

A BOOK THAT belonged to a particular person before being added to a public collection somehow brings with it an extra dimension. What adds to the appreciation of the extensive collection of historical school textbooks in the Deakin University Library is the knowledge that each one was—at some stage in the past 150 years or so—toiled over by an Australian schoolchild.

That they were used in Australian classrooms is the criterion for this special collection, but the evidence is also there, in many cases, in the form of children's handwritten names and grades, students' annotations and doodles, school

stamps, and—sometimes—turned-down corners and a general air of being well used. It's only in relatively recent years that the immense educational and social value of such old texts has been realised: previously, they were spurned by bibliophiles and collectors because of their condition and nature, and tended to languish forgotten at the back of cupboards at school and at home.

It was largely left to individuals and a few specialised institutions, aware of what these books could tell us about our past, to seek them out and bring them together. Such libraries were small, and inaccessible to the general public.

Currently housed in its own room at the university near Geelong, Victoria, the Deakin collection—now the largest in Australia comprising over 5,000 volumes, including some very rare titles—is a national one, and its librarian in charge, Heather Cox, is keen that it be used and enjoyed by as many people as possible. Within a couple of years it is likely that the books will move, along with some of the faculties, the short but significant distance to the centre of Geelong. Heather sees this as an exciting development.

'We'll be in an old woolstore by the bay which will make us much more accessible from Melbourne and other places, and we'll be able to open for longer hours than is possible at present. The special collection is already consulted by a wide range of people, from researchers into the history of the curriculum and those interested in tracing what and how children were taught over the decades to members of the public who want to be reminded of books they, or their relatives, used at school. Recently we've had the ABC here, filming books for Monash University's Open Learning program on the history of empire, as empire is one of our particular strengths.'

The genesis of the collection came with Deakin's acquisition in 1981 of the private collection of Mr

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J.B. Prentice, who concentrated on nineteenth-century Australian texts. A subsequent survey of other tertiary libraries revealing that they held little with the same focus, Deakin Library then decided on a policy of acquisition of old primary and secondary textbooks on all subjects, with the aim of providing a unique resource for the nation. Apart from books, holdings now include teachers' manuals, the Victorian *The*

School Paper, a monthly magazine for primary schools which began publication in the 1890s, and some teaching aids from an early progressive school in Ararat.

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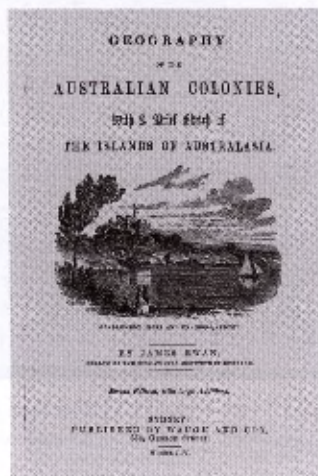
learned of the existence of another extensive private collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century textbooks. It was that of Carmel McPherson, a lecturer in education at what was then Toorak State College in Melbourne. Collecting both for herself and the college, Carmel had travelled all over the country—delving into attics (convents were good sources), charity shops, secondhand bookshops, schools, fetes and so on—in her quest. At that stage such remnants of the past were literally or virtually given away—today scarce titles can cost hundreds of dollars.

When Carmel indicated she was prepared to sell her collection on moving interstate, Deakin successfully applied in 1988 to the Myer Foundation, a philanthropic trust, for money to purchase and catalogue it. Now the Prentice and McPherson collections, and the many publications of the same era acquired and catalogued since then, can be accessed on the Australian Bibliographic Network, as well as through Deakin Library's general catalogue.

'Originally,' says Heather Cox, 'we established 1950 as the cut-off date for acquisition. As time went on we recognised that this was too arbitrary as all textbooks would gradually acquire historical interest. So now we collect by donation all textbooks not in current use, although these more recent titles are not yet catalogued or on the shelves.'

