

**A GREAT DAY FOR THE UNIVERSITY -
THE HAYES COLLECTION COMES TO UQ †**

December 2007

Mark Cryle

At 6 o'clock on the morning of Thursday 19 October 1967, eight people drove from Brisbane to the Darling Downs in an Avis Rent-a-Car – a mini-van in fact. They arrived at the Roman Catholic presbytery at Oakey to do a dirty job. As one of the party dubbed them, forty years after the event, they were the 'Collection Squad'.¹ The sobriquet was highly appropriate as we shall see.

Dressed like labourers, they began to collect and remove the riches that lay before them. It was exhausting work in the Queensland heat. Some worked long hours in a poorly lit corrugated iron shed, clambering up floor-to-ceiling shelves through dust and vermin. The fear of snakes was real but not talked about by the workers. These people were not miners nor were they navvies; typically their day's work was rather more genteel. The treasure they extracted was in itself a collection.

The 'Collection Squad' comprised staff from The University of Queensland Library, there to gather the great hoard of literary and other treasures that had been accumulated over 70 years by Father Leo Hayes, the parish priest at Oakey who lay critically ill in St Vincent's Hospital Toowoomba. Marianne Ehrhardt was one of the squad. Forty years later she recalls being assigned to collect books.

We were met by Father Hayes' housekeeper. The house was beautiful and everything in the public area was clean and polished but round the back was another matter. We tried to enter Father Hayes' bedroom but couldn't. A large pile of books had collapsed and fallen against the door, blocking entry. I had to crawl through a small gap we forced in the door and pass the books out in 2s and 3s until we could get the door open. The room was totally covered in books – on the furniture, on the floor, under the bed. I don't know where Father Hayes slept.²

The leader of this expedition Nancy Bonnin, then the head of Fryer Library, noted in a letter to a colleague: 'The job was enormous, took us far more time and effort than we anticipated and there were some dirty exhausted librarians by the time we were done'.³ The treasures were loaded into trucks – 'pantehnicos' as the reports from the time called them and freighted to UQ in an operation that took two full days to complete.

While the heavy lifting work was being done on those two days in October 1967 the transaction had had its genesis in a different kind of work that which had been going on in the years preceding. Derek Fielding, the University Librarian at the time, commented recently that 'the acquisition of private collections for libraries often requires a long period of courtship'.⁴

As the then Vice-Chancellor, Sir Fred Schonell, reported to the University Senate 'the discussions and negotiations relating to this went on for two and a half years and, as you can well imagine, were delicate and difficult in some senses'.⁵ Sir Fred's estimate of the courtship period may be somewhat

on the short side. Fielding remembers it as having begun well before his arrival at UQ in 1965.⁶ Other institutions had certainly expressed interest in obtaining the collection that was known internationally.⁷

The relationship between UQ and Hayes had its origins it seems in Hayes' personal relationship with former Reader in English Cecil Hadgraft who had, on occasions, borrowed copies of books from Hayes' collection for teaching and research in his literature courses. In 1966 some of the books had been displayed in the Library.⁸

The transaction was brokered in part by Walter Stone, a friend of Hayes' and well-known Sydney bibliophile. The ongoing courtship was, Fielding recalls, a joint effort between the Department of English and the Library. Both Fielding and the head of Library Reference at the time, Spencer Routh, concur though that 'the key charmer, instigator and follower-through was Nancy Bonnin.⁹ The October 1967 expedition was clearly not the first trip that the librarians and University staff had made to Oakey.

Recalling a visit she had made in September 1965, Bonnin wrote to Hayes:

Last Friday was a red letter day for Gunther [her husband] and me, and we can't stop thinking and talking about it. You must be one of the most unusual Australians we have met, because after all we are still a pioneer country, and there are not so very many people over the whole country who have such a sense of history and cultural values as you have. Your collection is a national treasure, of that there is no doubt at all.¹⁰

Fielding remembers a number of occasions when he borrowed a University car and drove a party often including Hadgraft and Bonnin to Oakey to visit their ‘short, snowy-haired, warm, friendly and relaxed host.’¹¹

In April of 1967 Hayes’ work as a collector of rare and valuable Australiana was formally recognised by UQ when he received an honorary Master of Arts at a ceremony at the Brisbane City Hall. On that occasion, Schonell noted that for Hayes ‘scholarship had been a beacon the he [Hayes] has always followed’ and praised the priest’s ‘determination that never wavered, to collect and preserve those records of the past, which our Australian literature provides. This was at a time, now more than sixty years ago, when very few people recognised the value of such material for the future’.¹² It was Hadgraft who collected Hayes from his hotel and drove him to the ceremony. It was the Bonnins who hosted the meal the party attended prior to the occasion.¹³

In an interview with *The Bulletin* printed on its Red Page, Hayes had made clear his intention to keep his collection in Queensland.

