

JEAN ARNOT MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP ESSAY – COVER SHEET

About the Jean Arnot Memorial Fellowship 2012:

The Fellowship is funded by the National Council of Women of New South Wales and the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Association. Jean Arnot was very active in both these associations. To keep the memory of Jean and her achievements alive the fellowship is offered each year to a female librarian who has written an outstanding unpublished original essay on librarianship. Judging is by the Mitchell Librarian at the State Library of New South Wales.



Miss Arnot

About Jean Arnot:

It was not Jean's original preference to become a librarian; she would have preferred a career in science. Nevertheless she devoted 47 years to working at the State Library of New South Wales as reference librarian, cataloguer and outreach librarian. She was passionate about providing better access to library services. She devoted a further twenty years in 'retirement' to librarianship. She was active in her trade union and after thirty years secured equal pay for women at the State Library. She was a founding member of the library professional association (ALIA) as well as many other community and state organisations such as the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Association. She spoke widely at conferences, dinners and to the media promoting libraries, their future, her ideas and women's rights.

More info: <http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/arnot-jean-fleming-14114>



About the essay author Rose Holley:

It was not Rose's original preference to become a librarian; she would have preferred a career working with animals. Nevertheless she has devoted the last 28 years to working in libraries in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. Starting out as a reference librarian, then cataloguer she is now a digital library specialist. She has worked for the last five years at the National Library of Australia as Manager of the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program and then Trove, the national discovery service. She is passionate about providing better access to library content and enabling social engagement online. She is active in the library professional association (ALIA) raising and explaining digital issues for libraries and librarians. She speaks widely at conferences, workshops and to the media promoting libraries, their future and her ideas. More info: <http://rose-holley.blogspot.com.au/>
Publications: <http://eprints.rclis.org/>

About the essay 'Harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation':

This essay has been written for the Jean Arnot Memorial Fellowship. The views expressed are my own and not those of my employer. The essay draws on my experience managing innovative library services that engage crowds such as The Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program and Trove, and my ongoing research into library, archive and museum crowdsourcing projects. I have put this experience and knowledge into the context of Jean Arnot's values and visions for Australian libraries. Jean Arnot, the distinguished Australian librarian, described her vision for an innovative library service over sixty years ago. I suggest how some of her goals are now being achieved through use of the internet and digital technologies, and how we can build on these to ensure that libraries remain valued and relevant by harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation they serve.

Harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation: new opportunities for libraries in a time of change.

Rose Holley. 24 March 2012

Jean Arnot's values and visions

Jean Arnot, Australian librarian (1903-1995)¹ was trained in public library reference work and cataloguing. She developed forward thinking attitudes and ideas on librarianship, which she effectively communicated. Jean Arnot's values and visions for libraries from sixty years ago are still relevant today. Some of her ideas that were never achieved in her lifetime can be implemented now in 2012, and to an even greater extent than she imagined possible, through use of the internet and digital technologies.

Jean campaigned for thirty years to gain equal pay for women. In 1961 the State Library of New South Wales, her employer for 47 years, finally awarded equal pay for work of equal value. Jean was equally passionate about providing equal access to libraries and expanding the library network around Australia. Jean's father ran a private lending library. This background² influenced both her career choice and her views on the right of all Australians to have free access to libraries. She particularly wanted there to be libraries in remote outback areas, also in prisons, hospitals, mental institutions and child welfare homes. The latter she achieved by writing an influential report into the need for a co-ordinated library service. In the 1940's, access to libraries mainly meant borrowing books. Jean's views on access to libraries in 1947 were considered so radical that they generated several articles in the Sydney Morning Herald, one of which described Jean as "*young, vital and red-headed*". She had an animated smile, was 44 at the time and had already worked in libraries for 26 years.

Her big idea in 1947 was that a 'Flying Library Service' should be established, operating in a similar manner to the 'Flying Doctor Service'. She said "*The Flying Doctor Service brings health to the body; the Flying Library Service will bring health to the mind for all Australians*". She believed that access to books for learning, research and leisure should be a right not a privilege. She spoke about her ideas at the annual ALIA conference and headlines in the Sydney Morning Herald read '*Words should have wings*'³ and '*Flying libraries wanted for outback people*'⁴. Jean is quoted as saying:

"In Australia there are large areas in which it will not be possible to establish libraries for many years. The people of the western district of New South Wales, Central Australia, parts of North Queensland and the northern and eastern districts of Western Australia need a regular library service of new books. To the people of these areas books are just as much a necessity as they are to city people, maybe more so. I frequently get poignant requests from children who live miles from the nearest railhead, who undertake their lessons by correspondence and who have no form of literary relaxation. I do what I can for them, but so much more could be done. The State Public Libraries must act in supplying a need where there is no local library. Children in particular in the outback are not only deprived of the ordinary sources of education but are isolated from the company and friendship of other children. We can lead them to better things than they now expect."

