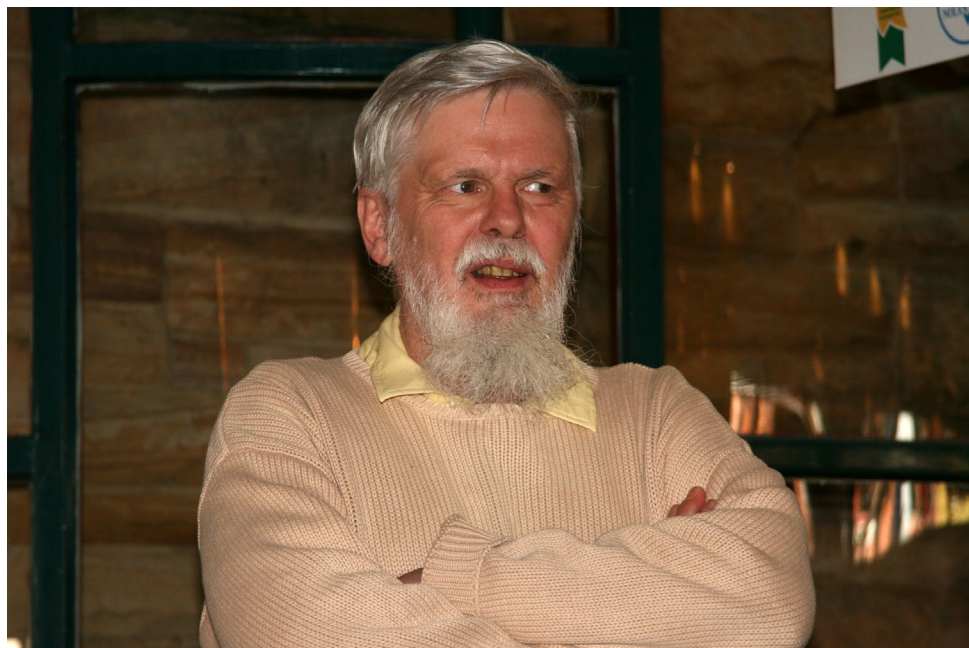


OBITUARY



## Alan Ives, 1946–2017



Alan Ives, courtesy of the Friends of the National Library of Australia.

By academic training, Alan was a librarian taking his library qualification while at the National Library, which he joined in 1971, having spent his Christmas holidays working for Hamersley Iron in Dampier, Western Australia. The theme that has run through most recollections of Alan is his passion for collecting and bibliography. So, it should come as no surprise to us that his recollection of his summer holiday job in Dampier is that it mainly involved, and here I quote from a biographical essay about Alan written by Gary Kent, ‘labouring on the rubbish truck, which allowed him to collect maps, plans, engineering and other drawings [which] remain in Alan’s collection to this day’.<sup>1</sup>

Alan’s employment association with the National Library was relatively brief. As mentioned, he was recruited in 1971 and over that year and the following one, he balanced study for the Graduate Diploma of Librarianship (at the then Canberra College of Advanced Education) with placements in various sections of the Library.

The Alan of 45 years ago is remembered by a National Library colleague of the time as follows:

Alan, who I’d got to know a bit, was instantly helpful [when I had to suddenly quit the share house I was in], letting me stay with him ... for three–four months till I got back on my feet ... I thought at the time, and still do, it was both kind and selfless (and [he] wasn’t [the least] interested in the reasons for needing help).<sup>2</sup>

The early to mid 1970s were a roiling time in the library and archives profession and Alan was deeply interested in the articulation of the professional identity and distinctiveness of archivists.

Therefore, it is not surprising that he spent the bulk of his professional life working in archives – first the Australian Archives, for which he left the Library in mid 1973, and then the institution which became known as Charles Sturt University.

Alan entered my consciousness some time in 1978. By that time, he had been the librarian for the Australian Archives for three years and I had just joined the organisation's NSW office as a graduate. I heard much about him long before I actually met him. Each of the Archives' Regional Offices had a small library to support the work of researchers and of staff. The idea was that these modest library collections would enable research into Australian history, particularly administrative history. In NSW, we were mystified by the regular receipt, courtesy of Alan the librarian in Central Office, of boxes and boxes of irrelevant publications. An example I remember vividly are the runs of the journal *Chemical Abstracts*, a title that, I think you will agree, is at some distance from Australian administrative history. We pleaded with Alan to stop sending such irrelevant material to NSW and told him that it went straight into the recycling bin. He responded with great cheer that that was fine but that he acquired this torrent of material in order to sift from it the valuable and useful and somehow had to dispose of the chaff.