‘Er, what do you propose to do with your collection ultimately, Father? I mean...’

‘Er, well, what’s going to become of it?’

‘You mean when I die? It will remain in Queensland, where it was gathered together.’¹⁴

By the middle of 1966 after experiencing a significant health scare, Hayes had signed documents entrusting the collection to UQ. After another visit to Oakey in June 1967, which included Schonell in the party this time, Nancy Bonnin once again wrote to Hayes.

The Vice-Chancellor was impressed and excited about it all himself and talked all the way home. The importance of what you are doing for the University and for the whole state is hardly realised yet. Even Sir Fred, who is accustomed to thinking big, feels that your collection is the most important thing that has happened to The University of Queensland for many years. Like Dr Mayne's gift of the land at St Lucia, it will have far-reaching effects.¹⁵

By the 13th of October the terms of the deal were in writing with Hayes expressing the wish that the University 'arrange to get the collection and take steps for its preservation as soon as possible'.¹⁶ Six days later the librarians in the mini-van arrived to do their work. The material was gathered up from the floor and shelves of the presbytery and from the basement of the adjoining Oakey Convent School. A convoy of four removal trucks hired from Grace Brothers made consecutive trips to Oakey over the 19th and 20th of October and transported 80 large crates and 400 cartons of books, papers, geological and anthropological specimens, and a hoard of other realia – maps, press cuttings, stamps, postcards, pictures, guns and cattle bells amongst them. There were 25 tons of material in all – 'a weight of learning' as Sir Fred Schonell put it.¹⁷ Sid Page, Fielding's deputy, reported on the second day of the collection exercise:

The Hayes collection is substantially larger than anyone knew. For instance the ‘fifteen or eighteen’ large crates under the school will probably number about 80.¹⁸

It was indeed ‘a great day for the university’ as Schonell announced at a ceremony of acceptance at the University’s Darnell Art Gallery (then in the central tower of the Forgan-Smith Building) on 26 October. A newspaper reported that Hayes’ attendance at the ceremony would have been ‘a moment of personal triumph’¹⁹ Sadly Hayes lay critically ill in St Vincent’s Hospital. He was represented at the ceremony by his assistant, Father Kevin Ryan.

Nancy Bonnin remained torn between her friendship and affection for Hayes, who was clearly in decline, and the momentous nature of the acquisition for Fryer Library. Her correspondence gives valuable insights into the personal background of the story.

We have had a very mixed up two weeks, the result of which is that the Hayes Collection is actually under this roof. I don’t know when I have ever gone through such a period of conflicting emotions. It is very hard to see Father Hayes so visibly fading, and yet his pleasure and ours in the whole transfer is unbounded. At present only half is unpacked, but that half is crammed full of treasures to our eyes. When Father Hayes made up his mind, he wanted everything done at once. I feel that this was when he finally knew how short his time was and wanted to enjoy the handing over as much as he could.²⁰

Hayes died in St Vincent's on 17 November, five days before his 78th birthday. In early December Schonell held a press conference in which he announced details of the transaction to the media.

Prior to this event Schonell and the Library had been cautious about news of the transaction leaking out, in deference to Hayes who was in poor health and little able to deal with the media attention which the occasion would garner. In a memo dated 23 October of that year Acting University Librarian Sid Page advised all members of Library staff that:

The acquisition of this collection will be announced by the Vice-Chancellor in Toowoomba on Wednesday 25 October and a ceremony will be held on Thursday 26 October. In the meantime I would ask you all to be discreet about the matter, particularly if the press or television phone or call.²¹

The ABC's Toowoomba office had wanted to interview Library staff. In preparing for the press interest Page had commented:

I expect to be asked by the ABC and newspapers, the value of the collection. If we are to give extensive publicity, this is the most newsworthy aspect. On the other hand, the Church is anxious that we should not give an impression that a priest could amass a fortune.²²

When briefing Schonell for the December press conference Cec Hadgraft pointed out that the Vice-Chancellor would inevitably be asked questions about the collection's monetary value. 'What is the value to be put on sixty years of experience, devotion and sheer time all expended by one man?'²³

While the work of acquisition was almost finished for some, for many others it had only just begun. In his December press conference Schonell announced:

It is one thing to acquire a large collection. It is quite another matter to catalogue it and this is going to cost us about \$20 000. It would seem that there are rather more than the 25 000 volumes of our earlier estimate.²⁴