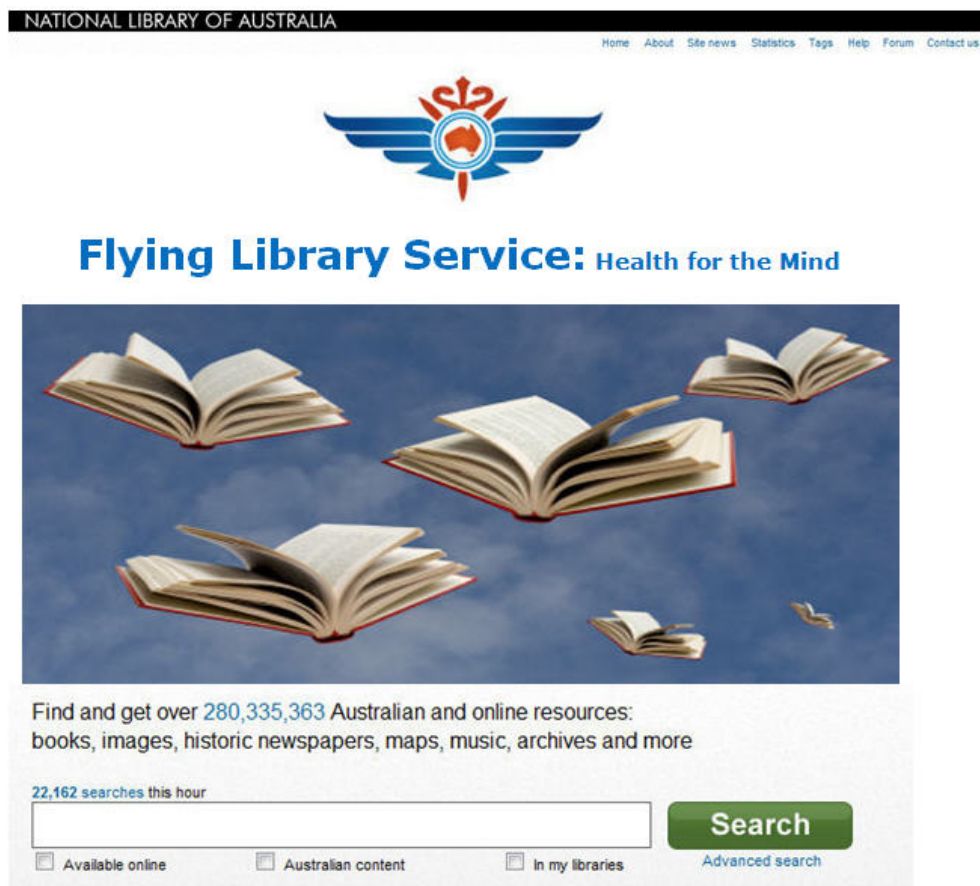
Two years later Jean visited several public county library systems in the UK to examine their mobile library services. Back then 'mobile' meant a van, not an iPhone app. The British aim was that no one should be more than a mile from a library. On returning to Australia she realised that our vast country meant it was not feasible to implement vans, but instead clung to her idea of planes, this time in combination with trains. She suggested that libraries could be transported by trains, stopping in sidings overnight and operating like a movable technical

college. The Sydney Morning Herald headlines ran: *'Train, plane and book-mobiles planned for NSW'* ⁵.

Jean understood that a national infrastructure was necessary to achieve her mobile library vision for Australia. She suggested that states pool their resources together to buy a fleet of planes and stock for the service. There were excuses not to, such as books being too heavy to fly around. Of course this was long before the idea of the internet and e-books had been thought of. She countered this criticism by suggesting the establishment of book depots at strategic points in the outback.

