National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries

Assessment and report for
Bathurst School of Art Collection, Bathurst Regional Council Library

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National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries

Assessment and report for Bathurst School of Art Collection, Bathurst Regional Council Library

This assessment was undertaken by Sarah-Jane Rennie (Manager, Sector Development) and Lyndel Wischer (Acting General Manager, Programs and Services) of Museums and Galleries NSW in 2007 as part of a project to assess the museums and galleries of Bathurst using the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries Assessment tool.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is recommended that the Bathurst Regional Council Library is managed through a staged process that will both ensure its long term care and provide the Bathurst region with greater access and understanding of the collection.

Stage One
Enter the collection onto the Library’s cataloguing system to improve both collection management and public access. There have been discussions about moving the collection to a future shared storage facility. Cataloguing should happen either prior to or in tandem to such a move to enable a stocktake to be undertaken as the collection is moved.

Stage Two
A workspace needs to be provided in which the collection can be assessed in terms of its significance and preservation needs. The workspace could then be used to undertake preservation activities such as surface cleaning and re-housing. This workspace could be in the existing library or within the future shared storage facility. Items that have been identified as requiring conservation should be sent to a qualified book conservator for conservation repair.

Stage Three
Develop a program of community awareness and engagement. This may be undertaken in collaboration with Charles Sturt University and the Bathurst Historical Society.

Stage Four
A purpose built space should be incorporated into any future Library refurbishment project (such as that outlined in Vision 2012). Such a space could provide for both the School of Arts Collection, photographic and local history collections. The School of Arts Collection could be housed within glass fronted bookcases with study spaces and materials for supervised access to the collection.

BACKGROUND

The collection consists of approximately 2,050 books dating from 1760 through to the 1950s with a “focus on nineteenth century non fiction/reference texts offering an emphasis on Australian, indicative of the earlier, educational role performed by school of arts institutions” (Statement of Significance on State Heritage Register October 2004). Themes covered in the collection include “History (Australian and World), Politics, Exploration, the Sciences and literature” (‘Bathurst School of Art Collection’, Tim Pike 2001)

The collection was developed by the Bathurst School of Arts (1855-1956) and was incorporated into the Bathurst Regional Council Library when it was established in 1956. The collection represents “about 7% of the estimated 30,000 books held in the library in its heyday” (Statement of Significance on State Heritage Register October 2004). “In the financial year 1913-1914 there were 19,736 volumes in the collection from which some 28,277 loans were made (Collection Development Policy, Bathurst Library April 2006).

An initial catalogue of the collection was developed in 1899 with a second catalogue being prepared in 1907, listing books acquired between 1899 and 1907. Books added
to the collection after this date were catalogued along similar lines when the collection
was assessed in 1982.

A number of reports have been prepared on the collection as follows:

December 1982 Rosalind Dorsman (Chief Librarian), Andrew Callan (Librarian)
and Lindy Astill (Typist)
January 2001 Tim Pike
April 2003 Musing Bathurst
October 2004 State Heritage Register Listing Elizabeth Robertson

An application has been submitted to the National Library of Australia’s Community
Heritage grants to undertake a significance assessment an preservation needs
assessment.

The collection is currently located in a series of compactus shelves in a staff only area of
the Library. The area provides a stable, clean environment with minimal light. Library
users can access the collection by request and occasional tours are conducted to the
collection.

The collection is managed within Bathurst Regional Council Library managed by John
Cumberford. The Library sits within the Cultural and Community Services division of
Bathurst Regional Council which is managed by Lesley Atkinson. Collection management
support is provided by Tim Pike, Collection Manager, Bathurst Regional Council.

SELF REVIEW SURVEY

The Self Review Survey provides the backbone of the assessment. It is undertaken by
the organisation prior to the visit by reviewers to provide the reviewers with an
understanding of the organisation and so that the organisation has an opportunity to
reflect on their processes prior to the visit.

