Edgar Crook finds in the National Library a wide variety of material relating to vegetarianism.

Australia has always been a big meat-eating country, so much so that, in the first year of Federation, Australians were eating two-and-a-half times as much meat as people in Great Britain. It is not surprising therefore that vegetarianism was not seen as an Australian trait and to some extent remains that way.

Australia's first vegetarians are unknown. Aboriginal Australians were by necessity hunter-gatherers, so it is generally accepted that the first Australian vegetarians would have been emigrants from Europe. The likelihood is that they would have abstained from meat as part of their religious practices, since many individuals in groups such as the Non-conformists, Methodists or Quakers were vegetarian.

The National Library holds a host of books on the subject: there are arguments in favour of a vegetarian diet from Ancient Greek and current philosophers, religious support from mainstream and marginal religious groups, and literary works from almost every age. In Australia, there was little literature written on the subject prior to the twentieth century and most of that produced before the Second World War was negative. However, for such a seemingly unpopular diet, The Bulletin, that most prominent Australian journal, published a number of poems, stories and editorials on the subject from the 1880s. Unfortunately for vegetarians, all of them were negative.

One short story, 'Vegetarian Vera', by Frank Henry (28 January 1909), tells of tea taken by two young people on a first date. She is a vegetarian, he is not. The vegetarian restaurant to which she brings him is ridiculed for having in the first instance 'no tea'. The man is therefore forced to have 'Nut broth' with 'Hunky husks' and 'Gluten sticks'. The unfortunate meal, relationship and story end with the male losing his false teeth amongst the gluten stick and considering, 'It is one thing to pursue a beautiful maiden for herself alone, and quite another to land oneself in a life wherein love and green-stuffs are inextricably linked.'

Norman Lindsay (1879–1969)
'Unusual Sights No. 3: The Unclose Season for Vegetarians'
Cartoon reproduced from The Lone Hand, August 1909
(Sydney: W. McLeod, 1907–1921)
An example of a poem from The Bulletin called 'Cheap Livers and Death Dodgers' (5 June 1913) demonstrates the perception of vegetarians as weak and unmanly. It concerns a conversation, recounted by a man to his chums in the pub, which occurred between himself and a vegetarian advocate. It ends with this supposedly humorous dénouement:

I thought of it
And with a beefsteak raw
I gave him one tremendous hit
Beneath his cheese-like jaw.

Like the above two, all the stories and poems published promulgated the idea that vegetarians and vegetarianism were feminine in concept and practice, cranky, faddish and positively unhealthy. The Bulletin was famously opposed to the Temperance movement and to 'wowserism' in all its perceived guises, and vegetarians, it seemed, were often confused as being part of this wider movement. This is not totally surprising as many vegetarian advocates had become that way as part of their pledging within Temperance organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which ran vegetarian cafés, published vegetarian recipes and hosted lectures.

There were also non-religious supporters of vegetarianism. In the 1890s, the Andrade brothers, the most prominent members of Melbourne's Anarchist community, ran a vegetarian café in their radical bookshop. In the same decade, Henry Hyde Champion, the Sydney vegetarian and anti-vivisectionist, published pro-vegetarian articles in his newspaper. Henrietta Dugdale, the rationalist, suffragist and author of the utopian novel, A Few Hours in a Far-off Age (1883), was also a leading vegetarian.

Probably the most famous, though little known, vegetarian was Alfred Deakin, Australia's second prime minister. Deakin was for periods of his life a strict vegetarian. In this he was probably influenced both by the Temperance movement and by his spiritualist beliefs. His novel, A New Pilgrim's Progress. Purporting To Be Given by John Bunyan, Through an Impressional Writing Medium (1877), even featured the hero as a vegetarian. Although it is not known whether Deakin was continuously vegetarian, it is known that he was always moved by the plight of animals. This led him throughout his life to support animal welfare causes and to be the patron of organisations such as the RSPCA. Indeed, his first attempt at getting a piece of legislation through the Victorian Parliament was an animal protection bill.

It was not until the 1890s that the first organised group of vegetarians appeared in Australia. They were the Seventh Day Adventists who had come to Australia from the United States, led by their founder and prophetess of the movement, Ellen G. White (1827–1915). With her son and a handful of followers, she arrived in Melbourne in December 1891 to bring their version of enlightenment to these shores. The Adventists had become converts to vegetarianism after White began having visions on 'health reform'. Maintaining their diet in this most un-vegetarian land proved difficult, meat consumption being so high and with consequent few meat-free options. But the Adventists were nothing if not resourceful, and they had supporters already working in the field in the United States.

Their most important patrons were John and Merritt Kellogg (brothers of Will Kellogg of Kellogg's Cornflake fame), who had founded the Health Sanitarium at Battle Creek, Michigan. The Kelloggs were happy to send out supplies to hungry Australian fellow vegetarians, but long-term this growing group really needed vegetarian food to be produced in Australia itself. To this end, Edward C. Halsey was sent from the United States to start a factory to produce some basic foods such as peanut butter and breakfast cereal. Taking its
name from the Kellogg Sanitarium, the Sanitarium Food Company was born in Melbourne in 1898. Halsey had the honour of being the first man to produce 'health' foods in Australia when he made his first batch of Granola cereal on 27 January 1898, which was followed the next day by Caramel Cereal and a little later by the much sought after peanut butter.