All this tells us that Jean thought libraries were core to society, especially for childhood reading and adult education and they should be available to every Australian no matter where they lived. She saw the solution as 'going mobile'. Rock on Jean. If only I could tell her that sixty years later we still agree with her vision.

If Jean was still alive I could tell her that the National Library of Australia has implemented a 'Flying Library Service', known as Trove ⁶. It is a free discovery service where anyone can find and access almost 300 million books, journals, newspaper articles, photographs, manuscripts and more, from over 1,000 libraries, museums and archives around Australia. All they need is a computer and an internet connection. Of course I'd have to explain to Jean about the computer, internet, digitisation, e-books, e-journals, mobile applications and devices. If Jean had implemented Trove the home page may look a little different to what it does now....



The image shows a screenshot of the National Library of Australia's Trove website. At the top, there is a black navigation bar with the text "NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA" on the left and a series of small links: "Home", "About", "Site news", "Statistics", "Tags", "Help", "Forum", and "Contact us" on the right. Below the navigation bar is the National Library of Australia logo, which features a stylized red and blue emblem with a central shield and wings. Underneath the logo is the heading "Flying Library Service: Health for the Mind" in blue text. The main content area features a large image of several open books floating in a blue sky with light clouds. Below the image, the text reads: "Find and get over 280,335,363 Australian and online resources: books, images, historic newspapers, maps, music, archives and more". Below this text, it says "22,162 searches this hour". There is a search input field with a green "Search" button to its right. Below the search field, there are three checkboxes: "Available online", "Australian content", and "In my libraries". To the right of these checkboxes is a link for "Advanced search".

Jean would be interested to know that Trove exists because of a decision made thirty years ago that the National Library of Australia would lead the development of a national union catalogue, a ground breaking concept at that time. Being a cataloguer, Jean understood the importance of union catalogues even though they didn't exist then. Before her idea of a 'Flying Library Service' Jean published her major professional work: a bibliography of newspapers held at the State Library of NSW, to help provide greater access to newspapers. Her bibliography was published fifteen years before the Australian union list of newspapers. Just imagine her ecstasy if I told her that six million newspaper pages are digitised and freely searchable and accessible in Trove.

I think that if Jean lived now she would be very interested in mobile applications, e-books and e-readers and the use of social media in libraries to bridge distances and connect with communities. She would be pleased to know that the government is bringing broadband access to remote communities so that they can access everything on the internet. Jean would probably be giving her views on the future of libraries to another well known red-head up at Parliament House.

But I don't want to stop there and say that we have achieved all of Jean's Arnot's visions through development of the internet and digital technologies, because we still have a big problem. A core concept of Jean's was that libraries were essential, valued and core to society, to all people in all geographic locations. In 67 working years she observed the replacement of small private commercial lending libraries with free co-ordinated public library services. She was active in making this happen. It is now this very concept that is being questioned and must be addressed by our profession. My question is "*as librarians what can we do to ensure that our profession continues to be relevant, valued and core to society?*" On the surface it may appear that utilising emerging and digital technologies is the answer, but these are just tools that we are already using. It will take more than that. The future of librarianship is threatened. The time for complacency and conservative thinking is over. As a profession we urgently need to develop a vision for the future. This vision should harness the unique value of our libraries and our points of difference from other information services. Our vision should be so ground-breaking and engaging that it makes headlines in the Sydney Morning Herald, just as Jean's did.

The value and relevance of libraries today and in the future

The value and relevance of libraries is two-fold. It lies in both our collections and in the community that creates, uses, and values these collections.

1. Our collections

Our collections are extensive. They are both unique and priceless, and common and mundane. The single common denominator between all library collections is that the community want them digitally accessible. Not just the catalogue records, but the entire contents. But the operational budgets of libraries (staffing, digitisation, online delivery) are decreasing whilst capital budgets (content buying, building works) are remaining static. This is a big problem because libraries need an increased operational budget to digitise and maintain digital collections.

2. Our Community

Libraries are in essence about people. As a profession we value the community both inside and outside our walls. Increasingly we know that for each person we physically

see there are many more virtual visitors that we don't. This invisible community accesses our collections from the comfort of their own home if they can, whilst still retaining the desire to visit our safe, contemplative library spaces to use our unique non-digitised collections. The community can be thought of as a crowd or hive mind, for they often want the same things from us and give us the same feedback. The internet has enabled the community to network and communicate with each other, becoming a virtual crowd with a common voice.