When Alan arrived at the Riverina College of Advanced Education in 1983 as its archivist, he applied the same approach to his archival work. He collected enormous quantities of material and his small team struggled to manage, control, describe and provide access to it. Alan's rationale was that voracious collecting built community relationships and goodwill and that a broad collecting net helped increase the probability of acquiring a treasure. Following Alan's retirement in 1995, his successor commented drily, 'A disposals program in the Regional Manuscripts and State Archives components of the collection has meanwhile seen the removal of significant quantities of time expired records and ephemeral printed material.'<sup>3</sup> It made Alan's colleagues smile and I think he too would have smiled knowingly and unapologetically.

Alan was an independent spirit and he relished, and possibly stretched, the autonomy of his position with the Riverina College of Advanced Education, which became Charles Sturt University. Through his prodigious collecting efforts and energetic promotion of the College, later University's, collection, he raised its profile in the research community, the archival community and within the University.

It would be fair to say that, in matters of decentralisation, Alan could give the leader of the National Party and our Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, a run for his money. Soon after taking up his position in Wagga Wagga, Alan started campaigning for the Australian Society of Archivists to hold its conference in Wagga. He offered his own services, that of his team and his organisation to support a conference. Emulating Olympic-style approaches, he marketed the fresh air and produce, the can-do community spirit, and the winery and wine science expertise of the University as blandishments. Assailed by this spirited advocacy, the Australian Society of Archivists for the first time held its 1992 conference in a regional centre, that is, Wagga, and a most congenial event it was.

Alan sought to contribute his skills to the then newly independent archival profession, writing reflections on the development of Commonwealth archives legislation and preparing bibliographies of the writings of Australian archival leaders, such as Ian Maclean and Michael Saclier. Alan took an enormous interest in the history of the archival profession in Australia and the development of its practice, preparing an extensive bibliography about it.

His interest in and appreciation of Australian practice led him to profess it overseas. He wanted to learn about how European and American institutions managed archives and was active in telling them about the Australian perspective, delivering papers on his overseas visits. This international engagement was ahead of its time. In 1992, when the first sizeable Australian contingent attended the Society of American Archivists' annual conference in Montreal, North American colleagues all seemed to know Alan. They said that, although Alan had attested to

the existence of many Australian colleagues, as they had not seen any they were disbelieving until that point!<sup>4</sup>

Alan served as Secretary of the ACT Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists and, from 1981–83, he served as the Society’s National Secretary. He also served briefly on the Society’s editorial committee. He sought election to these positions because he was interested in the Society’s development and in the interplay of ideas. An impartial observer would, I believe, conclude that Alan was not interested in administration and was therefore aloof from it. Alan himself would accept that his legacy was not in the organisational sphere.

When Alan left Charles Sturt University, he returned to Canberra and this enabled his second and far longer association with the National Library. Alan was a long-term member of the Friends of the National Library and, in 2006, he joined its Committee, which brought him into regular contact with the staff of the Library, particularly those in the office of the Friends. He was an habitu  of the Library’s shop as he was of bookshops around the country. He was deeply interested in the Library’s collections and in the collectors who built those collections. His immense appreciation and knowledge of the Library’s collection and his interest in the institution’s welfare endeared him to us at the Library. Sometimes that endearment was allied with exasperation as his wilful and mischievous technophobic tendencies made it difficult for Sharyn O’Brien, Sarah Jaensch and Kathryn Favelle to stay in touch with him.

Alan was a genial person who enjoyed a lively conversation and company. He liked nothing better than a good laugh. He could hold a view or an opinion with great tenacity and relished a verbal contest but was without rancour when he was in the minority. He was enormously loyal to friends and found great solace and respect on the Friends Committee. He enjoyed the company, camaraderie and chaffing that he received at Committee meetings. In Gary Kent, Chair of the Friends, he had not only a very kind interlocutor but a fellow collector and student of the history of the book.

Earlier, I quoted from the biographical essay about Alan that Gary has written for the recently published five-volume account of Australian book collectors edited by Charles Stitz.<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Blainey reviewed those five volumes in the pages of *The Australian* last weekend. He opened his review saying: ‘The collector of books is a detective, prospector, hunter, hoarder and eventually a philanthropist, all in one. Usually private people, and unknown to the wider public...’<sup>6</sup> And so it was with Alan. He will not only be remembered most affectionately by the National Library and those of us who knew him. We hope that the wider public will come to know him because it will be indebted to his generosity in bequeathing to the Library his collection.

## Endnotes

1. Gary Kent, *Books, Books, Books, Books Stacking up in Piles Again: Alan Ives as Book Collector*, The Sign of the Paw Print of the Old White Rabbit, Weston, ACT, 2013, p. 5.
2. Michael Piggott, private email, 14 July 2017.
3. Don Boadle, ‘Charles Sturt University Regional Archives’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 176.
4. I am indebted to Kandy-Jane Henderson for this recollection.
5. Charles Stitz (ed.), *Australian Book Collectors: Some Noted Australian Book Collectors & Collections of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Book of Kells, Albury, NSW, 2017.
6. Geoffrey Blainey, ‘The Biblio Files’, *The Weekend Australian*, 8–9 July 2017, Review Section, p. 16.

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