

Où sont les neiges d'antan?

French History Collections in Australian Academic Libraries

Juliet Flesch Collection Management Librarian

This paper is an account of a survey of the holdings of the University of Melbourne Library and other research libraries in two periods of French history. It was delivered at the Ninth George Rudé Seminar in French History and Civilisation held in Canberra 6-8 July 1994. It has been published in the proceedings of that seminar, entitled *Revolution, Politics and Society: elements in the making of modern France* and is reproduced here by kind permission of the editor, Dr David W. Lovell.

The paper was designed to provide information on two different topics. The first was the effect on Melbourne's collection of an exceptional bequest, the Henry Arthur Pitt Memorial Bequest. The second was the state of Australian academic library holdings in French history in an area in which my own library does not collect heavily. I have spoken and written at some length about the Henry Arthur Pitt Memorial Bequest elsewhere, so shall give only a brief account of it here.

The Bequest, which is the result of the generosity of Pitt's daughter, the late Associate Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick, brought to the Library something in the region of \$200,000 per year. The money can be used for the acquisition of books in any area of history, but Professor Fitzpatrick asked that special attention be paid to titles in British history of the Tudor and Stuart period, and titles relating to the French Revolution.

Understandably, this bequest is transforming our history collection and my survey was intended to assess its effect on the holdings relating to the French Revolution in particular.

Melbourne University has had a strong collection in this area for many

years, of course, and we have acquired impressive resources in hard copy and microform. We have also, for over 10 years, maintained a blanket order for the output of some 200 of the major US and UK publishers, which has ensured automatic supply of English-language titles. Where the collection, although far from negligible, was undoubtedly less adequate, however, was in currently-published titles in French.

The Pitt Bequest has changed all that. In the two years since we received the first disbursement, some 3,000 titles have been added to the Library, of which about 2,000 relate to the French Revolution.

When we first received news of the bequest in 1991, we sought the services of a French bookseller (Jean Touzot) who was able to send us several hundred bibliographical slips dealing with French history published during the previous 4 years. This gave us a start for improving

our holdings, although we were in fact fairly selective. After all, at an average cost of \$50 per book, the bequest, although magnificent, can provide only about 2,400 books per year. We tended, for example, to avoid very specialised local histories unless they dealt with an especially significant locality. It is sobering to reflect that, even in an area in which we believed our collection to be relatively good, we actually held only about 8% of the titles identified by Touzot!

My survey of how the Pitt Bequest was affecting the collection covers the time-span of French history from Louis XV (whose Dewey Decimal Classification number also happens to be where general surveys of the eighteenth century are to be classed) to the end of the Third Republic. (For those of you who can visualise what is on the shelves of your own libraries, the classification is roughly DDC 944.034 to 944.0812).

The second part of the survey examined an earlier historical period, not yet greatly affected in my own library by any sudden spurt in acquisition. It was undertaken because there have, during the last few years, been some significant signals coming to us from other libraries.

Some of you with long memories may recall a national conference of librarians concerned with Australian libraries' coverage of currently published books in Western European languages which took place in Canberra in 1985. The conference was concerned with books in the social sciences rather than the humanities, which is where we (unlike American librarians) tend to class history, and we thought at the time that our national coverage might be expected to be somewhat better in history than it was in economics or politics. Certainly



Associate Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick
Photographed by Helmut Newton, 1953.
(University of Melbourne Archives)

the national collection in the social sciences was woeful: between 10 and 15% of what we believed we should hold in French, German, Italian, Greek and Spanish was actually present in Australian collections. We did not investigate holdings in history at the time, but none of the librarians at the conference believed that their collections were likely to contain more than 50% of what they believed desirable.

My own contribution to the conference covered social sciences material published in German, and apart from establishing that Australian holdings were poor, it also established that when a title was held in Australia, it was most likely to be held only by the National Library of Australia, which had since the 1960s maintained an impressive range of blanket orders or approval plans. Under the terms of these arrangements, designated library suppliers sent automatically upon publication books in almost all subjects published in their countries.

For the last several years, academic libraries have been downsizing, refocussing and reassessing their priorities and the National Library of Australia, once the principal Australian repository of an immense range of Western European publishing in all subject fields, announced in its *Strategic plan 1993-98: service to the nation access to the globe*, published in March this year, that to achieve its objectives

"the Library also intends to release funds over several years by reducing its collecting and processing of printed materials from overseas. Other Australian institutions have greatly expanded their collections of overseas materials. Access to these collections has improved, and more materials, in particular journals, are becoming readily accessible in electronic form. This allows the Library to more carefully delineate its collecting from overseas as part of the Distributed National Collection (DNC) and in consultation with other institutions to minimise unnecessary duplication, while ensuring that national needs are met through the DNC"

The second object of my survey, therefore, was to establish how the refocussing, etc., alluded to above has affected national coverage of French history in a period other than the 18th and 19th centuries and to gauge the extent to which other Australian libraries have taken over the role once assumed by

the National Library of Australia in providing a broad coverage of core materials in the area.