In the case of the School of Art collection, some areas of the “National Standards for
Australian Museums & Galleries” are not currently relevant to their operation. The
collection is what is termed a “closed collection”, that is, no further material will be added
or removed from it. Due to its fragility it is currently only accessible in a limited manner
and items within the collection are only rarely on exhibition. This may well change in the
future with the anticipated development of a shared storage facility and the potential
expansion of the Library either on its current or another location.
KEY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COLLECTION

Significance
The collection is highly significant both in terms of its representation of a school of arts library collection and in its capacity to inform a range of researchers interested in the nineteenth and early twentieth century history of Australia. Contained within the collection are highly significant books such as a “1792 publication featuring scenes of old Sydney Town by ‘Captain Hunter’” (Statement of Significance on State Heritage Register October 2004). There are also documents that provide an insight into the operation of the Bathurst School of Arts such as the original minute book that documents the creation of the School of Arts and its library, a visitors book 1899-1913 and the 1899 Rules of the Bathurst School of Arts Library.

It is understood that an application has been put to the National Library of Australia’s Community Heritage Grants program to fund a significance assessment and preservation needs assessment of the collection. This would be a great opportunity to improve the Library’s understanding of the significance of the collection and its ongoing needs.

If the collection has not been independently valued, this should also be undertaken as it is anticipated that this collection would have high monetary value as well as its broader cultural significance.

Research
The collection provides a great range of research opportunities for those interested in nineteenth century history. As well as significant publications related to the history of NSW in areas including population statistics, geography, government administration and politics, the collection contains material of great relevance to broader nineteenth century research including Encyclopedia Britannica and themes such as science, geography and literature.

Community Engagement
Once the collection is in a sound condition and access can be provided in an appropriate space, there is great potential for the collection to engage with a broader cross section of the community. In terms of direct engagement, this is likely to be primarily researchers as outlined above and would include high school and university students, family historians, local historians, academics, heritage advisors and architects. Bathurst is fortunate to have a range of educational facilities within the city including Charles Sturt University, the Western Institute of TAFE, the Mitchell Conservatorium of Music and numerous public and private schools, all of which house students and staff who could be interested in undertaking research with the collection.

Beyond these primary researchers, there is a further group of artists who could gain inspiration from the collection including writers, playwrights, artists and performers.

To ensure community support and engagement, it may be possible to establish a Friends of the School of Art Collection. Alternatively, it may be possible to form a support network from existing groups such as the Friends of Bathurst Library and the Bathurst District Historical Society.
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Conservation/preservation

To an extent, the collection is currently in a state of benign neglect. The library has been undertaking a great deal of planning as is reflected in the Vision 2012 document and has wisely chosen to leave the School of Arts Collection in its current state until resources become available to undertake conservation and preservation activities. Overall the collection is in fair condition and is housed in a stable, clean environment with minimal lighting.

However, there are a great number of books with physical damage that prevents them being accessed by library users (books with damaged spines is estimated at 352 in Tim Pike’s report of 2001). The shelving appears to be overcrowded which has the potential to exacerbate damage to the collection. Pulling fragile books in and out of this shelving will cause abrasion and there is a high potential for greater physical damage. This could be readily rectified by providing a further row of shelves that would allow the collection to be spread out and lessen potential for damage.

Overcrowding is an issue for the School of Arts book collection

It is strongly recommended that the collection is not accessed any more than is absolutely necessary until it has been thoroughly examined and a long term preservation strategy is developed providing:

- A list of any books that cannot be accessed until they have been conserved
- An outline of any conservation requirements for the collection, both in terms of the overall collection and individual items
- Guidelines on handling the collection for both staff and library users
- A plan for undertaking conservation of collection items

The report of 2001 mentions rebinding, considering the age and significance of the books, it is suggested that the bindings are conserved and repaired rather than undertaking any rebinding as this will reduce the significance of the books. As stated in
the 2001 report “Any remediation done on the bookes should not destroy or damage the original form of binding” (Pike 2001).

It may be that such an assessment identifies only a small number of books that cannot be accessed by library users.

Access
It is important that the community of the Bathurst region can access this significant collection. At present the only detailed information about the collection are the original handwritten catalogues of 1899 and 1907, the typed copies and additional listing created in 1982 and the excel spreadsheets of 2001. The 2001 report, 2004 listing on the State Heritage register and the 2006 Collection Development Policy all mention putting the collection into a database. The State Heritage register listing mentions cataloguing the collection onto “Bathurst City Library’s database using standard AACRII and MARC cataloguing procedures” whilst the 2006 Collection Development Policy suggests that “The collection could be catalogued onto Libraries Australia” (Collection Development Policy, Bathurst Library April 2006).

