentary Library. Architecturally, the Library is a small version of the classic Edwardian reading room, with collections shelved from floor to ceiling, reached by two tiers of galleries running around all sides. On the floor stand the terrestrial and celestial globes which were acquired for the Library in 1868 and 1871 respectively. In 2015 the Jubilee Room underwent an extensive restoration to bring it back to its 1919 state as a Library Reading Room.

The new library reading room was designed by the Government Architect, Walter Liberty Vernon, and construction was completed in the latter half of 1905. Modifications to the ironwork railings and a need to let the plaster dry fully before books could be put against it delayed opening until 22 May, 1906 when it was officially opened by the Governor, Sir Harry Rawson. The room was named the Jubilee Library to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of responsible government in New South Wales. It remained the Parliamentary Library's main reading room and was the focus of its operations and services until 1980.

Of particular interest in the room is the ornate stained glass lantern and skylight. In the centre of the stained glass decoration is the laurel wreath, with the head of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, and the floral emblems of the rose (England), the thistle (Scotland) and the clover (Ireland). The text surrounding the centre is "Knowledge is the Mother of Wisdom and Virtue". Despite considerable research, it has not been possible to identify with any certainty the author or



**The stained glass light well of the former Main Reading Room of the Library, photographed in 1966 before restoration.**

source of this quotation. In the early 1980s, following the departure of the Parliamentary Library to the newly built Parliamentary annex, the room was restored and is now known as the Jubilee Room and is used for committee meetings and other functions.

Its historical association with the Parliamentary Library still exists, however, as the two galleries in the Jubilee Room house part of the library's collection of the Great Britain House of Commons Papers and the parliamentary debates (Hansard) from the Commonwealth Parliament and the other Australian state parliaments. The front room of Parliament House – now known as the Parkes Room – was the office of the Parliamentary Librarian and also housed the library's cataloguing department until 1980.

In July 1980 the Parliamentary Library moved to its current purpose-built accommodation in the new Parliamentary annex, overlooking Hospital Road and the Domain. This flexible and modern space was supplemented with a sizeable book stack storage area on another level which was completed in 1983. For the first time in many years the bulk of the library's collections was in one single, accessible location.

In the nineteenth century the Parliamentary Library was a well-stocked library – one of the best in the colony – with books relevant to the needs of legislators, having considerable holdings of books on parliamentary practice, political theory and economics, while also being



**The present Parliamentary Library**

cialists, to give depth and scope to the library's existing information and documentation services.

As a legislative library, the Parliamentary Library has considerable collections of Australian state and federal legislation, parliamentary papers, parliamentary debates (Hansard) and proceedings, in addition to strong holdings of British parliamentary publications. With such a long history, it is not surprising that the Parliamentary Library has acquired a considerable number of valuable books, understandably with an Australian focus. These rare books include accounts of the early years of the colony written by David Collins, Watkin Tench and John Hunter, in addition to books of exploration by James Cook and Matthew Flinders. Other rare and valuable items are a set of the *Sydney Gazette*, Australia's first newspaper, and Gould's *Birds of Australia*. While the Parliamentary Library does not collect manuscripts or records – that is the responsibility of Parliamentary Archives – it holds the unique *1800 Settlers' Muster Book*, the first census of the colony which was donated to the Parliamentary Library in the early twentieth century by a Member of Parliament with a strong interest in Australian history.

a general library with sizeable holdings of literature, history and travel books.

In the early 1960s, library staff began to create a more dynamic and focused library and information service, better suited to the information needs of Members of Parliament and the parliamentary institution in the second half of the twentieth century. From this time the Parliamentary Library was not only an impressive resource for Members, but became an active provider of information and research services.

As the Parliamentary Librarian observed in 1965, the “provisions of a specialised legislative research and information service is considered the paramount function of the Library.... Since research and reference is the Library's prime function it follows that every other activity is ancillary to this”.

This change in direction dictated that the library be staffed by a team of experienced reference librarians. Besides providing specialised services to Members the library staff also created tailored resources, such as press clippings, media monitoring services and other information files. In recent years the Parliamentary Library has expanded its access to information through on-line services and the internet. In the early 1990s, a research section was established, staffed by subject spe-



**Selection of rare books from the Parliamentary Library**

Parliamentary Library, Parliamentary Archives  
and  
Parliamentary Education  
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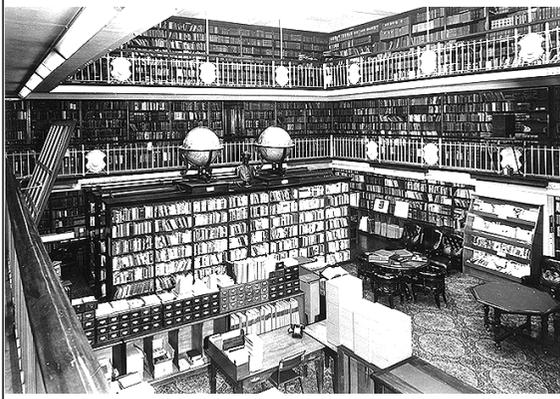


**PARLIAMENT  
OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES**

**HISTORY BULLETIN 3**

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**The  
Parliamentary  
Library  
and the  
Jubilee Room  
(Former Library Reading Room)**



**The Main Reading Room of the  
Parliamentary Library in 1963.  
The Room is known today as the Jubilee Room.**