

# Royal Society of New South Wales

## *Collection of materials stored at Prestons*

### *Background*

The Royal Society of NSW currently has a considerable portion of its library of books, monographs and bound serials and other printed material in commercial storage in Prestons near Liverpool. The warehouse is owned by Vice-President Clive Wilmot, whose generosity and ongoing goodwill has allowed the Royal Society of NSW to store the material at no-cost.

The Prestons collection comprises twelve shrink-wrapped pallets with some 12 cartons on each. During 2006 John Hardie, David Branagan, Robyn Stutchbury, and Peter Tyler examined a sample of about 25 per cent of this collection as part of the work undertaken through the 2006 Community Heritage Grant funded by the Australian Government and managed by the National Library of Australia. The grant was awarded in order to assess the state of conservation and the significance of the Society's collection. There was sufficient funding to engage the services of professional historian, Dr Peter Tyler and scientific scholar, Dr David Branagan. The Prestons investigation revealed that some of the rarest and most significant items of the Society's collection are located at this site, where they are totally inaccessible to researchers. Further assessment and/or management of the collection is impeded by the lack of a complete inventory or listing of the Prestons material.

In his report, David Branagan stated:

*"Approximately 9000 volumes, mainly of older serials, are presently in temporary storage at Prestons .... Many of these were retained in Sydney when the bulk of the serials, some 30 000 volumes, was moved to the University of New England in the 1980s. It is clear that the presently stored volumes were considered by the Society's then librarian and Council to be important, in every sense of the word, and worthy of retention at the Society's head office in Sydney. These volumes were included in a summary listing this author made of the Society's holdings, when they were housed at the Macquarie University site in 2000. It was not possible, in the limited time available for the recent inspection, to carry out a complete check of these volumes in storage, so the range of age and condition still need to be assessed. However a brief statement is given of the sampling carried out there (Appendix 3, below) with a listing of the sample items examined."*

Because the cartons are housed in a warehouse alongside perishable goods, there is serious risk of damage by rodents or insect pests, despite the precautions taken by the property owner, Clive Wilmot. Further, the Royal Society material is taking up useful space in the warehouse. It is therefore a matter of considerable urgency that this material be relocated and properly catalogued."

And to quote Peter: 'Which is why we are going back there three years later!'

In March 2009, at the instigation of Royal Society President, John Hardie, and with his direct involvement, the project was revived. John, along with Vice-President Robyn Stutchbury, Society Historian Peter Tyler and former Mitchell Librarian Elizabeth Ellis, agreed to continue as a voluntary operation the work on the collection begun in 2006. In addition to listing box contents, there was also some judicious culling of items which were considered to have no future place in the collection.

The group has now spent two sessions on 23 March and 20 May 2009 working through boxes stored on two pallets. It is estimated that the contents of more than four pallets still remain to be listed. Depending on the number of people involved, this would take between four working days (with the present complement) or two working days (if the number of people working on the project is increased to eight).

A meeting was held on 1 July 2009 at the Royal Society rooms, Darlington, with John Hardie, Robyn Stutchbury, Peter Tyler and Elizabeth Ellis present. The purpose was to discuss progress to date and future directions of the project.

## *Issues*

If the number of workers can be increased, then two teams of four members are suggested to provide further impetus for the project. Each team should comprise a supervisor, and three others, one of whom would be a recorder, preferably with PC skills, and two persons capable of lifting and sorting. Each team should include at least one of those who have previously worked on the collection during 2009.

In order to assist with the process, it will be necessary to outline the project's terms of reference, including:

- General outline of key tasks, and timing
- General guidelines for material to be retained or disposed
- General definitions of significance pertinent to this collection

## *Summary*

If the project is to be completed, then a larger group of workers needs to be recruited from Royal Society members. Ideally these people will have a great interest in both the Society's history and its superb collection. The project is an immediate priority, with the aim that it should be completed by the end of 2009.

