

A Truly Professional Dedication

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I first got to know Phyllis Mander-Jones in 1967 when I went to London as the National Library's Liaison Officer. I must have met her some time before but I have no recollection of doing so. It was during my two years in London that I got to know her when she was working on what was published in 1972 as *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*. This great work occupied her for more than six years. Miss Mander-Jones started working on it in 1964 and it was not completed until 1970. In that time, she and a very small number of associates surveyed the major and many of the minor archive repositories in Great Britain and Ireland, searching out collections which were relevant to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. Miss Mander-Jones was already over seventy years of age when I arrived in London but her energy and enthusiasm for the work was that of someone half her age. Each week she would come up to London from Dorchester-on-Thames, where she lived with her sister Mildred, and work almost singlemindedly on her project. It was undoubtedly her great enthusiasm for her project which kept her going, for at times she did not look at all well. I have clear memories of seeing her with an almost ashen face carrying a heavy bag full of papers. At times I wondered if she would live to see the project through. In this, of course, I was greatly mistaken as her great strength of body and mind preserved her for many years after the completion of the project.

I count it one of the great privileges of my professional life that for two years I was able to work closely with Miss Mander-Jones. Her truly professional dedication to her work was an inspiration and her great knowledge of printed, manuscript and pictorial Australiana was of great value to me in my work as the National Library's Liaison Officer. Many of the items which came up for auction, she knew well. In one area only did things pass her by, and that was in the realm of prices. I found her estimates were generally about one-third of what the items eventually brought when they were sold.

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In England Miss Mander-Jones had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances in her area of expertise; she was well-known and highly respected by those book-sellers who specialised in Australiana and by the librarians and other custodians of the major libraries and museums which had important collections relating to Australia and the Pacific.

The last time I saw Miss Mander-Jones was in mid-1981 when my wife and I visited her in Adelaide where she was living with her sister-in-law. She had only recently recovered from a serious illness. Although frail, her eyes were bright and her mind as keen as ever. She was looking forward to the publication of her *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch)*. Among other things she talked of a visit that she had made before the Second World War to New Guinea. She had kept a journal which she had illustrated of this visit which I would have dearly liked to have seen.

An Interview With Phyllis Mander-Jones

Baiba Berzins*

In 1983 while in Adelaide for the A.S.A Conference I recorded an interview with Phyllis Mander-Jones. The tape, together with a transcript, are now appropriately held in the Mitchell Library, the institution over which Miss Mander-Jones presided with such distinction from 1946 to 1957. Her recollections included some interesting details of her early years in The Public Library of New South Wales when it was still housed in the old Australian Subscription Library building in Macquarie Street which she recalled as a 'wonderful old building' and the later demolition of which she regretted. But she recalled also that it was a building with awkward high galleries above the reading room where books were hoisted up by a hand lift and then shelved yet higher up with the likely danger of dropping them on readers — or even the Principal Librarian — far below! Her handwriting was subjected to examination since catalogue cards were then still handwritten. Her duties were many, including stints at the bag reception desk and attendant duty in the exhibition galleries. She recalled, also, that in the 1920's women held quite a few of the senior library appointments, both professional and administrative.

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