
Beyond our Shores

A Union List of Serials in PNG Libraries



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The opportunity to establish a National Union List of Serials in Papua New Guinea Libraries (NULOS) presented itself in the form of a fellowship, towards the end of the long cold Canterbury winter of 1976. Understandably the attractions went beyond the undeniable challenge NULOS would be.

Situated between 4°S and 12°S, Papua New Guinea is bounded by Irian Jaya, Indonesia's eastern extremity to the west, Queensland to the south, and the Solomon Islands to the east. Seasons are measured in millimetres of rain rather than in degrees Celsius. Humidity rises from the 80% level in the dry season to the 90% range in

the wet season.

After German, British and Australian colonial administrators left Papua New Guinea to her independence in September 1975, only parts of the administration could be said to be working well. This reflects more on the former Territory status which Australia afforded Papua New Guinea after World War II than to the ability of the local people. Much of the administration had taken place in Canberra, where conditions could not have been more in contrast with those in Port Moresby. The Australian administration helped to establish a network of public libraries through the district administrators. Initially, it seems certain that these

were for the use of expatriates, who would have numbered many more than they do today.

District administrators were stationed in the major towns and villages. Through these men in the field, most of Australia's duties under the United Nations mandate were discharged. Library headquarters for this network are at Ela Beach, a suburb of Port Moresby. Here, the ordering of both periodicals and books takes place. From the Public Library's collection of Papua New Guinean material, a core collection will be transferred to form the basis of the new National Library of Papua New Guinea. At present, little exists beyond a National Librarian, his secretary, and office space.

Missionaries of all denominations have had an influence on the library resources of Papua New Guinea. These diligent people provided libraries with their high schools, teachers' training colleges, and theological seminaries. Because of isolation and poor communications, boarding schools are common. Here, the churches play a leading role in providing such accommodation and facilities.

It is interesting to reflect for a moment on a degree of literacy in Papua New Guinea. For the majority of her 2.8 million people, the village forms the basis of life. Most are isolated, and inaccessible except on foot and in some cases by air. As a result, many have their own distinctive language or ples tok.

Into this village situation the missionaries came bringing Pidgin, of a distinctive Melanesian variety. It constitutes the nearest thing to a common language for the villager. This applies to the north of Papua New Guinea and the islands. In the south, Papua, Motu is the dominant local language. Early schooling uses Pidgin or Motu as the language of instruction. At high school level, the Papua New Guinean child is introduced to his third language, English. Certainly his first language is likely to be without a written tradition. As more Pidgin books are being published his second language is developing something of a written tradition. Into the village setting, books and a literate tradition do not intrude. To the school child, it must seem to be an intrusion, posing problems and conflict with his village way of life.

It should be emphasised that the difficulties in attending primary school are often too great for the village child. He may have to walk long distances to and from school or he may have to live away from his village to receive his education. Fees are often too high for families to afford and

many children do not manage to complete this first stage of the education system.

Roads are not easily constructed or maintained. With a very high rainfall near the coast and in the mountains, as well as the high degree of land instability heightened by frequent earthquakes, movement is made very difficult in the wet season. This may last anything from three to six months, with rain falling both day and night. Falls are usually confined to the hours of darkness and in the dry season. These nocturnal falls may account for a gentle 50 mm or a violent thunder storm and torrential rain amounting to 200 mm in one night.

After two years of secondary education and in possession of a IVth Form Certificate, a student may gain entrance to one of Papua New Guinea's two universities. One of these is situated in Lae, the second largest city in Papua New Guinea. Lae possessed many of the marks of a small Australian town, Saturday morning shopping, closure of shops for lunch at midday, two picture theatres, squash, yacht, service and private clubs, as well as tennis courts and swimming pools (the sea was too hazardous for swimming, because of large number of the deadly stone fish, and few suitable beaches). These facilities existed for an expatriate population of about 5,000 in 1977. They were not segregated but use of them tended to be made by expatriates rather than locals.

Six miles outside the residential area for Lae's 60,000 people, the Papua New Guinea University of Technology is situated on a 500-acre campus. Most of the buildings on campus are less than ten years old, but only some were centrally air-conditioned. It was fortunate that the library fell into the latter category, for it was there that I spent most of my eleven months working on NULOS.