In 1901, Ellen White returned to the United States, leaving her son Willie to run the school, factory and churches she had established. She also left more than a few new members of her church. Not content with only producing healthy food, the Adventists also undertook to sell vegetarianism to Australia at large. They served vegetarian food at stalls during fairs and shows. In 1899, in Melbourne, their first vegetarian restaurant was opened, followed by one in Hobart in 1900. In 1902, a restaurant was opened in Pitt Street, Sydney. By the outbreak of the First World War, there were restaurants and shops in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Perth.

The greater access to suitable food and relevant information led to a growth in the number of vegetarians. There were vegetarian societies formed in Melbourne in 1886 and in Sydney in 1891, but both seem to have dwindled by 1905. It was not until 1948 in Sydney that a fully national Australian Vegetarian Society was founded. It was immediately popular and, by 1951, there were branches in Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. The National Library holds copies of the Australian Vegetarian Society's publications from 1948 to the present day. A history of the Sanitarium Company called 'What God Hath Wrought!': The Sanitarium Health Food Company Story by Graham Parr and Glyn Lister is also available.

The Library holds many other historical works on vegetarianism. Many of these come from England, which has had a rich tradition of vegetarianism for hundreds of years. One of the most appealing is the story of Roger Crab, an eccentric hatter who gave up his all his worldly goods for a life of asceticism and the promulgation of vegetarianism. His book, The English Hermite or, Wonder of this Age... (1655), is available in microform. Other early English works, including The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness (1697) by Thomas Tryon, can also be found in the Library's Rare Books Collection. There are also works by and on many famous literary vegetarians such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Isaac Bashevis Singer and George Bernard Shaw.

The Library also holds many vegetarian recipe books, the first fully...
Australian one being *Dishes without Meat: Original Recipes* by Alice Jevons (c.1900). Within the periodicals collection there are also many recipes. From 1900, vegetarian recipes gradually started to appear in popular magazines such as *Table Talk* and, later, quite frequently appeared in women’s magazines such as *The Australian Women’s Weekly*.

The Library also has all the works by that most famous Australian vegetarian, Peter Singer, now teaching at Princeton University in the United States. His landmark book, *Animal Liberation* (1975), distilled the thoughts of animal rights campaigners for the last two millennia into a cogent and logical exposition of the reasons why meat eating is wrong, both for humans and other animals. The book was compelling because he, as a philosopher and ethicist, did not seek to change social behaviour by using sentimentalised descriptions of the way that meat gets to the table, but by reasoned ethical argument. Singer’s work continues to be influential.

Whilst Singer has used his philosophy to stimulate debate, poets and authors have also sprung up in Australia to promote vegetarianism and veganism. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Australia, far from being the meat-loving outpost it once was, now boasts having the two most prominent vegan poets currently writing, Coral Hull and John Kinsella. Almost the entirety of Coral Hull’s creative output could be called a plea on behalf of animals. She has worked for many years as an animal rights activist and her writing has often served as an extension of this work. Once read, her striking poetry is rarely forgotten. Hull’s poem ‘The Queer Vegetation of Hope’ from her award-winning book, *Broken Land: 5 days in Bre 1995*, written after a visit to a goat slaughterhouse, is typical in its directness:

> Twenty separated goats heads with eyes that still shone for the purpose of seeing, stared straight up into my heart, it was not my imagination, simply the way the heads had positioned themselves in the long bloated grass, the smaller ones stared across to my ankles, planted in the dirt, queer vegetation, that seemed so alive, as if the shock of its murder hangs around for awhile, to say: We don’t believe you really did that to us, it’s just a bad dream, something.

John Kinsella, the multi award-winning poet, is another vegan of long standing. His work is less strident but nonetheless powerful and persuasive and his sensitivity to animal suffering is often present. He has published many poems on the subject, including a book with Coral Hull entitled *Zoo* (2000), which takes animals in captivity as its subject.

Whilst *The Bulletin*, and most other journals in the early part of the last century or in the previous one, carried little or no openly pro-vegetarian literature, it did appear in cautious amounts elsewhere. A notable early poem called ‘A Banquet of Blood’ (1874) concerns a cockroach who, when accidentally bitten by a lady eating a meal consisting of meat, exclaims when the horrified lady screams:

> Lady! Why gave you that terrible shriek! Why rolled your eyes, and paled your cheek? Why dread to bite a poor worm like me, But eat sheep and swine most greedily?

And ends

> Though lions, tigers, vultures prey. Be thou more merciful than they; Thy health will last, thy life be long! And thus the cockroach ceased his song.

This poem, first published in *The West Australian Times*, shows that, even when vegetarianism was seemingly most unpopular, there were always some Australian vegetarian writers espousing a meat-free diet.

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