Only after the university vacation began was it possible to take over two floors of the Duhig Building and ensure security of the area for substantial work on the Hayes material to begin in earnest.²⁵ Prior to that, the collection, most of it still in boxes and crates, occupied every available bit of space in the library – ‘something of an embarrassment’ – as Page noted in a memo to the Registrar on 30 October.²⁶ Work proceeded vigorously throughout the vacation period of 1967/68. For most of that time at least 35 people were engaged in processing and cataloguing the mass of material. At times, as many as 50 people were working on it, including many temporary staff hired just for that purpose. A number of these went on to have long and productive careers with UQ library.²⁷

All of the print items acquired from Hayes would bear the book plate, the design of which needed to be finalised. Hayes had requested that the graphic represent an image from the stained glass window at the Sacred Heart Church at Maleny which had been built while he was parish priest in that district from 1922 to 1924. Unfortunately the window had been broken in a storm years earlier. Despite a search of the Catholic Archives and an appeal to the readers of *The Catholic Leader*, no copy of the image could be found. The

Library and Hayes' executors settled on a design prepared locally by Geraldine Just.²⁸ The area of the Duhig Building where the main part of the collection was kept was marked with a signboard and a bronze plaque with a portrait of Hayes.

While Derek Fielding had been prominent in the negotiations to make the transaction happen, much of the day-to-day administration fell to his deputy Page, as Fielding was overseas on study leave. Page reported: 'as the collection is looked at in detail, it becomes obvious that we have underestimated the amount of work involved'²⁹. The impact on staffing was an issue. The Library was compelled to use most of the permanent cataloguing staff, senior and junior, on the Hayes operation for two months.³⁰ The impact that this acquisition had on workloads was major. As was pointed out in a memo from October 1967:

The library's intake for the year ending 30th June last was 33 000 books and this required a cataloguing staff of 29 for the full year. The Hayes collection is estimated to contain 25 000 books and on a comparative basis the estimates look low.³¹

Page's memo took no account of the manuscript material. Effectively, with the arrival of the one collection, UQ Library had added to its cataloguing workload for the year by a factor of 75%. Nor had Library management been able to plan for this event as they would have liked. Fielding was away overseas. During his final illness Hayes had signed the documents for the immediate transfer to the UQ. The then head of cataloguing, Mary Rose McCarthy, remembers the collection exercise being organised at very short notice. Available staff were thrown into the fray as it were.³² Yet the whole process was carried out with something akin to

a military operation - she recalls. The Library files support that view with large complicated hands-drawn flow charts mapping the path of items through the system.

As the collection was uncrated, sorted and classified, new treasures continued to be discovered – a first edition copy of Matthew Flinders' Voyage to Terra Australis; all 12 volumes of Gregory Mathews' extremely rare and valuable Birds of Australia and much more.

Marianne Ehrhardt, a reference librarian at the time, spent most of her non-desk hours sorting through manuscripts.

We would take the contents of a large tea chest and tip them out into a makeshift receptacle we created by pushing two study carrels together. We'd sort the material from there. It was easier than reaching into the tea chest.³³

Like prospectors panning for gold in a rich stream, cataloguers discovered new treasures daily. While working on the collection, Ehrhardt recalls:

I saw a page of library subject headings from some library somewhere. On the back of the page, in an exquisite hand, someone had written a poem – the middle part as it transpires. The handwriting was so distinctive. It stayed with me. Days later I found the beginning of the poem. A considerable time later I found the final page. The poem was a version of a Stephanie Mallarmé poem. *A Funeral Toast* translated by Christopher Brennan. I had found the original fair copy sent to *The Bulletin*. It was there among A. G. Stephen's papers³⁴

In an interesting twist Brennan had been employed from September 1895 in the Public Library of New South Wales. His job was to sort and catalogue the Mitchell Collection. He had used the discarded work stationery on which to write his poem.

By July of 1968 Fielding was able to report that:

All the books in the collection are now available to readers. The periodicals will be catalogued and, if shelving was installed, made available during the next long vacation. Good progress is being made on indexing the manuscript collection.

