



Early computer applications in the Library

Marta Chiba, a former Library director and branch manger, continues her history of the Library.

The rapid growth of student numbers and courses of study in the early sixties created pressure in the University administration and the Library for the application of computers in labour-intensive areas. While staffing remained relatively stable, student enrolments doubled each year between 1962 and 1964. By 1967 the Vice Chancellor reported to the Council, that “ Monash changed from a new university growing rapidly to a large university still growing rapidly.” In the same year, electronic data processing was applied in academic and financial operations including student enrolments.

On a stable budget and limited staff establishment, the Library also looked to computers to solve the problem of managing the rapidly growing demand for resources and services. At that time there were no automated library systems available on the market. The Library, like its parent institution, set out to design and develop computerized systems for application in specific areas, where suitable equipment could be found. One of the first services developed based on computer application was the Student Reading List of recommended titles. The list could be sorted by subjects (Dewey classes), courses of study, departments and faculties. The new service was well received.

Another area of high priority was journal subscriptions. Journals were expensive, and central to research and teaching. Having an accurate, up-to-date, easily accessible list of periodicals was essential to both clientele and library staff. From a computerized list, Periodicals Currently Received was printed on computer paper and bound in a folder. Copies were available in the library and academic departments. The list was revised each year.

Encouraged by early progress, the Monash University Committee on Computer Application saw potential for cooperation between universities , and noted in its minutes that Monash University may continue work associated with libraries, whilst other universities may specialise in other fields of computer application.

In 1968 the Library reported on planning computer application in the fields of acquisition and circulation. Following year, a prototype computerized circulation system was introduced. The system was devised for minimal capital expense, with the intention of compatibility with more suitable hardware, when it became available. The main problem was lack of

suitable hardware, specifically input devices to capture information. The first computer based circulation system retained an undesirable high manual component, as all loans information was typed in manually from loans slips. Considerable time was spent on program maintenance and file editing.

An important step towards a fully computerized circulation system was the creation of an inventory file of the collection on magnetic tape. To achieve this, library stock had to be equipped with machine readable badges. This was a major task that required careful planning to release staff for the project. Badging of the collection was typically carried out during breaks in the academic year and in long vacation.

The first truly computerized loans system was the Plessey Automated Circulation System. Plessey required careful planning and significant time for its implementation. Plessey was introduced gradually in 1978, first in the Main Library (now Matheson Library), followed by the rest of the library. The circulation system was so successful that other institutions entered into agreement with Monash, including State Colleges of Victoria, Burwood, Toorak and Rusden to use Monash central facilities, both hardware and software for their library operations. Central to the in-house development of the automated library system was the Library EDP department headed by Phillip Snoxall and his staff. Sue Steele (subsequently manager of the Library Systems Unit) directed implementation throughout the library and provided staff training.

The in-house development of computerized acquisition and



Above: Sue Steele, now Manager, Web Resources & Development with Information Technology Services, (ITS). Below, Phillip Snoxall



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cataloging systems was less problematic. External factors facilitated development in this area of library operations including the availability of Library of Congress cataloguing data in machine readable format, and the National Library of Australia shared cataloguing project which also provided machine readable catalogue entries. Equipment for the development of computer based cataloguing and acquisition systems was available on the market. The Library did not have to wait for suitable peripherals. An automated acquisitions system was gradually

installed in 1971, and work was progressing on its associated budgeting control system.

This is a brief, incomplete history of computer applications in library operations developed in-house by the Monash Library. The account is from a reader services point of view. Implementation involved most of the library staff who worked enthusiastically to achieve objectives. We were proud to participate in this pioneering work of our library.