

# J. E. Traue Chief Librarian The Alexander Turnbull Library, 1973-1990 A Tribute

Tributes to the living have the dangerous qualities of premature obituary. The scrutiny of the still lively subject renders their lyricism suspect. But there are good reasons for hazarding the attempt on the occasion of Jim Traue's retirement from the Chief Librarianship of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

One reason is that his period of office saw enormous shifts in national self-awareness and, perhaps even more important, a searching reassessment of the elements within national identity. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a reorientation of priorities in New Zealand history, cultural relations and creative activity. Many of these developments reinforced the importance of national research collections and their capacity to meet the needs of a culturally and socially diverse society, to reflect that society's human richness. On the one hand then, the Turnbull Library's role widened and its capacity to discharge that role became more critical. If knowledge is power, and self-awareness the first step to knowing, then the Library's function as a repository of knowledge and its institutional capacity to facilitate access to that knowledge became both more complex and more important. On the other hand, the 1980s saw a fundamental shift in the political consensus within New Zealand. The State's responsibilities with regard to the nation's longer-term development were reassessed. The market would lead. In the meantime, fiscal responsibility and the prospects of electoral success dictated retrenchment. As the Library's responsibilities deepened and widened, state support — to put it at its mildest — failed to expand with them. These were difficult times to be Chief Librarian. Fortunately an appreciation of the traditions of the Library, and a sensitivity to the nature of a research library, both in itself and for its users, were to be the hallmarks of Jim Traue's tenure of that office.

McCormick, in his biography of Turnbull, rightly stressed how that collector's interests related to, but were never confined by, his personal background. A New Zealander by birth, he collected New Zealand material. A Scot by descent, he pursued things Scottish. A frequent ocean traveller, he gathered accounts of voyages and explorations. But he never pursued his interests in an introverted or narrow fashion — one thing led to another. The deeper the collection became the wider its range had to be. And McCormick could, for example find no biographical impulse for the Milton collection beyond pure curiosity.