Once the collection has been assessed and necessary conservation work undertaken, access to the collection by Library users should be increased. However, given the value and rarity of some items within the collection, access should be provided in a supervised environment. Ideally the collection would be housed in the vicinity of the local studies and photographic collections (including the Gregory and Main Street collections) preferably in a visible but controlled storage system such as glass fronted book shelves. However, this is a long term goal and in the meantime, it may be possible to store the collection in its current location and provide library users which books by request. In the medium term, it may be possible to store the collection in the shared storage facility and incorporate a research room in that facility for both the School of Arts collection and other collections stored there.
**Synergies with other collections**

Once the significance assessment has been undertaken, the relationship of the collection with other collections within the Bathurst Region should be examined. In particular, how does the collection relate to Chifley Home, the Bathurst District Historical Society Museum and Miss Traill’s House? Can information in the School of Arts Collection improve the interpretation of these significant sites and collections of Bathurst?
NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR AUSTRALIAN MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

The following comments have been provided by the reviewers and incorporate information gained from both the Self Review Survey completed by John Cumberford (Bathurst Regional Council Librarian) and the site visit undertaken by Sarah-Jane Rennie (Manager, Sector Development) and Lyndel Wischer (Acting General Manager, Programs and Services).

This assessment has been undertaken of the Bathurst School of Arts Collection as it fits within the broader Bathurst Regional Council Library structure. As such, whilst the broader activities of the Library are considered, in general comments are addressed at the School of Arts collection rather than the broader library context.

Part B- Involving communities

This section focuses on how the collection is accessed by the community and how the community is involved in its management, interpretation and access. As the collection is currently not in a state for broad community access, much of this is not currently relevant. However, it should be taken into account when planning for the future use of the collection. It is suggested that a Friends of the School of Arts Book Collection could be established to assist with support activities such as fundraising and community awareness. Rather than a separate entity this could be a collaborative project of the Bathurst Historical Society and a ‘Friends of the Library’ type organisation.

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<th>Standard</th>
<th>Reviewer Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B 1.1</strong> The museum includes a wide range of people from its community in its management and programs</td>
<td>The Library sits within council’s management structure and as such its management is a council operation. As the future of the collection is planned, consider who in the community needs to be engaged in the ongoing care, use and promotion of the collection.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B1.2</strong> The museum involves and collaborates with many different groups and individuals when it develops and presents public programs</td>
<td>As with B1.1, as access to the collection increases, local and specialist organisations could be engaged in a range of activities around the collection including research into the collection, creating artistic works (such as performances, paintings, drawings, poems and novels) inspired by the collection and annual lectures focusing on material contained within the collection.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B1.3</strong> The museum consults with relevant local and/or specialist communities and seeks their advice on the preservation and presentation of their history and culture.</td>
<td>As the future of the collection is planned, there are a range of local and specialist organisations who could be involved in the ongoing care, use and promotion of the collection including, the Bathurst Family History group, Bathurst Historical Society, regional family history, genealogy and local history groups, CSU arts faculty students and staff, Chifley Home, Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum, heritage consultants and local historians.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B 1.4</strong> The museum carries out its activities as part of a broader</td>
<td>When the collection is more accessible, it is possible to use it as a focus within the Library for</td>
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community and contributes to community events  |  events such as history, library and heritage weeks.

| **B 2.1** The museum selects significant stories to highlight based on what is most relevant to its purpose and audiences. | This collection is primarily a highly significant research resource as opposed to an exhibition based collection. Through the work that has been undertaken in previous reports, there is a fair understanding of the main themes of the collection. However, the collection would greatly benefit from a detailed significance assessment of the collection as a whole and of individual items within the collection. This would be easier to undertake once the collection has been entered onto a database so that cross referencing can be used to better understand the collection.

