

Introduction

Julie Willis

When we think of collections, we typically imagine assemblages of things that are relatively small and portable: paintings, books, scientific instruments, documents—to name but a few. The University of Melbourne is fortunate in also possessing another type of collection: its buildings. At Parkville, the second university campus founded in Australia, we occupy an extraordinary collection of buildings dating from the mid-1850s to the present day. Our buildings speak to the ambitions and shape of the university at different moments, from the deliberate alignment with revered institutions of learning through the Tudor Gothic of the Old Quadrangle, to aspirations for the highest levels of artistry and performance in the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, opened this year at Southbank. Much of our heritage as a university is embodied in the buildings and landscapes of our seven campuses.

But universities are always changing, and need buildings and other facilities that can serve new purposes. Our infrastructure must meet the needs of new types of students, accommodate both traditional and emerging academic disciplines, and support different methods of teaching, learning and research. One very special element of our built heritage is the Japanese Room, created in the 1960s as part of a building designed specifically to house a Faculty of Architecture that was growing rapidly, and would continue to do so: it was one of three rooms that reflected the diverse backgrounds of the faculty's academic staff at that time. For decades this elegant space was used for meetings and events. When the university decided to replace the Architecture Building, we sought to preserve the Japanese Room as an important piece of its heritage. The careful dismantling, storage and re-installation of this 'pedagogical treasure in a time capsule' makes a fascinating story.

Just as a building can become obsolete, so too can some collections. Although audiovisual collections retain their meaning and significance, the media in which they

exist can physically deteriorate, while the unstoppable process of technological innovation means that their playback equipment can disappear from the market, often surprisingly quickly. Around the world, archivists are struggling to preserve the content of vast collections of video and audio tape and other relatively recent media that have proved disappointingly ephemeral. Donna Lyon writes about a successful effort to preserve (through digitisation) and make widely available the archive of short films made by generations of graduating student filmmakers, some of whom have gone on to have illustrious careers. In a similar vein, Melinda Barrie discusses a collection of cassette tape recordings of interviews with an important political figure from the 1970s, and its role in the development of new procedures for the care of University of Melbourne Archives' audiovisual holdings.

These and the other articles in this, the 25th issue of the magazine, explore many ways of making the most of the university's cultural collections, and ensuring their preservation for future generations.



Professor Julie Willis is dean and professor of architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne. She is a director of the Australian Centre for Architectural History, Urban and Cultural Heritage, and a scholar of Australian architectural history.