I have concentrated on the acquisition of what librarians call monographs and everyone else calls books, rather than on journals or large microform projects: in other words on the routine, bread and butter end of library resources to support teaching and research. The statement from the National Library of Australia shifts its focus rather quickly from "materials" which would include monographs, to journals, which are certainly becoming more available in electronic format, frequently at a significant cost to the reader.

Although modern French history continues to be taught and researched in this country, monographs are not in fact either available in electronic format or easy to borrow on international interlibrary loan. When they can be borrowed from overseas, they must often be read in the library to which they are lent and not infrequently arrive shortly before they are due to be returned. Any nationwide decline in collection of such material from overseas will therefore be serious.

My general impression from discussions with library colleagues is that it is not only collecting in French titles which has declined over the last ten years, but that coverage of English-language monographs has also decreased. My survey was intended to examine this also.

There are certain problems in establishing what we should be checking our holdings against, in arriving at what librarians have learned to call a verification standard. Two approaches have been made in the present instance. Specific bibliographical listings have been checked against specific library catalogues and an attempt has been made to determine what was published in the field as distinct from what has been reviewed.

Let us take the period of the Revolution (broadly the 18th and 19th centuries) first. Trying to see what has been published in the last ten years is a daunting task and trying to distinguish what one would reasonably want from what was available is even more so. And of course, the statistics are never

available in exactly the form one wants, so the best I can offer is a choice of different types.

Ronald Austin, Reference/Collection Development Librarian at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, recently published a study of the price of French academic books⁽¹⁾ based on information in 5 years of the *Bulletin critique du livre français* (2). The *Bulletin critique* has the advantage of selectivity. It is a list of books of interest to large public and academic libraries. In the category of Histoire, Austin found a total of 2,115 titles published between 1986 and 1990.

In an investigation which amounted to a selection of a selection, I had a look at what I expected to be boom years for French publishing on the Revolutionary period, namely 1989 and 1990. I looked specifically at the titles listed under *Histoire: généralités, Histoire moderne, Periode révolutionnaire* and two subsections of *Histoire contemporaine*, namely *Généralités* and *Avant 1914*. I did not count translations from other languages into French and concentrated on titles described in the inimitable style of the *Bulletin critique* as being directed towards universitaires, spécialistes, un public averti, etc.

In 1989, I identified 207 titles and in 1990, 129 which I believed should have been included in a collection aiming to support research in French history from the Revolution to the end of the Third Republic.

Getting an idea of what had been published in English on the Revolutionary period promised to take a very long time, so three approaches were adopted. To get an idea of American publishing I examined the titles reviewed in *Choice* between March 1989 and August 1990. There were far fewer than I had expected: a total of only 46. I suspect that this says more about the delays in reviews appearing in *Choice* than it does about anything else, a fact which has severely limited its usefulness as a selection tool for us in the past.

In its January 1991 issue, *Choice* surveyed the 1990 social sciences publishing programmes of 15 American university presses. Of the 215 history titles listed, *Choice* had reviewed about 43% in its pages. Of course, not all of those 215 titles dealt with French history at all, let alone with the period we are

examining. The great majority would have dealt with American and British and German history.

One can get a less selective view of English language publishing by looking at *Current Book Index and British National Bibliography*. I chose to look at the latter, partly to get an idea of UK publishing on the Revolution and partly because the classified sequence of *BNB* makes it much easier to look at British publishing on specific topics in particular years. Again, the number of titles dealing with the period from the Revolution to the end of the Third Republic seemed astonishingly small.

This may be a reflection of cataloguing backlogs at the *British National Bibliography*, or a reflection of some peculiarity in the classification which has eluded me. In any case, the figures for the relevant classification range are outlined in Table 1.

This gave me a picture, although an admittedly hazy one, of what might have been acquired by Australian libraries on the Revolution over the last 10 years. The marvels of the computer age enabled me to perform a pretty rough and ready check of how Australian collections compared with this. With the cooperation of my colleagues in other academic libraries I managed to obtain a series of snapshots of their French History collections by asking for a count of their holdings in the range of Dewey Decimal Classification numbers from 944.034 to 944.0812, which covers Louis XV and the 18th century generally to 1899.

These titles were counted according to their imprint dates. Seven libraries were able to assist me although not all were able to refine their search quite as I asked. One library (which does not use the Dewey classification) provided figures for titles catalogued as French history, another provided figures for the entire 944 range (also covering all of French history), not the time-span requested. See table 2 for the responses received.