Crowdsourcing and cognitive surplus

Clay Shirky has written extensively on the phenomenon of individuals working together online as a virtual crowd in his book *'Here comes everybody'*⁷. He provides case studies of amazing outcomes that have been achieved rapidly, on a scale not seen before, by people getting together on the internet. The most well-known example is the creation of the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, by millions of volunteers. This type of activity is commonly referred to as 'crowdsourcing'. The individuals that make up the crowd each perform micro-tasks but together they achieve a big goal 'for the common good'. Crowdsourcing may also be loosely and variously referred to as online collaboration, participatory culture, digital volunteering, virtual volunteering, citizen science, web 2.0, Gov 2.0, open government, social engagement, participatory collective knowledge, wisdom of crowds, and citizen centric services.

Shirky focuses on the ways in which the actions of a group add up to something more important than just individual gains: to a group goal. Hence, crowdsourcing is more than just social engagement or the use of social media, because it has specific and significant group goals and outcomes. Shirky coined the much quoted phrase "*the Internet runs on love*" to describe the nature of such collaborations i.e. people do it because they want to, because they love what they are doing. Libraries have harnessed the internet, but have not yet focused on using it to achieve positive effects, ambitious goals or solve problems with large collective groups.

Shirky wondered how anyone has the time to undertake major online collaborative activities and what motivates them to do so. In his second book *'Cognitive surplus: Creativity and generosity in a connected age'*⁸ he examines this topic in more detail. 'Cognitive surplus' means the free time that people have in which they could be creative or use their brain. Many people spend their 'cognitive surplus' time by watching hours of television, gaming, surfing the internet or reading. However, due to the increased availability of the internet in households, the rise of social media technology, and the desire of people to be creative rather than consumptive, there is now a major change in use of cognitive surplus time. People want to produce and share just as much if not more than consume. Due to new forms of online collaboration and participation, people are seeking out and becoming very productive in online social endeavours. Shirky hypothesizes that there is huge potential for creative human endeavour if the billions of hours that people watch TV are channelled into useful causes instead.

Luis Von Ahn's 2011 TedX talk⁹ on large scale online collaboration described how each year 750 million people are unwittingly converting the equivalent of 2.5 million books into digital text by using his reCAPTCHA program. He says:

"If you look at humanities large scale achievements, really big things that humanity got together to do, like building the pyramids of Egypt, the Panama Canal or putting a man on the moon, there is a curious fact about them. They are all done with about the same number of

people. They were all done with about 100,000 people. And the reason for that is before the internet co-ordinating more than 100,000 people, let alone paying them was essentially impossible. But now with the internet I've just shown you a project (reCAPTCHA) where we got 750 million people to help digitise human knowledge. My question is.... if we can put a man on the moon with 100 thousand people what can we do with 100 million people?"

This is a very good question that the library profession should be asking itself: how can libraries use this 'cognitive surplus'? To put it simply we have millions of people connected to the internet, many with a surplus of free time on their hands, who value libraries, librarians and our unique collections and would be willing to help us. My vision is that as a profession, on a national or international scale, we should harness this opportunity and call for their help.

Examples of how individuals in an online crowd help

Crowdsourcing can harness seven broad areas: opinions (for example rating content); ideas; adding knowledge; categorising and classifying; skills that require a human eye or hand; creation of new content; lobbying; and raising funds.

Examples of large goals achieved through crowdsourcing by non-profit organisations are: transcription of handwritten resources to create full-text searchable databases e.g. births deaths and marriages, census, shipping, and weather records; digitising out-of-copyright books and making them freely available; photographing museum objects with mobile phones and uploading them to catalogue records thereby creating a visual record; classifying and describing knitting patterns, weather records, photographs of the galaxy, menu cards and old photographs hence enabling online discovery and use; and creating new content, for example photographs of every day life, to record the social fabric of the nation and the times.

Since 2008 the National Library of Australia has harnessed the cognitive surplus of the nation for the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program. The library made an open call for people to: test the beta version and generate development ideas for the service; find missing newspaper issues for digitisation, and undertake newspaper text correction to help improve the quality of searching. Of its own accord the crowd also decided to: suggest further titles for digitisation; raise funds for newspaper digitisation (crowdfunding); run workshops on using the Australian Newspapers service, develop screencasts on using the service; create e-books from short stories in the newspapers; and speak to the media on their volunteer work to encourage others to participate.

