

# Introduction

Philip Kent



I have taken up the role of University Librarian at an important time, following the 2008 Information Futures Commission and the development of a University-wide information strategy. The Library is being reinvigorated, but its long history as a repository of cultural collections remains central to its role.

The later phase of this history is explored in the article, 'An aspiration to be modern', in which Jane Garner harks back to one of the original aspirations of the Baillieu Library when it opened in 1959. Her discussion of the exhibition marking the Baillieu's 50th anniversary demonstrates that the current building is very different from that opened by Prime Minister Menzies. The wealth of treasures we now hold is a far cry from the 150,000 volumes that comprised the Baillieu's collection on its opening day. On the other hand, Norma Redpath's sculpture *Areopagitica*, which has hung in the foyer since 1959, remains a striking component of the Baillieu's unique decoration. Conservator Kate Stanway provides a brief history of the sculpture as a background to her detailed description of the cleaning process. Thanks to this project, 'the vibrant colours of the mural are once again clearly visible'.

This issue of *University of*

*Melbourne Collections* discusses collections from many departments but my comments focus particularly on the continuing relevance of libraries. For example, set against the backdrop of Australia's current drought and the broader discussion of climate change was the discovery by Dr Joëlle Gergis of the author's annotated copy of the 1877 book *Climate of New South Wales* held in the Baillieu Library. This seemingly modest volume will help today's scientists better understand global warming. A very different way of understanding the heavens is presented in Louisa Marks' article examining depictions of the Old Testament stories of God creating darkness and light, day and night, and the sun, moon and stars. The Print Collection of the Baillieu Library provided the source material for Marks' research during her 2008 student internship. Professor Michael Bryan surveys early English law reports in the Law Rare Books Collection. He chronicles the advent of early reports published by individuals, including centuries-old cases that still influence modern law.

Situated near the site of the original University Library is the Classics and Archaeology Library, established in 1969. Miriam Riverlea's article 'More than just books'

describes this reference collection which includes works previously owned by eminent scholars, some featuring interesting annotations and doodles.

Libraries and their users are the beneficiaries of the generosity of donors. This is certainly true in the case of Dr Nicholas Hamilton's recent gift to the Medical Rare Books Collection of an early anatomy text. Descended from a long line of medical practitioners, Dr Hamilton describes how this 1694 book was brought to Australia by his pioneering forebear Dr Alexander Thomson and passed down through generations upon their graduation in medicine from the University of Melbourne.

The magazine also discusses the School of Chemistry Collection which was recently returned to the University after a long sojourn at Museum Victoria, the Medical History Museum, a portrait of an important early professor, and the University's Cypriot antiquities.

**Philip G. Kent** became University Librarian at the University of Melbourne in March 2009. His 30-year career in universities and at the CSIRO has covered diverse roles, including the management of libraries, information technology, knowledge and information, risk and audit. Philip's personal interests include history and the arts.