Most libraries show a predictable Bicentenary bulge in the number of titles held, although this does not, as I shall show below, necessarily mean that they hold a higher proportion of what was available for acquisition in 1988 and 1989. As far as the figures for my own library are concerned, despite the

Titles on French History of the C18 and C19 listed in the British National Bibliography				
1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
62	43	31	66	* 47
*January to October only checked				

Table 1

Titles on C18 and C19 French history in 8 Australian libraries					
Library	1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
LaTrobe	63	51	85	*52	
Melbourne	58	75	210	132	64
Monash**	179	103	179	135	41
N.England	10	13	15	8	4
N'Castle	36	21	50	14	7
Q'land	35	24	41	36	19
Sydney	48	61	106	50	15
Tasmania	38	36	63	27	10
* Includes 1990 and all later imprints					
**Figures are for all French history, not just the period specified					

Table 2

injection of the special funding of the Pitt Bequest at that time, the ratio of titles held to what was available appears to have fallen in comparison with other years. This may mean that many of them have been classified under other numbers, such as 320.944 (political history of France).

There is an observable diminution in the number of titles published in 1990/91 and 1992/93 held by all the libraries responding, but it would be a mistake to make too much of this. The count was based on call numbers, and some recent acquisitions would, inevitably, not have been yet catalogued at the time the "snapshot" was taken. The Melbourne snapshot was taken on 7 March 1994, and those of other libraries within a week or two of that so that one would need to take into account the delay in getting books into Australia from overseas and the time needed to process them once they arrived.

What also emerged from a comparison of Australian holdings with the number of titles listed in *Bulletin critique du livre français* and *British national bibliography* is that we appeared to hold an amazingly high proportion of what was actually published. Together, *BNB* and *Bulletin critique* listed 367 titles published in 1988/89. The University of Melbourne Library had acquired 210 titles. This, and the fact that I believed we had been advised of a greater number of titles published when we received our carton of slips from Jean Touzot, made me wonder how comprehensive these two listings were and I decided on another check of what was actually available.

French historical studies publishes in each issue a substantial listing of *Recent books*, which cites works in English and other Western European languages. For the years 1984 to 1993 approximately 3,125 titles are listed.

(This figure was derived by calculating an average of 25 titles listed per page on 125 pages for the 10-year period). The list includes a fair sprinkling of translations from English into other languages, unpublished dissertations and other works on which Australian libraries would be unlikely to spend their money, but it did provide the basis for the most useful title by title check.

The methodology was as follows. A basic list of desirable titles on the 18th and 19th centuries was established by selectively checking the list of recent books under the sections headed *The Revolutionary Period, Napoleon, 1815 to 1870* and *Third Republic*. Although titles for checking were more or less randomly chosen, an attempt was made to eliminate translations into French from other languages as well as unpublished dissertations. For reasons of economy, the list was checked first against the University of Melbourne Library catalogue. Titles found there were not checked further.

Titles not found at Melbourne were checked on the *Australian Bibliographic Network*. Not all academic library holdings are listed on ABN, but it is the major source of interlibrary loan information, so that if one is assessing nationwide accessibility of material rather than ownership, it is the tool to use. The University of Melbourne holdings are on ABN. The reasons for not checking them there are, as I mentioned, purely economic. Checking ABN costs money over and above the staff time involved, whereas checking our own catalogue does not. The results are shown in Table 3.

In percentage terms, The University of Melbourne Library holds 55% of the 793 titles checked. *The Australian Bibliographic Network* revealed a further 19% held in other libraries and 26% of the titles checked were not held in any library contributing to the database. The detailed breakdown is shown in Table 4.

These figures suggest that for the period of the Revolution, Australian libraries can offer their researchers access, from within the country, to about 74% of what was listed in *French historical studies* over a 10-year period and is presumably deemed to be of interest to academic readers.

Numbers of C18 and C19 titles listed in French historical studies published between 1984 and 1993 held in Australian libraries

	1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
Held VU	50	59	103	124	102
Held ABN	26	28	46	26	22
Not held	7	19	71	63	47
Checked	83	106	220	213	171

Table 3

Percentage of C18 and C19 titles listed in French historical studies published between 1984 and 1993 held in Australian libraries

	1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
Held VU	60%	56%	49%	58%	60%
Held ABN	31%	26%	21%	12%	13%
Not held	8%	18%	32%	30%	27%
Total	*99%	100%	*102%	100%	100%

* Aberration caused by rounding to nearest whole number.