This example demonstrates that although you can direct a crowd on your main goals the crowd often develops its own goals which may create more benefits than those initially identified and anticipated. The more "open" a project is the better it is likely to become. This is often characterised as 'the wisdom of the crowd'.

People join crowdsourcing projects for six main reasons: to help a worthy cause; learn and discover new things; be in a community; have fun; be challenged; and do something interesting. They stay because they develop a passion for the activity. Passion not only motivates the crowd but brings the project to the attention of others. Human nature is inherently honest, and most people want to do some good in the world if they can.

Crowds contain three types of people: highly active, casual, and one-time contributors. Whilst the highly active group undertake most of the work, when small contributions are made in large quantities they add up. The only common denominator individuals have is their passion. The online community is as diverse as the physical community and encompasses all ages and

occupations. The most active contributors are frequently those with a full-time job. In this respect Jean Arnot would be typical of a highly active individual in the crowd. The activities she undertook would have been achieved more quickly with the internet, social media and by crowdsourcing. An article about her life ¹⁰ notes that in her thirty year campaign for equal pay “she travelled to all the States and did the work in her two weeks annual holidays and on her weekends”. Also: “After her retirement, Arnot said her brain did not stop functioning.” This is why she worked at an antiquarian bookseller cataloguing and classifying Australian material for another eight years. She continued other voluntary activities for another twenty years. It is likely if she lived now she would be actively involved in some of the crowdsourcing projects I have mentioned that describe, classify and correct resources. She would not have hesitated to call on the community to help libraries. An advert was placed in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1942 by the State Library of New South Wales calling for volunteers. Jean co-ordinated the volunteers who packed up newspapers and manuscripts and sent them to secret locations for safekeeping during the war ¹¹. Later the volunteers helped move books into the new Mitchell Library.

Examples of libraries harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation

There are very few large scale examples of libraries harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation through crowdsourcing projects. In common with the broader “cultural” sector, crowdsourcing in libraries still is fragmented and very tentative, despite it being well over ten years since the principles and results of community online collaboration have been proven in practice, rather than theory. There is still very little collaboration on tools for crowdsourcing such as transcription tools, or platforms to harness and co-ordinate the community.

Crowdsourcing has gained greater traction in the world of science where it is referred to as ‘citizen science’ and large projects such as Galaxy Zoo ¹² are well established with significant outcomes. Citizen science places great value in the community and recognises that passionate amateurs may have equal if not greater knowledge and interest in some subjects than professional experts. Although equally true in the world of culture, it is not generally recognised by social science and humanity scholars who prefer to retain “ivory tower” thinking.

The National Library of Australia has led the way with crowdsourcing for libraries. It has set an international example of how to harness the cognitive surplus of the nation with the *Australian Newspapers* service ¹³. The community is able to improve the computer generated text in digitised historic newspapers by a ‘text correction’ facility, thereby improving the search results in the service. Since implementation in 2008, 40,000 people have corrected 52 million lines of text ¹⁴. Strong interest was shown by most European national libraries, with the initiative being widely recognised and praised. In 2010 the National Library of Finland was the second library to implement community newspaper text correction in their *Digitalkoot* crowdsourcing project ¹⁵. So far 50,000 people have corrected the text to 99% accuracy. In 2011 the New York Public Library released ‘*What’s on the menu?*’ ¹⁶, a crowdsourcing project where the community transcribe text from digitised menus held in the library’s collection. So far 800,000 dishes have been transcribed from 12,000 menus, making them full-text searchable. This year, the fourth large scale library crowdsourcing project was released by the Bodleian Library. ‘*What’s the score?*’ ¹⁷ is a project where the community can help describe the vast music score collection at Oxford.

Each of these four projects work by breaking down big tasks into micro-tasks and harnessing a large community of people to achieve a big outcome. The newspaper projects have a particular appeal to each nation they serve. In each case some cognitive thinking is required to

do the task, but not for the way it is done, which is kept very simple. The projects make it easy to participate. It is immediately apparent to the crowd how their assistance helps the library, the community and the nation.

Why should libraries harness the cognitive surplus of the nation?

Why should libraries harness the cognitive surplus of the communities and nations we serve, and why should we re-prioritise to make this a core activity rather than piecemeal project work? There are three good reasons why.