Therefore, the most pressing issue is to recruit assistants willing and able to commit two days of their time during the forthcoming months. In addition, the terms of reference will need to be defined prior to increasing the personnel.

## Appendix 3 from David Branagan's 2006 CHG Report

### *Sample list of material in commercial storage at Prestons*

- Cosmos. Revue Encycloped.- Hebdomadaire* (Fortnightly) des Progres des Sciences. M. Br de Montfort Redigiée par M. L'Abbe Moigne, Tome Septieme Paris: A. Trambly 4 Juillet 1855 [4<sup>th</sup> year]. Illust; h'back paper on card, red leather spine & cnrs with gold titling, small Roy Soc logo on spine
- The Chemical Gazette or Journal of Practical Chemistry* in all its applications to Pharmacy, Arts & Manufactures conducted by W. Francis PhD, FLS, FRAS, FCS, vol. XIII 1855; London: Taylor & Francis; red h'back, br leather spine & cnrs, rubbed; no logos.
- The Journal of the Society of Arts and of the Institutions in Union*, vol. XIII 1865; London: Bell & Daly; h'back green ornamental paper on card, br. leather spine & cnrs.
- Notes and Queries: A medium of inter-communication for Literary men, Artists, Antiquarians, Genealogists* etc (1 to 6) 1852. London: Geo Bell; yellow paper on card, br leather spine & cnrs.
- Proceedings of the Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, vols. XXIX – XXX; h'back 'earthquake' paper on card, black & br leather spine & cnrs, rubbed; small Roy Soc logo on spine, lge logo on cover.
- The Popular Science Review*: A quarterly miscellany of entertaining and instructive articles on scientific subjects, ed. By Henry Lawson M.D. 1872; London: Robert Hardwicked, P'dilly. Vol. XI h'back purplish b'cloth, dk br, leather on spine & cnrs, some rubbing, illustr (papers include Henry Woodward, Prestwich, & plate relating British & French geology), Ganoid fish (*Ceratodus*) from Qld.
- The Popular Science Review* [same title as above], Jan-Dec 1877, now edited by W.S. Dallas FLS (Asst. Sec Geol Soc), New Series vol. 1 (vol. XVI of whole series); fleur-de-lys on spine. Printer Hardwicke & Bogue.
- Tyneside Naturalists Field Club* vols. IV (1858-60) & V (1860-62); h'back mottled dk green & yellow paper on card, dk br leather spine & cnrs, elaborate fleur de lys on spine & title; Newcastle-upon-Tyne: F. & W. Dodsworth.

*Memoirs of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh*. H'back 'earthquake' paper on card cover, br & black spine & cnrs, rubbed, vol.1 spine edge loose, vol. 1 (for the years 1808 –09-10) with 15 engravings, folded plates, vol. 2 cover loose [?8 vols in all]; Edinburgh: ?Bell; Dr McKnight 'on the Highlands' publ 1811; (on end paper £4.4 ?8 vols).

*T. Huxley*, 6 vols from different publishers, diff. Sizes, 5 bound. H'back black b'cloth, bl leather spine & cnrs, with small Roy Soc logo at top of spine, one small logo at base. Note Roy Soc decision to bind as group.

Sets of volumes of Reports of the: Geological Survey of Tasmania; Geological Survey of W.A.; Geological Survey of NSW (includes bound Records & Mineral Resources Series); Geological Survey of Victoria; Geological Survey of Queensland; Victorian Naturalists; Aust Academy of Science; ANZAAS (1892 Hobart Report has loose cover);

W.A. [Astronomical ] Observatory, Reports by W.E. Cooke from the 1890s -;

University of Sydney Reprints from the various Scientific Departments, c. 1900; Australian Museum Reports to c. 1940; Geologists' Association (G.B.) journal.

Not seen but *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* from its beginning (Series began about 1650?) are stored with these volumes listed above.

Robyn Stutchbury based on contributions from Elizabeth Ellis and Peter Tyler  
17 July 2009