A clear history of the development of the Bathurst School of Arts and those associated with it would greatly assist in understanding the significance of this collection to Bathurst and the state of NSW. This material could then be used as a basis for further activities and promotion of the collection. |

| **B2.2** The museum’s exhibitions, activities and events are based on sound research and current museum practice. | Much of this standard is not of direct relevance to a research based collection. However, as research is undertaken, it is important that it is undertaken utilising the principles outlined in this standards. |

| **B2.3** The museum’s displays, activities and events offer visitors opportunities to get involved and learn something new | The collection is not very accessible at present due to its fragile state and lack of computer cataloguing. Once it is more accessible the issues outlined in this standard should be addressed as part of the future plans for the collection. |

| **B3.1** The museum knows who its current and potential audiences are and has strategies to attract and retain them | Whilst the collection is not greatly accessed at the moment, the Library has good information on its overall users as well as those accessing specific areas, such as the local history collection. This information can inform future planning for the collection. If data on the collection can be provided on line, it would be useful to incorporate tracking of this as well as those physically accessing the collection. |

| **B3.2** The museum promotes its key attractions, programs and services | The Library as a whole provides excellent promotion of its services both to its community and visitors. As the School of Arts collection becomes more accessible, it can be more actively incorporated into this promotion. |

| **B3.3** The museum provides information to help visitors locate the museum and find their way around while they are there | The Library as a whole provides excellent information to assist users. As the School of Arts collection becomes more accessible, it can be more actively incorporated into this. The particular needs of the collection and its users should be |
### Part C: Developing a significant collection

The collection is essentially closed providing a window into a specific time in Bathurst's past. This influences the manner in which the collection is managed as there should be little material accessioned into or deaccessioned from the collection. Its significances lies in its representation of a School of Art collection and in its ongoing research value for the community of the Bathurst region. At present its capacity to be used by the community is limited by the poor state some of the books are in. It is recommended that the assessment and conservation of the collection is considered a priority so that the collection can continue to be used by its community into the future. As it is anticipated that there will be ongoing use of the collection, this needs to be taken into account with future management of the collection in terms of its location and housing. For example it may be better to store the collection in a manner in which the spines of the books can be readily viewed using a technique such as book shoes rather than storing each book in an individual box.

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<td><strong>C1.1.1</strong> Key Collecting areas are based on the museum’s statement of purpose, key topics, themes and stories, and the communities it serves</td>
<td>The collection is incorporated into the Library’s overarching collection policy. As a closed collection, the collection should not be further developed.</td>
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<td><strong>C1.1.2</strong> The Collection Policy and Procedures explain procedures and criteria for acquisitions, documentation, cataloguing, loans, deaccessioning. Guidelines on</td>
<td>These are discussed in the Bathurst Regional Council Library Collection Development Policy. However, it would be good to provide further detail in relation to the School of Art Collection, in particular in relation to guidelines on how</td>
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<tr>
<td>C1.2.1 Decisions about acquisitions, deaccessioning and care of collections are based on significance assessments.</td>
<td>The collection is closed which will limit considerations for accessioning or deaccessioning. However, it is recommended that a significance assessment is undertaken to guide its future conservation.</td>
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<td>C1.2.2 The most important collection items are picked out, and their significance is researched and documented.</td>
<td>It is understood that an application has been put in for a Community Heritage Grant with the National Library of Australia to assist with assessing the significance of the collection. It is suggested that the collection is also valued as it is thought that some books within the collection would be of high monetary value.</td>
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<td>C1.3 The museum aims to have unconditional ownership of its collection</td>
<td>The collection is closed and was absorbed into the Bathurst Library when it was established in 1956.</td>
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| C1.4.1 The collection documentation system includes:  
- an Accession Register (including a unique numbering system)  
- a Catalogue (paper or electronic) including a minimum data set  
- Object Files (research notes, newspaper clippings). | At present the only detailed information about the collection are the original handwritten catalogues of 1899 and 1907, the typed copies and additional listing created in 1982 and the excel spreadsheets of 2001. The 2001 report, 2004 listing on the state heritage register and the 2006 collection development policy all mention putting the collection into a database. The State Heritage register listing mentions cataloguing the collection onto “Bathurst City Library’s database using standard AACRII and MARC cataloguing procedures” whilst the 2006 collection development policy suggests that “The collection could be catalogued onto Libraries Australia” (Collection Development Policy, Bathurst Library April 2006). It is important that the collection is incorporated into the council’s existing collection database system prior to any future moves to ensure its appropriate management. The inclusion on either the Library’s system or Libraries Australia would ensure that the collection was accessible to the broadest possible audience. |
| C1.4.2 Records of the collection are safely stored and procedures for back-up copies are in place. | Future cataloguing of the collection onto the Library’s system will ensure the ongoing management of the records. |
| C1.5 The museum plans digitisation projects carefully so they reflect the museum’s priorities and are tailored to its resources. | The collection has not been digitized. It is not clear that this would be appropriate. If considering digitising material within the collection, ensure that all aspects are considered in advance. |
including how the digitised images are going to be stored and accessed, that the software and hardware used is able to be upgraded over time and that the process used doesn’t cause damage to the items being digitized.

