

PATHWAYS TO THE PAST

BY SUE FAIRBANKS

IN FEBRUARY 2000, THE ARCHIVES, Special Collections and Grainger Museum Section at the University of Melbourne Library began an ambitious project to create a website through which it can make the photographs and other images in the Archives' collection more accessible to researchers and the public.

In the longer term, the website will become a very important interface between the Archives' holdings and the research community. It will be used to make all of the Archives' special format holdings — from films to architectural drawings — more accessible, as well as to deliver imaged documents.

A format management database will underlie the website, allowing Archives staff to manage preservation of the non-paper format items that often accompany archival collections. These include the aforementioned films as well as audio and video recordings, artworks and museum objects.

This year, though, the Photograph and Image Project 2000 has concentrated on preparing the database and website to display an initial 1,000 images from the John Ellis Photograph Collection and a further 400 images of the University of Melbourne.

The Archives acquired part one of the John Ellis Photograph Collection of Peace and Protest Movements in Melbourne (1971–1996) in 1999. The Collection consists of 12,000 negatives and images taken by John Ellis during his participation in Melbourne's social protest movements since the Vietnam War. It includes a catalogue in which John has recorded dates, times and people involved with him in protest, as



Overcrowded laboratory conditions for students at the University of Melbourne, 1958. (University of Melbourne Photo Collection.)

well as his stories of people and events. From these, John has selected 1,000 of the most significant photographs to be digitised and exhibited on the Archives website with the stories that accompany them.

The digitisation of part of the John Ellis Collection will herald another innovation for the Archives — the opportunity to cooperate with academics from the History Department to prepare a multimedia teaching unit for first year undergraduate students.

The project, titled "Pathways to the Past: enhancing undergraduate research work in Australian history", has been funded by an ITMM Project Grant awarded to Associate Professor Alan Mayne and Dr. Andrew Brown-May. The aim is to expand the range and depth of first year undergraduate research assignments in Australian history by exposing students, via

web-based multimedia, to a diverse range of primary sources otherwise not easily accessible. The John Ellis photographs of peace and protest on the Archives website will be incorporated into the module to be used in second semester 2001.

The University celebrates its sesquicentenary in 2003. Displaying photographs of the University of Melbourne on the website is therefore timely, as interest in the University's history, particularly through the History of the University Unit, is gathering momentum.

The 400 University photographs that will be accessible on the website have been digitised on CD-ROM for some time, but without the means to make them readily accessible to researchers and the public, their use has been limited. The photographs represent a substantial part of the holdings of over

1,000 historic University images which the Archives has acquired from a variety of sources in the past 40 years. Once available online, the University photographs will be searchable for specific buildings, grounds and people within the University community.

The website and its underlying format management database will support further development of multiple access points to the information and images held within it. Plans are maturing to make the catalogue records and images from the website available on the University Library's online catalogue. This will enable researchers to locate images as well as publications on desirable subjects during the one search. A longer-term possibility also exists of making the Archives image holdings accessible through the National Library of Australia's service, PictureAustralia.

The project has involved extensive cooperation in the planning stage between staff of the Archives (Michael Piggott, Peter Bode, Jason Benjamin, Sue Fairbanks, Fay Anderson), the Grainger Museum (Brian Allison), and the Ian Potter Museum of Art (Lisa Sullivan). In the implementation stage, Information Division staff have also contributed: from Information Development and Marketing (David Cunnington, Andrew Gfrerer), the Information Resources Division (Eve Young), and Photography and Digital Imaging (Bob Ivison, David Adam). Librarians and archivists from many of the leading state and national institutions have also given their advice with great willingness.

The Archives, Special Collections and Grainger Museum Section owes an enormous debt of gratitude to all participants, and we look forward to demonstrating it when we launch the site in 2001. ♦

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University students and staff in the cafeteria, c.1938. (University of Melbourne Photo Collection.)



Zoology staff and senior students (and friends), c.1925. (University of Melbourne Photo Collection.)



May Day March, 4 May 1976, Melbourne. (John Ellis Photo Collection, University Archives.)