Table 4

This is a period in which the University of Melbourne Library would claim to have the strongest collection in the country and in which we can guarantee to continue acquisition at an adequate if not world-beating rate. (The figures I have provided do not of course prove this. It is possible that another library holds all the titles Melbourne does, in addition to some we don't, but anecdotal evidence I have gained from my colleagues does not suggest this.) It would be instructive, although outside the scope of the present survey, to know how this access rate of 74% compares with the access rate available to American scholars of the French Revolution.

The second part of my survey was intended to test how Australian academic holdings stood up for a different area of French history, paying particular attention to titles published in French. I concentrated in this part of the survey on titles published in French partly because Australian academic libraries are likely, in order to satisfy the demands of undergraduates, to continue to acquire in

English, even if they cut back acquisition in other languages. I also wished to test the assertion of the National Library that "other Australian institutions have greatly expanded their collections of overseas materials".

For this part of the survey, we checked 392 titles in French listed in the Recent Books section of *French Historical Studies* under the heading *Ancient and medieval* published between 1984 and 1993. The results are shown in Table 5.

In percentage terms, the University of Melbourne Library held 30% of the titles checked. A further 25% were held by other libraries and 45% were not held in a library contributing records to the Australian Bibliographic Network. The detailed breakdown again is shown on Table 6.

In other words, for the *Ancient and medieval* area as defined by French historical studies, Australian academic libraries can offer their community access to only 55% of the academic titles published in French over a 10-year period.

These figures do not suggest that, in an area of French history in which the University of Melbourne Library is not especially active, any other Australian academic library is taking up the slack. The Australian resource in French history, at least for the ancient and medieval period, on the contrary, would seem to be declining from a 72% coverage of 1984/85 imprints to 47% coverage of 1990/91 imprints and 26% coverage of those of 1992/93. Even with the caveat that the figures for 1992/93 may reflect delays in supply and processing, the downward trend seems pretty clear.

Is this important? Much of the debate in academic libraries these days revolves around our capacity to provide the requisite number of multiple copies for undergraduate classes, the constant re-evaluation of journals because of their tendency to swallow an increasing amount of the budget, and the need to balance acquisition of traditional printed material against the need to invest in the new technologies of CD-ROM.

Making choices between these different types of library material is not easy, but I suggest that it would be a pity for historians to fail to make every effort to ensure that the choices libraries make are the ones that they want. If books in Western European languages generally and in French specifically are important to French historians, this needs once again to be made very clear to librarians.

It is in fact unlikely that many libraries will be able, in the near future, to spend a greater percentage of their acquisitions budget on non-English monographs than they do at present. That my library has been able to do so in the field of French history has, as I have made clear, been only because of the quite exceptional generosity of Kathleen Fitzpatrick. There are not many like her and in most of our libraries the competing demands of journals, electronic databases and English-language monographs will not be gainsaid in favour of books in French or any other language.

The solution, I suggest, will be to make better use of the declining resources we have. One way of achieving this is to ensure that, for research material at least, our libraries buy different books, rather than several

Numbers of "Ancient and medieval" titles listed in French historical studies published between 1984 and 1993 held in Australian libraries

	1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
Held VU	22	34	38	17	7
Held ABN	20	27	24	18	7
Not held	16	38	44	39	41
Total	58	99	106	74	55

Table 5

Percentage of "Ancient and medieval" titles listed in French historical studies published between 1984 and 1993 held in Australian libraries

	1984/85	1986/87	1988/89	1990/91	1992/93
Held VU	38%	34%	36%	23%	13%
Held ABN	34%	27%	23%	24%	13%
Not held	28%	38%	41%	53%	74%
Total	100%	*99%	100%	100%	100%

* Aberration caused by rounding to nearest whole number.

Table 6

copies of the same one for different locations. In a country the size of Australia, this has severe implications for people without the time or the money to travel to where the largest Australian collections are, or (like undergraduates below 4th year) without access to interlibrary loan. Fourth-year undergraduates, whose lead-time for final year essays is short, are likely to face problems if they must depend on interlibrary loan.

The concept of a Distributed National Collection, in which specific libraries provide the national resource in specific subjects, is now widely accepted by Australian academic librarians as the only possible way of coping with shrinking budgets and skyrocketing prices. However, it will provide an acceptable national resource only if the formerly pre-eminent role of the National Library of Australia in collecting books in languages other than English is genuinely and systematically taken over by other research institutions.

My survey does not suggest that this is happening in the area which concerns all of us here, and I think we all, librarians and researchers alike, need to think how we can remedy this.

Notes

1. *College & Research Libraries*. (Chicago, Ill.: American Library Association) January 1994
2. *Bulletin Critique du Livre Francais*. (Paris: Association pour la Diffusion de la Pensee Francaise); 11 issues per year
3. *Choice*. (Middletown, Conn.: Association of College and Research Libraries) January 1991
4. *French Historical Studies*. (Raleigh, NC: Society for French Historical Studies) quarterly.