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<th>C2.1.1 Policies and procedures reflect the principles of preventive conservation.</th>
<th>It is understood that an application has been put in for a Community Heritage Grant with the National Library of Australia to assist with an assessment of the preservation needs of the collection. Policies and procedures for the ongoing care and use of the collection will be developed out of this report.</th>
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<tr>
<td>C2.1.2 A Preventive Conservation Strategy is in place.</td>
<td>The plan should consider both the significance and conservation needs of the collection and outline strategies for the management of the collection both in storage and in use by Library users.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2.1.3 The Preventive Conservation Strategy is based on reputable materials, conservation information and advice.</td>
<td>The strategy should be undertaken by a book conservation specialist who can provide current advice on approaches to book specific issues such as the conservation of book spines and ongoing care, management and use of the collection.</td>
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<td>C2.1.4 Guidelines and training about preventive conservation are readily available to all museum workers.</td>
<td>Bathurst Regional Council have a collections manager who provides ongoing guidance on the overall care of all council’s collections. Once the collection has been assessed and its future access determined, guidelines and training may need to be undertaken with those supervising access to the collection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2.2 The museum strives to create and maintain an appropriate and stable environment for its collection</td>
<td>The collection is securely stored in the Library’s stack area with low light levels and a clean, stable environment. It may be worth considering monitoring for pests and utilising a data logger for a period to assess the relative humidity and temperature. The needs of the collection and its use should be considered when planning a new location for the collection.</td>
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<td>C2.3 The museum’s display, storage and handling methods minimise risks to the collection</td>
<td>The collection is currently in storage with little material on exhibition or provision of public access. The shelving doesn’t appear to be quite enough for the size of the collection causing pressure on a number of books and increasing the risk of damage to the books if they are pulled in and out. This could be alleviated by removing a few books from the shelves thus reducing pressure.</td>
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There has been discussion about providing an individual box for each book. Whilst this will provide protection for the books from dust and pollution infiltration and will assist in holding damaged books together, there is a great increase in handling when books are housed in such a manner. Further, the significance of the books is in their holistic appearance as a School of Arts Library, this is reduced if the books are housed in boxes and thus can’t be viewed. An alternative method would be to create “Book Shoes” for the collection that provide support but still allow the collection to be viewed. Book shoes also provide support for the text block that is not as easy to achieve in a box. Information on books shoes is included in documentation accompanying this report.

In the long term, the collection could be housed in glass fronted shelves which would protect it from dust and allow Library users to view the collection without security risks.

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<th>C2.4</th>
<th>The museum makes decisions about conservation treatments based on current conservation advice and practices.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>With the work of a dedicated collection manager, Bathurst Regional Council has an impressive track record of ensuring that advice is sought in relation to all conservation activities. It is recommended that a book conservation specialist undertakes a preservation/conservation assessment of the collection so that current advice on approaches to book specific issues such as the conservation of book spines and ongoing care, management and use of the collection can be provided.</td>
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<td>It is important that the overcrowded storage has been addressed prior to the treatment of the collection to ensure that the books are appropriately housed after treatment. In the medium term, this may be as simple as providing one more shelf for storage.</td>
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<th>C2.5</th>
<th>The museum has identified, and is able to respond to, all potential threats to the collection</th>
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<td>Bathurst Regional Council have undertaken an impressive Disaster Planning exercise incorporating a risk assessment of each site, the development of a disaster response plan, the provision of site specific first response charts and training of staff and volunteers. Council is to be highly commended for this undertaking which is all too often left as a low priority until after a disaster has occurred.</td>
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<td>When undertaking changes to sites or locations in the future, it is important to undertake a risk assessment in light of changed conditions. Similarly if an incident does occur, ensure that a debrief is undertaken afterwards to assess the effectiveness of the plan.</td>
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Appendix 1 – Putting Shoes on Duke Humfrey