Years later he recalled:

I was blessed throughout my 27 years as University Librarian with a cataloguing department - led by the indefatigable Mary Rose McCarthy - consisting of mainly women who knew they could do anything. As a consequence they took this addition to their cataloguing load in their stride and the books quickly took their place in the Library's records.³⁵

Storage space was a major headache for library administrators of the time. As Fielding recalls:

I was already campaigning for another building that eventually was built as the Central Library but that did not open till five years later. So space in the Duhig Building was already in short supply when the 25 tones of new material arrived.³⁶

In September of 1968 the Vice-Chancellor approved the installation of electrically powered compactus (mobile shelving that runs on tracks) for the Hayes Collection at

a cost of over \$6000.³⁷ This was fitted during Christmas 1968. Effectively this doubled Fryer's storage capacity. Special display cabinets, fittings and other furniture were also acquired.³⁸

While the bulk of the work on the printed material was completed by 1968 the process of sorting and listing the manuscript material was ongoing through the mid 1970s. Margaret Brennan played a major role here. Carol Hetherington was employed on manuscript cataloguing from 1973. She recalls the impact of 'amazing new technologies' on their work – 'a typewriter with memory... You could produce multiple catalogue cards and only have to type the details once!!' ³⁹

As Fielding pointed out, the acquisition of the Hayes Collection made a huge contribution to the research resources of UQ library 'which, up to that time had been primarily only a moderately good resource for undergraduate study and teaching'.⁴⁰ In books on Australian subjects the Library doubled its resources in one intake. It was, as Schonell noted in 1967, 'one of the major collections in Australia' and 'the best collection this university has ever received'.⁴¹ The intervening years have furnished no equivalent nor are the future years ever likely to. Nancy Bonnin effectively sums up the episode in her words to Walter Stone:

The Vice-chancellor contemplates a proper exhibition next year. This is the biggest thing that has ever happened of this nature in the state; and his pride is, if this can be imagined, almost as great as ours.⁴²

† This paper is from a collection of papers written to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Leo Hayes Collection by the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane and is reproduced here by the kind permission of The University of Queensland..

Mark Cryle completed an Honours Degree in History from The University of Queensland.

He has previously published an historical introduction to the University of Queensland Press edition of Tom Petrie's 'Reminiscences (1992)' as well as writing articles for the 'Australian Dictionary of Biography'.

Currently he holds the position of Manager of the Fryer Library at The University of Queensland; having been employed at that university's library for many years as a Senior Librarian.

Mark is also a songwriter, musician and singer and has released CDs of his original music

ENDNOTES:

Unless otherwise stated, all references given here are to documents contained in Fryer Library's Hayes donor file.

1. Interview with Mary Rose McCarthy, 8 Nov 2007.
2. Interview with Marianne Ehrhardt, 9 Nov 2007.
3. Nancy Bonnin to Walter Stone, 1 Nov 1967.
4. Derek Fielding, Hayes Collection – 40th Anniversary, typescript of talk delivered 5 Oct 2007, F.D.O. Fielding Collection, UQFL 126, Box 12.
5. Minutes of the University of Queensland Senate Meeting, 2 Nov 1967.
6. Derek Fielding, Hayes Collection.
7. Minutes of the Senate.
8. Fielding to Hayes, 23 Mar 1966.
9. Spencer Routh to the author, 17 Sept 2007.
10. Bonnin to Hayes, 22 Sept 1965.
11. Fielding, Hayes Collection.
12. Parish News, St Monica's Parish, Oakey, 24 Sept 1967.
13. Bonnin to Hayes, 4 Apr 1967.
14. *The Bulletin*, 26 Nov 1947 p2.
15. Bonnin to Hayes, 5 Jun 1967
16. Hayes to the Registrar, University of Queensland, 13 Oct 1967.
17. *The Catholic Leader*, 2 Nov 1967, p 3.
18. Page to Schonell, 20 Oct 1967.
19. *News Mail*, Bundaberg, 27 Oct 1967.

20. Bonnin to Stone, 1 Nov 1967.
21. Page, Memo to all Library Staff, 23 Oct 1967.
22. Page to Schonell, 20 Oct 1967.
23. Hadgraft to Schonell, 29 Nov 1967.
24. *The Catholic Leader*, 14 Dec 1967.
25. Page, memo, undated.
26. Page to Connell, 30 Oct 1967.
27. Page to Schonell, 6 Feb 1968. They included Margaret Brennan, Margaret Eva and Alison McCreath.
28. Fielding to Schonell, 19 Jun 1968
29. Page to Schonell, 6 Feb 1968.
30. Page to Schonell, 6 Feb 1968.
31. Page to Connell, 30 Oct 1967.
32. Interview with Mary Rose McCarthy, 8 Nov 2007.
33. Interview with Margaret Ehrhardt, 9 Nov 2007.
34. Ibid.
35. Fielding, Hayes Collection
36. Ibid.
37. Fielding to L.J. Teakle, 20 Sept 1968
38. Page to Harris, 25 Mar 1968.
39. Interview with Carol Hetherington, 7 Nov 2007..
40. Fielding, Hayes Collection
41. *The Catholic Leader*, 2 Nov 1967, p3
42. Bonnin to Stone, 1 Nov 1967