Firstly, libraries will never have the resources to fully do what we or our community want us to do, so crowdsourcing is a way of addressing the shortfall.

Secondly, the UK, USA and Australian Governments have all mandated it. At the end of 2009 the Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce Report *'Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0'*¹⁸ made a number of recommendations for government departments including large libraries which were subsequently endorsed as *'Declaration of Open Government'*¹⁹. These encouraged the opening up and 'freeing' of data, improving access, utilising social media, and involving citizens in crowdsourcing. The Australian declaration states:

"Citizen collaboration in policy and service delivery design will enhance the processes of government and improve the outcomes sought. Collaboration with citizens is to be enabled and encouraged. Agencies are to reduce barriers to online engagement, undertake social networking, crowd sourcing and online collaboration projects and support online engagement by employees"

The goal of the open declaration is to enable better community service delivery and ensure that publicly funded services demonstrate value for money.

Thirdly, the whole concept of libraries and librarianship is now under threat from internet-enabled capabilities: Google and other search engines to find information; the ability of people to more easily and cheaply obtain their own books than they can from a library; from the misconception that libraries are only about books, and the reality that libraries rely on government funding which due to the global financial crisis has been severely cut. In our information-dependent society, libraries need to actively demonstrate their value and relevance and how they can move with the times.

Drawing on ideas from Lisbet Rausing's brilliant essay *'Toward a new Alexandria: Imagining the future of libraries'*²⁰, the library profession needs to understand that realising our goals to survive and make our collections accessible is no longer a question of technology, it's down to us. Keeping our collections largely hidden and difficult to access affects the way our community think about 'their' money being spent on 'their' libraries. We need unwavering commitment to equal access and the common good, otherwise we may return to Jean Arnot's era of private commercial libraries for the privileged few. The last sixty years of co-ordinated free library services may become a distant memory. If libraries are unable to better expose our content right now, we are risking our own irrelevance in a digital age and in so doing, condemning our society to the total commercialisation of information provision.

We are surrounded by change. We need to be pro-active and choose to be change-makers ourselves. We need to be imaginative, take opportunities and collaborate and build the infrastructure required for our survival. Our community is educated and engaged and we must put our trust in them to help us. The community can help us make our collections more

accessible by describing, digitising, collating, rating and using them. They can add value to our collections by adding their own knowledge and content to ours. They can help us with problems so big that we can do nothing about them ourselves. We can ask our community to help us find solutions for our big problems and then help us implement and support them. A major advantage libraries have is that we are non-commercial, and our activities are for 'the common good'. This means we should easily be able to get the community to help us with our big goals. Ross Dawson says in his book *'Getting results from crowds'*²¹:

"Those organisations that have the skills and competences to draw on external crowds, as well as tapping the best ideas from their 'internal crowds,' have an immense advantage over those organisations that rely solely on their internal resources and traditional service firms."

How can libraries harness the cognitive surplus of the nation?

In 2010, thinking it may simply be a matter of librarians not understanding how to go about crowdsourcing, I wrote an article titled *'Crowdsourcing: how and why libraries should do it'*²². This outlined the basic principles of successful crowdsourcing such as interface design tips, and motivational factors. But I now see that it is not just technological reasons that hold libraries back from harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation; major changes are required by our profession.

There are four areas of change our profession needs to work on: our culture, thinking and environment; identifying and exposing our items of value and interest; taking the lead in developing and utilising crowdsourcing tools and applications and infrastructure; and engaging the community to help us.

Firstly, we need to change our culture and thinking from power and control to open and free. Although libraries agree to the principle of 'free' information, in practice this is often far from the case with caveats being attached, and a high level of control being exercised over digital objects and their metadata. There is no risk to exposing data for community collaboration, correction and addition. It is easy to keep community generated data linked but separate from library data. Successful crowdsourcing projects demonstrate that the community can be trusted and the natural inclination of individuals is to be honest, trustworthy and helpful. The OCLC Research Partners Group on Social Metadata recommends that libraries should not hold back on community engagement because of unjustified vandalism fears²³. The library environment needs to change so that experimentation and innovation (or 'risk') is acceptable, which means both success and failure will be embraced. The greatest risk in a crowdsourcing project is that you won't be able to attract a crowd, which isn't really a big risk. Fear of failure is a major reason why some libraries do not attempt innovative activities. Ironically this will inevitably lead to their downfall. A leap of faith is needed to give projects enough openness so that the crowd can move in its own way, unhindered by controls and boundaries.