The special collection has recently been complemented, through the kind donation of a

Geelong resident, by some hundreds of children's storybooks. Shelved separately from the textbooks, many of them date from last century and a large number of them are Australian. These are the sort of books that students would have read for



Ewans' Geography of the Australian Colonies, 1854. Frontispiece is a drawing of Government House and environs in Sydney

From the Deakin University school textbook collection

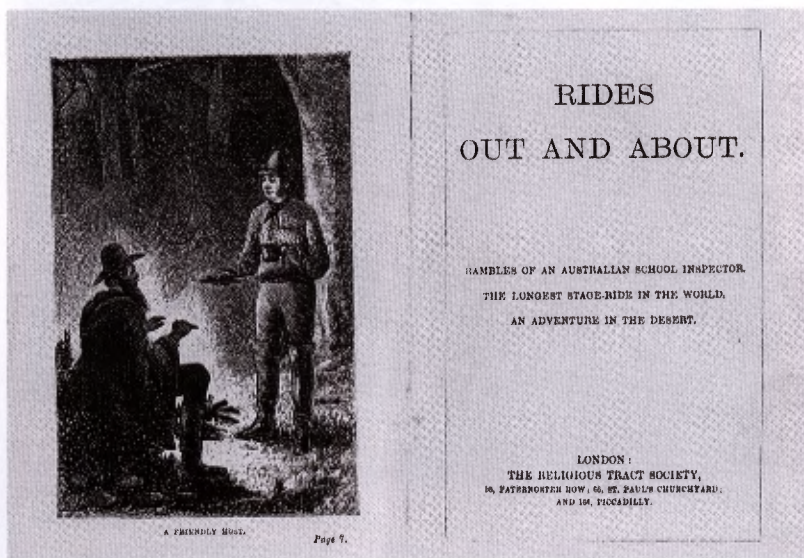
pleasure at home while tackling weightier ones at school.

And weighty they certainly were. In those days no effort was made to seduce children into learning through attractively presented pages, appealing pictures and interesting activities: well into this century learning was by rote and

mastery of the subject via application to hundreds of pages of small, dense type, occasionally relieved by detailed line drawings or smudgy photos. Even the primers for beginners plunged straight into grammar and numbers, while in keeping with the prevailing ethos that education was about 'putting in' rather than 'drawing out', moral ideas were imparted from the earliest days and through all possible subjects.

The books had several roles to play, particularly in light of the fact that the children may have been the first generation of their family to be educated, and most would leave school barely into their teens. There were not many years available to teach them about the world, but the universe reflected to them was one often far removed from their own experience and environment.

It was only towards the end of last century that textbooks were produced in any number in this country (there could have been as few as about two hundred titles, 150 of which are now in the Deakin collection). During most of the nineteenth century, books used in Australian schools generally came from England and Ireland, some with the same contents as for the British schools, some in colonial editions. The Irish imports are an interesting example of non-



Rides Out and About, published in London by the Religious Tract Society, includes a story 'Rambles of an Australian School Inspector'

From the Deakin University school textbook collection

sectarianism, being compiled by representatives of the major religious groups, but like the English books they gave Australian children a very skewed view of matters, including some misinformation about Australia. Reading them now it is amusingly clear that in many cases their authors had no real idea of Australian life, nor illustrators of the

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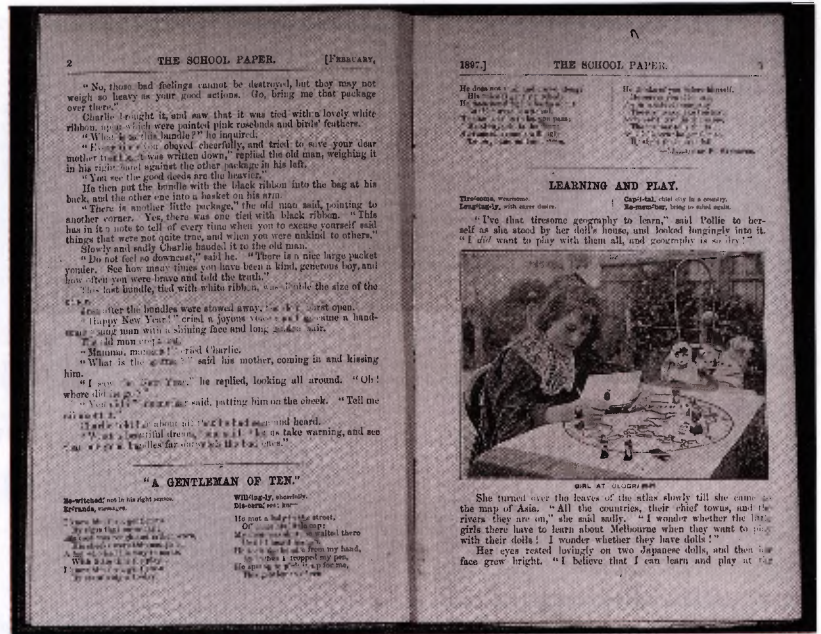
appearance of Aborigines or the Antipodean landscape.

