Digitising projects include (above) Plate from A Natural History of the Birds of New South Wales by John William Lewin, London, 1822 and (below) Samples from Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in Three Voyages of Captain Cook to the Southern Hemisphere, 1787. (University of Melbourne Library Collection.)

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The University of Melbourne Library acts as a filter for library users by collecting quality information resources that provide the building blocks of knowledge, and perhaps occasionally, a glimpse of wisdom. It does this now, as it has done so in the past, through a range of information artefacts, most commonly of the paper and ink variety. But it has never been a purely paper and ink library.

Information has always been packaged in ways other than the codex. Already by the 1950s, when the Baillieu Library was built, the new storage medium of microfilm was beginning to emerge. Film, fiche and card were a revolution in library storage and access, and only a hint of what was to come.

Very quickly the Baillieu’s information collections included audio recordings, first on records and tape. Later information came on compact disc. Pictures, manuscripts, archives, slides, kits, and filmstrips emerged as the new artefacts of the 1960s. By the 1970s the computer file made its appearance, first remotely via modem connections, then via compact disc within the Library.

Online bibliographic indexes that were once only available at high cost and with often precarious connections were suddenly in the Library on CD-ROM and available for searching on a desktop computer.

Paradoxically, by the 1990s with the introduction of the World Wide Web we have come full circle and we once again access our information remotely, no longer via modem but directly through the Web. With the growth of the Web it is now possible to publish full text electronic versions of journals and books, and a whole new industry of electronic publishing and distribution has begun.

We have added these new resources to our collections as well.

Unfortunately, perhaps not for Library users but for those managing these artefacts, while new formats of publication are developed and hit the market, the old ones don’t really go away. For many libraries, including the Baillieu, collections no longer mean paper and ink but any format that can store or hold information.

In this decade the concept of the library only as a physical building housing all the collections has become an outdated paradigm. The electronic and digital revolutions means that libraries are no longer limited in their selection of what can be bought and put on the shelves. It is also possible to provide physical access seamlessly to resources held elsewhere on the Web.

The information provision paradigm has shifted from ownership to access. This has not only meant a rethink of library buildings but also the realisation that the information seeker can gain access to the library from virtually anywhere as long as they have access to the World Wide Web. Libraries, including the Baillieu, are shifting away from the reality of a static physical building toward the idea of a virtual place or gateway.

There has been a growing realisation that what librarians are managing is no longer simply a library, not quite a “cybrary” (the totally virtual collection as some of the soothsayers have predicted), but a combination of formats; that is better described as the hybrid library (or “hybrary”). In the hybrary, the challenge is to achieve a balance between resource formats in order to derive the best value for money in providing information to the University. It
is this imperative that has prompted the
University Library over the past few
years to consider opportunities for the
gradual replacement of some paper and
ink publications with access to elec-
tronic versions. It has also opened up
possibilities for the digitisation of
existing resources. This provides a
means of making current collections
more accessible to library users, both
within the Library building and
remotely from anywhere on the Web.

Ironically it has been the potential
users of some of our older, rarer and
least accessible publications who have
benefited most from the rapid arrival of
the digital age. Some of the digitisation
projects for our arts and humanities col-
lections that have been completed or
are currently in publication include the
following:

Exam Papers — as one of the most
heavily used publications in the Library
the digitisation of University of
Melbourne exam papers was an early
project that now delivers, via the
Library’s Web site and Buddy service,
over 1,200 separate exam papers in
selected subjects from 1996 onwards.

Cambridge Manuscript — in conjunc-
tion with a rare books exhibition to
highlight the donation by Pierre Gorman
of over 1,300 books about Cambridge
University and the city of Cambridge, a
digital facsimile of one of the
manuscripts in the collection was pro-
duced and promptly sold out. An accom-
panying online exhibition is currently in
production. The work is a superbly illus-
trated manuscript titled Foundation of
the Universitie of Cambridge: an herald
manuscript depicting the arms of the
Earls of Cambridge, the Chancellors of
Cambridge University and the colleges
of Cambridge University, dated 1662.
The facsimile and images for the online
exhibition were produced by first pho-
tographing each page onto film and then
creating digital images by scanning the
transparencies.

Lewin’s Birds — this is a copy of the
first surviving London edition of the
beautifully illustrated John William
Lewin’s A Natural History of the Birds
of New South Wales, published in
London in 1822. The complete work has
been digitised, again from photographic
transparencies. The online exhibition is
currently in production.

Cook’s Tapa Cloths — a very rare and
fragile tapa cloth book, A catalogue of
the Different Specimens of Cloth,
Collected in Three Voyages of Captain
Cook to the Southern Hemisphere,
published in London for Alexander Shaw in
1787. The complete work has been digi-
tised and an online exhibition is in pro-
duction.

Farrago — the University’s student
newspaper began in 1925 and various
archival collections, in paper and micro-
film, are held in the University of
Melbourne Library, the State Library of
Victoria, and the Rowden White Library.
This project aims to convert the com-
plete set of Farrago from 1925 onwards.
Already 1950 to 1998 have been digitised and stored on CD-ROM
for conservation and access purposes.
Farrago will be available on the
University Library’s Web site once
arrangements for copyright have been
resolved.

Maps — a range of antique and historic
maps, including collections of rare plan-
ing maps of Melbourne, are currently
being digitised for the Library’s Map
Collection. These will be available from
the Library’s Web site.

Online Exhibitions — the opportunity
for publishing digital images of the
Library’s rarer collections is continued
through the production of online exhibi-
tions that complement the Library’s
physical exhibition program. These con-
tinue to be published and are available
from the Library’s Web site.

Additional projects are in various
stages of production, including a
database of archival photographs of the
University, individual online exhibitions,
Art in the Library projects, and contin-
uing research into the feasibility of high
use electronic reserve
collections.

The future of electronic library
resources for the University Library also
includes video and audio streaming, fur-
ther links from catalogues and indexes
directly to full text titles, 24 hour, seven
days a week access for all University of
Melbourne staff and students from any-
where in the world, further digitisation
of existing collections, and the creation
of multimedia publications that will
continue to assist library users to access
our civilisation’s memories and know-
ledge. The proliferation of information
in multiple formats reinforces the need
for filtering and quality support for
library users. It makes the selection of
resources an even more important role
for librarians in the digital age. The
value that the University Library offers
to its users is represented by the total of
the benefits we provide — by selecting,
providing physical and intellectual
access, time and cost savings, ease of
use, relevance, reliability, trustworthi-
ness — less the costs to the user.

Electronic products are now an estab-
lished resource in the Library’s collec-
tions and provide new benefits to users
that were unimaginable when the
Baillieu Library opened its doors in
1959.

As we continue to serve our users
40 years on, in a hybrid library that
maintains its “tightness of fit” with the
information needs of our academic com-
munity, we will rely increasingly on the
growing supply of electronic products.
We will also rely increasingly on human
intervention and assistance to ensure
that administrators, academics, scholars
and students continue to obtain value
from their investment. And hopefully we
might also use the electronic informa-
tion revolution to help us on our journey
from information to knowledge, and
possibly move us a little closer to
wisdom.

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