

Erudite and Meticulous Scholar

Judith Baskin*

I first met Miss Mander-Jones early in 1963 when I was posted to the National Library's office in London. I was somewhat awestruck to meet her. She had a considerable reputation as Mitchell Librarian and she came from that great institution with which, as a junior National Library officer, I had not previously had any dealings. My first impressions remained the same throughout my acquaintance with her, that she was a charming and most erudite Australian scholar, a person with meticulous work habits and a person totally devoted to her work. I therefore found it very moving as President of the Library Association of Australia to preside at the presentation of the H.C.L. Anderson Award to her in Adelaide in 1982. At the time, at the age of eighty-six, she was occupied in work on the papers of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, S.A. Branch Inc.

As Australian Joint Copying Project Officer, she had an office in New South Wales House. Of course, much of her time was spent in the Public Record Office and other repositories throughout the United Kingdom. But she would visit us from time to time to discuss administrative matters with Bill Torrington and myself.

At that time, the proposal to prepare the guide later published as *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific* was being developed. She ardently desired to undertake this work. As A.P. Fleming and Professor J.A. La Nauze¹ said in their foreword to the guide

'From the beginning [of negotiations between the National Library and the Australian National University] both sponsors assumed that Miss Phyllis Mander-Jones would be the Director of the project. Indeed it would not have been launched at that time had she not been available.'

She was at that time sixty-seven.

She began work on the guide with a secretary, Joan Pilbeam, and with Australians and New Zealanders whom we employ from time to time, people with the necessary interest and qualifications to work as surveyors.

* Judith A.D. Baskin, Director, Networks Branch, National Library of Australia.

It was a lesson in planning to see how from the very beginning she organised the work. Her notes were a model of clarity and were meticulously kept. When a survey was complete, a draft was prepared and as each section was completed it was indexed so that at the end it was relatively easy to bring it all together. When I worked with her in 1967 on the guide, I had the opportunity to look at this masterpiece of organisation. The working papers which are now held in the National Library's Manuscript Section reflect that careful organisation. A detailed account of the working methods is to be found in *Archives and Manuscripts* for 1970.²

She was always pleasantly firm in directing the work of those of us who worked with her on the guide. She was equally firm with scholars who would come to visit her to seek advice on sources of information. Although always intensely ladylike, 'if a lady could be said to snort' she would occasionally resort to a snort when she thought that someone should have known better, and this was applied equally to the scholar as to the librarian.

Amongst the many scholars who knew her, she had a number of friends of long standing. Pere O'Reilly, the French Dominican head of the Societe des Oceanistes, was a particular friend and colleague. He visited her when he came to London, and it was quite moving to listen to these two elderly devotees of Australian and Pacific studies talking about their field. During that time they translated *A Poetical essay on the Dolphin sailing round the world in the years 1766, 1767, 1768* by R. Richardson, and edited and published it.³ It was one of the few times I knew her to make a mistake and it upset her enormously. They had recorded in the preface that this was the first time the work had been published. They were both greatly embarrassed when they found that in fact it had already been published. The fact was that it was long out of print and they had rendered yet another service to Pacific studies by bringing it back into print and translating it.

She had a great sense of humour. Her friendship with this priest gave rise to a rather amusing incident one day. Pere O'Reilly was a Frenchman and his name was pronounced accordingly. However, there was another priest, an Irishman, who used to visit her and he was well known for his ability to wheedle material out of people. The porter at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies where we were based (awaiting a place in an Australia House extension) telephoned to say that a priest with an Irish name was coming to visit her. At this time a notable Tasmanian collector of Australiana was visiting us to display some of his recent acquisitions. We settled back to await the arrival of Pere O'Reilly whom we knew would very much enjoy seeing the collector's new purchases. Great was the dismay as we saw an Australian Irish priest pass the window. The visiting collector leapt to his feet and, pushing his purchases into his overcoat pockets, fled, while Miss Mander-Jones concentrated on turning over everything on her desk which might attract the unwelcome attention of her unexpected visitor. She was so overcome with amusement at this that she could not speak for several minutes after her new visitor had settled in.

The work of the survey was brought to a conclusion in 1968. She would happily have continued to work on the guide but it was thought desirable that the considerable body of material already revealed by the survey should be made available to the general public. Will someone continue the work one day?

It was a mark of respect to Phyllis Mander-Jones that from the beginning the guide project, and later the published work, have been known as 'The Mander-Jones guide'.

FOOTNOTES

1. Respectively Director-General of the National Library, and Professor of History at the A.N.U. Research School of Social Studies.
2. See 'The Guide to manuscripts in the United Kingdom relating to Australia and the South West Pacific. An outline of its scope and working methods', by J.A. Baskin, *Archives and Manuscripts* vol. 4, no. 3, Nov. 1970 pp. 5-13.
3. *A Poetical essay on the Dolphin, sailing round the world in the years 1766, 1767, 1768, by R. Richardson, Barber of the said ship; with an introduction by ... Miss P. Mander-Jones* / *Voyage du Dolphin autour du monde au cours des années 1766, 1767, 1768: poeme maritime, par R. Richardson, chirurgien a bord du-dit navire. Avertissement au lecteur et traduction française par D.J. Simon.* [With coloured engravings by R. Dessirier.] Bibliophiles de la Société des Oceanistes. Paris, la Société, 1965. [The work has parallel texts in English and French, and these details have been taken from the Mitchell Library's *Dictionary catalog of printed books.*]