These early books from various sources were superseded in the 1870s by Thomas Nelson's series of Royal Readers, published in London, and then in the late 1890s by indigenous readers, state education departments having been gradually established over the previous decades. (Catholic schools went on to produce their own readers.)

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But wherever the books originated, they promoted the same values: industry, obedience, sobriety, piety, loyalty to family, the overwhelming superiority of the British empire. Those unfortunate enough not to be British (or even white and Protestant) they patronised. They held it as self-evident that men and women had totally different roles in life.

Prose could be purple: the words of Mr T.E.H. Braim exemplify



The School Paper, February 1897
From the Deakin University school textbook collection

the tone and spirit of many. As founder, headmaster and classics teacher of Sydney Grammar School, he wrote in 1848 one of the first textbooks published in Australia (a copy of which is one of the Deakin collection's prize holdings). Mr Braim is also the author of another book in the collection, a history of New South Wales from 1788 to

1844, published in the 1850s in London, in which he really let himself go:

Long may Australia flourish as a healthy offshoot from the parent stem! Resplendently may she still glisten as a sparkling gem in the crown of Britain's queen! Let Britain be true to herself, and her colonies; let her enlightened zeal—enlightened by the soundest principles of national policy, of social prosperity, of divine religion, and unerring and immortal truth—let her zeal thus enlightened preserve as her own, intact and undefiled, that which her enterprise has called into existence, which her energy has created, and her fame shall be extensive as her dominion—enduring as her destiny.

Along with most others, Mr Braim found the original population of Australia at best a puzzle, at worst a problem, although the words he applied to its members (ungrateful, thoughtless, too independent, above all *uncivilised*) were not as savage as some. He laments that Aboriginal parents hid their offspring from Europeans bent on instructing them, and comes up with a plan to 'obtain



The New Graphic Reader. Frontispiece drawing of an Aborigine discovering gold.
From the Deakin University school textbook collection

their children' and educate them separately, concluding however that it would not work because the 'youths are sure to return to the bush when they are grown up'.

A series of problems was how textbooks writers of the period tended to view world history itself, punctuated by notable events and great deeds. To boys were held up role models of heroes through the ages, particularly soldiers, and they were urged to be cheerfully prepared to defend their far-off monarch to the end. A graphic poem about the slaughter of British troops in the Crimean War reproduced in the popular *Hill's Oratorical Trainer*, published in Sydney in 1865, gave male students a taste of expectations:

There came a tale to England;
 'Twas of a battle won,
 And nobly had her warriors
 That day their duty done.
 They fell like sheaves in autumn
 Yet, mid that fearful scene,
 Their last shout was for England,
 Their last breath for their Queen.
 There rose a shout to England,
 From them 'twas wafted o'er—
 From those sick, wounded
 soldiers,
 And it rung from shore to shore.
 From Alma, Balaclava, and from
 Inkerman it came—
 God bless the Queen of England!
 Again we'd do the same.

Accounts of female lives were much fewer—Joan of Arc, Boadicea, Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry were about the gamut—but the message was made amply clear that (unlike them) schoolgirls were training for quiet, supportive, diligent and dutiful lives as wives, mothers and sisters. (In fact one mid-nineteenth-century text, written by a woman, claims that 'doing their duty' is what makes girls happy.)

The impression permeating the Victorian and Edwardian books is of parents and teachers seeking to contain deviant boys and wilful girls through stern warnings and accounts of punishment and retribution. Idleness could lead to vice; every moment needed to be filled with

suitable occupation to ward off evil and keep the different layers of society in their God-ordained places.

It is fascinating to trace these attitudes, and the strands of sexism, racism, and worship of Home, through the old century and into the new. After the First World War the books reveal a growing national pride in Australia, and a view that the bush was less of a threat, and her unique flora and fauna something to appreciate. The teaching of civics, which emphasised individual rights and responsibilities in a modern community, played an increasing role, and an expanded, though still limited, range of options for girls was promoted. The world of textbooks

was to change again after the Second World War, while the 1950s and 60s brought their own metamorphoses, revealing a strong American influence.

Publications in the special collection are arranged by subject, with primary books shelved first. Series have been kept together by assigning a standard call number. For information about hours of opening and conditions of borrowing, ring Heather Cox on (052) 271433.

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T. Nelson and Sons, Ltd., London, Edinburgh, and New York.

Frontispiece from *The Queen Primer*, *Royal School Series Part 11*, published by Nelson and Sons Ltd.

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