

Obituary

Mary Elhonor Lucy Archer, first Chief Librarian of the organisation now known as CSIRO, died on 3 May 1979 at the age of 85.

To many readers of this *Journal* she will be little more than a name as she retired in 1954. A detailed article on her career appeared in the *Australian Library Journal* (V22, no 10, pp415-417, November 1973) on the occasion of her 80th birthday.

It is not my intention to recapitulate those details but to try to give an impression of the dynamism that kept her interested and alert to the end of her long and active life.

In reading through some of the talks she gave it has been brought home to me again how well the library network that she established has stood the test of time and how little, fundamentally, it has changed. The technology may be more sophisticated but the concept of individual libraries, each geared to the needs of its specialist clientele but linked by centralised services, still has validity.

The number of published papers to be credited to Miss Archer is not great. She was far too busy organising meetings, exhorting her staff to study, and travelling to divisional libraries to put pen to paper very often. But when she did it was always to give practical, down-to-earth advice to those struggling to make li-



Elhonor Archer

brarianship, and most particularly special librarianship, in Australia a worthwhile profession.

She acknowledged her good fortune to have been set on the right path by help from the Public Library of Victoria when she wrote in an article on CSIRO libraries: 'Fortunately for us ... the Executive Committee had the great good sense to arrange that almost from the beginning the library should be organised on orthodox lines ... For those days it was quite unusual foresight on the part of men who themselves could have had little knowledge of library affairs ... It is such a pity that even today there are government departments and institutions which do not realise that amateur methods in a library are a waste of time and money'. But she came to realise that some different approaches were necessary in special libraries, which were virtually a new concept in Australia, when she said 'In a public lending library the

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more the book is off the shelf, the better it is earning its keep, but in the specialist library, the holdings of which have been collected together for the use of the specialist and mostly at his suggestion, extensive lending between library and library is not always to be indefinitely encouraged'. 'The amount of subject indexing to be undertaken in a special library is practically always a very controversial matter and I do not think we are anywhere nearer a solution of the problem in Australia than anywhere else'. *Jean Conochie*

New generations of librarians came to know Miss Archer not only through the admiring stories told by their seniors, but personally because she was assiduous in attending meetings of the Victorian Branch, LAA, and other similar get-togethers right up until a few years before her death.

Her retirement was a very active one. For the Women of the University Fund she raised money through collecting and selling secondhand books. The Governor of Victoria allowed her to use a room in the Government House Mews for this purpose. From there she often telephoned various librarians with news of splendid discoveries at bargain prices.

Immediately after her retirement, and for some years, she did some cataloguing for the State Film Centre and gave cataloguing advice to other bodies. She was also an assiduous traveller and showed that her botanical expertise and interests were still very much alive during a long trip to New Guinea where she collected specimens along the Sepik River.

In all, she remained a person of keen mind, great activity, and with her energy and optimism set