The NULOS project had already commenced, shakily, some three years before. Very little progress had been made, somewhat outweighed by set-backs. Most of these involved weaknesses in the computer program for the ICL 2903 on which the NULOS file was recorded. A large portion of the original information had been inadvertently wiped a short time before I arrived. A 200-page print-out of remaining titles was presented to me in mid-January 1977. A preliminary edition had been scheduled for November 1976 by an optimistic Deputy Librarian. This became my first priority. What I found when the print-out was examined was a finding list of periodicals, with a separate title-entry for each library's holdings. The linear format was one which had to be accepted.

This type of computer was not programmed to produce recorded information in the conventional two-columns-per-page manner. Of necessity, the preliminary edition was a rushed one, which had only obvious errors removed from it. About forty libraries including public libraries had contributed.

From the preliminary edition, the computer program could produce a selective print-out of the holdings of each contributing library. This was a very useful aspect of the NULOS program, particularly for contributing libraries. Many did not have catalogued serials or a list of their holdings. To prepare for the first edition, one of these lists was sent to each library, together with a request to check holdings and report back any alterations.

Trained and capable librarians were relatively rare, and it proved a little difficult to persuade some libraries to co-operate, but most spent many hours checking serials or reporting holdings for the first time. This staff-time was greatly appreciated and contributed greatly to the recorded periodical resources of Papua New Guinea.

The preliminary edition appeared in April 1977. Between this date and the arrival of the first updated library replies, a card file was constructed. It is essential to have a base for NULOS; one which can be consulted more readily than the computer file. Cards were only added to this file when the title had been checked bibliographically. A quick check through the index of Ulrich's *International Periodicals Directory* was all the verification given to entries in the preliminary edition.

Problems of program 'bugs', filing order, both programmed and innate, as well as computer-operator errors were encountered. The author of the programme went overseas on eighteen months' study leave shortly after I arrived. There had been no time to encounter any of these snags before his departure. The very capable and understanding systems analyst solved most of these problems quite satisfactorily.

With the beginning of work on the first edition, the decision to use successive title was made. This removed all the complications attached to the use of latest title. These were compounded by the fact that references of an acceptable nature were not possible. Preference was given to the inclusion of all Papua New Guinean periodicals, excluding only the telephone directory, electoral rolls and conference proceedings.

Before many Papua New Guinean periodicals could be included they had to be checked

bibliographically. Apart from some titles which had been included in either of the two union lists of serials which Australia produces, there was no Papua New Guinea serials authority against which titles could be checked. Such a list I constructed before any local periodicals were included in the first edition. This list is being prepared for independent publication. It will act as a very useful companion to NULOS.

Replies from new and existing libraries continued to arrive in Lae up until November 1977. Wherever possible, most reported titles were verified and entered on to the computer file. It had become necessary to distinguish identical titles by the insertion of a two-letter country-of-origin code. This was based on the list used in Ulrich's *International Periodicals Directory*. Occasionally a place of publication was also added, where the two-letter code was inadequate. The 95-character limited line-length prevented the inclusion of any further useful information.

Checking the seemingly endless lined pages of computer type added a degree of tedium to the work, but after the local response to the preliminary edition, the project seemed to have local approval. This encouraged me to complete the task and produce as accurate and up-to-date a list as possible. Numerous print-outs were produced and checked up until the night before I left, in an attempt to achieve this end. Although inevitable delays did occur, local and expatriate staff were most helpful.

A recent letter from the Deputy Librarian in Lae informed me that the NULOS first edition has been printed. Covers and binding alone remain to be done, before distribution commences. The format of this edition is reduced from a computer print-out paper size to A4. The preliminary edition was simply a printed version of a computer print-out page master. I had left the completed NULOS file, along with a list of abbreviations and all other foibles explained in the preface and introduction, prior to my departure in mid-December 1977.

What future NULOS can wish for is not yet decided. It was to have been part of my Fellowship to devise a method of updating the computer file. This will have to be agreed upon internally, to ensure the co-operation of all contributing libraries. To this end, I intend to recommend a course of action for the Librarian of the Papua New Guinea University of Technology to put to the Papua New Guinea Library Association to test reactions and eventually gain the approval of its members.