Secondly, we must make a greater effort to identify and expose both our items of value and interest. We must tackle the legal issues and take calculated risks with digitising items. Too often I see libraries focus on items of 'value' and overlook 'valueless' items that would have massive popular appeal. To harness our community we need to meet their needs. We should not waste time in laborious selection processes, but instead shift into mass digitisation and get as much content out there as we can.

Thirdly, libraries should be take a lead in developing tools and applications to help us harness the cognitive surplus of the nation, such as transcription tools, volunteer portals and mobile applications. We don't need to re-invent social media tools, but we do need to collaborate on

infrastructure and software that advantages our profession which is potentially the most useful software for libraries since the advent of the OPAC. Libraries could be recognised for their leading expertise and ability to harness the cognitive surplus of the nations they serve.

Fourthly, as a profession we must make a bold statement similar to the Open Declaration of Government, that we need our community to help us solve our big problems. We should clearly articulate our big problems and convey a vision of how the cognitive surplus of the nation can help libraries in a time of need. We must establish and use terminology that is commonly understood. ‘Citizen science’ and ‘citizen journalism’ are well understood but there is no equivalent for citizen culture and crowdsourcing is a term disliked by many.

The dangers of doing nothing

Our profession should not sit back and watch their relevance decline as commercial providers “eat our lunch”. It is *our* responsibility to enhance *our* value to society. If we take no action, two ongoing trends will reduce our relevance to our community.

Firstly, the commercial sector will take up crowdsourcing and offer the generated content back to libraries and the community for a fee, as has already started to happen with book reviews and services to the genealogy community.

Secondly, the community will take the data that we have made open, add it into their own often poorly preserved, unsustainable and unconnected spaces, and then add their own value and context to it because we won’t allow them to do that in our spaces. This “value-added” data, content and context layered on top of our collection data will then be lost for future generations.

Our own inaction will condemn us as no longer relevant.

The rewards of doing something

Aside from safeguarding our professional future, there are many benefits for libraries from harnessing the cognitive surplus of the nation. Some benefits seen by the National Library of Australia include: building new virtual communities; engagement of the community with the library, other users and collections; harnessing the knowledge, expertise and interest of the community; first-hand insight on community needs and answers to difficult questions; building community trust and loyalty towards the library; fostering a sense of community ownership and responsibility towards library collections; demonstrating the value and relevance of the library in the community; increased media interest; improving the quality of data and services; improving discoverability of collections; achieving goals that the library would never have had the time, financial or staff resource to achieve on its own; and achieving goals in a much faster timeframe than the library could have achieved on its own.

If our profession leverages our expertise with technology and collaboratively harnesses the cognitive surplus of the community we will be able to develop, expand, and open our collections. We will be able to enhance and preserve the social history of the nation while meeting the ever-changing needs of our society. By engaging the community, libraries can develop projects of equal scale, quality and output of commercial endeavours.

Conclusion

In my vision the internet runs on love and libraries run on love as well: the big love of our community, who are actively engaged in developing, exposing, growing, digitising, and using our collections. The community could be doing this to a greater extent than we ever imagined possible if, collaboratively as a profession, we declared our need for community help and actively engaged the cognitive surplus of the nation via the internet to help solve our big issues. Having experienced the love, action, engagement, passion and commitment of the virtual community on the Australian Newspapers Digitisation Program and then Trove I know that this vision can easily become reality on a much larger scale if only the profession made a determined decision to take this path.

The survival of libraries is under threat and I believe that gaining the help of our community with their ideas, knowledge, skills, time and money is the answer. To remain relevant and valued in society libraries must look at their collections and communities in new, imaginative and open ways. We have the technology to do whatever we want. We must change our culture and thinking to embrace new opportunities such as crowdsourcing on a mass scale. Libraries are all about people, not books. Let us demonstrate this and our place in it.

Jean Arnot imagined the idea of a free mobile 'Flying Library Service' where all Australians would have free access to library services, wherever they may live. She worked hard towards establishing a co-ordinated free library service in the community, at a time when libraries were generally for the privileged few. She called for the help of the community in war-time to save libraries. In her last interview she said librarians today need to remember it is a privilege to work in a library. Let us hold onto Jean's values and do whatever it takes to remain core, valued and relevant in society.

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